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## Profiling ESL children: How teachers interpret and use national and state assessment frameworks: Volume 1: Key issues & findings

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# Edith Cowan University

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# **Profiling ESL Children**

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National and State Assessment Frameworks**

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DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION,  
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TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

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1. The first part of the document  
describes the general situation  
and the objectives of the project.

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Australian Education Council (1994) *English - A Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools*. Carlton: Curriculum Corporation (St. Nicholas Place, 141 Rathdowne St. Carlton, Victoria, Australia)

Australian Education Council (1994) *ESL Scales*. Carlton, Victoria: Curriculum Corporation (St. Nicholas Place, 141 Rathdowne St. Carlton, Victoria, Australia)

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## Chapter One

# The Purposes and Organisation of the Study

### Purposes of the Study

The three volumes which make up this study describe in detail how a number of teachers in different school situations in different parts of Australia undertook the assessment of young children's development of English as a second language. Most of the teachers worked in pre-primary to Year 3 classrooms where the majority of the children were aged between five and eight years. The majority worked in a mainstream context in which the number of children speaking English as a second language (ESL) varied from more than half the class to two or three students. About a third of the teachers whose assessment practices we studied worked in classrooms in which all the children came from homes or communities in which languages other than English were the main means of communication. A minority of the teachers acted as ESL specialists who provided support to mainstream teachers often throughout the primary years. Over half the teachers in the study had undertaken some form of professional development focused upon working with ESL children.

The young ESL children in the classrooms which we studied revealed a remarkable diversity and richness of cultural and linguistic experience. Some attended school in communities within which they had acquired a particular indigenous Aboriginal language in the context of hearing several other languages being spoken by the adults around them. Some were members of families who have lived in Australia for several years and who communicate with one another in a language other than English. And some of the children had only recently arrived in Australia from another country and quite often as refugees from traumatic circumstances. Across all the 15 schools in which we worked during the investigation there were close to forty different languages spoken by the students. If we regard the learning of English as a second language as a process that occurs in a wider social context in which English is the prevailing language in use, some of the children - particularly in parts of Western Australia and northern Queensland - were beginning their schooling and learning to be literate in English as a language which was essentially foreign to their experience.

Our major purpose in this study was to focus upon how teachers made judgements about their ESL students' progress and achievements in learning English. The reasons for this particular investigatory focus will be elaborated upon shortly. What were our specific objectives, however, in undertaking the research? These can be summarised as follows:

- To investigate the interaction between the teachers' daily classroom pedagogy and their use of mainstream English assessment frameworks and those assessment frameworks specifically designed for ESL learners.
- To investigate, through teachers' interpretations and practice, the relative significance and value they attached to mainstream English assessment frameworks as compared with those specifically designed for ESL learners.

- To discover how teachers made judgements about student achievement on the basis of mainstream and specific assessment frameworks. To identify, in particular, the pedagogic practices and assessment activities used by teachers which enabled them to inform their judgements so that they could diagnose the learning needs of ESL children, identify achievements in English, and subsequently develop appropriate learning experiences and programs to ensure active participation by ESL learners.
- To discover how teachers regularly monitored ESL students' development in English and how they reported to parents and the school on the basis of mainstream and specific assessment frameworks and to identify the assessment practices that facilitated such reporting.

Throughout this study we use the term "assessment" to refer to a teacher's judgement of a student's achievements in English against particular criteria. We see assessment as a central part of the broader activity of evaluation. The latter also includes teacher judgements and decision-making directly related to the appropriateness of their own pedagogic plans and teaching practices. Evaluation therefore entails how the teacher acts upon information derived both from assessment of student achievement and from informed reflection on *all* aspects of the teacher's pedagogy; its purposes, planning, and classroom implementation.

In making judgements of student achievement, teachers relied upon a whole range of criteria based upon their experience and knowledge of their students and upon their familiarity with certain curricula documentation which also provided them with specific criteria. Among these were documents comprising statements organised and sequenced in ways that described achievement and progress in English language and literacy. These "frameworks" of student achievement were designed by expert teams commissioned by Commonwealth or States and Territories ministries to provide detailed descriptive criteria in order to inform teacher monitoring and their reporting of student progress to school and school systems throughout the State or Territory.

As the objectives of our study imply, a major variable with which we were concerned was the actual nature of the assessment frameworks which the teachers implemented as part of their classroom pedagogy. In order to explain this particular focus, we need to consider the broader educational context which provided the rationale for the research. A detailed account of the significance of language and literacy assessment in Australia at the present time is provided in Chapter 2. However, some of the main signposts leading to the present study are briefly identified here.

### **Why the Focus on Assessment?**

The research was undertaken at a time of significant developments across Australia in how teachers were expected to assess their students achievements across all the learning areas of the curriculum. Beginning in 1989, the Australian Education Council (AEC), made up of the education ministers of the States, Territories and the Commonwealth of Australia commissioned the development of Statements and Profiles in eight broad areas of learning including English. Released in draft form in 1992, the *Statement on English for Australian Schools* (AEC 1994a) provided a framework for curriculum development in English which defined the area, outlined its essential elements, and described a sequence for developing knowledge and skills in English. The main organisation of the

Statement was a matrix based upon a distinction between the language modes of Speaking and Listening, Reading and Viewing, and Writing. Within each of these, the content of English was organised in terms of four main strands:

- *Texts*: what the student does with different kinds of texts.
- *Contextual Understanding*: understanding about the sociocultural and situational contexts that the student brings to bear when composing and comprehending texts.
- *Linguistic Structures and Features*: how the student uses linguistic structures and features to compose and comprehend texts.
- *Strategies*: how the student undertakes the composition and comprehension of texts.

More central to the concerns of the present study, the *English - A Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools* (AEC 1994b) was released in draft form in 1992 and provided a description of development in English typically achieved by students during the school Years 1-10. Using the distinctions between modes and strands from the Statement, the Profile provided a framework for mapping and reporting on student achievement in relation to each mode and strand. Crucially, the Profile indicated progression in terms of levels. Within each level, general statements describing student performance were given appropriate to that level. For assessment and reporting purposes, the teacher applying this framework would, for example, use a level statement such as *"Interacts informally with teachers, peers and known adults in structured classroom activities dealing briefly with familiar topics"* as one of four similarly criterial statements against which to assess a student's achievement in Speaking and Listening. The decision would be facilitated by the Profile in its further provision of a list of pointers or descriptions of contributory achievements under each level statement. (Under the level statement given earlier, for example, such pointers include: *Use appropriate greetings, introductions and farewells; Follow, one step at a time, short, simple instructions (for playing a game, completing a classroom task; or Attempt to give directions and instructions to others, etc.)*)

Therefore, in assessing student achievement in English, a teacher would refer to the pointers to deduce whether or not a student had achieved a particular level within a strand within one of the modes. Providing lists of pointers for eight levels of development in four strands within the separate modes of Speaking & Listening, Reading & Viewing, and Writing, the Profile is clearly a comprehensive framework of criterial statements against which to judge student achievements in English. (For a fuller illustration of the English Profile, see the Guide to the Case Studies in Volumes 2 and 3)

Its hierarchical organisation and, in particular, its sequencing of superordinate and subordinate statements describing progress and achievement, largely in terms of a student's composition and comprehension of English, are mirrored in the design of most of the frameworks which were the reference points for assessment and reporting used by the teachers in this study.

## **Why the focus on ESL Children?**

The English Profile was developed as a national template from which most of the States and Territories in Australia evolved their own local versions, some of which were already adopted across a State or Territory or were being trialed in selected schools during the period of the present study. (For a full account of this State-based evolution, see Chapter 2) An issue central to this study, however, was the concern felt during the period of the development of the Profile

by many language educators that the particular starting point and pattern of development in English which typified children who were learning English as a *second* language were not captured in the Profile. The Profile was seen as offering a comprehensive framework for mainstream students whose first language was English and, as a result, its use in the early years of schooling in particular might not fully reveal the emerging capabilities and progress of children who were becoming bilingual in English.

However, how important is it in a nationwide assessment process to cater for specific development in the English of ESL students in the school system? What proportion of the school population does such a decision directly affect? The 1996 Census of Population undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that, on average across the country, ESL students represent 16% of the school-age population. The following table indicates, according to data obtained through the census, the proportion of 4-17 year olds in each of the States and Territories whose home language, is not English:

<b>Table 1.1: Proportion of 4 -17 Year Olds who may Speak a Language Other than English at Home</b>					
<b>STATE</b>	<b>Well or Better</b>	<b>Not well or Not at all</b>	<b>Level not Indicated</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Language Spoken not Indicated</b>
New South Wales	18.9%	1.7%	0.3%	<b>20.9%</b>	3.2%
Victoria	18.4%	1.7%	0.3%	<b>20.4%</b>	3.0%
Queensland	5.5%	0.6%	0.1%	<b>6.2%</b>	2.6%
South Australia	9.3%	0.8%	0.2%	<b>10.3%</b>	2.5%
Western Australia	9.1%	0.9%	0.2%	<b>10.2%</b>	2.8%
Tasmania	2.0%	0.2%	0.07%	<b>2.2%</b>	2.4%
Northern Territory	30.8%	14.4%	0.9%	<b>46.1%</b>	7.7%
ACT	11.3%	0.9%	0.2%	<b>12.4%</b>	2.6%

**Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996**

The table indicates the range of school-age ESL speakers in different parts of Australia. The first two columns indicate the level to which the languages are spoken. The second column indicates that the 4-17 year olds have access to a home language but appear to be losing it as part of their language repertoire. The third column indicates that languages are spoken but the census did not obtain figures in relation to level. The final column in the table identifies those homes in the census which did not indicate the language spoken in the home. (These last figures may therefore include English as a home language.) From these statistics it appears fair to claim that, to assess students' attainments in English only against a framework which is based upon the developmental patterns of speakers of English as first language, an accurate account of the specific attainments of a significant number of students may not be obtained.

Three years prior to the publication of the English Profile, The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) was funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training to develop a set of ESL Bandscales which could be used to report on the progress of school-age ESL

learners in their development of English (NLLIA, 1993). This design project was undertaken by a consortium of research Centres of the NLLIA across the country and called upon the advice of representatives from all educational systems of the States and Territories and from ESL practitioners across Australia. The project aimed to provide a set of scales not only for reporting purposes but also to inform teachers' recognition of the particular characteristics of ESL learners' development in English language and literacy.

The drafts of the ESL Bandscales had been released just before the drafts of the English Profile were circulated in late 1992. At the time, the Curriculum and Assessment Committee of the Australian Education Council believed it was necessary to commission a team of ESL specialists from a number of States and Territories to design ESL-specific scales that would be seen to directly mirror the format and organisation of the English Profile. This framework became known as *The ESL Scales* (AEC, 1994c). The wider dissemination of the ESL Scales and the NLLIA Bandscales occurred almost simultaneously. Since the launch of the English Profile, a number of States and Territories also began to develop their own State-specific ESL assessment frameworks which would harmonise with established local curricula or complement the particular local version of the English Profile. (For an account of the range and use of different frameworks across States and Territories, see Chapter 2. For a description of the frameworks used by the teachers in this study, including the two ESL-specific scales, see the Guide to the Case Studies in Volumes 2 and 3.)

Prior to the introduction of the National Statement and Profile and the two ESL-specific frameworks, teachers already based much of their pedagogy on established State and Territory syllabuses or curricula for English. In Western Australia, for example, the Education Department had already drafted and trialed a language and literacy program and related assessment framework for the early years of schooling titled *First Steps* (1994). Its Developmental Continua were organised in a similarly hierarchical set of criterial statements of achievement to that of the Profile, although the terminology for the different organisational elements of the framework and the wording of the statements of achievement were different from the Profile. In the period before and during the introduction of the State's version of the English Profile, the Education Department provided comprehensive professional development for large numbers of primary teachers in the use of *First Steps* and the assessment criteria incorporated in its Continua. At the time of the present study, Queensland adapted the First Steps Developmental Continua in order to assess all Year 2 students in what the Queensland Ministry of Education termed the *Year 2 Diagnostic Net*. In administering this framework, the purpose was to identify particular children who appeared in need of intervention support for their development of English literacy.

Such activity in the development of assessment frameworks in English and, in particular, frameworks which accounted for the development in English language and literacy of ESL learners has been virtually unique to Australia. From 1994 onwards, teachers of ESL children potentially had access to emerging or draft State and Territory versions of the English Profile, complementary ESL frameworks in some States or Territories, and two nationally available frameworks of progress and achievement specifically designed for ESL children. It was inevitable that, during the period of this study, teachers were becoming aware of quite complicated, fairly rapid and sometimes confusing shifts in how they were expected to assess the development in English of their ESL students.

How teachers were reacting in this period of intense activity to the provision of externally designed assessment frameworks was therefore the central concern of

our research. That they are now being required to adapt to new ways of perceiving and judging student achievement in English has come to influence much of their thinking and their daily classroom work at the present time. A recent change in Commonwealth government has not resulted in a lessening of the inevitable challenges of adaptation that the teachers face. At the time of writing, the findings of a large National School English Literacy Survey are being released and, of more direct impact upon teacher's assessment practices, new National Literacy Benchmarks are being developed as a framework for assessing achievement in literacy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across the school system and as a means for identifying where intervention appears most in need.

## Why the Focus on Teachers' Interpretation and Use of Frameworks?

Any major curriculum innovation, such as the introduction of comprehensive profiles of student achievement in English exemplified by the frameworks so far briefly described, will depend for its proper implementation upon the classroom teacher. The new assessment frameworks will be interpreted by teachers through the lenses of their established pedagogic priorities. And, inevitably, they will be adapted during their implementation through the teachers' established ways of working with their students in the classroom within the specific circumstances of their school context. In order to trace the actual use of an innovative assessment framework, it is essential to enter the classrooms in which it is being used and to explore with the teachers the sense they are making of such a framework, how they are using it, and the particular significance and values they are attaching to it.

This kind of teacher-focused and classroom-based investigation can provide us with information concerning the ways in which the innovation is being turned into practice and, thereby, further inform future refinements of the assessment frameworks and the design and implementation process of subsequent innovations in assessment.

When we commenced our research, there existed a range of studies which also focused, at least in part, upon teachers' initial work with the English Profile or its State and Territory versions (Australian Journal of Language & Literacy, 1995; Dilena et al., 1993 and 1996; Education Department of Western Australia, 1995; Elliott, 1994; Hancock et al., 1995; Fehring, 1996; Meiers, 1994; Mellor, 1995; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1996; Warhurst, 1994.) None of these studies, however, focused directly upon the teachers' use of assessment frameworks in relation to ESL students.

There is little doubt that the introduction of the English Profile generated a great deal of debate among language educators across Australia, including the identification of assessment issues directly relating to ESL children (Breen, 1994; McKay 1994; Sloniec 1994; *inter alia*). The significant funding of nation-wide professional development in relation to the Profiles for all eight learning areas between 1994 and 1996 also generated an extensive involvement of teachers in classroom-based action research and pedagogic innovation. And a small number of these professional development projects in various parts of the country focused upon the teaching and assessment of ESL students (See, for example, Morgan, 1996; Oliver 1996).

The present study therefore provided the opportunity to explore in some depth teachers' reactions to, and practical implementation of the particular frameworks against which they were endeavouring to make judgements of the development in

English of their ESL students. The age range of the students in this particular study was also significant. Their learning of English coincided with their first experiences of school and, in particular, the development of initial literacy. They had acquired their first language and were learning to become bilingual at a highly formative time in their social, cognitive and emotional development. Their achievements in English and, crucially, the teacher's assessment of these achievements would have a significant impact upon their longer term progress throughout their schooling.

## **The Research Approach**

Because the critical point of focus in the study was the unfolding relationship between the teachers' assessment practices and their classroom pedagogy, it was necessary to get as close as possible to the teacher's daily work and how the teacher located assessment within it. An open dialogue had to be established between the researchers and the teachers and this needed to be complemented by observation of how the teachers were working with their ESL students and, in particular, how they made judgements about these students' achievements. The researchers had to work together with the teachers in ways that would facilitate reflection, frankness, and a mutually beneficial exploration of the issues.

A case study methodology was therefore adopted in which each member of the research team worked closely with, usually, four teachers. In some cases, this meant that the researcher worked with both a mainstream teacher and the ESL support teacher in the same school. The teachers and their Principals were initially contacted by the researcher by telephone and a letter which detailed the purposes of the study and what would be asked of the teachers in terms of the proposed data gathering procedures. Teachers were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so and that anything written about them and their work would be given to them to amend or refine before being included in the research report. They were also asked to provide pseudonyms for themselves and their schools for use in the report.

In order to gather the appropriate data for each case study, the researchers typically undertook several days of observation in the teachers' classrooms over a period of two terms in the second half of 1996. They also interviewed the teachers for about an hour, usually after each observation. (In the case of schools far outside metropolitan areas, a smaller number of observations and interviews were undertaken due to the requirement of long distance travel to and from the school.) Teachers were advised in the initial contact letter that the focus of the interviews would be upon how they made judgements of the achievements in English of their ESL students and how they may be using the particular assessment framework(s) with which they were familiar. The researchers deliberately adopted an informal conversational approach to the interviews, aiming to explore issues relating to assessment rather than requiring the teachers to answer a pre-determined set of interview questions. Initial interviews focused on aspects of the teachers' approach in language and literacy work with students during which the researchers built upon the initial classroom observations as points of focus for further clarification with the teacher. The mainstream teachers were asked to identify the ESL students in the class and all teachers provided brief descriptions of the backgrounds of their ESL students. They also described in particular the different kinds of assessment tasks they might use with their students. Researchers also asked the teachers to describe to them the assessment framework(s) they were using and how they implemented these in practice. Teachers' views were sought concerning the actual impact of these frameworks upon their broader work in the classroom.

In later interviews, teachers were asked to bring particular examples of assessment tasks which they found helpful in their work with ESL students and any reporting documentation which they relied upon. Teachers elaborated upon the purposes and the nature of these materials during the interviews. In these interviews, the teachers further described how they made use of the assessment frameworks in relation to their students and, in particular, their ESL students. Teachers also talked researchers through their actual assessment of, in particular, the reading development and written work of ESL children. The teachers also provided the researchers with samples of classroom activities and students' work, with assessed tasks, and with assessment and reporting documentation which they had completed and which they had commented on in detail during the interviews.

Building upon the data provided through such material and derived from the observations and the interviews, it was intended that each Case Study should provide the following:

- An account of the school context and the provision for ESL students within it.
- An account of the classroom context in which the teacher worked, including the linguistic backgrounds and proportion of the ESL children in the class and the typical classroom activities which focused upon the learning of English language and literacy.
- A detailed picture of the teacher's assessment practices in relation to the development of English of their ESL students, including their on-going assessment of classroom tasks, how the teacher monitored and kept records of the students' progress, and the ways in which the teachers reported student achievement to parents, the school and the system.
- An account of the interaction between the teachers' assessment practices and their daily classroom pedagogy, including the reasons why the teachers undertook assessment in the ways they did.
- The teacher's views on the assessment frameworks which they had chosen or were required to use, including their preferences regarding appropriate assessment frameworks.

Once each Case Study was written up in draft form, it was given to the respective teacher to amend, clarify, or add any further information or data which the teacher felt was necessary. During this process, teachers occasionally provided extra data relating to their assessment practices which were relevant to the Case. Drafts were simultaneously circulated among the research team and the project's Advisory Committee for them to seek further clarification from the member of the research team who had written the Case. From this consultative process, final versions of the Case studies were completed.

## **The Sample**

In order to address its specific objectives, the investigation had to account for the likely effect of the following contextual variables which might shape differentiation in teachers' interpretations and use of the assessment frameworks:

- The particular State or Territory in which the teacher worked.
- The type of school and its community context.

- The particular assessment framework or frameworks which the teacher was using.
- The ages of the students whom the teachers taught (between K-Year 3).
- The proportion and characteristics of the ESL students in the teacher's class.
- The relative experience of the teacher in working with ESL students.

Although preferable to the research team, time and funding prohibited us from working with teachers in all States and Territories across the country. However, the research provided Case Studies of 25 teachers in 15 schools. The schools were located in a regional city in New South Wales, the Cape Peninsula and metropolitan Brisbane in Queensland, metropolitan Melbourne in Victoria, and the Pilbara region and metropolitan Perth in Western Australia.

The sample of teachers included: 11 mainstream Years 1-3 primary teachers, of whom two were also ESL specialists, and 4 pre-primary teachers; 5 teachers working in English/Intensive Language Centres for ESL students; and 5 ESL specialists who worked as support teachers for mainstream teachers, often throughout the school.

More than half the sample of teachers had experienced some form of professional development in working with ESL students and, of these, four provided colleagues in their schools or in their district with professional development in assessment frameworks specifically designed for ESL children. The teaching experience among the sample of teachers ranged from two to more than twenty five years.

In the mainstream classrooms, the proportion of ESL children ranged from more than half to two or three students while all the children in the English/Intensive Language Centre classrooms were learning English as a second language. As we indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the children in these classrooms exemplified a remarkable diversity of cultural, linguistic, and educational experience.

The research team sought to obtain the voluntary participation of the teachers and it was important to inform them initially of the demands we would be making upon them and their time. Perhaps not surprisingly, we could not ultimately work with all the teachers whom we had originally invited to participate. The sample of teachers with whom we eventually worked throughout the study was selected on the basis of their current use of one of the externally designed assessment frameworks and, in most cases, their growing familiarity with at least a second assessment framework which was being trialed or formally implemented in their district or State.

The chart on the pages which follow lists the Case Studies which we undertook. It indicates the teachers, their experience and the Years for which they were responsible; the types and location of schools in which they worked; the proportion of ESL children in their classes; and the assessment framework which the teacher was using. The names of the schools, students and the teachers are, of course, pseudonyms.

Profiling ESL Children

The 23 Case Studies				
Teacher	Location	Type of School	ESL Learners in Class	Assessment Framework
Leigh: Yr 1/2 (2 yrs exp.)	Weaver Pilbara WA	State Primary Priority Schools Program (PSP) Mainstream	10% ESL plus high numbers Aboriginal English a Second Dialect (ESD)	Student Outcome Statements (SOS) First Steps
Nicole: Yr 2 (4 yrs exp.)	Weaver Pilbara WA	State Primary (PSP) Mainstream	10% ESL plus high numbers Aboriginal (ESD)	SOS First Steps
Kylie: Pre Primary (8 yrs exp.)	Banksia Pilbara WA	State Primary Mainstream	10% Christmas Islander & Aboriginal	SOS
Joanne: K-2 (6 yrs exp.)	Nyamal Pilbara WA	State Community School Mainstream	All Aboriginal ESL	First Steps SOS First Steps Highgate Continuum.
Linda: Pre Primary (14 yrs exp.)	Harthill Perth WA	State Primary (PSP) Mainstream with an Intensive Language Centre (ILC)	More than 50% ESL	First Steps
Elizabeth: Pre Primary (20 yrs exp.)	Harthill Perth WA	State Primary Mainstream (PSP) ILC Attached	More than 50% ESL	First Steps
Janet: Yr 3-4 (20+ yrs exp)	Greenway Perth WA	State Primary ILC	All ESL	ESL Bandscales. Negotiated Evaluation
Aimee: Yr 1/2 (14 yrs exp)	Southern Perth WA	State Primary Mainstream	Several ESL learners	SOS First Steps
Yuen: Phase 1 (10 yrs exp)	Greenway Perth WA	State Primary ILC	All ESL	ESL Bandscales Negotiated Evaluation
Marion: Phase 2 (20+ yrs exp)	Greenway Perth WA	State Primary ILC	All ESL	ESL Bandscales Negotiated Evaluation
Rose: Yr 1 (4 yrs exp)	Harthill Perth WA	State Primary Mainstream (PSP) ILC attached	50% ESL	First Steps
Sara: Yr 2 ESL Coord Mainstream (20 yrs exp.)  Carly: Support Teacher (7 yrs exp)	St Bertrams NSW	Catholic Primary Mainstream/ESL	20%ESL	ESL Scales Early Learning Profile  ESL Scales Early Learning Profile
Meredith: ESL Teacher Various yrs (16 yrs exp)	Daviston NSW	State Primary Mainstream	20%ESL	ESL Scales Early Learning Profile
Barry: Kindergarten (24 yrs exp)	Daviston NSW	State Primary Mainstream	20%ESL	Early Learning Profile
Deidre: ESL Teacher (16 yrs exp)	Greenvale NSW	State Special School	Severely intellectually impaired ESL	ESL Scales First Steps
Laura: Yr 2 ESL Teacher (11 yrs exp)	St Cecilia's Brisbane QLD	Catholic Primary School	30%+ ESL	Year 2 Diagnostic Net (First Steps Adaptation) ESL Bandscales
Minh: Yr 2 ESL/Bilingual Teacher (8 yrs exp)	Lachlan Street Brisbane QLD	State Primary Mainstream	High percentage ESL Mostly Australian born.	Year 2 Diagnostic Net

Teacher	Location	Type of School	ESL Learners in Class	Assessment Framework
Erika: ESL Specialist (20 yrs exp)	Four Schools Brisbane QLD	State Primaries	Work with ESL students only	ESL Proficiency Scales Year 2 Diagnostic Net
Maree: Yrs 1-3 (11 yrs exp)	Andelu Campus Ichuru State School QLD	Community School Mainstream	Torres Strait Islander	Year 2 Diagnostic Net in English and Torres Strait Creole
Stephanie: ESL Specialist Whole School Teaching P2 (20 yrs exp)	Oxford Street Melbourne VIC	Catholic Primary Mainstream	Mostly ESL Australian born	ESL Bandscales ESL Scales Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) English and ESL Companion Document
Clare Yrs 1-2 (6 yrs exp)				CSF English and ESL Companion Document ESL Scales. Victorian English Profiles:
Stephanie: ESL Specialist Whole School Teaching P2 (20 yrs exp)	Oxford Street Melbourne VIC	Catholic Primary Mainstream	Mostly ESL Australian born	ESL Bandscales. ESL Scales. CSF English and ESL Companion Document
June: P-1 (25 yrs exp)				ESL Scales CSF and ESL Companion Document
Jenny : P-2 (10yrs + exp.)	Hillsdale Melbourne VIC	State Primary English Language Centre (ELC)	All ESL Mostly new arrivals	ESL Scales CSF and ESL Companion Document Victorian English Profiles
Sue: Yrs 3-5 (15yrs exp)	Hillsdale Melbourne VIC	State Primary ELC	All ESL Mostly new arrivals	ESL scales CSF and ESL Companion Document

**Location of The Case Studies**



## **The Contents of the Study**

The detailed Case Studies provided in Volume 2 and 3 of this study represent the basic data which was gathered to inform the issues inherent in the original objectives of the research (pages 1-2 above). Once the draft Case Studies were returned by the teachers, they were circulated among the research team with the explicit purpose of identifying what actually emerged from the data as the major issues in the use of frameworks to assess ESL students. Subsequently, the research team shared the issues they had identified with the project Advisory Committee. As a consequence of this process, it was found that the major issues revealed by the research could be expressed within the following key questions:

1. What is the general pattern in the use of frameworks for the assessment of the English development of young ESL children in Australia? And, more specifically, to which assessment frameworks did the teachers have access in the particular school systems within which they worked?
2. What is the influence of the teachers' particular working contexts upon their choice and use of assessment frameworks? What facilitated or hindered their use of a particular framework?
3. What is the impact of the assessment frameworks upon the teachers' daily classroom pedagogy? How do new ways of assessing interact with established pedagogy?
4. What are the teachers' views on the assessment frameworks in relation to young ESL learners?
5. What particular purposes do teachers attribute to their assessment and with what consequences for ESL children?
6. Is there a need for a distinct ESL assessment framework?

The above questions are related to one another in particular ways. However, the six chapters in the present Volume directly focus upon each of these key questions in turn. **The main findings from the research are therefore provided as a conclusion to each of the chapters.**

As deductions from these main findings, the final chapter of this volume provides a number of implications for the design and practice of assessment which is intended to focus upon the English language and literacy development of ESL children in the context of the early years at school.

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## Chapter Two

# National Developments in the Assessment of ESL Students

Beverly Derewianka

The aim of this chapter is to locate the present study within the context of recent developments in the assessment of students of non-English-speaking background. It begins with a brief general overview of international trends in assessment, noting the current interest in criterion-referenced and outcomes-based assessment and in frameworks describing levels of student achievement. This movement is then examined more fully in terms of the Australian context, with the development of national statements and profiles in the key learning areas. More specifically, the chapter looks at the development of ESL materials and frameworks in response to outcomes-based education, and goes on to document in some detail the current use of these in each State and Territory. Finally, it reviews a number of issues surrounding the use of assessment frameworks (particularly in relation to ESL students) which have been documented in the literature.

### International Trends in Assessment

Assessment has always been a significant part of schooling. In the late twentieth century, however, it has assumed a singular importance throughout the world. Moore (1996) refers to the 'new discourses of crisis and reform' in a time of uncertainty and change, leading to an international obsession with assessment and standards:

*In the search for a strategy to match schooling to 'society's needs', assessment is an obvious tool because it bridges the work of the school and the public domain. ... The preoccupation with assessment reflects the strongly instrumentalist and vocationalist goals now attributed to schooling. Assessment practices operationalise and formalise what the child must do for his or her schooling to be acknowledged by others. They constitute school experience in explicit terms, regulate it, and translate it into a form that can be communicated to the rest of the school, to the parents, employers, and to outside educational and credentialling institutions. (p.191)*

The pressure to be productive and accountable has led educational systems to adopt management practices from the world of business and commerce, specifying outcomes to be achieved from the educational enterprise (Moore 1996, Brindley 1995b). In countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and France, these outcomes have been formalised into statements of achievement, variously referred to as 'benchmarks', 'standards', 'attainment targets', or 'competencies'. (For an overview and critique of outcomes-based assessment, see Eltis 1995.)

In the United Kingdom, for example, following the British Education Reform Act of 1988, we have seen the growth of the National Curriculum and assessment

system. Here, expectations have been set at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16 in terms of the ten levels of the UK attainment targets. Teacher rejection of the high assessment workload and the government's accountability agenda led to considerable modification of the scheme in 1993. (For further detail, see Department for Education, *The National Curriculum*, HMSO Books, London, England 1995.)

And in the United States, there has been the 'standards movement'. Pascoe (1997) attributes the situation in the US to a 'profound sense of crisis' in response to such reports as *A Nation at Risk*, which 'convulsed' policy makers and educators with its explicit allegations that America's global competitiveness was under threat. To stem the 'rising tide of mediocrity', urgent action needed to be taken. In 1989 a summit of the state governors was convened which resulted in the agreement known as *Goals 2000* in 1991 (and reaffirmed by the Clinton administration in 1994). This provided the basis for widely-based consultation in the development of national standards statements, outlining the knowledge and skills to be attained ('Content Standards') and the timeframe for achievement of certain levels of knowledge and skills ('Performance Standards'). (For further detail, see A.C. Lewis, An overview of the Standards Movement, *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1995.)

But alongside these assessment and reporting imperatives at the systems level, there has been a revolution in the way that the teaching profession now conceives of assessment. Where the term previously evoked notions of teacher-made tests or standardised examinations, nowadays 'assessment' refers to a wealth of practices: self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher monitoring, standard tasks, records of achievement, parent observation, embedded assessment, formative and performance-based assessment, progress profiling, interactive diaries, anecdotal records, teacher-student conferencing, portfolio assessment, as well as tests and examinations.

Assessment is no longer seen as a formal, one-off activity tacked onto the end of a teaching program, but as an all-pervasive process involving the on-going monitoring of learners' performance as they engage in curriculum tasks. This type of assessment is highly focused on the individual and tends to generate elaborate, multi-faceted accounts of students' learning.

*While assessment and reporting mechanisms at the system level have become more outcomes-oriented, centralised and bureaucratic to serve national economic goals, at the classroom and local level, the focus has shifted back to the individual learner. There has been a major move away from a reliance on mass standardised testing, particularly in the United States, towards the use of 'alternative' or 'performance' assessment which directly reflects learning activities and which is carried out in the context in which learning takes place. (Brindley 1995:2)*

These practices have resulted in greater responsibility being placed in the hands of the practitioners and taken away from the external test-designer. This, in turn, has meant that teachers have needed to develop a high degree of professional expertise in their ability to identify relevant and valid assessment criteria and to track student achievement of outcomes over time.

The tension between the accountability demands of the system (requiring aggregated statistics about cohorts and minimal information about the individual) and the emphasis in the classroom on the detailed progress of specific students has led to the development of new assessment and reporting instruments: descriptions of learning sequenced into levels or stages, outlining

typical or expected performance at each point on the scale. These 'progress maps' include statements of outcomes which may or may not be tied to a particular grade or stage of schooling. They also generally provide detailed lists of 'pointers' or 'indicators' which guide teachers' observations in determining whether an outcome has been achieved. In some cases, work samples (often annotated) are provided to give teachers a concrete example of performance at a particular level. They might also be accompanied by a range of support materials and standard assessment tasks. (In the present study, such instruments will be referred to as 'assessment frameworks').

These frameworks are intended to act as an interface between the institution and the classroom, mediating between the demands for accountability on the one hand and the need for diagnostic information about the learner on the other. By referring to the scale, the teacher is able to provide information to administrators on the relative performance of groups of students in terms of explicit, system-wide outcomes. The scale also allows teachers to qualitatively evaluate and profile an individual student's progress in relation to desired educational goals.

The use of such frameworks recognises the expertise of classroom teachers and provides them with assistance in making judgements about learner performance. As opposed to a one-off examination, they allow for learning to be assessed in a number of different contexts over time, through a variety of task-types embedded in authentic classroom practices and closely related to the curriculum. They also enable feedback in an assumed common language to a range of stakeholders:

- informing students and parents of progress
- providing diagnostic information on individual learners
- providing accountability information to institutions and systems
- assisting in the allocation of resources and funding
- acting as a selection and placement device
- providing feedback to the teacher on the effectiveness of the learning program

While in theory these developments appear to hold a great deal of potential, Brindley (1995a) warns that in practice there are a number of political, practical and technical problems related to their multiple purposes.

## **Outcomes-based education in Australia**

Australia has similarly witnessed a recent surge of interest in outcomes-based education and the development of assessment frameworks for profiling learner progress towards these outcomes.

The 1960s and 1970s in Australia was a period when responsibility for curriculum development and student assessment was generally devolved away from any central authority to the individual school and often the individual teacher. The approach at the time operated at a very local level, marked by catchphrases such as 'democratic', 'participatory', 'school-based decision-making' and 'curriculum autonomy'. Schools were encouraged to respond to the needs and values of the community and teachers would seek to nurture the growth of individual students. Syllabus documents were relatively slight statements of principle, with no attempt at outlining content or expectations in any detail.

The mid 1980s saw a major change in thinking about curriculum goals in Australia. Until then, curriculum and assessment were primarily matters for the individual States and Territories. But with an historic conference in Hobart, there

began an unprecedented move towards national collaboration. This unified stance grew out of a desire to see more commonality in the curriculum across Australia in order to achieve economies of scale and to facilitate the movement of students between States (McGaw 1997, Pascoe 1997). It was also related to international pressures to make Australia more economically competitive, as well as a concern about the return Australia was receiving on its investment in education. There were claims that literacy standards were falling and that various disadvantaged groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and students of non-English-speaking background, were not getting equal benefits from the educational system. It was felt that there needed to be a greater accountability for how government funding was distributed and the kinds of results produced (Wildash-Campagna 1996). In contrast to movements elsewhere which were primarily assessment-driven, Pascoe (1997) sees the Australian initiatives as more related to curriculum renewal and equity issues.

The first phase of collaborative work by the States and Territories on national curriculum began in the late 1980s with the ratification of the "Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia" by the Australian Education Council (AEC). This agreement was accompanied by a major curriculum mapping project which investigated curriculum and syllabus documents in all States and Territories in all curriculum areas.

In the early 1990s, a series of statements were developed which outlined national curriculum considerations in all the different key learning areas. At the same time, interest was developing in the notion of outcomes-based education, as opposed to the 'input-oriented' approaches of previous decades. McGaw (1997) attributes the adoption of an outcomes approach to three main factors: a focus in the business and public sector on quality assurance and strategic planning, based on a view that 'clarity on intended outcomes is a prerequisite to well-focused planning' (p.11); a growing concern about accountability in the education sector; and the 'great paranoia (in the educational establishment) in Australia about a national curriculum' (p.11), with outcomes statements being seen as less threatening to State autonomy than a detailed statement of content.

So, in addition to the curriculum statements, profiles were also developed in order to provide a means of describing student progress at a number of levels. The profiles would 'provide a framework which could be used by teachers in classrooms to chart the progress of their students, by schools to report to their communities and by systems reporting on student performance as well as being amenable to reporting student achievement at the national level' (National English Statement, p.44).

In 1994, *A Statement on English for Australian Schools* and *English – A Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools* were published, with the understanding that each State and Territory would then adapt these documents according to its own particular needs, traditions and priorities. By 1996, all States and Territories had responded in some way to the taking up of the national statements and profiles. A great deal of reviewing, trialing and implementation had taken place, some States simply adopting the national documents without change, while others modified certain aspects or developed their own distinct statements. We now have, in addition to the national statements and profiles, 'levels of attainment' in South Australia, 'learning outcomes' in the Northern Territory, 'staged outcomes' in New South Wales, 'student performance standards' in Queensland, 'key intended learning outcomes' in Tasmania, 'curriculum and standards frameworks' in Victoria, and 'outcomes statements' in Western Australia.

This enthusiastic embracing of outcomes-based education has been subjected to scrutiny by Eltis (1995:12):

*While there may be considerable merit in ensuring some consistency exists in curriculum requirements across Australia ... the question remains whether there is a strong research base that bears out the claimed benefits of establishing a large number of outcomes coupled with detailed assessment and reporting mechanisms at a number of levels.*

The most recent development in Australia is the design of a set of national literacy benchmarks and targets. The benchmarks will take as a major starting point the literacy learning outcomes described in the national English Profile, but will also take into account the literacy demands encountered by students across all curriculum areas. Whereas the English Profile allows for the identification of literacy outcomes in individual students, it does not interpret and evaluate those attainments in terms of how well the student is achieving in relation to his or her age cohort, or to students in other schools, systems or countries, or to previous levels of performance. A benchmarking system will provide the means by which educators and administrators can determine whether a student is progressing at an appropriate rate (Campagna-Wildash 1996, Masters 1996).

### **Assessment trends in English as a Second Language**

Alongside this flurry of activity at the state and national levels in the mainstream curriculum areas, there have been parallel developments in the ESL field. Until recently, the assessment of ESL learners in Australia had generally been left to the discretion of the individual teacher or school. Testing, particularly the use of standardised tests, has been viewed with suspicion by most ESL teachers, with most expressing a strong antipathy towards their use (Gunn 1995). Virtually the only external influence was the requirement by systems to collect data for resourcing purposes. This typically took the form of allocating the learners to a particular group (eg 'first phase', 'second phase', 'third phase'), primarily on the basis of length of residence in Australia.

One of the few studies done of ESL assessment among teachers in the Australian school system (Grierson 1995), found that practitioners' assessment practices were somewhat unsystematic, often done as an afterthought or on the spur of the moment, with criteria based on a restricted view of communicative language ability, as evidenced by some of the teachers' responses:

*My focus in teaching ESL has not been on assessment. I'm continually watching, observing and assessing but not in a structured way. This is because I'm not sure how to.*

*I think it is very important. However I need to clarify my own ideas and develop a more effective assessment system.*

*My students are more interested in assessment than me and respond very strongly to it. My colleagues mostly assess in the formal red pen way and create an environment where marking and discipline are linked.*

*Assessment is generally too haphazard and teachers lack skills and measurement tools. (pp.214-217)*

### **ESL assessment frameworks**

Grierson's study highlights the need for an assessment framework to inform the teachers in primary and secondary schools in their attempts to observe and monitor the progress of ESL learners.

In the adult ESL field, similar frameworks, commonly referred to as 'proficiency scales', have been around for several decades. An early model was that developed in the USA by the Foreign Service Institute in 1957 in response to the US government's concern with its personnel's lack of foreign language skills during the cold war. Rather than simply reporting a mark indicating 'fair', 'good', 'fluent' or 'bilingual', the levels on the scale described the sorts of attributes that such a speaker would have.

In Australia, the notion of the proficiency scale was taken up by Ingram and Wylie in 1979 with their development of the ASLPR (*Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating Scales*), which drew on the FSI scales. The scales were designed in response to Galbally Review (1978) in order to inform learners of the goals they could be expected to achieve in the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES) courses. Its main role is as a placement instrument, placing students on a scale from 0 to 5 in order to determine appropriate learning pathways.

Whereas the ASLPR seeks to identify general language proficiency for placement purposes, other scales relate to very specific competencies which are to be attained within the course of a program. The *Certificate in Spoken and Written English* (CSWE) for example was developed in 1992-93 in order to provide a means of providing certification of competence in English for adult migrant learners. The CSWE reflects principles of competency based training, focusing on outcomes of what an individual can do, a concern with attainment of specified knowledge, skills and application, criterion-referenced assessment, an allowance for flexible and self-paced learning, a recognition of prior learning, and the use of a variety of assessment forms (eg. unstructured observation, written or oral tests, group tasks)

These adult frameworks were of little use to teachers of ESL students in primary and secondary schools, however, who were seeking an instrument more relevant to their context. In the late 1980s, there was great interest in *The Primary Language Record* (Barrs et al 1988) a five-level scale for primary learners (including those of ESL background) developed in the United Kingdom. The PLR used structured observation, conferencing and tools such as diaries and miscue analysis of reading, to observe children's progress in language and literacy. Their progress was recorded in a cumulative profile, providing qualitative judgements to complement the Standard Assessment Tasks under the National Curriculum.

Early local initiatives included the *ESL Framework of Stages* (McKay & Scarino 1991), which provided curriculum-linked and criterion-referenced assessment activities and tools for observation and recording. In NSW, a couple of short, unpublished scales were developed in individual schools (Grierson 1991; Metropolitan North Intensive Language Centre, Chatswood). In South Australia, the *ESL Student Needs Assessment Procedures* (SNAP) materials were produced to guide teachers' assessment of students' language. In Queensland the Curriculum Centre Language Assessment Project (1991-2) produced materials to guide teacher in curriculum-based ESL assessment procedures in both primary and secondary contexts, including a booklet on assessing oracy and an initial Assessment Profile for recently arrived primary bilingual learners. And in Victoria, work had begun on the *Victorian ESL Profiles Project* under the guidance of the Victorian Directorate of School Education.

At the national level, the need for a national ESL proficiency instrument was recognised following findings from the Campbell report on the evaluation of the Commonwealth ESL program. Lack of consensus around the issues of assessment purpose and methodology, however prevented support for an AACLME proposal in 1988 for the development of a national ESL assessment instrument (Michell, 1997).

In 1991, the Commonwealth government committed itself to developing proficiency measure in its Language and Literacy policy. From this point, a complex set of political pressures saw the development of two sets of government funded ESL assessment frameworks: the *NLLIA ESL Bandscales* and the *CURASS ESL Scales*.

### **The NLLIA ESL Bandscales**

In 1991, a team funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training began work on an assessment and reporting package for ESL language development in schools, in order to provide a more reliable and accurate way of measuring and describing attainment levels of ESL students. The project was managed by the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA).

The major component of the package was to be a set of proficiency descriptions for ESL learning in schools. The project team adopted a 'top-down consultative process', with the descriptions of learner progress being derived from informing theory and research and constantly modified in response to practitioner trialing and feedback.

The ESL Development Project materials involved extensive consultation nationwide with practising teachers and ESL specialists, educators and administrators, professional associations, academics with expertise in the field of ESL, second language acquisition and assessment. The package of materials consists of the Bandscales; exemplar assessment activities and observation guides for in-class observation and tracking of language proficiency; reporting formats and guidelines for on-going recording and for profile reporting. In developing the materials, great pains were taken to ensure that the descriptions in the Bandscales reflected the diversity of ESL learners and the characteristics of their language learning. Emphasis was placed on the context of learning, including teaching/learning settings, the age of the students, their educational and social backgrounds, the nature of the task and the degree of teacher support.

The following principles guided the development of the materials:

- To enable the assessment, recording and reporting of learners' English language development repeatedly, over a period of time, in a range of contexts, in different curriculum areas, and in situations requiring both social and academic language
- To include all ESL learner groups and to recognise the dynamic and interwoven factors of growth and context (ESL learners are, for example, learning English, developing literacy skills, studying mainstream learning content, moving from a primary learning context towards a secondary learning context, moving from one cultural context to another, growing up)
- To recognise positive starting points for ESL
- To provide positive descriptions of growth, while at the same time helping in the identification of difficulties
- To stress the key role of the L1 in the learning of English, and to have as a goal the development of effective bilingualism (rather than simply 'native-speaker-like' language ability in English)

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- To accommodate developmental and contextual changes, together with multiple entry points (K-12). This will include (often critical) transition points, temporary regressions and plateaus.
- To recognise and cater for the integrated nature of ESL teaching and learning (ESL across the curriculum; language and content; interrelationship of four macroskills, curriculum and assessment process) in the school context
- To take account of the constraints in the school context (eg. time, numbers of students, a range of expertise)
- To describe language ability across a range of personal, social and general/academic school contexts, in particular the students' control of 'basic interpersonal communication skills' and 'cognitive academic language proficiency' (NLLIA 1993)

Importantly the *Bandscales* recognise that being an ESL learner at age 5 is a vastly different experience to being an ESL learner at age 16. They therefore provide three quite distinct sets of descriptions for the different age groupings (junior primary, middle/upper primary, and secondary).

### *Junior Primary Learners*

- are at earlier stages of cognitive development
- are experiencing early literacy development in English; may or may not have developed literacy concepts at home ('literacy set') in either L1 or English or both
- may be experiencing early literacy development in L1
- are still growing in their L1 language development or may be bilingual
- are not likely to be self-conscious in their language use
- sometimes experience a silent period when they begin to learn a second language
- do not have well-developed awareness of language
- are learning in a school context which is designed to cater for the individual; eg. activities are generally selected which allow learners to progress at their own level
- are learning in a context which encourages play, social interaction, shared language activities, etc.

### *Middle/Upper Primary Learners*

- are more mature
- have an increasing knowledge of the world and therefore tend to apply this to their learning of English
- are able to draw on L1 language and literacy (to varying degrees)
- if low literacy background, generally have a literacy set because of experiences with environmental print, television, etc.
- have growing language awareness

### *Secondary Learners*

- are more mature
- have extended knowledge of the world and possibly background knowledge in content areas which they can apply to their learning of English and through English
- may be self-conscious
- can draw on their first language and literacy (to varying degrees); for some, L1 literacy will be highly developed
- if low literacy background, generally have a literacy set because of experiences with environmental print, television, etc.
- may have advanced learning-how-to-learn skills
- are learning in a more demanding school context (eg. more context-reduced; more abstract language; pressure of exams; difficult textbooks)

Within these age groupings, they also acknowledge the range of educational, linguistic and cultural differences among learners. The descriptors vary according to the maturity of the student, the student's literacy background in L1 and in English, the learner's experience of the world, and previous schooling. They attempt to avoid, as far as possible, a deficit model of description of student language development. They also anticipate the various domains in which students need to develop English – personal, social, general school contexts and English for academic purposes. In addition, the descriptors suggest the various roles that the teacher might play in supporting the student's learning, thereby seeing progress as a joint responsibility, not something inherent in the individual student.

(Readers interested in further detail regarding the development of the *NLLIA ESL Bandscales* are invited to consult the research report published as part of the project: 'An empirical study of children's ESL Development and Rapid Profile', Volume II of report (NLLIA 1993).)

### **The CURASS ESL Scales**

During the development of the NLLIA Bandscales, certain factors led to the development of another set of ESL scales. In 1993, a separate project was established to develop national ESL scales which would fit more closely with the national statements and profiles documents. It had therefore been more widely recognised that the national profile for English did not accommodate ESL students well:

*Although the English Profile may give some insight into the English development of some ESL students, it is by no means adequate to describe the development of the huge range of ESL learners of all ages and stages of English and literacy development who appear in Australian schools (Saker 1994:10)*

It was felt that the National English Profile did not take account of the ESL students' developing English language and literacy skills on their different points of entry to the schooling system. In view of this and in the interests of inclusivity, it was successfully argued that supplementary documents to those of the eight learning areas needed to be developed for English as a Second Language.

These arguments involved identifying monocultural and monolingual assumptions about prior learning of the 'majority' of students which excluded ESL learners from access to the mainstream curriculum on entry to school at Level 1. The following example from the National Profile highlights the problems of trying to use it with ESL students:

*Students who have achieved Level 1 show a growing awareness of the many purposes for using spoken, written and visual texts in and outside the classroom and school.*

*Student mix informally with teachers, peers and known adults in the classroom. Using their home variety of English, they ask and respond to questions and contribute to class or group discussions. Students try to make themselves clear and to understand others and correct themselves or indicate when they cannot understand.*

*Students show an emerging awareness of the nature, purposes and conventions of written language. They experiment using written symbols for conveying ideas and messages and role play themselves as competent readers. In responding to and discussing visual texts*

*and written texts read aloud by the teacher, they relate what they know about the world and their own experiences to the ideas, events and information in texts. (English Level 1 Statement)*

Such statements appear to make the assumption that all students have developed oral fluency in English, that all students' initial literacy experiences are of the English writing system are mediated and supported by oracy in English, and that all students have developed equivalent levels of spoken and written English. (Michell 1997)

A writing team from New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria was therefore commissioned to design a set of ESL scales which addressed the problems outlined above and which conformed to the format and levels of the new national scales. This project was managed by the Australian Education Council Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CURASS), the body established to produce the national profiles and statements in all key learning areas. Drawing on the methodology developed for the Victorian ESL Profiles, the ESL Scales were written, trialed, validated, rewritten and accepted for publication in the space of less than a year. (Saker 1994)

The *ESL Scales* provide descriptions of differing levels of proficiency in English to enable teachers to chart the linguistic development of ESL students using a common language for identifying and reporting progress across all the key learning areas. They are intended to inform decisions relating to assessment, recording, reporting, classroom practice, planning and programming.

The *ESL Scales* are based on the premise that achievement in school requires development across three major dimensions of language competence:

- Pragmatic competence

*Pragmatic competence involves the ability to use language appropriately and acceptably according to particular purposes, audiences and situations. It focuses on the relationship between the language users and their communicative context. It draws on knowledge and skills in relation to cultural and linguistic awareness and the functions of language use. (ESL Scales 1994: 3)*

- Organisational competence

*This involves the ability to control correctly and coherently the formal structures of language. It focuses on the relationship between language and its expressed meanings. It draws on grammatical knowledge and skills, vocabulary, the graphophonic systems of language and the construction of complete spoken or written texts. (ibid)*

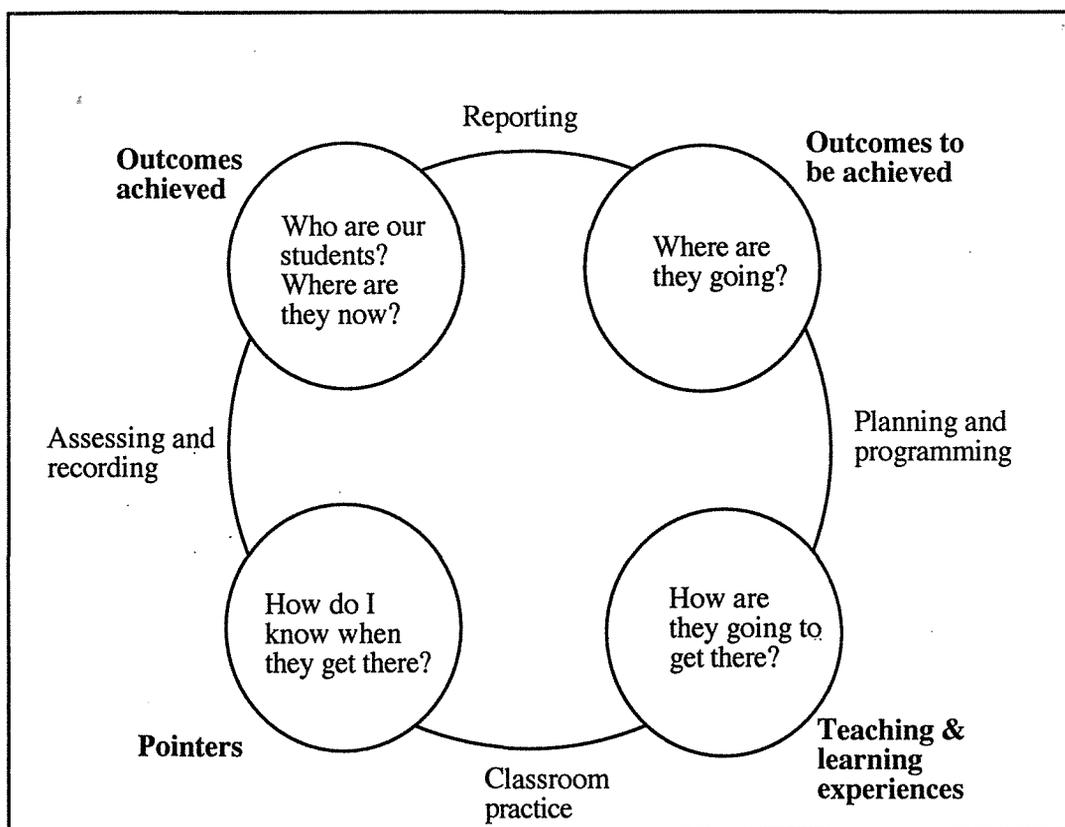
- Strategic competence

*This refers to the ability to assess, respond to and negotiate meanings as part of a dynamic process of language use. It focuses on language users and their language reception and production processes within the constraints of a communicative context. It includes the knowledge and skills needed to plan and use language in a communicative situation. (ibid)*

The scales provide an indication of outcomes that we might expect students to be achieving in relation to these dimensions of language competence. These outcomes are based on observable student behaviour in terms of students' knowledge, skills and behaviour. According to a member of the writing team:

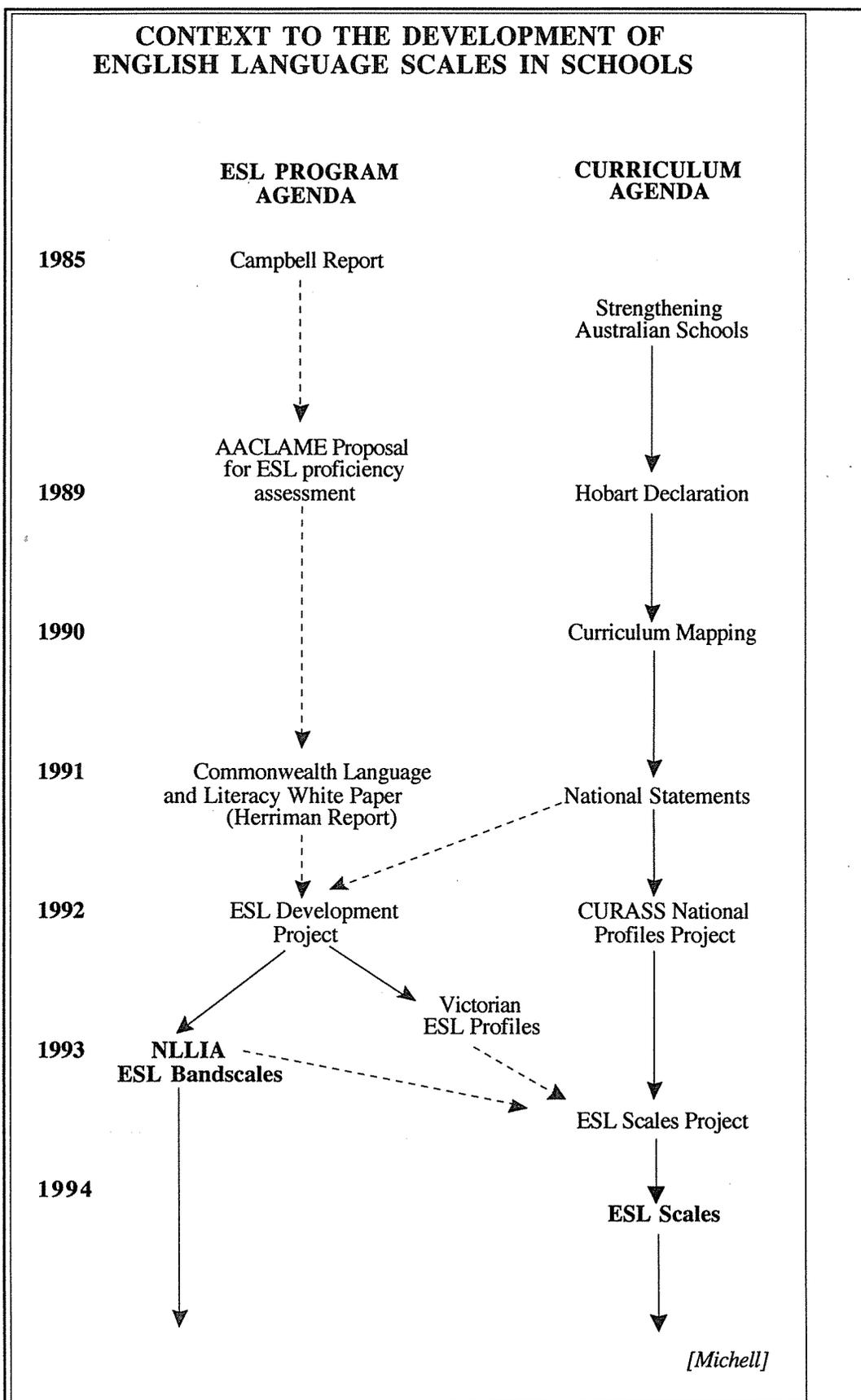
*In the national context, profiles and scales have very specific and focused aims. They are first and foremost reporting documents. They seek to promote a consistent approach to the reporting of student achievement by describing the progression of learning typically achieved during the compulsory years of schooling (Years 1-10) in each of the areas of learning. By setting out, through a validated 'map' of the learning, the typical order in which students learn as they progress through school, we as teachers are provided with a powerful tool for reporting on the progress of both individuals and whole groups of students. (Saker 1994: 11)*

The relationship between the Scales and the curriculum can be seen in the following diagram of the Teaching/Learning Cycle included in a professional development package dealing with the implementation of the Scales (*The ESL Scales: Implications for Teaching and Learning*, p.10):



### The antecedents of the two sets of ESL scales

To summarise the developments in ESL assessment over the past decade Michell (1997) provides the following diagrammatic overview:



## The current situation

Moore (1996) believes that the Australian educational system is the only one to have produced assessment frameworks specifically for the evaluation of ESL development in school contexts. And what is particularly interesting is that two such tools were produced. The ensuing years have seen heated discussion in ESL circles regarding the relative merits of each of the scales. A consensus is emerging that both sets of scales are valuable resources and can be used in a complementary ways.

In the words of one of the writers of the NLLIA Bandscales:

*The ESL field, through no fault of its own, has been caught up in a time of transition in educational politics. Now, with the two ESL scales ... available, there is a danger that ESL becomes 'divided and ruled'. I think there is a strong sense of confusion amongst teachers, and there is a possibility that two 'camps' might develop around the two scales. We should work hard not to let this happen.*

*The ESL field can gain much from these two developments. But in effect, we have all only touched the surface. There is much more to be understood and documented about the learning of ESL in our schools, about the processes of recording and reporting second language progress and about how we ensure that ESL learners' needs are met in our schools. (Penny McKay 1994: 17)*

At this point in time, the use of the NLLIA Bandscales and the ESL Scales varies across the country and across systems. In the following section an indication is given of the current ways in which the various States and Territories have responded to the availability of these and other assessment frameworks to monitor the language development of ESL students.

## Responses by States and Territories to Assessment Trends

The following section outlines the different frameworks (both mainstream and ESL-specific) being used in the various systems in each State and Territory to assess ESL language development. Much of the information that follows has been supplied directly from a survey done as part of this project of all systems in all Australian States and Territories in early 1997. The survey requested information on the current use of mainstream and ESL frameworks in assessing the language development of ESL students and the type of support provided to teachers in using these frameworks.

### Australian Capital Territory

#### Response to national initiatives

In June 1994, the ACT *English Curriculum Framework* was published, incorporating the *National English Statement* as its scope and sequence section. The Outcomes section of the Framework includes the broad outcomes of the *National English Profile* plus additional outcomes which were considered important for ACT schools. To deal adequately with the concerns of the early years of schooling, a further band was added to accommodate preschool education.

Despite the heavy involvement of the ACT in the development and trialing of the national *English Statement and Profile*, 'the introduction of the profiles into ACT

government schools has been far from universally welcomed by teachers' (Willis 1997: 41). This has been attributed to the shift to an outcomes-based approach to education, perceived by some as an erosion of their autonomy; the profile in particular being seen as inaccessible and unwieldy; and workload issues (Devlin & Barr 1996). Towards the end of 1995, industrial action was taken, imposing a series of bans, including a moratorium on curriculum development using the curriculum frameworks and profiles. The dispute lasted some ten months, colouring teachers' perceptions of and future response to these documents:

*... for many teachers, the lengthy hiatus resulting from the bans means that there is a sense that the documents, in particular the profiles, have gone away, just as cynics predicted. Now that the dispute between the government and teachers has been resolved the future roles of the statements and profiles will need delicate handling and their roller-coaster history over the past three years would indicate that there is a lengthy and difficult road to be traversed before they will have the kind of impact upon classroom practice that was envisaged during those heady days of national collaboration in the early 90s. (Devlin & Barr 1996:18)*

In resolving the industrial unrest, an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement included a clause that the *ACT Frameworks* and the national profiles (including the *ESL Scales*) should be used in schools as an aspect of curriculum development and renewal, informing the planning of class programs and school-based reporting of student achievement.

To make the *Curriculum Framework* more user-friendly, the ACT is participating in a project with South Australia and Queensland to make the language of the outcomes statements more accessible to parents. In addition, it is exploring currently available computerised reporting models. A computer program has been made available at minimal cost to all government and independent schools which contains the *ACT Frameworks*, the national profiles, and the *ESL Scales*:

*It has the facility to search by keyword across one or all of these documents simultaneously and then to select all statements and outcomes with references to the selected word. (Willis 1997: 47)*

To further encourage the acceptance of the frameworks and profiles, highly practical professional development programs in outcomes-based education are being offered to teachers, and reporting formats reflecting an outcomes approach are being developed.

### **ACT Department of Education and Training**

Teachers of ESL learners refer to the *ACT English Curriculum Framework* in describing the progress of their students. Despite a certain amount of teacher resistance, the Department remains committed to their use to inform school-based curriculum development and reporting on student progress. In addition, all primary schools are being inserviced in the *First Steps* continua and resource books over the next four years. They will therefore need to make the links between the outcomes of the *ACT English Curriculum Framework* and the developmental continua of the *First Steps* program.

ESL teachers have trialed the *ESL Scales* and use this to inform their teaching practices. All teachers participating in the trial of the profile and *ESL Scales* were given a half day inservice. Additional inservice has been available on the profile and the *ESL Scales* through an National Professional Development Program (NPDP) funded project offered by the professional associations.

In addition to using teacher-developed profiles of development, the ACT, in 1997, will gather data on student literacy achievement using the ACER DART materials to obtain information on year 3 and 5 student performance.

### **Catholic Education Office**

In the Catholic sector, the response to national initiatives and the use of frameworks has been more cautious, preferring to await the outcomes of local and national trialing. They have adopted a more long-term, 'wait-and-see' position.

There is evidence, however, that:

- all schools, in a gradual fashion, have begun to plan with outcomes;
- a number of teachers were finding it difficult to develop programs using general outcome statements. Staff were reluctant to shift from an objectives and content approach to an outcomes approach;
- teachers needed to make meaning of the introduction of national statements and profiles and, as a consequence, needed a more thorough grounding in the implications of outcomes-based education; and
- such change is a paradigm shift for many and implications for programming, assessment and reporting will be evolutionary and take a number of years. (Willis 1997:52)

In the meantime, the ESL teacher and classroom teacher use regular classroom-based procedures to observe students' language use across the curriculum. The ESL teacher develops strategies (eg. running records and folios) to build a picture of student achievement and plots students' language development on the *NLLIA Bandscales*. This is forwarded to the CEO and collated for government funding purposes. Teachers are being inserviced in using the *NLLIA Bandscales* and the *First Steps* continua, and have participated in workshops on assessment, reporting and planning literacy outcomes.

## **New South Wales**

### **Response to national initiatives**

In 1994, the syllabus document for the primary years of schooling, *English K-6*, was produced by the NSW Board of Studies, after many years of drafting, consultation and revising. It was the first syllabus document in Australia to incorporate a statement of outcomes based on the *National English Profile* (amended somewhat to reflect curriculum priorities in New South Wales).

Because it was felt that the Level 1 outcomes of *English K-6* did not take into account sufficiently the great amount of learning which occurs in the early years of schooling, the Department of Education developed the *Early Learning Profiles*, which added a Foundation and Transition level before Level 1.

Following the implementation of outcomes-based education in NSW schools, there was a markedly negative reaction from the teaching profession, who objected to the added work involved and the 'load of newness'. In response to this, the Ministry commissioned in 1995 a review of outcomes and profiles, conducted by Professor Ken Eltis. At this stage, a moratorium was placed on the implementation of the outcomes, profiles and levels aspects of the syllabus.

Inservicing on both the *English K-6 Syllabus* and on the related *ESL Scales* was suspended. Most schools used this as a justification to cease the implementation of the syllabus document and a widespread cynicism was evident regarding any curriculum initiatives.

The review found that:

*The two most frequently mentioned concerns were: the pace of change introduced in schools was too rapid; and the perception that increased attention to assessment and reporting was resulting in less time being available for teachers to concentrate on teaching and learning programs. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents indicated that a focus on outcomes facilitated the quality of teaching and learning and the monitoring of individual student progression. (Eltis 1995:76)*

As a result of the review, a revised *English K-6 Syllabus* is being developed, no longer based on Levels but on Stages. Whereas the Levels mapped individual progress unrelated to age or grade, the Stages will describe minimum achievement to be attained at particular points in the primary and secondary years (eg by the end of Kindergarten, the end of Year 2, the end of Year 4, and the end of Year 6). In addition, the number of outcomes will be greatly reduced.

The Eltis Review also received submissions in relation to the *ESL Scales*. Concerns included:

- *the comparability of the ESL Scales with the English outcomes and with the Early Learning Profiles;*
- *anxiety at the difficulty of combining ESL scales into key learning area profiles;*
- *the perception that outcomes and profiles were essentially 'monocultural constructs';*
- *the recognition that teachers should measure the achievements of ESL students in terms of their understanding of the subject content rather than their facility with the English language;*
- *the feeling by some teachers that the scales were complex and the training variable;*
- *the difficulty for mainstream teachers to become familiar with the ESL Scales and the importance for mainstream teachers to understand the role the ESL Scales may play in identifying individual students' learning needs*
- *the need for sound professional development in using the scales for both ESL and mainstream teachers (Eltis 1997: 88)*

Despite the negative reaction to the implementation of the Key Learning Area outcomes, the Eltis Review found that the *ESL Scales* were an 'important adjunct to achieving equity' for ESL students and that work on the use of the *ESL Scales* in schools were valuable and was informed by an understanding of implementation issues. (Michell 1997)

### **New South Wales Department of School Education**

The main frameworks used by NSW departmental teachers in assessing the progress of ESL students are the *English K-6 Syllabus*, the *Early Learning Profiles*, and the *ESL Scales*.

In its *ESL Education Statement* (1995 draft), the NSW Department of School Education states that one of the objectives for ESL Education is 'to ensure the implementation of assessment procedures which enable appropriate identification, diagnosis and support of ESL students' (p.2). In achieving this

objective, the Statement requires that principals will ensure 'accurate assessment, documentation and reporting about ESL students with reference to KLA and *ESL Scales* outcomes and system requirements'(p.5). It is the responsibility of the ESL teacher to 'identify and report on ESL students' achievements in key learning areas with reference to *ESL Scales*, and to maintain relevant, ongoing records on ESL students for ESL planning, accountability and reporting with reference to the *ESL Scales* and other measures as required' (p.5).

In a memorandum to schools, the Director general outlined the status of the *ESL Scales* in NSW Government Schools as 'an essential resource for teachers to describe and report on the English language and Literacy achievements, needs and progress of ESL students' and recommended their use in tracking ESL students across critical transitions throughout their schooling.

As an additional resource, the Specific Focus Programs Directorate of the Department is currently developing an *ESL Curriculum Framework*. This document will be based in stages, linked to the various key learning areas, and referenced to the *ESL Scales*.

The *Framework* will contain the following elements:

- Principles of ESL Teaching and Learning
- Stage language and literacy demands
- Nature and diversity of ESL learners at this stage
- Stage ESL scope and sequence
- Relationship to key content-concepts at this stage
- Key assessment activities
- Progressive and "benchmark" student work samples.
- ESL teaching and learning issues specific to this stage
- Collaborative programming and recording proformas and software disc.

The *Framework* will be supported by a variety of materials, including exemplary teaching units, student work samples, and a task design booklet.

Professional development support to teachers has been provided in the form of an inservice program on the nature and implementation of the *ESL Scales*. On release of the *ESL Curriculum Framework* additional support will be provided in terms of Executive Support Materials, inservice sessions and workshops and follow up in school support by trained facilitators for the initial phase.

### **Catholic Education Commission (New South Wales)**

As each diocese is relatively autonomous, it is not possible to describe the overall situation in Catholic schools. The Sydney diocese, for example, is using the *ESL Scales* in conjunction with the English K-6 Syllabus and the Early Learning Profiles. Similarly, the Parramatta diocese is using the *ESL Scales* to benchmark all phase one and early phase two ESL students. Students in transition from phase two to phase three are assessed by ESL teachers in collaboration with mainstream colleagues, using descriptors from both the *ESL Scales* and the English K-6 Syllabus. The pointers and level statements in the *ESL Scales* are used by ESL teachers to assist in compiling data for the annual ESL survey required of each school in the diocese, particularly in helping to determine the number of students in particular phases. The *ESL Scales* are used in the Catholic Intensive Language Centre to assess new arrival students both on entry and exit.

The Sydney diocese is currently providing inservice to ESL teachers and classroom teachers on the *ESL Scales* with a view to teachers then implementing the *ESL Scales* as an assessment and planning tool if they desire. So far, over 110

teachers (90 ESL and 20 classroom teachers) have participated in training, with a further 55 (mainly ESL teachers) scheduled for early 1997. Facilitators have been trained by a 5 module course developed through NPDP funding. All infant teachers have undergone an Early Literacy Course focusing mainly on reading & writing assessment strategies with a particular emphasis on meeting the needs of ESL learners in the mainstream classroom.

In the Parramatta diocese, all ESL specialists have been familiarised with the *ESL Scales*. In 1997, mainstream teachers are also being offered inservicing. In 1996, 65 primary and secondary teachers have been formally inserviced on all modules of the ESL Training Kit. In 1997, there will be further professional development on the use of the *ESL Scales* as a programming and teaching tool (through the NPDP funded "Language and Literacy in the Middle Years of Schooling" action research projects). Thirty teachers in the diocese have done a Graduate Certificate in TESOL through the Australian Catholic University which also investigates use of the *ESL Scales*.

Generally the implementation in the Catholic system has been more measured, with each diocese providing a great deal of support and guidance. The teachers appear to be less stressed by the notion of outcomes-based assessment and reporting, seeing this as enabling them to continue with an approach which is highly learner-centred.

## **Northern Territory**

### **Response to national initiatives**

In 1994 the new Northern Territory English course of study, already trialed and popular with teachers, was about to be released. At the same time however, schools were being inserviced in the *First Steps* program, with a sequence and organisation somewhat different from the new curriculum. And the Board of Studies had just decided that all future curriculum documents would incorporate statements of learning outcomes based on the national documents – again, a significant difference in content and organisation.

In 1995, the nationally developed profiles in English were trialed in a number of schools:

*Results from the trialing process indicate – among other things – that teachers are finding it too confusing to use the NT English Curriculum for teaching and then the English profile for tracking the development of student learning. Teachers want both the profiles and the Curriculum to use similar language, and they want the language to be simplified so that Primary teachers particularly will be able to profile in each learning area and have a life too. (Hayward & Elvery 1997:28)*

Towards the end of 1995, work-bans disrupted the implementation of profiling in the Northern Territory, with few teachers participating in the 1996 workshops aimed to assist schools in the profiling program.

In 1996, a draft *Northern Territory English Profile* was developed by the NT Board of Studies, based on the *National English Profile*, but with a reduced number of outcomes written in accessible English. The strands are organised in terms of 'knowing how to ...' (Texts/Contexts, Strategies) and 'knowing about ...' (Grammar/Conventions).

The *NT ESL Outcomes Profile* has also been developed, based on the overall structure of the *ESL Scales* and reflecting aspects of the *NLLIA Bandscales*. These scales are intended to provide for the needs of ESL and Aboriginal students, from literate and non-literate backgrounds. Their progress will be charted on a second language learning continuum until they are able to be profiled on the English profile.

With a quarter of the territory's students coming from Aboriginal backgrounds where English is spoken as a second or third language (often as a foreign language), the major priorities in the development of the *NT ESL Outcomes Profile* have been:

*Firstly, to make the profile inclusive of ESL learners in non-urban communities with a predominantly Aboriginal population; and secondly, to ensure that the document is easy for non-specialists to understand. The ESL Outcomes Profile should be a useful focus for dialogue between ESL support teachers and classroom teachers, and between teachers and parents and caregivers. (Lokan (ed) 1997:74)*

The *NT ESL Outcomes Profile* differs to a certain extent from the *ESL Scales* in that the Oral Interaction strand is separated into Listening & Speaking. These two strands have beginning levels prior to Level 1 to cater particularly for students for whom English is not the community language and where its use is largely limited to the school domain.

To make the relationship between the *English/ESL Profile* and the *First Steps* continua clearer, a chart has been drawn up which enables teachers to see at a glance how students' progress along the developmental continua relates to the a particular level on the *English/ESL Profile*. This information will also be available in computerised form, though 'manageability of the requirements of both outcomes profiling and *First Steps* continues to cause some concern' (Jacob 1997: 63).

A common reporting format has also been developed, with the development of student learning toward stated outcomes being made explicit in each report. The recognition of common levels of achievement is also seen as beneficial for the large numbers of mobile students in the territory whose movements from school to school often mean a lack of continuity in their education.

Despite apprehension on the part of some teachers as to the nature of and relationship between the various documents, trialing of the *NT English Profile* will continue throughout 1997, with full implementation in 1998.

### **Catholic Education Office**

*NT Outcomes Profile* for English as a Second Language is being used in Catholic schools as the primary document with *NLLIA Bandscales* and *ESL Scales* as supporting documents. In urban primary schools, *First Steps* is also being implemented, with students being placed on the developmental continuum (though for ESL students, the *NT Outcomes Profile* for ESL will be used).

In 1996-97, English literacy development has been and is a priority and in 1997 staff are involved in both profiling workshops and specific *NT ESL Outcomes Profile* inservices.

Teachers in urban settings are continuing to be inserviced in *First Steps*. In several urban schools teachers have been inserviced in the *ESL in the Mainstream* courses conducted by Department of Education. All teachers new to the NT and teachers

of students with special needs have had an initial inservice on the *NT ESL Outcomes Profile*. Remote Catholic Aboriginal schools vary in level of inservicing on the *NLLIA Bandscales* and the *ESL Scales*, but most have taken part in the *ESL in Anangu Schools* program conducted by the Department of Education.

## Queensland

### Response to national initiatives

The situation in Queensland is somewhat different from the other States and Territories. The Queensland *English Syllabus* materials (Years 1-10) do not incorporate the *National English Profile*. Rather, a set of *Student Performance Standards* were developed in draft form in 1994. These standards were redrafted in 1995, now consisting only of statements and outcomes, with no pointers. The revised *SPS* was intended to align more closely with the content of the *English Syllabus*, the outcomes being based on the Syllabus objectives. Although considerable work was put into the development of these documents, various pressures in Queensland prevented the implementation of *Student Performance Standards*.

More recently, *Queensland Levels of Student Performance* have been developed, but a ban on their use has been put in place due to industrial pressure:

*Many teachers simply do not want to be involved with outcomes-based assessment and reporting. There is alienation among those teachers who gave it their best effort before and who now feel abandoned. There is the threat of further industrial action by unions.*  
(Grace & Ludwig 1997:164)

After many years of struggling to accommodate national, state, and union interests, the formulation of evaluative frameworks remains strongly contested in Queensland and it appears at this stage that the use of reporting frameworks based on national profiles is unlikely to proceed in Queensland (Wyatt-Smith, C. & Ludwig, C. 1996; Grace & Ludwig 1997).

### Queensland Department of Education

Departmental teachers in Queensland use the *English Syllabus Years 1-10* as a framework to support the literacy needs of all students, including ESL. It has been a deliberate strategy in Queensland for ESL personnel to work closely with teams developing mainstream documents and programs to infuse ESL perspectives where possible. The English Syllabus has therefore been the major document that underpins work with students from language backgrounds other than English and its assessment framework has been used to guide teachers when assessing outcomes for ESL students. In addition to the English Syllabus, a Queensland version of *First Steps* is being used in many schools.

More specifically related to ESL learners, a number of ESL teachers are also using the *NLLIA Bandscales*:

*Although Queensland has not adopted their use at a systematic level, many ESL teachers are finding them helpful. In the present industrial climate, it would be difficult to ask mainstream teachers to use them in any comprehensive way. As Commonwealth requirements for educational accountability accelerate I believe ESL teachers will make greater use of the Bandscales as there is not capacity within our system presently to develop any other framework*

*at the moment. (Response by the Queensland Department of Education to project survey.)*

Other assessment procedures include the *Year 2 Diagnostic Net* and the *Year 6 Test*, from which ESL learners can be exempted. It is expected that Queensland will endorse the move to *National Benchmarking*, however the question of their suitability in relation to ESL learners is a matter of concern to Queensland ESL teachers. In many of the recent developments in this whole area, there is apprehension that little acknowledgment is given to the fact that the needs of ESL learners are very different to the general literacy needs of other students.

### **Catholic Education Centre**

Catholic schools in Brisbane are using the *NLLIA ESL Bandscales*, the *First Steps* continua, and the *Queensland Student Performance Standards (SPS) for English*.

Brisbane Catholic Education was associated with the NLLIA ESL Development Project, which resulted in the *ESL Bandscales*, from the beginning, seconding a primary teacher to write the primary Bandscales under the direction of the project manager. The Catholic ESL advisors have been involved in conducting inservice on the *Bandscales* for Sydney Catholic Education Office and the NSW Department of School Education as well as within the Archdiocese and in the Diocese of Cairns.

The Brisbane Archdiocese is conscious of the need for accountability in ESL and for ESL teachers to be able to identify student needs, and to assess and report on students' ESL development in a meaningful manner. It has therefore sought to make the *Bandscales*, together with other frameworks, particularly *First Steps*, practicable for teachers. ESL teachers have had intensive and ongoing inservice in the application of the *NLLIA ESL Bandscales* and mainstream teachers (early years) have been inserviced on developmental continua, based on *First Steps* and on *SPS*.

### **The Association of Independent Schools of Queensland Inc.**

In the independent schools in Queensland, a variety of assessment frameworks is used: the *National English Statement and Profiles*; the *Draft Queensland ESL Proficiency Levels*; and the *ESL Scales*. It is the *NLLIA Bandscales*, however, which are most widely used. The AISQ has run two training sessions each year for the last two years to support teachers in the use of the *NLLIA Bandscales*.

## **South Australia**

### **Response to national initiatives**

In the 1970s and 1980s, the education system in South Australia was characterised by a high level of school autonomy in curriculum development, underpinned by the 'Freedom and Authority in Schools' memorandum of 1970. Teachers were encouraged by the Director General to experiment and be creative:

*... you have the widest liberty to vary courses, to alter the timetable, to decide the organisation of the school and government within the school, to experiment with teaching methods, (and) assessment of student achievement. (Jones 1970)*

This situation began to change in the late 1980s with senior curriculum personnel putting the case for outlining specific student outcomes which might be expected and assessed at various stages. It was argued that statements of student learning

outcomes, monitored and reported on by teachers, would retain control of assessment in the hands of the teaching profession, as opposed to external testing authorities (and often commercial publishers), as was the case in other countries (Boomer 1987). This position was influential nationally, and was instrumental in the development of the national curriculum and profiles project.

Because of South Australia's early commitment to 'attainment levels' and heavy involvement in the developmental phase of the national curriculum project, there has been a much greater acceptance of the *National English Statement* and the *National English Profile*. These documents have been adopted virtually unchanged as the outcomes framework for the state. Throughout the process there has been a commitment to inclusivity and a concern for education equity, with the statements of attainment seen as providing the basis to improve the schooling outcomes of such groups as Aboriginal students (Stehn 1997).

Implementation has been in process since 1994 with a carefully staged timeline such that teachers are being gradually familiarised with certain aspects of the documents at defined points in time. All government schools are now expected to report student achievement in English against the *Profile*.

Although at the system and sector level there was a great deal of cooperation and decisiveness about goals and means of achieving them, at the level of the individual teacher, the response to the initiative has been less positive, particularly among secondary teachers who had just undergone a period of curriculum and assessment change:

*It is fair to say that the average Secondary English teacher viewed another innovation with something less than delight. Implementation of the English statement and profile was thus likely to be patchy in quality, and it has been. (Homer, Millard & Reddin 1996: 46)*

The smooth path of implementation has been somewhat disrupted by 'the volatile industrial situation ... providing distraction and a dissipation of energies at a time of major changes' (Homer, Millard & Reddin 1996: 46). To support the teachers, a number of inservice courses and support materials have been developed including train-the-trainer courses, mini-courses and distance education packages.

### **Department for Education and Children's Services**

In 1994, the *ESL Scales* were approved for use in government schools in order to assess, monitor and report the achievement of learners in ESL. Every school and ESL teacher was issued with a copy of the *Scales* and principals were informed of its use. Schools with ESL programs and Intensive Language Units were encouraged to include the implementation of the *ESL Scales* within their curriculum management and school management plans.

In 1995 ESL teachers, schools with ESL programs and non-school-based personnel were offered training aimed at developing their understanding of the purpose, structure and terminology of the *ESL Scales*. To assist the teachers in promoting and assessing the language development of ESL learners, the following support is provided:

- a structured training and development program for ESL teachers including those who are newly appointed
- the *ESL Curriculum Statement for SA Schools*
- ESL Scales* teacher-to-teacher proformas

- ESL Scales Moderated Writing Samples (expected to be published by Term 3, 1997)
- units of *Quality Assessment Tasks* (to be available in Term 1, 1998)
- the report on sharing good practice: "Monitoring Student Achievement in ESL School Based Development Project: 1996".

There is also a project to develop culturally inclusive Quality Assessment Tasks in ESL and one or more areas of study. In terms of reporting, ESL teachers are expected to report on ESL learner achievement in English language development at classroom, school and DECS level alongside the profiles for the areas of learning. The following reporting timeline has been established:

- 1995: ESL Scales familiarisation
- 1996: ESL teachers to use the ESL Scales to report to other teachers
- 1997: ESL teachers to report to other teachers and parents
- 1998: ESL teachers to report to DECS, other teachers and parents

Data on ESL student achievement will be collected by the DECS to help inform ESL curriculum provision and delivery and will provide information for ESL Program accountability.

### **Catholic Education Office**

In the Catholic system, a variety of assessment procedures are currently used. The majority of teachers plan assessment procedures within a unit of work and focus on schematic structure and linguistic features. Some have explored the use of *First Steps* but have not found it appropriate for ESL learners.

The *ESL Scales* have also been used but will be superseded by the *NLLIA Bandscales* which are seen to contextualise language within school levels, deal with methodology and provide rich descriptions of levels. A professional development program on the *Bandscales* has begun - initially with ESL teachers and later others.

## **Tasmania**

### **Response to national initiatives**

In Tasmania, due to significant involvement by Tasmanian educators in the collaborative process, the *National English Statement* and the *English Profile* were accepted intact and distributed to schools from 1994. Since then they have been adopted as the first point of reference for curriculum review and development in English, though they are not seen as 'the sole, immutable and definitive underpinning of the curriculum' (Pullen 1997).

The statement and profile were released with the expectation (not requirement) that they would be used:

- to assist teachers in planning the learning programs in schools and colleges;
- to assist teachers to monitor the progress of students;
- to inform the reporting process;
- to assist schools and colleges in the review of their education program.

The implementation process was deliberately gradual, spanning some five years. To assist schools, a series of support documents have been developed:

- Working with the English statement

- Working with the English profile
- What is English?
- Snapshots of the English classroom at different bands
- Scope and Sequence: planning an English program
- English in focus: a series of exemplary English units

Because of this unhurried, non-coercive approach, underpinned by a range of support materials and mechanisms, there appears to have been a high degree of acceptance in Tasmanian schools.

### **Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development**

ESL and mainstream teachers use the ESL Scales to demonstrate progress, assess skills, look at likely next steps, and report to teachers and parents. When ESL children no longer require direct ESL support, assessment, monitoring and reporting move to Key Intended Literacy Outcomes (KILOS). These statements of key outcomes are the result of a significant literacy project in Tasmania has also had an impact on provision for ESL students. Drawing on the national profiles, a number of key literacy outcomes were identified, with the expectation that all teachers (primary and secondary) will address these outcomes in each area of the curriculum. The Department will require system-wide reporting on the achievement of the KILOS from each school. The implications of assessing ESL students according to this document are currently being considered by the Department.

ESL teachers have been involved in the development of the *NLLIA Bandscales* and the *Victorian Profiles* through consultation. Three-day workshops on using the *ESL Scales* have also been conducted for ESL teachers throughout Tasmania in Hobart.

The *Directed Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART)*, developed by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) and based on the *National English Profile*, has been used in 1996 to monitor the development of Year 5 students.

### **Catholic Education Office**

Teachers in Catholic Schools in Tasmania are encouraged to use the *ESL Scales*, the *First Steps Continuum*, and where appropriate, the ACER *Diagnostic English Language Tests*. In 1996 teachers from Catholic schools attended a three day professional development course organised by the Department of Education. The CEO purchased the *ESL Scales* for their participating teachers and each participant was issued with a resource book which focused on using the *ESL Scales* to inform decisions relating to assessment, recording, reporting, classroom practice, planning and programming.

## **Victoria**

### **Response to national initiatives**

Victoria had made a head start in curriculum reform with the publication of its *Frameworks* documents in 1988. In the *English Framework*, there was an attempt at outlining growth points: 'broad characteristics of language growth rather than strict performance criteria'. By 1991, however, this gentle attempt at guidance had become a more aggressive adoption of an outcomes-based approach, as exemplified in the *Victorian English Profiles Handbook*.

By the time the national statements and profiles were released, Victoria was already way down the path of implementing outcomes-based curricula, with clearly specified student learning outcomes.

In 1993, following a great deal of criticism of the national documents, a review was set up to investigate their inadequacies and suitability for adoption in Victoria. It was recommended that the documents be taken up, but with significant revision. By July 1994, a draft of the *Curriculum and Standards Framework*, based on the national documents, was released for widespread consultation.

The *Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework (English)*, published in 1995 by the Board of Studies, is based to a large extent on the nationally developed *English Profile*. There are however a number of differences:

- there is one document rather than two;
- there are seven levels, not eight;
- a Curriculum Focus statement is provided for each strand at each level, providing an indication of the kind of learning context in which is it anticipated the learning outcomes defined for that strand will be demonstrated;
- an explicit link is made between school year levels and expected levels of achievement
- the place of grammar and spelling are explicitly located in the CSF
- a greater emphasis on technology in English (Howes, Doecke & Hayes 1996)

The CSF is intended to inform the teaching, learning and assessment programs of all Victorian teachers and from 1996 all government schools are required to use the CSF for reporting student achievement in the school annual report.

In 1996, the *ESL Companion to the English CSF* was published, based heavily on the *ESL Scales*:

*The development of the ESL Companion document is very significant. It effectively brings English as a Second Language teaching programs into the mainstream curriculum. ESL programs had an uncertain status under the national Statements and Profiles. They received but one ambiguous mention in the English Statement. ... The development of the ESL Companion to the English CSF gave ESL programs the same status as mainstream programs and now provides schools with an important option for assessing and reporting the achievement of ESL students. (Howes, Doecke & Hayes 1996:65)*

The above timeframe reflects the approach taken of 'full and immediate' implementation of an outcomes-based curriculum, assessment and reporting program.

### **Department of Education**

The *Curriculum Standards and Framework (CSF)* document is used for planning curriculum and reporting on student achievement. The *ESL Companion to the English CSF* (developed from the CSF and the *ESL Scales*) assists schools to plan curriculum for students of non-English-speaking background. *Keys to Life Early Literacy Program – Developmental Stages of Reading* is also available for further assistance with children in the early stages of literacy development. This document includes relevant indicators from the *ESL Companion*.

The *Assessment and Reporting Support Materials in English and ESL* document provides teachers with assessment principles and record-keeping techniques. In addition, to support CSF implementation, schools have been provided with training in KIDMAP, a computer software program designed to assist teachers plan an outcomes-based program and then assess and record student progress against those outcomes.

Professional development for the CSF and the *ESL Companion* documents have been provided to schools across the state and modules to support implementation have been provided in kit form.

### Catholic Education Office

Several Catholic schools in Victoria use both the *NLLIA Bandscales* and the *ESL Scales* along with the *ESL Companion Document to the English Curriculum & Standards Framework* (Victorian Board of Studies 1996) and the developmental continua of the Western Australian *First Steps* program (Reading, Writing, Spelling and Oral Language components). For recently arrived learners, the *New Arrivals Language Record* (CEC, Victoria) is used. Individual teachers record language skills using checklists, anecdotal records, planned observation sheets (later compiled into observation diaries), and file/communication books which are a record of students' achievements and progress and a means of communication between home and school.

In terms of professional development, ESL Education Officers & selected ESL teachers attended a partnership conference organised by the Victorian Department of Education in 1996 on the ESL Course Advice Documents. The purpose of this conference was to introduce the participants to the ESL Course Advice Professional Development support kit and to assist ESL teachers to set up and support regional ESL teachers' networks across Victoria.

Professional development to assist teachers in the use of the *ESL Scales* has been largely offered through regional network meetings of ESL teachers and through school closure days and staff meetings.

A number of other professional development opportunities have been offered:

- Focused Literacy Intervention - three days using *First Steps* and the *NLLIA Bandscales*.
- *First Steps* professional development (two days for each of the four components), looking at how to use the CSF with *First Steps* and the *NLLIA Bandscales*
- Reading Recovery, consisting of twenty modules (spaced learning), including collections of pre- and post- intervention data using the Marie Clay Observation Survey
- *Keys to Life* Professional Development Strategy Plan, an introduction to the philosophy and modules contained within the reading component of *Keys to Life*.

Teachers have also attended a professional development program focused on monitoring & assessing students' English development in the primary school (About Teaching Languages - Unit 4 Monitoring & Assessing Language Development, CEO, Victoria). This program has been trialed in a number of schools across Melbourne in order to:

- identify key features of strong & effective assessment
- address issues in assessing students' second language development in both ESL and LOTE

- explore links between language competence and how this relates to learning in school
- identify the stages of the teaching/learning cycle and professional growth points for teachers in their understandings regarding language acquisition & development
- develop procedures that most effectively monitor students' English language and learning developments
- develop and trial appropriate record-keeping formats and ways of summarising & reporting assessment information to various target groups; and
- explore ways of using the assessment information to inform the teaching-learning cycle.

## **Western Australia**

### **Response to national initiatives**

Work on a standards framework for curriculum accountability purposes had begun in Western Australia as early as 1989. Draft *English Student Outcomes Statements* were published in 1992, with a high priority on the notion of inclusivity and diversity, attempting to ensure that the framework addressed the needs of students from all backgrounds.

With the appearance of the national curriculum project, the work on the *Student Outcomes Statements* shifted to adapting the national profiles and carrying out consultative activities. The modified national profile was trialed in 1994 and 1995. The trials concluded that overall the student outcomes would 'be valuable as an integral part of a curriculum framework and that they had the potential to improve learning outcomes for students' (Randall 1997:204).

Following extensive consultation and a positive response from the trials, the modified *Student Outcome Statements* are being further refined and are to be adopted from 1998 for use in schools, incorporated within new statewide curriculum frameworks. At this stage, then, adaptations of the national statements and profiles have not yet been implemented in Western Australia.

While not directly linked to the national curriculum initiatives, the *First Steps* project needs to be mentioned because of its impact not only in Western Australia, but in all Australian States and Territories. *First Steps* is a literacy support program devised, trialed and inserviced in Western Australia based on developmental continua in the areas of oral language, reading, writing, and spelling. These developmental continua were extensively researched and were available to the writers of the national English profile. The continua are supported by resource books outlining teaching practices designed to assist students to progress along the continua. The popularity of this program has predisposed teachers in Western Australia towards an approach which describes development in terms of a continuum against which student performance can be mapped. A 'link document' has now been produced which indicates to teachers how the information gained about student progress from the *First Steps* program can be related to the *Student Outcomes Statements*.

### **Education Department of Western Australia**

While waiting for the *Student Outcomes Statement* to become available, teachers have been using a number of assessment frameworks, particularly the *First Steps* continua. Some use the *Framework of Stages* based on the Australian Language Levels project, while the Intensive Language Centres are trialing the use of the *NLLIA Bandscales* with newly arrived ESL students. The *Bandscales* and the *ESL Scales* are both endorsed by the Department as companion documents to the SOS. Almost all ESL teachers have received training in outcomes-based education and monitoring using standards frameworks. Mainstream teachers of ESL students have accessed professional development offered through the ESL Unit on using the *Framework of Stages* and the *Bandscales*. (Fine-grained detail is seen to be provided by the *Framework of Stages* with more global judgements being made against the *Bandscales* and later the SOS.) Most primary teachers have also undergone *First Steps* training and those teachers involved in the trialing of the *Student Outcome Statements* have been trained in the use of the SOS.

### **Catholic Education Office**

Western Australian Catholic primary schools use a range of tools to assess the language development of young children from non-English speaking backgrounds. The most widely used of these would be the *First Steps* continua in which the great majority of the primary teachers state-wide have had extensive professional development and ongoing support from within their schools and from Catholic Education Office Consultants. A small number of teachers took part in the National Professional Development Program which examined the application of the 1994 draft of the *Student Outcome Statements*. In the Kimberley region of the state, some teachers had professional development in an ESL program for Aboriginal students which used the *NLLIA ESL Bandscales* as an assessment framework.

### **Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia**

Each school is independent and there is a great variety in the use of assessment frameworks: *First Steps* continua (with reference to the Highgate Report in terms of the usefulness of *First Steps* material and continua for ESL students); *ESL Framework of Stages* (eg to identify point of transfer from Intensive Language Unit to mainstream); *NLLIA Bandscales* (eg for new arrivals from Albania); *Student Outcome Statements*; teacher observation and anecdotal evidence (eg for placement in the categories in their submissions for government funding).

Very little professional development on evaluative frameworks has taken place with the Independent sector as yet, simply because the ESL Consultancy has been run on a .5 basis for only eighteen months. The schools are waiting until the SOS have been revised before inservicing teachers in its use with ESL students. The main focus of professional development has been on *ESL in the Mainstream*.

In the survey conducted for this project, a spokesperson for the AISWA commented that:

*As some schools in the Independent sector cater for one cultural/religious group exclusively they often don't feel the need for using evaluative frameworks in any rigorous form eg the difference between a new arrival and a second phase learner being very clear and their different needs obvious.*

And raised a question pertinent to future assessment considerations:

*An interesting future development within the Independent sector, which has already started in some of our longer established and more*

*prestigious schools, is the intake of fee paying foreign students who presumably have learnt English as a foreign language in their homeland. Will they be assessed using the current evaluative frameworks or will they require to be reported on using assessment measures more appropriate to the ELICOS domain?*

<b>Overview of English and ESL Assessment Frameworks Used in each State</b>		
<b>State</b>	<b>Government Schools</b>	<b>Catholic Schools</b>
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	ACT English Curriculum Framework First Steps ESL Scales	NLLIA Bandscales First Steps
<b>New South Wales</b>	English K-6 Syllabus Early Learning Profiles ESL Scales First Steps ESL Curriculum Standards Framework (Being developed)	English K-6 Syllabus Early Learning Profiles ESL Scales
<b>Northern Territory</b>	NT Outcomes Profile for ESL ESL Scales First Steps	NT Outcomes Profile for ESL ESL Scales NLLIA Bandscales First Steps
<b>Queensland</b>	Queensland English Syllabus Years 1-10 Queensland version of First Steps NLLIA Bandscales Qld Draft ESL Proficiency Scales (1996)	NLLIA ESL Bandscales First Steps Queensland Student Performance Standards for English Proposed ESL Scales of Need (Draft 3)
<b>South Australia</b>	ESL Scales ESL Curriculum Statement for SA Schools	ESL Scales Language Australia Bandscales First Steps
<b>Tasmania</b>	ESL Scales Key Intended Literacy Outcomes (KILOS)	ESL Scales First Steps Diagnostic English Language Tests (ACER)
<b>Victoria</b>	Curriculum Standards & Framework (CSF) ESL Companion to English CSF Keys to Life Early Literacy Program Assessment & Reporting Support Materials in English and ESL KIDMAP	NLLIA Bandscales ESL Companion to English CSF First Steps ESL Scales Monitoring & Assessing Language Development New Arrivals Record Reading Recovery Keys to Life Early Literacy Program
<b>Western Australia</b>	Student Outcome Statements First Steps Framework of Stages (ALL) NLLIA Bandscales ESL Scales	First Steps Student Outcome Statements ESL Bandscales

## Issues Raised in the Literature

From the above overview, it is obvious that each State and Territory is endeavouring to implement assessment practices based on the use of both mainstream and ESL-specific frameworks. It might now be timely to review some of the reactions from teachers, administrators and academics in relation to their use.

The following section is based on the research and observations of academics and administrators involved in the implementation of the various frameworks and on studies of teachers and school systems engaged in the trialing process. Because very little research has been conducted into the use of specific ESL frameworks, this review also includes information from mainstream trialing which has relevance to the ESL context.

### Positive contributions

In many cases, the use of the assessment frameworks has been seen as having a positive impact, particularly in terms of the quality of teaching and learning, improved reporting practices, enhanced professionalism and the addressing of equity issues.

#### *Improved teaching and learning*

Bottomley, Dalton & Corbel (1994) see the value of profiling in the fact that assessment is integrated into the learning process through the use of attainment targets which are directly linked to course content and objectives. Learners are able to obtain useful diagnostic feedback on their progress and achievement since explicit criteria are provided against which they can compare their performances.

Bronlyn Schoer, Principal of Lucas Heights Community School in NSW, comments that:

*In teaching and learning an outcomes approach makes us think more specifically about where we are headed in relation to the learning process. Although this sounds very simple, as far as I am concerned it is a revolution in the mind of a teacher where they change a question from 'what am I going to teach?' by swinging 180 degrees and ask 'what are the students going to learn?' ... Because of this, many of my staff have had to confront their long held assumptions and beliefs about their role within the classroom and the learning process. (Schoer 1997: 23)*

In Western Australia, Neil Jarvis, Executive Director of Curriculum, reported from trialing of *Student Outcomes Statements* that teachers felt they were making better judgements about student learning and achievement because the progressive development in concepts, skills and processes clearly was set out in the statements. They were also made more conscious of assessment criteria when planning learning experiences, leading to a sharper focus on where individual students need to improve. The *Student Outcomes Statements* raised levels of expectation and it was felt that students' learning improved to meet them. They gave teachers and schools a common knowledge and an improved sense of continuity of learning from teacher to teacher and from school to school. And school development planning was enhanced by student performance information, with the data being used to identify priorities and determine strategies to improve learning in particular areas (Jarvis 1997; Randall 1997).

The Forum on National Statements and Profiles in Australian Schools (1997) found that the exercise has focused teachers on why they are doing what they are doing and has led to reflection on the role of teaching and intended learning. The use of outcomes-based frameworks has facilitated teacher development and led to greater collaboration, cooperative planning, and organisational restructuring. The profiles and statements have given increased legitimacy to teacher judgements and have provided a shared language, giving an explicit focus to what teachers are trying to achieve in the classroom.

Williams (1994), while welcoming the potential for enhanced teaching and learning, sounds a cautionary note:

*One potential value of the widespread adoption of a new curriculum, assessment or reporting framework can lie in the process of its implementation. This can induce teachers to think about their work, and of students' learning, in new and productive ways. It is in this sense that an argument that a framework which claims to capture the results of "good teaching" such as the ESL Scales, can be seen as a way of improving the general standard of teaching. However, this is a two-edged sword. For if the framework acts to restrict teachers and limit them in their capacities to meet the needs of their students, then the introduction of a framework can actually inhibit good and creative teaching. (p.20)*

#### ***Improved reporting practices***

The use of classroom-based assessment anchored in statements of system expectations is seen by many as a useful way of locating assessment within the classroom and yet satisfying the need to provide information about learner progress which can be interpreted at a broader level by other stakeholders.

*In a public education system which has the responsibility of ensuring that all young people have access to a high quality, broad based and well balanced curriculum, we cannot operate in a laissez-faire manner, leaving things to chance. We must now clarify what we expect our students to be able to know, do and understand at various stages in relation to the designated areas of learning. (Boomer 1991)*

Teachers reported that the use of a common framework and language for monitoring student learning achievement enhanced the information being communicated by various reporting processes. Information gathered at the classroom level to inform teaching and learning is used as a data source for school development planning and school and system accountability (Jarvis 1997; Randall 1997).

Similarly, Bottomley, Dalton & Corbel (1994) noted that better communication between users of assessment information and educational institutions is established through the use of various forms of outcome reporting which are couched in performance terms and are hence intelligible to non-specialists.

#### ***Enhanced professionalism***

Western Australian teachers found that their use of the *Student Outcomes Statements* provided a clear incentive for developing more professional teaching practices. There was increased collaboration among teachers and teachers were more reflective about their practices and more willing to share professional strategies (Jarvis 1997; Randall 1997).

In the Northern Territory, teachers pointed to the usefulness of profiling information to new teachers who need to know what their students can do but who sometimes find these students (many of whom are Aboriginal) reluctant to demonstrate their knowledge, particularly to strangers, something that can lead to low expectations and little sense of progress (Cockshutt 1997).

### ***Equity***

In New South Wales, a focus on outcomes was seen to have the potential to address some important aspects of equity in schooling. The review of the *English K-6* document pointed out that 'the school curriculum should contribute to a fairer society by building on students' own experiences, cultures and values while also enhancing all students' participation and success in valued areas of learning' (Eltis 1997: 71).

In Western Australia, the *Student Outcomes Statements* were seen to give schools the flexibility to choose the strategies most suited for their students to achieve the outcomes. The *Student Outcomes Statements* are based on the assumption that all students can be successful learners. Teachers noted that the statements allowed achievement of all students to be described using the one framework (Jarvis 1997).

Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory saw great gains to be made from profiling, as the frameworks made a link with "mainstream" schooling, which allowed all students to be measured against national standards. They saw the value of some sort of permanent and consistent record of student progress in situations where students are mobile and attendance is irregular. They also looked favourably on the reporting of progress according to levels of achievement rather than against benchmarks for years of schooling, so making more allowance for different rates of progress (Cockshutt 1997).

One of the recommendations of the Forum on National Statements and Profiles in Australian Schools (1997) was that an outcomes based approach should continue to be used to ensure that educational access and entitlements be maintained for all students.

### **Concerns**

While the use of the assessment frameworks has evoked positive responses, a number of concerns have also been raised, particularly in terms of the adequacy of the instruments themselves, the way in which they construct certain groups of learners, reporting to parents and other stakeholders, and their impact on the teaching profession.

### ***Questions of proliferation, validity, and proficiency vs achievement***

The survey of instruments in the previous section demonstrates the profusion of assessment frameworks being used in the ESL field across Australia. In many respects this 'extraordinary rich tapestry of initiatives' (Pascoe 1997) can be seen as a positive development, allowing for local needs to be addressed and for greater diversity. It could also be argued however that such proliferation is a great indulgence in a country with such a small population and scarce resources. Moore (1996) points out that States and Territories are now developing local documents to support the *ESL Scales* – a job which could have been done collaboratively drawing on much of the material already available in the *NLLIA Bandscales*.

For teachers trying to use multiple assessment frameworks, there is a problem with trying to make connections between the different instruments. In the

Northern Territory, for example, Jacob (1997) reports teachers trying to draw the links between the *First Steps* developmental continua and the *National English Profile*:

*After months of work in various forums to clarify the links in practical terms, the clouds are beginning to lift but manageability of the requirements of both outcomes profiling and First Steps continues to cause some concern. (p.63)*

Similar difficulties are reported in most States and Territories as teachers attempt to see the relationship between the various frameworks they are using. In Victoria for example, members of the Schools ESL Sector Group were concerned about the lack of clarity for mainstream teachers about when the *ESL Scales* should be used and when the *Curriculum Standards and Framework* should be used with particular learners. 'The issue is complex and the more so because of widespread lack of recognition of the ESL composition of the school population.' (Victorian Association of TESOL and Multicultural Education (VATME) Newsletter, No.63 1996, p.10). The fact that up to 30% of the students are from non-English-speaking backgrounds means that ESL development needs to be addressed in each of the Key Learning Areas. This involves teachers making the links between the ESL frameworks and each of the KLA documents, or else the KLA documents being rewritten to include ESL perspectives (VATME Newsletter October 1994, p.17).

This issue is also raised by Williams (1994):

*The identification of the point at which the ESL Scales will no longer be appropriate for use with NESB students is not stated as explicitly as necessary. ... The issue of how an ESL scale relates to a series of mainstream profiles, and the extent to which they may overlap, is a complex one, and one which still requires further work, especially as it relates to different curriculum areas in later stages of schooling. (p.21)*

Questions of validity are still being raised about the nature of the national profiles. In particular, these are concerned with the division of the curriculum into eight key learning areas and the division of learning in each key learning area into levels of progress (McGaw 1997, DTEC Forum 1997).

*Is it possible to develop a developmental set of curriculum outcomes which has validity for all Australian children in all schools? Can school knowledge be divided up into 'Areas of Knowledge' and then subdivided into 'Strands'? Can outcomes be set out in developmental/growth terms as 'Levels'? (Collins 1994:7)*

McGaw (1997) questions the degree to which actual student development matches the sequences defined. He acknowledges that the development of the developmental sequences was hasty and that there was little research base for anticipating the detail. He recommends that the national profiles should be treated as first specifications to be refined in the light of classroom use over time. Of particular relevance to ESL students, he asks how we should treat lack of fit at the individual level:

*How should we consider individual developmental patterns that do not fit the norm (in the statistical sense)? Should we consider them to be simply aberrant, or should we have a more positive view about non-standard patterns of development? (p.14)*

The description of learner progress has in fact posed difficulties for some ESL teachers:

*In ESL most teachers found problems with the sequences and reflected on and reported their own understanding of how students learn language. (Willis 1997: 41)*

In terms of the construct validity of the different frameworks, we might ask questions about the way in which the designers of the frameworks have framed the construct to be assessed (Brindley 1995). The *NLLIA Bandscales* and the *ESL Scales*, for example, are seen to offer somewhat different constructs of 'the learner', 'learning', 'context', 'language', and so on, resulting in different criteria and different values being placed on student performances. The *ESL Scales* for example treat speaking and listening as a single strand (Oral Interaction), while the *NLLIA Bandscales* distinguish between the different demands placed on ESL learners in terms of listening and speaking:

*The gap between capabilities in listening as opposed to speaking is more significant for second-language learners than native-speakers (although it exists for both). Research on L2 learning shows overwhelmingly that separate attention to receptive and productive skill development is required. (Moore 1996: 214)*

The level of detail of the outcomes/pointers is another source of difficulty. On the one hand, many teachers complain of too much detail, while test developers, in attempting to relate their tests to the profiles, complain of not enough (Masters 1997). As Brindley (1994) points out, we need a rich model yet one which is manageable.

Although there have been significant advances in profiling and reporting schemes, it is felt that a lot more work needs to be done to establish the validity and reliability of the assessment tools used (eg Grierson 1995:200). A commonly expressed view is that it will be important to see the current crop of frameworks as simply one phase in the evolution of such instruments, which should be regarded as constantly open to change and improvement (McKay 1994, Smith & Griffin 1995).

A further issue in the design of such frameworks is the question of whether they are describing achievement or proficiency:

*Do they map achievement in relation to particular curriculum areas? If that is the case, they map learning of the knowledge/concepts, skills and attitudes of a subject area. Or do they map the development of students as language users in general, and/or their acquisition of a new language (English)? This implies a map of students' increasing capacity to control the features of the target language, and their ability to use English to make increasingly precise and elaborate meanings in an increasing range of contexts, in ways that approximate, or are understandable and acceptable to native speakers and other proficient users of the target language. (VATME Newsletter July 1993, p.6)*

Or as McGaw (1997) puts it:

*Are they descriptors of development that might occur? Are they expectations of what development is desirable? (p.14)*

Earlier versions of State documents (eg the *Victorian English Framework*) tended to emphasise the 'natural' growth that could be observed in students' language development, while later documents actually specified what the students should be expected to achieve at different levels given exposure to good teaching and engagement with a particular curriculum (Howes 1997).

The developers of the *NLLIA Bandscales* are insistent that their framework describes typical growth in proficiency, based on research into second language acquisition and on recognition of learner differences. The *ESL Scales*, on the other hand, appear to be more 'outcomes-driven':

*The scales assume that the particular nature and order of outcomes will apply to all ESL learners regardless of age, grade and language and literacy background. Differences in learners will be reflected in their rate of attainment of outcomes and the outcome levels they ultimately attain.* (Australian Education Council 1994:8-9)

The problem of course lies in the nature of ESL programs. While the national profiles are intended to be used within the context of a particular curriculum, the ESL frameworks cannot assume such a situation, as there is often not a separate ESL program to which outcomes can be tied. ESL is generally taught within the context of other key learning areas and teaching programs vary widely depending on whether a specialist ESL teacher is available, whether the program consists of parallel classes, withdrawal, team teaching and so on. It is difficult, therefore, to specify the outcomes of a program that has no particular content or form. It is more realistic to describe typical development than the achievement of outcomes (Moore 1996, Brindley 1995a).

#### *Accounting for the diversity of ESL students*

Much has been written about the ability of scales to adequately reflect the great diversity of ESL learners and the complexity of second language learning.

In their response to the Review and Consultation of the *ESL Scales* (July 1994), the Victorian association of ESL teachers made the following criticisms:

- *the Scales do not reflect the ESL student as a whole person.*
- *the Scales do not reflect the L1 and C1 influences on students as ESL learners.*
- *the Scales do not reflect affective and contextual factors which are the most influential in ESL development. They do not provide for consideration of, for example, evolving issues of settlement, family, identity, alienation, racism, motivation and so on and their influence on the ESL learner.*
- *the Scales do not address the phenomena of spurts and plateaus in learners' acquisition of ESL.* (VATME Newsletter October 1994 p.20)

McKay (1994) expresses a concern as to whether the scales are delicate enough to describe the differences between ESL learners with different linguistic and educational backgrounds. Does the development of low-literacy background learners, for example, follow the same pathway as learners who have developed literacy in their first language? Do they take into account the particular cultural and contextual differences of Aboriginal learners using English as a foreign language or as a second dialect?

Moore (1996) cautions that the use of such instruments is not without risk, particularly for ESL students. Classroom-based assessment tends to involve the teacher's subjective judgements and can further disadvantage students whose class and/or culture do not accord with teacher values and traditional schooling. Moore argues that these new approaches penetrate the life of the classroom in ways that standardised tests and exams never could. It is therefore critical that the content of such assessment frameworks take into account as far as possible the backgrounds, values, experiences, and capacities of the learners whose education will be shaped by judgements made on the basis of these tools.

This is a view echoed by Linn, Baker & Dunbar (1991):

*It would be a mistake to assume that shifting from fixed-response standardised tests to performance-based assessments will obviate concerns about biases against racial/ethnic minorities or that such a shift would necessarily lead to equality of performance. (p.17)*

Shopen (1996) criticises an over-emphasis on outcomes as the search for a single, normalising identity, the narrowing of focus to things that can be assessed, with no interest in the ways in which the diversity of learners' backgrounds could in fact be seen as making a positive contribution to the learning process:

*The sole task of the student from a diverse cultural or linguistic background is to become as proficient in English as the rest of the population is supposed to be, to move as quickly as possible into the 'mainstream', their differences having been normalised. There is no hint in this view that these people can contribute something to the culture from their diversity. (p.22)*

So while contemporary approaches to student assessment appear to resolve certain dilemmas, it cannot be taken for granted that they will automatically benefit all students, and might even disadvantage and devalue some in unexpected ways.

With the move towards national benchmarking and with the tying of levels of achievement to particular stages of schooling in Victoria and New South Wales (as opposed to the assumption in the national profiles that different students will achieve different outcomes at different ages and stages), there is the issue of how 'atypical students' will be taken into consideration. According to McGaw (1997), this 'simply recreates the fiction that students are sufficiently similar for whole classes to be moving on together under a whole class teaching regime' (p.14).

This has implications for ESL students, who will not have the same chance to achieve the outcomes for a particular stage as their native-English-speaking peers.

*The relationship between the levels and years of schooling is not supported by VATME as this guide does not include the students' prior experience of English. Such a model is excluding rather than being inclusive of all students. ... Inevitably students who do not come to school with English will be a significant number of those most likely to fall outside the age-level guide. This is not because students are less capable of ultimately achieving the same goals nor because teachers have lowered expectations, but because ESL students will need up to seven years of learning English within the school context before achieving at the same level as their native speaking peers. (Introduction to the ESL Scales) This indicates that the achievement of ESL learners cannot be divorced from their stage of English language development. If a relationship needs to be expressed, a link between a level and the number of years of learning English/learning in an Australian school would be a far better indicator of growth. (VATME Newsletter, October 1994, p.18)*

With newer arrivals, it is more likely that their linguistic background will be taken into consideration. It is not as clearcut, however, in the case of ESL students who have been in an Australian school for some time but who are not yet achieving at

levels of native speaker proficiency. When their progress in English is assessed as being inadequate for the particular grade, will they be required, for example, to repeat the grade until the outcomes have been reached? The question of when a student of non-English-speaking background ceases to be an ESL learner is not addressed (VATME Newsletter No. 42, 1993). It is also not clear what the situation would be with classes and schools with high numbers of ESL students. Will the assessment results be used for increased resourcing or for accountability purposes?

Similar issues arise in relation to Aboriginal learners. Cockshutt (1997) notes the issue of slow progress demonstrated by some Aboriginal students as a result of language difficulties, poor health, poor attendance, and limited motivation. Use of a profiling approach is further complicated by teacher and student mobility; limited administrative infrastructures to support requirements such as record keeping; and the cost of providing access to professional development and regular moderation activities for teachers in remote areas.

Cockshutt also raises the question of the appropriacy of certain outcomes and indicators for students with different cultural backgrounds:

*The eight learning areas are based on Western constructions of knowledge and make assumptions about background knowledge and experiences which many of these students simply don't have. Conversely, they do not necessarily recognise the knowledge that the students do have and the learning that does take place, in one or more indigenous languages for example, or in other spheres of indigenous knowledge. The pros and cons of earning pocket money, or keeping birds in cages simply aren't issues in these communities, and have no meaning for these students. (Cockshutt 1997: 46)*

### **Dilemmas for reporting**

McGaw (1997) cites the complaint that the levels are so broad that they are not sufficiently sensitive to growth. This is particularly important in the case of ESL students, where the significance of each tiny step in their learning cannot be captured in the gross brushstrokes of the profiles, giving the impression that they are not progressing at all.

A study by Hancock, Roberts and Tonkin (1995) on teachers' use of and views on the national *English Profile* also found that some teachers were concerned that the profile overlooked many of the significant achievements of students for whom English was a second language. According to Jarvis (1997), teachers felt that regular reporting of levels of achievement may not show progress in a meaningful way, particularly when the students were having to learn English as well as curriculum content.

A further issue relates to the usefulness of the reported information. The Forum on National Statements and Profiles in Australian Schools (1997) identified concerns that the profiles were not robust enough to report on what a school 'value adds'. It also indicated that the type of information provided by profiles was not necessarily what was wanted by the various stakeholders. Politicians, parents and business, for example, were seen to be asking for comparisons and norm referencing. There was a need to recognise and cater for the different types of information required by the different audiences: students, parents, systems/sectors. It was recommended that there needed to be an effort to educate the community on changes to assessment and reporting.

A concern commonly voiced related to the language used in the documents to describe outcomes and pointers:

*For many of our students, English is a foreign language used only in school. ... The development of the ESL Profile alongside profiles for the eight learning areas marked a recognition of the special needs of ESL students; it was not able, though, to cater for different needs within that very diverse group. ... Not only students, but also their parents and many of their teachers use English as a foreign language, so if profiling is all about articulating and communicating information about student progress, we really do have to give a good deal of thought to how this is best done. (Cockshutt 1997: 46)*

Similar sentiments are expressed by Alison Kidd (Manager, Outcomes and Reporting, ACT):

*The Profiles are written in language not easily understood. The language is often complex and full of jargon. Teachers have indicated their difficulty in using profile language for reporting to parents. The complex educational terms used in the profiles are often confusing to parents and therefore make the profiles inappropriate to use in reporting (Kidd 1997: 52)*

The Forum on National Statements and Profiles in Australian Schools (1997) also found that terminology was a major problem in attempting to explain the concepts to parents and teachers. It was felt that the wording of many of the outcomes needed to be simplified to make the statements meaningful to parents, students, employers and even teachers. This concern has resulted in a joint project between the ACT, South Australia and Queensland to develop outcome statements written in language which is more accessible, providing a common language for parents and teachers.

With particular reference to the *ESL Scales*, Williams (1994) points out that where an ESL specialist is not available in a school, much of the monitoring and reporting will need to be done by mainstream teachers. It is therefore important that the descriptors be written in such a way that will make them amenable to use by non-specialists.

It also needs to be pointed out, however, that certain groups of ESL teachers feel that the language is not sufficiently technical. As professionals in the field of ESL, many Victorian teachers, for example, felt that their state companion document was not clear and precise in its use of terminology, using terms which were vague and inconsistent in the name of 'simplicity':

*Technical terms must be included to allow for clarity within the Document. Although we are not suggesting that the Document become so dense that it is inaccessible to some ESL teachers, we do feel that without more technical terminology the Document will lack clarity and precision, and more significantly, will not meet the purpose for which it has been designed. There are some concepts and ideas which are best expressed – or can only be expressed – using technical language. (VATME Newsletter, March/April 1995, p.6)*

### ***The impact upon teachers***

Jarvis (1997) found that teachers were most concerned about the impact of profiling on their time and workloads. This was due to the need to become

familiar with all the strands and substrands, the need to become confident about making professional judgements using the statements, and the need to consult other teachers about good practices.

In their study of teachers using the English Profile, Hancock, Roberts and Tonkin (1995) reported that the amount of time required to become familiar with the profile was a widespread concern. The teachers participating in the study felt that they would need much more time and support to be allocated if they were to implement the profiles effectively, particularly in terms of coming to grips with the content of the profiles, its implications for teaching, program organisation, the development of practical strategies for assessing and recording, and the need to consult and share with other colleagues.

Teacher responses to the Eltis Review (1995) in NSW included comments such as the following:

*I already spend four hours most nights on preparation, programming and evaluation. (p.63)*

*The time needed to write these assessments and reports is absolutely horrendous. (p.63)*

*I have always maintained a work sample folder for each child and kept anecdotal records, standardised test results and running records for all children in my class. I found the work involved in the profiling of each Kindergarten child was extremely time-consuming. ... I feel that I spent many hours assessing at the expense of lesson preparation time. (p.57)*

Similar views were reported by Breen (1995), in referring to studies by Elliott, Hagan, and Meiers & Williams:

*... coping with such changes was found to be a very demanding experience in time and effort. Some teachers were concerned that assessment of their students was beginning to take up a far greater proportion of their workload than was professionally appropriate. (p.6)*

Change and stress is another major issue for many teachers. The curriculum change process undergone in Australian schools over the past few years has been massive in scope and not without a deal of anguish on the part of many teachers and administrators. In many cases the rate of change and the lack of adequate support led to high levels of anxiety, tiredness and disorientation. Typical of the stress-producing scenarios is that of Victoria, where the *Curriculum and Standards Frameworks* were implemented and a significant number of substantial print resources were developed 'with extraordinary speed'. This was part of the new government's commitment to significant changes in the delivery of education, with an emphasis on efficiency and accountability, accompanied by school closures, a downsizing of the teaching force and support structures, and the introduction of state-wide standardised testing (Howes 1997).

As can be seen from the above review of the States and Territories, such changes resulted in massive industrial unrest and stoppages, with the profiles being used as bargaining chips in industrial negotiations. The top down imposition of change lowered the morale of teachers. It was felt that a political agenda often drove educational change at an inappropriate pace. There was concern at the politicisation of education, and that economic rationalism increasingly drove educational reform and policy. The manner of change in many States and

Territories has led to cynicism amongst teachers, burnout, frustration, and 'anti-thinking'/'anti-change' attitudes (DTEC Forum 1997, Eltis 1996).

The Forum on National Statements and Profiles in Australian Schools (1997) recognised the critical importance of teacher practice in the successful implementation of educational reform, and that the effective implementation of outcomes-based education depends upon the provision of necessary resources to support the professional development of teachers. It noted the importance of developing systemic change management strategies and recommended that such innovation be supported by adequately resourced professional development.

Many teachers have felt that the frameworks constrained the use of their professional judgement and forced them to conceive of learning in ways which were new or alien. Using the frameworks involved having to learn new skills needed to design assessment opportunities which allowed better diagnosis of students' levels of achievement. Some teachers expressed concern about their ability to make judgements in terms of the levels of achievement and about the comparability of these judgements (Jarvis 1997).

There was seen to be a greater disparity in teacher practice than ever before: some teachers were well-versed in the new approaches, others were yet to emerge from the 1950s. In many cases, traditional teaching and learning frames and constructs of learning have been found to be no longer appropriate within an outcomes based approach, leaving many teachers feeling deskilled. This was exacerbated by insufficient funding for professional development. Preservice training was also identified as an issue for the quality of teaching and learning: in managing reform there need to be systematic links between tertiary providers of preservice teacher education and school authorities (DTEC Forum 1997).

The problems faced by teachers in their judgements of developmental stages (particularly with regard to ESL learners) have been noted also by McGaw (1997), who reports that preliminary evidence from studies by the Australian Council of Educational Research indicates that there is inconsistent use of the sequences between teachers from different Year levels. If teachers are experiencing difficulty in making valid judgements about the placement of native-English-speaking students, then there are grounds for concern at their ability to accurately assess students who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This suggests that there is a need for teacher professional development in how to recognise the complex needs of various types of ESL learners and how to support them in achieving higher outcomes.

A perennial issue for the teaching profession is the way in which outcomes statements can be misused as a repressive exercise in accountability. The national profiles are often seen by teachers' unions as being 'economic rationalist checking up mechanisms rather than as means of curriculum renewal and reform' (Stehn 1997).

Concern has also been expressed as to whether the use of profiles sufficiently enables educators to counteract allegations that standards are falling (DTEC Forum 1997). This is linked in part to the question of the reliability of information produced by teacher assessment, with the potential for overly subjective judgements of language performance, inconsistencies and lack of inter-rater reliability (Brindley 1994). One recommendation to counteract this has been the use of more moderation procedures and rater training (Cockshutt 1997).

## **The need for research with teachers**

The *NLLIA Bandscales* project stressed the need for ongoing research into the ways in which the scales were actually used by teachers in the classroom and how ESL development was constructed in classrooms where these profiles were used (Moore 1996). This issue is also raised by Brindley (1995):

*Although there has been a great deal of discussion about the nature of assessment and reporting systems and considerable debate concerning the merits or shortcomings of different approaches, very few studies have been conducted of the impact of such systems on day-to-day teaching and learning. Nor do we know very much about how information on learner outcomes is being collected, interpreted and used at either classroom or system level. Only by systematically investigating such questions will it be possible to gauge the extent to which outcomes-based assessment schemes can assist in improving the quality of learning. (p.36)*

The present study is a response to these concerns. The case study approach adopted by the project team focuses upon how teachers are actually using and interpreting particular assessment frameworks in the classroom. The issues identified by the teachers in many cases resonate with those above identified from the literature. The following chapters will explore these in greater detail.

## **National Developments in the Assessment of ESL Students: Main Findings from the Literature**

- International trends towards outcomes-based education have had a significant impact in Australia, particularly in terms of assessment and the development of a range of national and state profiling frameworks.
- The ESL field has undergone a turbulent period where teachers of ESL students have had to come to grips with a number of mainstream and ESL-specific documents designed to assist their assessment of ESL learners' progress.
- Each system in each State and Territory is attempting to implement a range of assessment frameworks which have consequences for ESL learners.
- The relationships between the multiplicity of assessment frameworks is often not clear for teachers trying to work with both mainstream and ESL-specific documents at the national and state levels.
- Previous studies of the use of frameworks, mainly from trialing, suggest that teachers see these assessment frameworks as making positive contributions particularly in terms of more effective teaching and learning, improved reporting practices, enhanced professionalism, and greater learner equity.
- Previous studies have identified a number of concerns which need to be addressed regarding the nature of the frameworks (eg issues of construct validity, the question of 'proficiency vs achievement'); the way in which they define the ESL learner (eg their ability to account for the diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the extent to which they see diversity as a positive attribute); problems with reporting to stakeholders (eg the information needs of different stakeholders, the use of overly technical

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- language); and their impact on teachers (eg the time required to assess, record and report, the stress of change, and perceived challenges to their professionalism).
- The current literature indicates that further research needs to be undertaken into how all the assessment frameworks are actually being interpreted and used by teachers in the classroom. This issue is directly addressed by the present study with reference to ESL students in particular.

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## Chapter Three

# The Influence of Teachers' Working Contexts on Their Use of Assessment Frameworks

Mary Rohl

### Introduction

The teachers in the 23 classrooms in our study were all teaching children (K-3) from families in which a language other than English was spoken and they were all using, to a greater or lesser extent, an assessment framework. However, their classrooms were situated in very different parts of Australia. In terms of geographical location, their classroom contexts varied from the cities of Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and regional New South Wales, to the Cape York Peninsula in North Queensland more than 2 000 kilometres from the state capital, to a small town on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert in the Pilbara region in the north of Western Australia. The teachers' classrooms also differed in the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the children, the age range of the children (some classes included children older than Year 3), the total numbers of children, the proportions of ESL children, the children's levels of English, the acceptance and/or encouragement of the use of the children's first language and the types of program being implemented. These are the more obvious factors that differentiated the teaching contexts and had the potential to influence the teachers' choice of specific assessment frameworks and also, how they used the frameworks in their daily work. As we shall see, there were also other influences upon the teachers' use of frameworks. These include the amount of collegial support they experienced, their access to professional development, the particular frameworks that teachers might be officially required to use in their particular location and the level of their personal investment in the framework.

In this paper the main focus is on the teachers in seven classrooms, although from time to time we refer to other teachers who took part in the study. We cannot claim that these seven classrooms are typical, but they have been chosen to illustrate the diversity of contexts in which the Case Study teachers worked. Moreover, they are presented here so that many of the contextual factors which recurred within them may be seen as likely to have an impact upon **all** teachers' use of assessment frameworks. In order to make these particular teachers' contexts immediate and to capture the flavour of their day to day practices, they will be described in present tense.

### Features of the working contexts

Joanne is located in the Pilbara region in the north of Western Australia at Nyamal School, 300 kilometres inland from the regional centre and on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. The total school enrolment is 48 children who range in age from Pre-primary to Year 10. Joanne has 12 children from the ages of 5 to 7 (Pre-primary to Year 2) enrolled in her class, all but two of whom are from an

Aboriginal community and for whom Standard Australian English is a foreign language. These indigenous children are exposed to several Aboriginal languages in their community and speak mostly Kartajarra and, as they grow older, Aboriginal English; one of the non-indigenous children speaks French at home. Joanne is assisted by an Aboriginal Education Worker and another teaching assistant.

**Elizabeth** is a mainstream Pre-primary teacher at Harthill Primary School in a multicultural area of inner city Perth, which over the years has been home to various groups of immigrants and now houses, in addition to migrants who are mostly from SE Asia, some young upwardly mobile families. This school has an Intensive Language Centre on site which does not cater for Pre-primary aged children. Elizabeth's class of 18 5- and 6-year-olds includes 12 ESL children from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the majority being of Asian descent, some of whom were born in Australia. Elizabeth is helped by a Vietnamese multi-lingual assistant.

Also in Perth is **Janet**, who is based in an Intensive Language Centre attached to Greenway Primary school in a well-established middle class area, in which only a few families who speak English as a second language now live, but which used to contain a migrant hostel. Janet teaches a class of between 18 and 25 children in the 8- to 10-year-old age-range, most of whom have been in Australia for between six and ten months. These children speak a wide variety of languages and many of them have come from war-torn parts of the world. Before moving on to mainstream schools nearer to their homes, the children spend about one year at the Centre, although their first few months will be in a Stage 1 class. Accordingly, the composition of Janet's class changes several times during the course of the school year. Janet has access to a multilingual assistant on a part-time basis and, as her class increases in size, she is joined by another part-time ESL teacher.

In Victoria **June**, a mainstream teacher and **Stephanie**, a part-time ESL specialist both teach at Oxford Street Primary, which is a small Catholic school in a long-established, relatively prosperous multicultural inner city suburb of Melbourne. June's mainstream class is made up of 22 students in Grades Prep and One (5-7-year olds). The majority of the 80 children at the school are of ESL background, although most were born in Australia and between them speak at least seven languages other than English.

In New South Wales our focus is on **Sara**, a mainstream teacher at St Bertram's, a diocesan primary Catholic school in a regional city. Sara teaches a mainstream class of 32 Year 2s (7- to 8-year olds) which contains eight ESL children from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. She is helped by **Carly**, a highly experienced ESL assistant.

In Queensland we focus on **Minh**, the Vietnamese teacher in a bilingual program for Vietnamese children from Pre-school to Year 2 at Lachlan Street Primary School in inner city Brisbane. Minh has access to a Vietnamese assistant and works in tandem with an ESL teacher, sharing the Year 1/2 classroom and also working with the Pre-school children. In her program she withdraws groups of four or five children at a time. The school has a multi-cultural population of 500 children from 33 language backgrounds, the majority being Vietnamese whose parents originally came from rural areas in Vietnam or were fishermen. The teachers also have diverse cultural backgrounds and the motto written on the school t-shirts is "*We all smile in one language*".

Also in Queensland our focus is on **Maree** at the Andelu campus of Ichuru State School. Andelu is in the far north of Queensland, at the tip of Cape York and a two day drive from Cairns, the regional centre along unsealed roads. On the Andelu campus there are 80 indigenous students who speak a version of Torres Strait Creole. There has been some historical tension between the Andelu and Ichuru communities, the Ichuru people being Islanders and the Andelu the original Aboriginal people of the area. Twenty years ago, as part of a centralisation program the Andelu school was moved to Ichuru, 11 kilometres away along an unsealed road which is subject to flooding. The school has now been moved back to Andelu after the community campaigned for its return. The community feel that the generation who attended the school at Ichuru are "*the lost ones, the lost generation*" as they did not learn literacy skills. The community are now highly involved in the school's program, seeing the children as "*the future of the community*" and want the children to learn English. Maree is responsible for the literacy development of two composite classes, Years 1/2 and Years 2/3, for whom English is a foreign language in that the children encounter English only in the classroom and are not immersed in it out of school.

It can be seen that these seven classrooms are situated in an extremely diverse range of physical and community contexts. They do not by any means show the whole range of contexts as each of our total sample of 23 classrooms is unique. Our sample of classrooms also includes one in a special school for children with disabilities and several classrooms in which mainstream teachers have access to little or no extra help with their ESL children.

We now look in turn at each of the teachers who are the focus of this chapter and whose classrooms are in the four Australian states represented in our study, in order to discover exactly which frameworks they are using, how they are being used and which particular aspects of their working contexts may be influencing their choice. (For a description of the use of frameworks in each state and of the frameworks themselves see Chapter 2 this volume. For more detailed descriptions of the classroom context and the ways in which the teachers are using the frameworks see the Case Studies in Volumes 2 and 3.)

### **Joanne at Nyamal School in the Pilbara region of Western Australia**

Like most primary school teachers in Western Australia, Joanne and two other Case Study teachers in the Pilbara region are using the First Steps Developmental Continua (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994) in order to assess their children's literacy development. These teachers have had access to extensive professional development into the use of these curriculum (First Steps Resource Books) and assessment documents (First Steps Developmental Continua). Further, many of the teachers in the Pilbara region are required to report levels of student achievement to their school principals in terms of First Steps Continua. Joanne accordingly reports her children's achievements in terms of the First Steps Continua for Reading, Writing and Spelling. For Oral Language she uses the Continuum from the Highgate Project (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994), which was developed by ESL teachers in Western Australia. She also uses these assessments in her planning for the children's needs:

*First Steps has been invaluable...It assists your planning really well...I've been able to set more specific reading programs to pinpoint weaknesses.*

Joanne is also using the *English Student Outcome Statements (SOS)* (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994), the state version of the national English Profile even though at the time of the study the document is in draft form, is only being trialed in Western Australia and is not widely used throughout the state. The strong influence of Eliza, the district School Development Officer in Language and Literacy, can be felt in all Case Studies from this region. Eliza has provided intensive professional development into the use of Student Outcome Statements and has shown the teachers how they can still assess in terms of First Steps Continua if they wish and then map these assessments onto Student Outcome Statements, using a document which links First Steps assessments to Student Outcome Statements (Education Department of Western Australia, 1995). Joanne is still coming to terms with Student Outcome Statements, perhaps because in Nyamal she is geographically more isolated than the other Case Study teachers in the region who all teach in Far Harbour, the regional centre and have been able to provide each other with support in using the new framework. Nevertheless, she is keen to use it:

*I'm trying to lean towards a Student Outcome Statement approach...I will use the SOS as a means for assessing children's performance and use the First Steps as a guide for teaching strategies.*

Thus, Joanne in the Pilbara is using both Student Outcome Statements and First Steps to assess and plan for her children's language and literacy development. At the time of our study most teachers in Western Australia have not received professional development in the use of the English Student Outcome Statements. Teachers in the Pilbara, however, have experienced some professional development in the use of this document as the district is trialing the English strand, having already implemented the Mathematics strand, with the intention that each year a new learning area will be implemented.

Eliza has also, during the course of the project, introduced the teachers to the ESL Framework of Stages (McKay & Scarino, 1991). Joanne and the other Case Study teachers are considering using it for specific purposes. Joanne explains:

*The ESL Framework is something that I'm new to, but would like to use for those children in my Pre-primary who don't speak much English and don't display many of the Student Outcome Statements at Level 1.*

This enthusiasm for embracing the new seems to be a feature of the Case Study teachers in this region. Joanne's principal points out some of the reasons for this:

*The district is very proactive so anything that comes out of Central Office, if it is good, the district people have a look at it and, if they think this is going to help our children, [they say], "I think we should be able to get into it." Also there are a lot of young teachers in the district. They're enthusiastic and adaptable to things that are new.*

It appears that for Joanne and her colleagues in this particular region in the north of Western Australia, several factors have been particularly important in helping to determine their use of assessment frameworks. First, there is the strong influence of professional development, previously in First Steps, more recently in Student Outcome Statements and just beginning, the ESL Framework of Stages. The recent professional development has been conducted by Eliza, the enthusiastic School Development Officer. It is interesting to note that Joanne, whose class of 12 children includes 10 Aboriginal children for whom English is a foreign language, appears to have had little training in the teaching of ESL learners until she was introduced to the ESL Framework of Stages by Eliza.

The second factor is the fact that many of the teachers in this district are at the beginning of their teaching careers and so **may** be more open to innovations: Joanne, in her sixth year of teaching, is very experienced for this region. Third, whilst Joanne is more isolated than the teachers in Far Harbour who appear to experience a high level of collegial support in an area far away from city life, she nevertheless has professional support from her principal as well as from the School Development Officer.

A fourth factor is that Joanne and the Case Study teachers in Far Harbour are working with classes containing a majority of children of Aboriginal descent and are looking for alternative ways of helping them acquire the English language and literacy knowledge and skills required by the wider Australian society, even though English may be a second or foreign language or a second dialect for these children. Joanne encourages the use of the children's first language in the classroom. A fifth factor seems to be that Joanne and the teachers in this district are not alone in their classrooms and have access to additional help in the form of teaching assistants: Joanne has two assistants helping her teach a class with 12 children on the roll, not all of whom attend on a regular basis. This extra help may allow her time to examine the documents and the children's achievements in terms of the documents.

### **Elizabeth at Harthill Primary School in Perth, Western Australia**

Elizabeth and the other two Case Study teachers at Harthill Primary School in inner-city Perth are using the First Steps Developmental Continua to assess their children. They are required by their principal to make this assessment on all four Continua twice during the school year, necessitating eight assessments in all. These teachers are not using the ESL Oral Language Continuum from the Highgate Project which is used by the staff at the on-site Intensive Language Centre, even though more than half of the children in their classes are ESL and Elizabeth had some involvement in the project which resulted in the Highgate Project document. Elizabeth says that it is "*just a bit too much hard work*" and that it "*didn't really show enough of the children's global development.*" This appears to be the only assessment document specifically for ESL children to which these teachers have been introduced.

Elizabeth, like her colleagues at Harthill, has been trained in the use of First Steps, but does not seem consciously to use the information from her First Steps assessments to any great extent in planning for the children's needs. These teachers are vocal in their feeling that the Oral Language Developmental Continuum is highly inappropriate for the assessment of ESL learners. Further, Elizabeth and Linda, the other Pre-primary Case Study teacher, feel that none of the Continua are appropriate for the assessment of Pre-primary children, as structured assessment of language and literacy is not a part of the philosophy of early childhood education. Moreover, in the early childhood setting, there are not many situations in which children can be observed in formal reading and writing activities, so that it is difficult to assess children's achievement of the indicators accurately. Additionally, in the case of children from certain cultural backgrounds, Elizabeth feels that some First Steps indicators are particularly inappropriate as examples of the language development of her ESL children. She gives as examples from the Oral Language Continuum, "begins to use pronouns but may make errors in syntax" and "may confuse tenses when describing an event":

*"Me go park" becomes "I'm going to the park. "That's fine for English speaking children but it doesn't give a true indication of the*

*level obtained even in the first language because of the distances between English and the other languages' conventions. For example, in Chinese there's not tenses or pronouns anyway, so even an adult would say, "I go shop."*

Elizabeth further explains that whilst children from some cultures do not appear to display role play reading and writing behaviours, the essential features of the earliest reading and writing phases, they may "understand more than a [role-playing] child who says, 'This is my shopping list and this is what it says'."

Towards the end of the project, Elizabeth and another Pre-primary teacher at the school choose to attend a session on the assessment of oral language in ESL children with the staff of the Intensive Language Centre at the school. Whilst this session is only brief, Elizabeth finds that the Intensive Language Centre staff are having similar problems to her in using First Steps to assess ESL children's language development and are exploring alternative ESL specific frameworks. Accordingly, she examines the alternative indicators presented at the session and modifies them to create a list of her own, which bridges the First Steps Beginning and Early Language phases and more accurately reflects the features of her ESL children's language.

We have seen that Elizabeth is using the First Steps Developmental Continua in order to assess her children's language and literacy development, even though she does not see the Continua as being appropriate for the needs of ESL children. So why is she using this framework? The most important factor seems to be that the school principal requires these assessments. However, she does not seem to use this framework in her planning, over which she has more personal control. Although she and the other Case Study teachers have all attended First Steps inservice courses and are familiar with the use of the documents, this does not influence their decision to reject them as planning documents. Length of teaching experience does not seem to be overly important, as the Year 1 teacher who uses them only in a general way in her planning has been teaching for two years, whereas Elizabeth is an extremely experienced practitioner who has been teaching for over 20 years.

What does seem to be important here is that Elizabeth is a mainstream Pre-primary teacher who has not had any significant training in teaching English as a second language. This is in spite of the fact that she has been at Harthill for seven years, a school which has an Intensive Language Centre on site, has always had a majority of ESL children in her classes here and in her first years at the school had classes composed entirely of ESL children. She explains in detail, showing particular knowledge of the framework and of her children's language development, why she feels the Continua are inappropriate for her ESL children. It is not, however, until the end of the project that she attends one professional development session, designed for the Intensive Language Centre staff. As a result of this professional development she adds some indicators which more accurately reflect the language development of these children.

Another important factor that appears to influence Elizabeth's use of the First Steps Developmental Continua is that she sees herself first and foremost as an early childhood educator who is concerned with the development of the whole child. Language and literacy development is only part of her whole program in which there is also an emphasis on the social, emotional, cognitive and physical aspects of development: she assesses children for entry into the Intensive Language Centre program on the basis of all these aspects as well as language. She also sees the Pre-primary program as being process not outcomes oriented so, for her, any outcomes-based assessment is not appropriate in this setting.

Finally, in spite of the fact that there are several early childhood teachers in this school, Elizabeth feels some sense of isolation from the rest of the school. The classroom which she shares with her multi-lingual assistant is physically somewhat isolated from the main school building and her process oriented multidimensional program differs from that of the primary school teachers.

## **Janet at Greenway Intensive Language Centre in Perth, Western Australia**

Unlike the other Case Study teachers in Western Australia Janet and her colleagues at Greenway Intensive Language Centre are using neither First Steps nor Student Outcome Statements. The teachers in this Centre are using the ESL Bandscales (McKay et al., 1993) as part of a tightly structured evaluation, assessment and planning process. This process also includes use of the Australian Language Levels and the mainstream Negotiated Evaluation strategy (Woodward, 1994) in which teacher, child and parent all have some input into the evaluation process. Why is it that these teachers, unlike the other Case Study teachers in Western Australia, are not required to report to the mainstream school principal in terms of First Steps or Student Outcome Statements?

Intensive Language Centres in Western Australia are situated within a mainstream Primary School and are answerable to the school principal. They do, however, have a fair degree of autonomy, in that the manager of the Centre has the status of deputy principal in the mainstream school. Janet and the deputy principal have been teaching ESL children at the school for many years and all the teachers have specialist ESL qualifications. Thus, the seven staff of the Centre have a great deal of credibility as teachers of ESL children.

The teachers at the Centre appear to form a very cohesive group, which is greatly facilitated by the way in which the deputy principal encourages democratic processes to operate. This cohesion may also be a result of the frequent use of team teaching in which the deputy principal plays an important part and of the fact that the children move from class to class throughout the year as their English improves and new arrivals take their places in the Stage 1 classes. At the beginning of our project the research team in Western Australia were involved in a meeting with all seven teachers, who insisted that they all wanted to be involved in the project, even though they did not all fit the criteria for inclusion, in that the children in their classes were out of the K-3 age-range. In order to acknowledge this interest, another meeting was arranged towards the end of the project so that all the staff could have input into our data. During this session they reaffirmed their commitment to their highly structured assessment-planning process in which the Bandscales are pivotal.

A further very important feature that was reinforced for the researchers in this meeting was that, even though all the teachers are involved in this process, Janet's leadership, enthusiasm and hard work in the evolution and implementation of the Centre's assessment-planning process is evident. Several letters and statements have been created by the Centre staff as a whole in order to inform various state Education Department officials of the Centre's views on the unsuitability of Student Outcome Statements and First Steps for assessing ESL children. Janet has been highly involved in the writing of these letters and statements. She has also been commissioned by the Education Department to report on the use of Student Outcome Statements and the ESL Bandscales with ESL children. In the commissioned document she emphatically states her reasons for rejecting Student Outcome Statements for ESL children in their first year in Australia. A brief excerpt follows:

*In the first 12 months the newly arrived NESB child makes very rapid progress in English. This progress is identified in the Bandscales. However, most, if not all of this happens within the first level of SOS ie. SOS doesn't identify these stages for NESB children at this time because the descriptions are so broad. Because Bandscales does identify these levels (levels 1-4) teachers can assess and plan development, plan and report with confidence.*

Janet has been conducting professional development courses in other schools for both mainstream and ESL teachers into the use of the ESL Bandscales with ESL children. She and her colleagues are very well able to justify to parents, to the mainstream school principal and to the Education Department their use of the ESL Bandscales instead of First Steps or Student Outcome Statements in assessing their children's achievements. Her confidence and enthusiasm are clearly shown when she says:

*I have better weeks and worse weeks, but I can say to you or to principals, or to parents or to anybody else, "There you go. That's how it happens."...It's [the assessment-planning process] based on a valid system of planning, which is the Australian Language Levels, which is, I think, just about spot on in terms of how it makes you hold things together. It's based on the things in the Bandscales, which I think are pretty valid as well...It's evaluated through Negotiated Evaluation, which once again I think is a very valid and sensible way to go. So I think in terms of accountability it's pretty well sewn up.*

The major contextual factors which seem to be influencing the use of the specialist ESL Bandscales by Janet and the other staff at Greenway Intensive Language Centre include their wealth of experience and qualifications in ESL teaching. This leads them to see a need for such a document which they consider describes more accurately than mainstream frameworks the progress of their particular children. They also feel that the examples of children's language which illustrate the ESL Bandscales levels seem to the teachers to be particularly appropriate: when Janet talks the researcher through her assessment of a Bosnian child who has arrived in Australia during the year she refers to the examples in order to validate the level of her assessment. She finds that some of the given language examples are from a child of the same language group who has also been in Australia for a similar length of time. Further, the transient nature of the Centre's student population may well have had an influence on Janet's and the other teachers' strong commitment to an assessment system that is able to demonstrate the progress of ESL children over relatively short periods of time. Most importantly, clear demonstration of children's progress in terms of the ESL Bandscales enables [Janet and the other teachers] them to justify the existence of their Intensive Language Centre at a time when some feel that states are philosophically opposed to such centres.

The staff's collective commitment to their tightly structured assessment-planning procedures also impacts upon their use of the ESL Bandscales for evaluation and assessment as this is an integral part of these procedures. Their participation in team teaching and access to teaching assistants may have helped to consolidate this collective commitment by initiating new members of staff into the procedures and allowing for discussion of individual children's achievements during shared teaching experiences. The use of the ESL Bandscales in the Centre is further consolidated by Janet's promotion of this framework in the wider community as an appropriate means of assessing the language of ESL children. Interestingly, the school principal does not, unlike the school principals of the other Case Study teachers from Western Australia, insist on assessments in terms of either

First Steps Continua or Student Outcome Statements for either the mainstream school or the Centre. Consequently, the staff of the Centre as a group are able to choose their own framework. This may well explain why they chose to explore the ESL Bandscales when no other teachers in Western Australia were apparently using it, with the result that interpreted the document themselves, without outside professional development.

## **Clare and Stephanie at Oxford Street Primary School in Melbourne**

Clare, the Grades 1/2 mainstream teacher and Stephanie, the ESL specialist teacher and curriculum coordinator at Oxford Street (Catholic) Primary School are using their state version of the national English Profile, that is the Victorian Curriculum and Framework of Stages, or CSF (Board of Studies (Victoria), 1995). They use this document in order to identify the outcomes and indicators they will assess during the term. Unlike the state system, the Victorian Catholic System has no system-wide reporting requirement. Nevertheless, Oxford Street is moving towards a reporting system based on the state framework. Clare, as the relatively less experienced teacher, also draws upon her knowledge of an earlier state framework, the Victorian English Profiles Handbook with which she became familiar in her initial training, but which she now sees as inappropriate for her ESL children. In collaboration with Stephanie she has now become familiar with the Curriculum Standards and Framework, which she considers to be a more tightly structured assessment and curriculum guide, catering for the learning of all children, both primary and secondary in the state:

*Well, I actually like the Curriculum Standards Framework document...I feel I have more of a direction now...maybe that's what we need because you feel like you're working towards something and everybody has the same goal...Once children get to secondary school, with the CSF you know that they've been covering the same sort of things as children everywhere else.*

In accordance with the school's assessment policy, Clare and Stephanie make an Assessment Book for each parent, which includes annotated samples of the children's work to show how they are related to Curriculum and Standards Framework outcomes.

Stephanie has also introduced Clare to the ESL Companion to the CSF (Board of Studies (Victoria), 1996) and together they have used this to supplement the outcomes and indicators from the Curriculum Standards and Framework on which they plan to focus. Clare appreciates this specialist document for her ESL learners when she points out that the mainstream document assumes that:

*[ESL] children have all those skills and...there's a whole lot of things that they can do with social language that may not be presenting in classroom language.*

Stephanie, as a highly experienced ESL teacher who has the role of assisting other teachers in becoming familiar with new assessment frameworks, also has knowledge of other ESL specific frameworks, including the ESL Bandscales and the ESL Scales (Australian Education Council, 1994). Whilst she appreciates the content of these two documents, she does not use the ESL Bandscales because of the physical bulk of the document and what she feels is the unapproachable presentation of the material. She suggests that the ESL Bandscales might be more suited to use in a Language Centre for new arrivals. Stephanie prefers the ESL Scales to the state developed ESL Companion to the CSF which was derived

from the ESL Scales, because she feels that the ESL Scales are more complete and that they should be used throughout Australia:

*I think that [the ESL Scales] overall seem to be a bit fuller and more detailed and I mean why do they bother changing? I mean the whole nation should be using these [the ESL Scales] and we'd all be a lot better off.*

We have seen how at Oxford Street Primary School Stephanie is involved in helping the teachers get to know both the mainstream English Curriculum and Standards Framework and its specialist companion document, the ESL Companion to the CSF. Both of these documents are state developed, unlike the ESL Bandscales, which she finds not at all user friendly and the ESL Scales which she prefers to the Companion to the CSF. Nevertheless, she is using the state Companion to the CSF when working with Clare who is new to the school and who has had little experience of professional development in assessment, most likely because this document has been produced by the state education department and Oxford Street is a Catholic school. Although Clare is not required by the Catholic education system to use this specialist document, it complements the state Curriculum and Standards Framework which teachers at the school are using, so that it seems logical for this to be the ESL specific framework that Stephanie encourages Clare to use.

Stephanie appears to be having some impact upon the relatively less experienced Clare's use of the documents. There seem to be several possible reasons for this. Stephanie has twenty years of teaching experience, a specialist qualification in teaching ESL, she is the school's curriculum coordinator and she has familiarity with, and a wealth of experience in using various frameworks. Clare, on the other hand, who has been teaching ESL children since she qualified as a teacher six years ago, is only now at the time of our project undertaking a specialist ESL course. Their working relationship seems to facilitate Clare's professional development in the use of the frameworks, in that Stephanie works alongside Clare. Stephanie collaborates with Clare as they use the documents in Clare's own classroom context, so that they are able to share concerns about the needs of the children and how the chosen frameworks can specifically address these needs.

### **Sara and Carly at St Bertram's in regional New South Wales**

Like Clare and Stephanie in Melbourne, Sara in New South Wales is working in a team teaching situation in a Catholic school. In this case the teaching partner, Carly is not a trained teacher but a very experienced assistant who has attended various inservice courses in teaching ESL children. Sara is using the state version of the national English Profile, the English K-6 Syllabus (NSW Board of Studies, 1994), in order to assess and plan for her mainstream class of 32 Year 2 children, which includes eight who are ESL learners. She is also using the ESL Scales, although it is Carly who, with guidance from Sara, assesses the ESL children. The staff at St Bertram's, a diocesan Catholic primary school, were affected by the 1995 moratorium which was placed on the implementation of the outcomes aspect of the English K-6 Syllabus and the ESL Scales, with the result that inservice courses were suspended. Nevertheless, at the beginning of our project professional development in the use of the ESL Scales has just been resumed and the teachers, with the help of Sara who is a facilitator for the diocesan ESL Scales inservice program, are trying to integrate them into their existing tightly structured assessment system.

This assessment system at the school seems to have evolved over a period of time as part of an overall commitment to the individual needs of all students. An executive committee coordinates the Special Purpose Programs which include ESL, Languages Other Than English, Special Education and Reading Difficulties. ESL is thus seen as a substrand within the whole school program which aims to ensure that all children with individual needs are identified, taught and monitored. A variety of screening and support measures which address identification and teaching are in place within the school. Sara, who was previously the school's ESL teacher, but is now a mainstream teacher since the school is no longer able to employ an ESL teacher, coordinates the ESL Committee. She has 20 years experience as a teacher, and a Masters degree in TESOL. Whilst Sara and the other class teachers are responsible for the progress of ESL students, it is Carly, the ESL assistant who assesses children requiring extra help, maintains their portfolios and assists teachers in implementing appropriate programs, either in the classroom or on a withdrawal basis. It can be seen that Carly plays an extremely important role in the school's ESL program, particularly in the area of assessment.

Carly uses a variety of assessment methods, from a range of sources, including documents from South Australia and the *Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 1985), which was developed in New Zealand. Under Sara's guidance Carly, who at the beginning of the project was not familiar with the particular framework, makes a detailed assessment of one of the ESL children in Sara's class using the ESL Scales. Now that she is a mainstream teacher, Sara appreciates that assessment in terms of the ESL Scales may take up more time than is available to mainstream teachers so that it may only be manageable with the type of extra assistance that Carly is able to give:

*It should work, I know it should work, but when you are thinking of one person with 32 children, it is not possible. It certainly works from the ESL perspective. But only, I think, if you have somebody competent like Carly [the assistant] to do it.*

Sara suggests that in order to be effective, professional development in the use of documents such as the ESL Scales and the English K-6 Syllabus, needs to be carried out over a period of time so that teachers do not feel overwhelmed:

*That was the trouble with the English K-6. In the departmental schools they rushed the inservicing and tried to implement it all at once, whereas the Catholic system took it much more slowly, introducing just certain parts at a time and allowing the teachers to become more comfortable with them before moving on to the next.*

So what is the connection between Sara's classroom context and her use of the English K-6 Syllabus and the ESL Scales? The school's decisions in the area of language and literacy are informed by the state document English K-6 Syllabus which contains a version of the national English Profile. As a member of the school staff Sara is obliged to use this and in her Case Study we see how she uses it for planning and for making informal observations of her children's progress. It also seems that the Catholic education system has influenced the school's use of this document at a time when the moratorium on its implementation has just ended. Sara has pointed out that professional development in the Catholic education system was more gradual than that of the state education department, thus leading to wider acceptance of the document.

Sara's use of and views on the ESL Scales are particularly interesting. As an ESL teacher she has used the document for assessment, but now that she is the teacher of a large mainstream class she suggests that it may be too time consuming to use herself. She has therefore introduced this document to Carly,

her assistant, who is familiar with other assessment procedures and who has been able to use it for assessing a member of Sara's class. Carly appears to be extremely knowledgeable about and skilled in the assessment of ESL children. It is she who has made possible the assessment of the ESL child in terms of the ESL Scales, showing the pivotal role that an informed assistant can play in assessment.

### **Minh at Lachlan Street Primary School in Brisbane**

In Queensland, various pressures have prevented the implementation of an assessment framework based on the national English Profile. Here teachers are using a version of the First Steps Reading and Writing Developmental Continua. First Steps is being used in this state as part of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net in order to identify children who may need literacy intervention. Funding is provided to schools for identified children. (For a description of the Diagnostic Net process see Chapter 2, this volume). The Year 2 Diagnostic Net hangs like a shadow over all four Case Studies from Queensland. Minh's is no exception.

In Minh's bilingual program (Pre-school to Year 2) where Vietnamese is used in varying degrees for instruction, beginning with most instruction in that language for the preschool children and with more English being gradually introduced, there is no provision for the Year 2 literacy Diagnostic Net process to be carried out in the children's first language. As a result Minh says that by Year 2 she does not feel that there is the time for her to teach writing in Vietnamese. Minh is not directly involved in the Diagnostic Net process in that it is the mainstream class teachers who plot the children on the Continua, whilst she is involved only in setting the context for the Diagnostic Net validation tasks. Minh does, however, act as an interpreter in the numeracy component of the Diagnostic Net for her bilingual children and would like to develop a Vietnamese version of the language and literacy components, as she feels that her children are disadvantaged by assessment in English, but as yet has not been able to do this.

Minh, who has a graduate qualification in TESOL and has been teaching for eight years is not using any specialist ESL framework to assess the children. She has been trained in the use of the Diagnostic Net, the ESL Scales and the ESL Bandscales, but is not using the ESL specific frameworks. She is, however, using an informal ESL framework of her own making and is continually making observations of her children's progress:

*All the things they do for me are used for assessment. When I notice something important I write it down.*

Minh talks about what she sees as her difficult position in being involved in building up the children's knowledge base for the Diagnostic Net validation tasks. She uses the weeks before the validation tasks to back up the mainstream teachers in setting the context for the tasks. For example she teaches a bank of English sight words for the writing task to her Vietnamese speaking children. As a result of her teaching methods and the children's learning strategies the validation task demonstrates what the bilingual children can write in English with a large amount of support. Minh feels that some of her children who need a great deal of support are not identified by the Net validation task because of the support that she has given them and so they are not eligible for the intervention program that she thinks they need. Further, she finds that the First Steps Continua do not accurately describe the literacy behaviours of her children, with the result that children may be allocated to a phase that does not alert teachers to the need for intervention, which Minh feels may be necessary for progression to

the next stages of literacy acquisition. She explains what may be the consequences for these children:

*Even if the children do manage to pass the Net, I feel in a few years' time as they move further up in the upper primary to Years 5, 6 and 7, that will be where the trouble will begin to surface. By then it's too late for anyone to do anything...They have learnt to run before they could walk.*

It seems that at present Minh plays a peripheral role in the school's assessment system, although she plays an important role in reporting to the children's parents. As she is not the children's mainstream teacher she does not undertake the First Steps language and literacy assessment, although she is involved in teaching for the Year 2 Diagnostic Net validation literacy tasks and interprets for the numeracy validation tasks. In spite of her TESOL qualification, professional development in the Bandscales and ESL Scales and experience with and understanding of ESL learners, she is not using a formal ESL specific framework. In particular, she is not using the ESL Bandscales which were developed in her state because the region has not taken on this framework and so Minh is not required to use it, although she feels that she could use it if required. She has found the ESL Scales to have some use in reporting children's progress and uses some of the descriptors for this purpose, but she is not using the framework as a scale "as they didn't really tell me about the students' progress and their learning".

Nevertheless, as we have seen, Minh is using her own form of informal ESL assessment, which she feels to be more suited to her individual needs, "This is suitable for me. This is enough". In her position as the only bilingual teacher in the school, she has been able to have more control than the other teachers in her choice of assessment methods. Minh also feels that if there were an ESL scale-compatible with the Diagnostic Net she would use it. Further, she is planning to adapt the First Steps Continua for her bilingual children, deleting any indicators which are not appropriate to the children's first language. She is also planning to carry out the literacy validation tasks in Vietnamese, although she foresees some difficulties in translating texts for this as "a simple text in English can be a very complicated text in Vietnamese".

## **Maree at Andelu Campus of Ichuru State School in the Cape York Peninsula, Queensland**

In her Torres Strait Creole/English program at Andelu in the Cape, Maree is also using the First Steps Reading and Writing Continua to assess her children in English and she has similar concerns to Minh about the exclusive use of English for the Diagnostic Net process:

*The area of validation is actually the be all and end all of the Net. You can map the children, that continues all their junior primary life, but it is what they do in validation, that's what is counted by the Department and validation is done in English...They have competency in Creole, not in English...They show skills at the right level, but the Net does not give a clear picture of them*

Maree does, however, unlike our other Case Study teachers, assess the children's literacy in terms of an outcomes-based framework in their first language. This is on her own initiative and forms part of the Home Language Program. She points out that when she carried out Year 2 Diagnostic Net tasks with her children in Torres Strait Creole twice as many reached the expected level. There seem to be several factors which have allowed Maree the freedom to produce and use her own Torres Strait Creole versions of the First Steps Continua.

The Torres Strait Creole English program, the Home Language Program has been created in consultation with the community elders who discussed with the program developers their experiences of trying to learn English as a foreign language. The elders also take an active part in the program and there are indigenous teachers as well as indigenous assistants in the classrooms. Maree has high levels of collegial support for innovation in assessment in the form of the school principal who feels that the program needs to be trialed for a substantial period of time, the visiting ESL adviser and other indigenous and non-indigenous 'experts'. Further, the program with Maree as Chief Project Officer is a response to the identified problems which children in Cape schools experience in acquiring the English language and literacy skills expected by wider community agencies, in particular the state education department. Maree points out that in the Cape "whole schools were caught in the Net" and that the Home Language Program "is the intervention [for such children]". As such the program appears to have a high profile and the children are responding enthusiastically to it:

*They just soak it in. They are so open to books and to role play writing...And they actually get grumpy if you seem to be playing too many games or something and they demand 'hard work' because they want to...be seen to be doing school work.*

Whilst Maree has developed an assessment framework in the children's first language she is not using a formal specialist ESL framework and has no specific knowledge of such frameworks. She has been trained in the use of the Diagnostic Net, but she is a mainstream trained teacher who is very experienced in teaching ESL children, but has not at the time of the study, had access to training by the Education Department in any ESL assessment framework. Two other Case Study teachers in this state who are both employed by the Catholic system are, on the other hand, using the ESL Bandscales. These teachers, who are ESL specialists working alongside mainstream teachers, have been actively encouraged by their education system to explore the use of the Bandscales, they have been trained in their use and both have a wide experience of teaching ESL children in a range of contexts.

Maree is, however, like Minh, beginning to create a framework of her own, based on the particular needs of her students. She is mapping the children's literacy progress in both English and the home language using the First Steps Continua. The additional framework that she is forming is based on First Steps, but she uses her understanding of the differences between the two languages, such as the fact that Torres Strait Creole does not signal past tense in the verb form and does not signal plural by adding an s. On the basis of her assessment in this evolving framework she is able to plan for the children's very specific needs.

For Maree and the other Case Study teachers in Queensland, the effect of the mandated Year 2 Diagnostic Net, based on the First Steps Developmental Continua, seems to be the strongest influence on their assessment practices, even though they are opposed to its use with ESL children. This is regardless of whether they are based in education department or Catholic schools. Their use of ESL specific frameworks seems, on the other hand, to have a systemic influence, with the Catholic system actively encouraging use of the ESL Bandscales with the provision of professional development. Whilst Maree and Minh are opposed to the purpose of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net process, which is to identify particular children on the basis of their performance on certain literacy tasks, and whilst they see the limitations of the First Steps Continua for use with their ESL children, they are both working towards using their own adaptations of these frameworks. Maree already is using them in the children's home language and Minh is planning to do so. Moreover, both teachers, who seem to have more autonomy over their use of frameworks than many of the other teachers in our

study, are developing their own less formal frameworks which allow them to track the progress of their own particular groups of bilingual learners. These self-developed informal frameworks are based on their detailed knowledge of the culture and language of their children's home communities.

## **Major Contextual Factors that Make a Difference**

We have seen how context has affected the teachers' choice and use of national and state mainstream and specialist ESL assessment frameworks in various ways with their ESL children. We now draw together the findings from the Case Studies in order to consider important influences upon teachers' use of these documents. In doing so it is necessary to attempt to isolate individual factors from amongst a complex web of interrelated and interacting elements. The following discussion is based on the data set from all 23 classrooms in our study, which was collected during 1996 and represents what was happening in their classrooms at a particular point in time. It is acknowledged that changes in the teachers' practices and in the assessment frameworks themselves have been made in the time between the end of the data collection period and the publication of this report.

### **Availability of documents within the state**

Location seems to be of central importance. Teachers can only use those documents to which they have access and all four states in our study had produced their own versions of the mainstream national English Profile. However, some versions, such as the English Student Outcome Statements used in Western Australia, were, at the time of our study, still in draft form and in the process of revision. All the Case Study teachers had access to some state mainstream documents. In Queensland and Western Australia the First Steps Developmental Continua were the mainstream documents used by many of the teachers, although the English Student Outcome Statements were also available to and being used by some teachers in Western Australia. All of the teachers in the study, with the exception of Janet and the other teachers at Greenway Intensive Language Centre in Western Australia were, to some extent, using their state version of the national English Profile and/or First Steps.

The use within states of ESL specific frameworks was not so clear cut. In Western Australia, the teachers at Greenway Intensive Language Centre were using the ESL Bandscales, Joanne at Nyamal was using the Highgate Project, a genre-based version of the First Steps Oral Language Continuum for ESL children and she had also been introduced to the ESL Framework of Stages. Neither Minh nor Maree, the two Queensland teachers on whom we focussed in this chapter and who were based in state schools, were using the ESL Bandscales. On the other hand, the other two Case Study teachers whose schools were in the Queensland Catholic system were using them, the Catholic system having been highly involved in their production. In New South Wales, Sara and two of the other Case Study teachers were using the ESL Scales, whilst in Victoria the ESL specialist Stephanie, who was working with the mainstream teacher Clare, was familiar with the ESL Bandscales, the ESL Scales and its state version the ESL Companion to the English CSF. During the course of the study Stephanie was helping Clare become familiar with the ESL Companion to the CSF.

It seems that availability of mainstream frameworks was more determined by location within a particular state than was availability of ESL specific frameworks. This may reflect the fact that, of the four states in our study, only Victoria had made available its own state ESL framework, whereas all four states had produced a state mainstream framework. Nevertheless, production of

a state mainstream framework did not necessarily mean that it was being used by teachers of children in the K-3 age range: Janet and the teachers at Greenway Intensive Language Centre in Western Australia did not use a state mainstream framework. Nor was the particular state mainstream framework used by the teachers necessarily based on the national English Profile: some of the Case Study teachers in Western Australia were using the First Steps Developmental Continua developed in this state; and the Case Study teachers in Queensland were all using the Queensland version of the Reading and Writing Continua as part of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net process.

### **School and system requirements**

In addition to availability of documents, the requirements of individual schools and systems also had a very strong influence upon the assessment frameworks used by teachers and the purposes for which they were used. At a system level Minh, Maree and the other Case Study teachers from Queensland were required to use their state version of the First Steps Continua in order to assess their Year 2 children. This evaluation was then backed up by the "validation" process in which children were required to perform certain standardised language and literacy tasks. Before these tasks were performed, teachers were required to build up the field of knowledge. For example we saw in the description of Minh's classroom that, as part of her task of building up the context for the validation tasks, she was teaching her bilingual children to write specified English sight words. Children's performance on this validation exercise determined whether or not they were funded for intervention programs. The dilemma for the teachers was this: if they taught systematically to the test, their children might be able to "pass"; if teachers did not teach so closely to the test then their children might well "fail", with the result that they would be funded for intervention. Minh gave examples of children who were not receiving the intervention that she believed they needed because they had been systematically taught for the test. Maree at Andelu found that if her children had been formally assessed in their first language, fewer of them would have been "caught in the Net".

In Western Australia, where First Steps was created, government schools frequently reported to their head office the achievement of their students in terms of First Steps Continua. Use of a computer package made this reporting easier for schools. We saw how Elizabeth and the other early childhood teachers at Harhill Primary School were required to make eight First Steps assessments for each child each year, even though Elizabeth felt that this was inappropriate for all Pre-primary children, especially so for those who spoke English as a second language.

A further influential factor at the state level was that different systems had somewhat different requirements and preferences for documents. Unlike the state system, the Victorian Catholic education system had no system-wide reporting requirement. Whilst the Catholic Oxford Street Primary School, where Clare and Stephanie were based, was moving towards a reporting system based on the state framework, the move seemed to be more gradual than that of the state system. This gave the teachers time to reflect on the merits of various documents, not only those that were prescribed. In Queensland, teachers in Catholic schools had a great deal of input into the ESL Bandscales and the two Case Study teachers from the Queensland Catholic system were using them. In Western Australia we were unable to work with any teachers in the Catholic system who were teaching ESL children in the age range K-3 who were using either English Student Outcome Statements, or the ESL Scales, or the ESL Bandscales.

## **Professional development**

Professional development had the potential to be a determining influence on teachers' use of frameworks: Elizabeth revised part of the First Steps Oral Language Continuum after one session on the assessment of ESL children. Nevertheless, it seemed that to be effective certain factors needed to be present: in Elizabeth's case it was her preparedness for the information she received. It also seemed that professional development needed to be carried out carefully and by personnel who had certain characteristics. Sara from New South Wales attributed the problems experienced by the state education system in implementing the English K-6 Curriculum to "rushed" professional development. The valuable influence of Eliza the School Development Officer in the Pilbara region of Western Australia was shown in the Case Studies of Joanne and her colleagues. Eliza was largely responsible for their enthusiastic take up of the Student Outcome Statements and, during the course of the project, she introduced them to the ESL Framework of Stages.

Professional development did not necessarily have to be provided by personnel outside the school for it to be successful. At Greenway Intensive Language Centre the strong commitment by the staff to the use of the ESL Bandscales may well have been influenced by the enthusiasm of Janet and the deputy principal. The staff of this Centre obtained copies of the document, examined it themselves and began using it without any outside professional development. Janet was training other teachers, both mainstream and those in Intensive Language Centres in the use of the document. Also within the school, Stephanie's influence on Clare's use of the English Curriculum and Standards Framework and the ESL Companion was evident.

It seemed that most of the Case Study teachers were using those frameworks for which they had experienced professional development. An exception was Minh, who had been trained in the ESL Scales and the ESL Bandscales, but was not using them with her bilingual learners as she was not required to do so and did not see a need for this. Furthermore, she had independently developed her own informal assessment system, which she saw as adequate for her specific needs. Maree, who at Andelu was geographically a long distance from her state and regional education offices had not, at the time of the study, had any training in ESL specific frameworks. Nevertheless, she, like Minh was developing her own system of assessment. Some of the teachers, like Stephanie at Oxford Street, had experienced professional development in several frameworks and were able to choose between them. Stephanie rejected the ESL Bandscales as she felt the document to be relatively inaccessible.

A further issue related to professional development and use of frameworks was that of the teachers' level of personal investment in a particular framework. Janet at Greenway, who was particularly enthusiastic about the ESL Bandscales, saw the use of the framework as a way of justifying the existence of Intensive Language Centres. She had also had some input into the document when the authors asked for feedback on a draft version. Further, this document complements previous documents that she had been using, in that they were written by the same authors and, as such, represented an affirmation and extension of her previous work. Her level of investment in the document increased with the professional development sessions that she conducted for both mainstream and Intensive Language Centre teachers. Several other participants in the study, such as Stephanie at Oxford Street and Joanne's School Development Officer Eliza in the Pilbara, also seemed to have some personal investment in helping other teachers become familiar with particular frameworks in that such innovations were a part of their professional responsibilities.

## **Support for teachers**

Like professional development, the moral support of colleagues seemed to be important in many teachers' continued use of the frameworks. On the whole, where there was a high degree of collegiality, teachers were confident to use new documents: in Western Australia the teachers in the Pilbara region far from Perth who were using the Student Outcome Statements which were only being trialed in that state seemed to have a good deal of support from their colleagues. Likewise, at Greenway Intensive Language Centre, which had a high degree of independence from the mainstream school, the teachers were united in their commitment to the use of the Bandscales and were using this document alone for the assessment of children at the Centre.

On the other hand, where teachers were particularly isolated in their teaching environments or felt that they had little support from their colleagues in the school, they sometimes either abandoned certain documents or used them only to fulfil requirements. Elizabeth who felt somewhat isolated as a Pre-primary teacher at Harthill Primary School used the First Steps documents for school accountability purposes, but did not consciously use her assessments in order to plan teaching experiences. Minh, who was the only bilingual teacher at her school and had a higher degree of autonomy in the use of assessment frameworks than many teachers, relied mainly on her own assessment system.

An important source of local support for teachers was their assistants. Many of the teachers in our study had the support of assistants, some multi-lingual. The amount of assistance varied, but some teachers had a full-time assistant in their classrooms. Joanne had the support of two assistants for her class of 12 children at Nyamal. Some of the assistants were particularly skilled: Elizabeth's multi-lingual assistant was a trained teacher from Taiwan and Sara's assistant Carly carried out most of the assessment of ESL children at the school. Many of the teachers pointed out the time-consuming nature of the frameworks. Sara, previously an ESL teacher, but now a mainstream class teacher, acknowledged that children in a class of 32 could not be assessed in terms of the ESL Scales without the help of her experienced assistant. In other classrooms the assessment was done by the teacher, sometimes with help from the assistant and sometimes by the teacher alone. The presence of an assistant in the class, another person familiar with the children, had the potential to allow all the teachers more time to devote to assessment and another perspective on the children's achievements.

## **Teachers' experience and training**

It is difficult to see a consistent pattern of a relationship between the Case Study teachers' years of teaching experience and their use of frameworks. Many of the Case Study teachers were highly experienced, which did not seem to have deterred them from using new documents. Nevertheless, Joanne's principal at Nyamal commented that the Student Outcome Statements had been taken up enthusiastically by the teachers in his district, which he attributed in part to their young age and recent training. It is likely that our sample of teachers, whatever their age and experience, were particularly enthusiastic about their teaching or would not have volunteered to become involved in the study, knowing of its time-consuming nature and that their classroom practice would be observed and discussed. It is possible that, for teachers in general, there might be some relationship between length of experience and the use of new frameworks, with younger teachers being more likely to respond more openly to innovations. This is an area which requires further investigation.

Training in ESL and/or experience in the area showed a somewhat more clear cut relationship with the use of ESL specific frameworks. Whilst there seemed to be little use of these by mainstream teachers who did not have ESL training, most of the Case Study teachers with ESL training were using an ESL framework, with Minh in her bilingual program going against this trend. Maree had previous experience with ESL children, but had not been trained in this area and had, at the time of our study, no specific knowledge of ESL specific frameworks.

## **Type of program**

The type of program that teachers were involved in was an important contextual variable. Those teachers who were located within Language Centres were using ESL specific frameworks. Janet stated that such programs allowed her to demonstrate progress that might not be observable in the early stages of learning English when mainstream documents were used. She saw this documentation of progress as important in justifying the existence of her Intensive Language Centre and she used the ESL Bandscales without an accompanying mainstream framework for assessment purposes. Those teachers who had responsibility for ESL children in mainstream settings tended, like Stephanie, to be using both a mainstream and an ESL framework. Mainstream teachers were more likely to be using mainstream frameworks alone, although Sara, a mainstream teacher at St Bertram's was also using an ESL framework. However, until recent funding cuts, she was the school's ESL teacher.

Paradoxically, in the programs which formally used the children's first languages to help them develop their English, only mainstream frameworks were used. Minh and Maree were responsible for programs which used the children's first languages to help language and literacy development in English and were highly involved with the communities from which the children came. Whilst their education department only accepted assessment in English for the Diagnostic Net process, Maree was also using the First Steps Developmental Continua to assess her children in Torres Strait Creole and Minh expressed her intention to do this also. First Steps assessments in both the home language and English have been used with Cambodian bilingual children. However, if a complete picture of the linguistic achievements of bilingual children is to be given, it seems important also to assess certain other linguistic features, such as the capabilities they are developing in the process of learning two languages (Barratt-Pugh, Breen, Kinder, Rohl & House, 1996).

The use of the children's first languages was recognised by Joanne at Nyamal and Elizabeth at Harthill Pre-primary centre. Both teachers had assistants who spoke most of the children's first languages, but as Elizabeth's assistant pointed out, she saw her role as using the first languages only as a means of helping the children to acquire English, not to maintain or develop their first languages. There was apparently no outcomes-based assessment of children in these classrooms in their first languages.

## **Characteristics of the children**

Certain characteristics of the children in the teachers' classes seemed to play some part in the teacher's use of the frameworks. Characteristics that seemed particularly important were: the age and developmental levels of the children, their linguistic backgrounds, their levels of English and the amount of time they spent in the class or centre.

A criterion for inclusion in the study was that teachers were working with the K-3 age group. Some classes included children older than this. Elizabeth's Pre-primary class included some of the youngest children. The notion of formal assessment, particularly of literacy did not sit well with the educational philosophy of some of the pre-school teachers in the study, who saw themselves first and foremost as early childhood educators who were concerned with the development of the whole child. Language and literacy development was seen by them as only a part of the whole. The other Case Study Pre-primary teacher at Elizabeth's school claimed, "*Writing etcetera...that's not nearly as important as the social side*", and explained that in order to be able to learn in a classroom setting, children needed to have the prerequisite social and emotional skills.

Elizabeth discussed how children in a Pre-primary centre were not usually engaged for long periods of time in reading and writing tasks. Further, she was not always able to observe such activities when they did occur since, for much of the day, the children engaged in self-chosen small group activities in different locations within the centre. Accordingly, she made her First Steps assessments for school accountability purposes and, whilst the activities which she provided for her children seemed to a trained observer to be highly appropriate for their age and levels of English, she did not consciously use these assessments in her planning.

The children's levels of English seemed to have some effect upon the particular framework used by their teachers. Janet and her colleagues at Greenway Intensive Language Centre used the ESL Bandscales with their children, virtually all of whom had been in Australia for less than one year and were transferred to mainstream schools when their English was at a certain level, or when they had been at the Centre for their allocated time. Janet considered that children should reach Level 4 on the ESL Bandscales before transferring. One of the other teachers in our study regarded ESL specific frameworks as being more suitable for use in Language Centres than in her own school as her ESL children's levels of English were higher than those of children in Language Centres. The regular transfer of children out of Language Centres and of movement within classes in the centres seemed to necessitate very tight assessment and planning practices by the teachers in order to ensure that the children's specific needs were being met.

Another characteristic of the children which affected teachers' use of frameworks was that of linguistic background. Maree at Andelu was assessing her children in their first language as well as in English and Minh planned to follow this procedure. This was possible because the children in their individual classrooms spoke the same first language. There are not many classrooms in Australia where this is the case. In most of the other classrooms in our study the children came from a range of language backgrounds. It seems that there would be significant logistical problems if teachers were to try to assess all children in their first languages.

A crucial issue related to linguistic background of the children was that of the suitability of the available ESL specific frameworks for indigenous children. These children might well be speaking English as a foreign language, rather than as a second language, with little exposure to English outside the school setting. Joanne at Nyamal was using the Highgate Project version of the First Steps Oral Language Continuum with her indigenous multilingual children. This document was developed at a school where most of the ESL children were from immigrant backgrounds, the majority being of Asian descent. Maree at Andelu was also working with indigenous children from complex linguistic backgrounds, for whom English was a foreign language. She was not using the ESL Bandscales framework, developed in her state of Queensland, but it is likely that she would

have found that it needed some modifications for use with her children. This document focuses upon the language of children who are recently arrived in Australia, with exemplars of levels coming from the language of such children.

### **The teachers' participation in the research process**

Participation in this research project provided the teachers with the opportunity to reflect with an outside researcher on their classroom practice in general and on assessment of their ESL children's language and literacy in particular. Some of the teachers, in the course of the interviews, indicated to the researchers that they had reflected in detail on topics discussed at a previous interview. Whilst the researchers did not see their role as providing professional development in any form and took great care to try to avoid influencing the teachers' classroom practices, it was inevitable that the process of helping the teachers articulate their thoughts and practices led to some changes in practice during the course of the study.

Some of these deliberations were translated into action. Towards the end of the project, after much reflection on the problems she had encountered in using the First Steps Developmental Continua with her Pre-primary children, Elizabeth at Harthill chose to attend a professional development session on assessment with the staff of the on-site Intensive Language Centre. As a result of this session she developed her own additional phase of development for her ESL learners. Such action was not only confined to the teachers themselves. When, after a lapse of several weeks, one of the researchers made a second visit to the Case Study teachers in the Pilbara region of Western Australia he found that the School Development Officer had introduced the teachers to the ESL Framework of Stages since his previous visit. Further, informal contact by some of the research team with the teachers soon after completion of the data collection period, indicated that significant changes had taken place in the assessment practices of some teachers.

Nevertheless, some changes in teachers' practice would be expected over the time-frame of the study, even without the presence of researchers in their classrooms. Teachers' practices are continually evolving as they accommodate the changes that are an integral part of education in Australia at the present time. The assessment frameworks used by the teachers are recent creations and, as can be seen in Chapter 2 (this volume), there was a large amount of change in the ways in which the frameworks were, or were not, adopted by systems and individual teachers immediately before the study began.

### **The Influence of Teachers' Working Contexts upon their Use of Assessment Frameworks: Main findings**

We now summarise the main findings of this study in terms of the relative importance of those factors which have been identified as having some influence on the teachers' use of assessment frameworks. The two most powerful factors seemed to be the location of the teachers within a particular state and the requirements of schools and systems within the state. Professional development, which was often related to state, system and school requirements seemed to be next in order of importance. Other factors which also affected some teachers' use of the frameworks were: characteristics of the children in their classes; the type of program; support in the classroom and moral support; teachers' experience and training; their investment in a particular framework; and, to a lesser degree, the research process itself.

- A particularly important factor that influenced the teachers' use of mainstream evaluative frameworks was location within a particular state. Versions of the national English Profile had been created by all four states and, if teachers were using a version of this document, it was the version for their particular state. The First Steps Developmental Continua, produced in Western Australia, were being used by all but one of the mainstream teachers in this state and all four teachers in Queensland were using the slightly modified Queensland versions of these Continua.
- For ESL specific frameworks, the location of teachers within a particular state was not so important, with the ESL Scales and the ESL Bandscales used across states. However, the Victorian ESL Companion to the CSF, a document produced by that state to complement the state version of the national Profile seemed only to be used by teachers in that state.
- Another highly significant factor that influenced the use of frameworks was that of school and system requirements. Many of the teachers carried out mandated assessments in terms of particular frameworks. In Queensland the mainstream teachers were required to assess children using First Steps Developmental Continua for the Year 2 Diagnostic Net process. In Western Australia some school principals required First Steps assessments for school accountability purposes. There were also some requirements in terms of ESL specialist assessments: at a school level the teachers at an Intensive Language decided as a group to use the ESL Bandscales as part of their highly structured planning, teaching and assessment procedures.
- In some locations the assessment framework was linked to particular consequences for the children. At an Intensive Language Centre, once the children had reached Level 4 on the ESL Bandscales they were deemed to be ready for a mainstream placement. In Queensland, those children who in the Diagnostic Net assessment process did not reach a specified level on the First Steps Reading and Writing Continua were funded for literacy intervention. The problems inherent in using a mainstream framework with ESL children for this purpose were eloquently argued by their teachers.
- Where teachers had a choice of frameworks, they used those for which they had received professional development. This seemed to lead to changes in teachers' practices when it was carried out by professionals at either a regional or school level. There was some feeling that in order to be most effective, professional development should allow teachers time to accommodate new information to their existing knowledge and practices. Professional development seemed to be particularly important to teachers whose school contexts were distant from state and regional centres.
- Related to the issue of professional development was the issue of teachers' personal investment in a framework or related program. Several of the teachers who had been involved in the final stages of the development of frameworks, were particularly enthusiastic about them and were training other teachers. Where frameworks complemented or extended teachers' existing philosophies and practices, they were enthusiastically taken up; where they were not seen as appropriate by teachers they were either not used, or used only to fulfil specific imposed requirements. In the latter case, teachers voiced their concerns about the unsuitability of the frameworks for their children.
- Certain characteristics of the children in the teachers' classes seemed to have affected the teachers' use of particular frameworks. These characteristics

included: age and developmental levels of the children; time spent in the class or centre; the children's levels of English; and their linguistic backgrounds. In the two classrooms where children shared a common first language, the teachers used the language to help development of English and both teachers were moving towards evaluation of the children in their first language as well as in English.

- Collegiality in terms of moral support seemed to be a factor in the teachers' acceptance and use of specific frameworks. One teacher found it to be particularly difficult to justify her practices to the school community when she was the only teacher using a new framework with which she had become familiar at her previous school.
  - Many of the teachers had assistants working alongside them in their classrooms. These assistants were invaluable in helping to give the teachers time to observe their children for assessment purposes. Some of these assistants were particularly skilled: some were multilingual; one carried out most of the assessments of ESL children at her school.
  - Those teachers who had been trained in ESL were more likely to be using an ESL specific framework than those who had not. There were some teachers who were very experienced in ESL teaching who had little or no knowledge of ESL specific frameworks.
  - The teachers in Intensive Language Centres were particularly enthusiastic about the need for ESL specific frameworks. Some felt that the use of these frameworks allowed for the fine-grained analysis of ESL children's language necessary to demonstrate progress over relatively short periods of time and so justify the existence of their centres.
  - Finally, both the research process itself and the climate of change endemic in education at the present time also had an effect upon the teachers' use of evaluative frameworks and related practices.
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## Chapter Four

# The Relationship Between Assessment Frameworks and Classroom Pedagogy

Michael P. Breen

### Introduction: Interpreting an Innovation in Assessment

In their recent comprehensive guide to classroom-based assessment in second language education, Genesee and Upshur deduce that the most effective system will be one where assessment provides a feedback loop in which:

*(A)ssessment activities are motivated and shaped by instructional purposes, plans, and practices in the classroom, and the decisions that arise from the results of these activities, in turn, lead to reshaping of these instructional purposes, plans, and practices.*

*(Genesee & Upshur, 1996: 257)*

In other words, assessment is genuinely effective only if it informs pedagogy in order to improve it. This chapter focuses upon the relationship between teachers' use of assessment frameworks and the specific purposes, plans and practices that constitute their classroom pedagogy. The chapter therefore traces the impact of the particular assessment frameworks adopted by the 25 teachers in the study upon their daily classroom decision-making and instruction, their ongoing judgements of ESL students' progress, and subsequent planning and reporting. A further aim of the chapter is to identify the teachers' perceptions, based upon their experiences, of the limitations and benefits of the frameworks in direct relation to their teaching.

The belief that assessment has a direct influence upon teaching is very common, although this assumption has hardly ever been researched. In one of the very rare studies of the effect of the so called "washback" effect of nationally used tests upon teaching, Alderson and Wall (1993) were surprised to discover that, although teachers were seen to be influenced by what they assumed to be the content of the tests in **what** they taught as content in their lessons, there was much less impact on the **ways** they taught. This research was conducted in the context of the introduction of a new school-leaving examination in English in Sri Lanka. Despite its rarity and thoroughness, we need to be cautious of generalising its findings to the classroom-based assessment of children in an ESL context such as Australia. However, it is clearly the case that the present chapter explores the relationship between assessment and teaching as largely uncharted territory.

The adoption of an externally devised framework of assessment by a teacher entails a process of adaptation and change. This process takes time and the Case Studies reveal teachers in different stages of adaptation. Most of the teachers in this study were beginning to incorporate such frameworks into their pedagogy only relatively recently. On the other hand, teachers like Janet at Greenway, Stephanie at Oxford Street, and Meredith at Daviston, for example,

have become sufficiently familiar with a particular framework that they themselves provide professional development to their colleagues in its use. For all of the 25 teachers in this study, assessment of learning outcomes is not their first priority. It is clear from the Case Studies that their experientially informed teaching purposes, planning, and teaching practices which best enable their students to develop competence in English are their primary concerns. The extent to which they accommodate an externally devised assessment framework depends upon their judgement of its positive contribution to these three pedagogic priorities.

Studies of adaptation to particular changes in the professional work of teachers and other professional groups reveal that there are clear and inevitable phases of transition in the change process (Adams, et al. 1976; Hall & Hord, 1987; Claxton, 1989; Levine 1990, and Breen et al. 1996 *inter alia*). Teachers are most resistant to change in their ways of working if they initially perceive an innovation to intrude upon pedagogic priorities that have been honed by long experience and perceived as most appropriate within a particular working context. If a change is required of them rather than chosen by them, such resistance is likely to manifest itself either as a denial of the importance of the change or its mere assimilation. This latter reaction entails reducing the intended scope of the change so that it can be subsumed easily within how the teacher *already* thinks about their work and how they undertake it. The intended innovation is reinterpreted as requiring little or no adaptation on the part of the teacher with the result that it is never really implemented.

There is some evidence in this study that, whilst all of the teachers clearly recognised the significance of external assessment frameworks in the broader context of their work, there was an initial and understandable wish to assimilate the assessment frameworks and, thereby, reduce their impact so that they did not intrude upon strongly held teaching priorities. Genuine *accommodation* of a change entails three distinct phases. Acceptance that the change is necessary through the conceptual and affective recognition of its ultimate benefit to one's own pedagogic priorities is the first of these phases. The Case Studies reveal that virtually all of the teachers accept one or other of the particular assessment frameworks as, at least, potentially beneficial to their pedagogy.

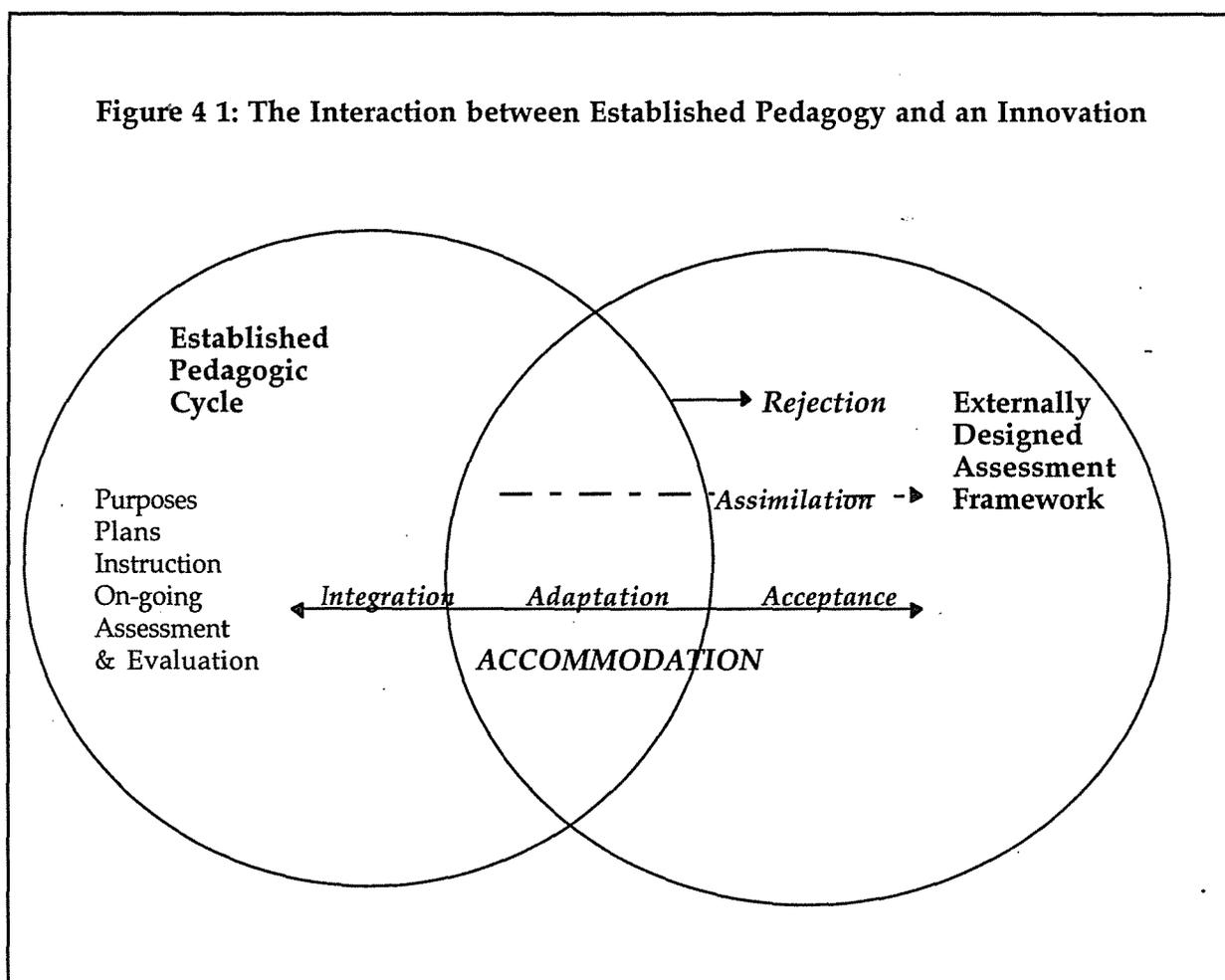
The second phase of accommodation is revealed by the teacher's *selective* trialing and adaptation of the framework within their established assessment procedures. Almost all of the teachers in this study had entered this phase of selective adaptation. Indeed, this is the predominant phase which typified our sample of teachers at the time of the investigation. And this is not surprising for two main reasons. First, the teachers who participated in the study revealed a strong sense of professional responsibility and, within the particular circumstances of their teaching contexts, were clearly grappling with the demands placed upon them in balancing their deep concern for their students' learning with the need to be informed of students' progress and, in turn, to reveal this progress through feedback to the students and through reporting to parents and the school. The second reason why the 25 teachers were mostly in the process of selectively adapting the assessment frameworks within their current pedagogy was that the frameworks themselves were recent innovations. For the relatively novice practitioner, as the Case Studies reveal, the frameworks existed as merely one more element in the wider experience of having to adapt to new circumstances. For the more experienced practitioners, established ways of assessing and reporting had themselves to be adapted in order to incorporate what was recognised as new.

The final phase of accommodation of the change is revealed when the teacher has

fully *integrated* an innovation, such as a particular assessment framework, within their own cycle of planning, teaching and assessing or, more broadly, evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching upon student learning. Such integration has to build upon the earlier selective adaptation with the result that the teacher will be interpreting the framework in ways that may not have been fully intended by its original designers. In order to integrate it, the teacher has to impose their own meaning and justification upon the framework and, through this process of full ownership of the innovation, will often refine it beyond its original design. There is some evidence that some of the teachers who have become very familiar with one or other of the frameworks have fully integrated them in this way.

Figure 1 summarises the interaction between established pedagogy and an externally devised innovation which I have described so far. This general pattern of interaction is confirmed across the Case Studies as a whole and, while many teachers described their initial wish to assimilate or subsume, almost all were accommodating a particular framework, and most were selectively adapting it.

**Figure 4 1: The Interaction between Established Pedagogy and an Innovation**



A reading of the individual Case Studies will, of course, present a reality that is more complex than the overall process so far described. Many of the teachers had adapted one particular framework whilst also becoming gradually familiar with another. And the extent to which each teacher accepted one or other framework and how they selectively adapted it within the opportunities and constraints of their own working context can only be understood from a reading of each Case. Other chapters in this volume describe in more detail the teachers' reactions to the various frameworks (Chapter 5), the purposes they assign to

them (Chapter 6), and the impact of their specific working contexts on their implementation (Chapter 3). However, the general model of interaction presented here provides us with a window on to the Case Studies and allows us to explore the process in closer detail in what follows.

This chapter begins with an overview of the major characteristics of the classroom pedagogy of the 25 teachers. It then focuses more specifically upon the teachers' on-going assessment practices within current pedagogy. The third section of the chapter discusses the experience of adaptation between the teachers' established systems of assessment and reporting and the requirements of the frameworks. The fourth section identifies where the frameworks currently appear to be having their strongest impact upon the teachers' work. The final section considers the teachers' perceptions of the limitations or benefits of the frameworks in direct relation to their teaching. The chapter concludes with a summary of what the Case Studies reveal about the process of interaction between pedagogy and the new assessment frameworks.

## **An Overview of Pedagogies**

What appear to be the prevailing characteristics of the classroom pedagogy of the 25 teachers who participated in this study? It needs to be said at once that the Case Studies reveal a diversity in the teachers' approach to the task of enabling young ESL learners to acquire and develop English language and literacy. This diversity is guaranteed by, among other factors, variations in the teachers' perceptions of the capabilities and needs of ESL children, the teachers' relative experience in working with ESL learners, and whether the class is a mainstream group with a minority of ESL students or whether it is a class which is located in an Intensive/English Language Centre.

The difference between the teachers in their approaches to ESL learners is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. The extent of direct experience of working with ESL children ranged from one year through to more than twenty years. Two thirds of the teachers who participated in this study were working in a mainstream context. Of these, 4 were teaching in pre-primary classrooms and 13 in primary Years 1-3 classes. Of the latter, five were also trained and experienced in working with ESL children. Participating teachers also included 5 ESL specialists working in Intensive/English Language Centres and 3 ESL specialists working in support of mainstream teachers often on the basis of withdrawing certain ESL students who need specific help. One of these teachers was working in a special school for disabled students. The individual teacher's working context and their definition of their role within it will clearly result in variation in preferred pedagogies. The impact of the specific context of the school upon teachers' use of assessment frameworks is discussed in Chapter 3.

A number of recurring priorities in pedagogy can, however, be discerned among all 25 teachers with reference to their purposes, plans, and practices. Without exception, the teachers were concerned with their ESL students' long term successful participation in the mainstream demands of school. For the pre-primary teachers this entailed a concern with socialising all their students, including ESL children, in the expectations and procedures to which the children would need to adapt on entry to primary school. Intensive/English Language Centre teachers focused upon providing their ESL students with that level of knowledge and capabilities, particularly in their use of English, which enabled the teachers to be sure of the children's readiness to transfer to the mainstream. The ESL specialists typically worked as closely as they could, often in quite pressured circumstances, with mainstream teachers in order to address the

specific needs of children which emerged from their difficulties in the language and literacy activities of the mainstream class. And the mainstream teachers, including those in pre-primary classrooms, tailored specific or additional classroom tasks for their ESL students closely within the frame of their mainstream curriculum.

Also without exception, the teachers devoted a very high proportion of the teaching-learning process to the development of literacy. Generally much of this work involved the teachers in building individual writing tasks - from drawing through alphabet work to extended writing - around a shared reading experience. In every classroom there was an explicit focusing upon and modelling of the formal elements of written English. The students were constantly exposed to sound-symbol relationships, they copied, coloured, and combined letters of the alphabet, and were shown how different parts of words made whole words or indicated differences in meaning. Students learned frequent sight words and specific vocabulary items derived from Big Books, songs, or sentences related to a topic presented by the teacher. And teachers often explicitly focused upon basic conventions in syntax.

This kind of gradual and explicit building up of the children's recognition and practice in the different elements of written language was always located within an integrated purpose or plan. At the highest level, virtually all the teachers sought to integrate the students' language and literacy work with the other learning areas in the pre-primary or primary curriculum. They acted on the assumption that subjects like Maths, Health and Science entailed the child's mastery of the language of such subjects. Many of the teachers did not identify the children's work in English as separable from their learning of the broader curriculum and, in this sense, stories, songs, and poems were seen as vehicles for literacy development which, in turn, served the child's acquisition of knowledge across the curriculum. Perhaps this was most obvious with pre-primary teachers who often based their planning upon levels of conceptual and social development which they saw as underlying all learning. This was also a priority for Deidre at Greenvale when working with disabled ESL students.

The next level of integration reflected clearly in the teachers' planning and instruction was the wish to provide a meaningful context for the children's focused tasks. Again almost without exception, teachers based their work upon themes and topics. Within these, some of the teachers used pedagogic frameworks such as genres, functional grammar, situated role plays, and other strategies derived from State and Territories curricula and syllabuses with which the teacher was most familiar in order to provide contexts and coherence for their students' work. Some of the teachers sought a further level of integration by explicitly linking the students' learning of English with their first language, as did Minh with Vietnamese and Maree with Torres Strait Islander Creole.

In general, therefore, the teachers working with the K-3 students located the child's development of English, with a prime focus upon English literacy, as a means towards, and support for their learning of the broader mainstream curriculum. The explicit and more analytical focus upon aspects of English was balanced by a thematic or topical contextualisation and was intended by the teachers as contributing to broader early childhood curriculum objectives. Any account of how the teachers would interpret or adapt an assessment framework that required them to focus on the discrete development of English language and literacy has to be seen against the backdrop of such priorities. The teachers' practices devoted much attention to the children's emerging competence in English, but language and literacy was most often seen as a means to the broader curriculum rather than an end in itself.

To the reader who is familiar with the teaching of K-3 students, this general picture of the major pedagogic purposes, plans and practices of the teachers in the study is probably both unsurprising and rather sketchy. My purpose has been to provide a background against which any externally designed assessment procedure has to be seen. It is time to look more closely within the Case Studies at the interface between the diverse realisations of these major pedagogic priorities and the assessment frameworks which the teachers were using. Within their different pedagogies, the teachers in this study refined their work on the basis of reflection and evaluation. Part of the evidence they relied on for the latter was derived from their own established assessment procedures. And it is upon these that we might expect that an externally devised framework would have a most direct impact.

### Assessment On The Run

There is strong evidence in the Case Studies that teachers base their judgements of their students' potential, their overall progress, and their momentary achievements on the basis of on-going and experientially informed intuitions. In ways seemingly independent of the written assessment records which they complete from time to time, whether they are closely related to a particular framework or built up from a range of sources over the years, the teachers appear constantly alert to changes in the children's learning. These judgements are not static and are made spontaneously on the basis of a child's achievement within a particular classroom task and on the basis of day to day personal interaction with the child. One of the prevailing features of the teachers' descriptions of their students is the detailed picture they have formed in their own minds, even in a short period of time, of each child's progress and potential in relation to the expectations of early schooling.

Perhaps because the teachers appear to rely upon experientially informed intuitions in the day to day bustle of classroom work, they often found it hard to put such intuitions into words. When asked if she relied on First Steps as a guide to her students' immediate needs, Elizabeth, a pre-primary teacher explained that she worked in a different way:

*There doesn't seem to be any rule for what they want. The teacher who was here about ten years at Pre-primary, I asked her (about the children's needs) and she said, 'You know, well it's like kind of "what do you feel?"' And I look at the children's English and again it's a gut feeling,*

*Elizabeth at Harthill*

Of the teachers who were familiar with working with First Steps, those who were relatively less experienced often valued the teaching strategies which made up a part of this framework more highly than the assessment component of the Developmental Continua. However, more experienced teachers, like Janet at Greenway, perceived it as mere confirmation of how she has worked for years:

*First Steps has no impact on my teaching full stop. First Steps is a misnomer in the sense that, well the concept is, I mean it's almost like there wasn't any light before First Steps and that the only way you were a creative in touch teacher was if you had read First Steps. But some of us were actually born before First Steps was written and some of us actually did think and collaborate with other teachers before First Steps was written. And all First Steps did was go around and pick up these things. The strategies and all that stuff were just put together and they were based on good teachers' ideas.*

Janet meantime had developed a very thorough assessment system for her ESL students based upon the Bandscales but she made a clear distinction between the purposes and actual practices in her teaching and her assessment of the students' progress. Many of the teachers either overtly or intuitively made this distinction and particularly when seeing the relationship between a new assessment framework and how they managed the on-going teaching-learning process in their classroom.

Even when accepting the potential contribution of a particular framework in informing them about the more precise achievements of their students, several teachers realised that how they taught and what they taught could be seen as independent of the frameworks. Kylie, teaching pre-primary at Banksia, worked together with a group of other teachers on the Student Outcome Statements in order to inform her teaching:

*We went through the whole day and I found that I was really concerned that I wasn't doing Technology the way it should be done, like I wasn't using the computer. But looking at the Technology area, my children are playing with blocks, they are building stuff. I could say to them, 'Build me a house that has six rooms.' and they would go and do it. It's design, making something and then appraising it. I didn't realise I was doing the Design part, but I was. Even down to routines and things like that was part of the Technology process. So that was what came out of it for me; just so amazing that I was doing things without thinking about them. That's what makes me believe that you don't have to change the things you teach. I mean, if every teacher sat down and took a look at the Outcome Statements, they'd find they were doing everything anyway.*

*Kylie at Banksia*

The participating teachers knew from the outset of this study that the researchers were interested in their assessment practices. Working with the researchers often enabled the teachers to reflect on these practices and become much more aware of them than, perhaps, they had been for some time. This reflection uncovered the kind of day to day, intuitive process of making judgements which all of the teachers incorporated within their teaching. Rose expressed this process in the following way:

*I suppose I was (assessing) without realising it. (On a barrier game) it provided a really good assessment activity because just by listening to them I could hear all sorts of things, improving their oral language, improving their concepts. The knowledge that I have of their reading is in my head. I suppose they're constantly being judged and assessed because they go onto a next stage or group for their reading books. I'll listen to them read and see whether they are ready. It's probably a continual evaluation but nothing down on paper, until they come to the miscue analysis.*

*Rose at Harthill*

Virtually every teacher in the study asserted that they relied a good deal on spontaneous observation of their students. When asked how she had managed to build up a particularly detailed knowledge of the children in her class, Kylie explained:

*Through talking to them basically. I've been here so long and I can know what the family is like, knowing the other children who have been through, because, with the bulk of them, I've taught their*

*brothers and sisters and I know the parents. Also, for five years now down the track teaching pre-primary, I have background knowledge. I have a good idea. (Even in the first week) I can say, 'Yes, this one's fine, that one is going to be a bit of a problem, this one needs a lot of work, that one we'll have to watch,' and so on.*

*Kylie at Banksia*

Almost without exception, the teachers found it easier to assess their students' written language because the evidence could be seen and reflected upon beyond the rush of the classroom. They could also assess development in reading during those occasional moments when they allocated time to hear individual children read to them. In making judgements about their students' oral development, however, the teachers most often relied upon observation, whether their observation focused on a particular aspect of the child's speech or whether it was a more broad assessment. In talking about how she made judgements about her students' progress in speaking, Leigh aptly summarised the basis on which most of the teachers undertook such on-going assessments:

*What I observe and how they talk to me. A lot of it is observation and how they're relating to one another, how they're playing in the shops and how they're mixing.*

*Leigh at Weaver*

A prevailing feature of many of the classes in the study was the teachers' grouping of children according to perceived levels of progress and achievement. Teachers very often selected and devised different activities and tasks within the same lesson for different students. Because the teachers appeared keenly alert, especially in relation to their ESL students, to the wide diversity of previous learning experiences, or differences in knowledge and capabilities, or variations in the rate of progress among the children, they often allocated different tasks to different students during a lesson or expected some children to achieve one aspect of a task rather than another. And this grouping of students was commonly based upon quite early observations of individual children. Leigh, for example, identified a group in her class who needed specific help from her support teacher:

*Just by listening to them and working with them I split the class into two. For these two weeks I've prepared all the lessons and activities for the children so they're out there doing something different. They're getting to the stage when they're now pointing to each word as they're reading and discovering one to one correspondence while these children are now actually reading and identifying words. The ones out there are still not familiar with the alphabet, they're still not sounding out the letters . . . The ones I have with me here are into blends and getting into sentences.*

*Leigh at Weaver*

Leigh's ability to rely on extra support reminds us of the working context of the ESL specialists in the study. Working as closely as they could with the mainstream teachers, often in circumstances where this was difficult, the ESL specialist most often informs the mainstream teacher's assessment. As a result, Meredith, the ESL specialist at Daviston, makes a distinction between her teaching and formal assessment. Typically she has little time to analyse the children's progress. She keeps a running record in her head and makes anecdotal notes in a context where the formal assessment is inevitably driven by the mainstream teacher's program. The ESL specialist with several mainstream teachers to support has to assess even more 'on the run' than teachers who are

working with the children much of the day:

*I find with fractional positions, you're there two days a week or whatever, you're seeing the students once a week for an hour. The child has to survive in the mainstream class when you're not there. So I base the ESL work that I do on how that child can survive within the mainstream class while getting the ESL that they need within the teacher's program. I don't see any point in me doing a separate thing, it's all within the teacher's program.*

*Meredith at Daviston*

On-going observation appears, therefore, as the foundation for all the teachers' perceptions of student progress and achievement. In this context, the framework that provided a specific guide to observation was highly valued:

*At the back of the Bandscales are the Observation Guide points and I find those to be far more useful (than indicators). So what happens is, I look at the back of it for the group of kids at the beginning of term and I say, 'right, for this group of children these are the things I will focus on when I observe them.' So when I'm walking round looking at the kids I will look specifically for those points.*

*Janet at Greenway*

The advantages of observation are that it is continuous and embedded within the shifting teaching-learning events in the classroom. For the teachers in the study, an assessment procedure which has these two characteristics appeared invaluable. All the teachers inevitably relied upon brief moments of noticing how the children worked and what they produced in order to make their judgements. This does not mean that a resulting assessment will not be informed from other sources. The common reliance upon observation, though often spontaneous, appears not to be unfocused or random. Even when there is an extra moment of time to take stock of a piece of child's writing, a relatively rapid judgement appears to be informed from several pieces of evidence:

*I just made some notes there. Basically it's using some work samples, of just really seeing how they go. It's fairly broad over a period of time . . . Photos (of the children) I use quite a bit and check lists and comments and also intuition is used quite a bit too, just thinking how an individual child has gone or he's not having a very good day. You just pick up certain things there too.*

*Linda at Harthill*

Linda shared this strategy of anecdotal note-making with virtually every teacher in the study. Minh, a teacher in a bilingual Vietnamese-English program, described her strategy in the following way:

*All the things they do for me are used for assessment. When I notice something important I usually write it down. It's very basic, Okay? And it's not just on language, it's on everything. I mainly assess their concepts, what they haven't got yet.*

*Minh at Lachlan*

June, a very experienced teacher at Oxford Street, relies on informal observation during questioning and discussions but she also keeps detailed anecdotal notes. Describing her own system of anecdotal records, she says:

*(It) helps me I suppose because it helps me pinpoint, because sometimes you can go through a whole day without knowing*

*whether somebody's actually said anything, and sometimes I look back and say, 'Oh yes, they DID do that, and I think that's the beauty because I think you should always do that, see that the children have asked questions and posed questions. So it helps me move away, because we've used those types of questions, to other types of questions. This year I was really going to use them a lot more, but because we had the review I didn't have time to concentrate on being more specific in some areas of my observations.*

*June at Oxford Street*

Most of the teachers had developed or were beginning to develop a more systematic way of making anecdotal records. These records were closely based upon the teacher's curriculum purposes, were most often focused on individual children, and described their progress against very specific learning goals. In this way, anecdotal notes were most teachers' first signposts for more formal assessments not least because they could be undertaken in a relatively quick but regular fashion:

*I use anecdotal records mostly, otherwise it's hard to remember. They're just rough notes probably and I've started this system so that I can see how often I actually notice the child. So I put the date here. Check list with the date and whatever it is: process writing, oral language, reading, handwriting, and I'm keeping those kinds of things in this book at the moment. Probably about once a fortnight . . . I'm thinking that ideally you should be able to do more, that should be the base limit . . . it shouldn't be lower than that. Some comment once a fortnight.*

*Jenny at Hillsdale*

The Case Studies make clear that, in the dynamic of classroom life, a recurring process of spontaneous assessment is embedded within the teachers' work. From recognising progress in their speech development, to grouping of children at different levels, to forming a detailed picture of each child, observation informed by experience appears to be at the heart of their assessment process. Teachers supported these observations with similarly spontaneous and on-going note-making which was focused upon individual children's achievements and difficulties. Both these 'informal' assessment procedures, which were closest to the real time of classroom work, typically synthesised evidence from several moments of contact with each student. It appears that the teachers' strongest impressions of their students derived from such a synthesis. And observation and note-making, in turn, provided the groundwork for more formal or reflective assessment.

## **Accommodating Frameworks**

The most likely circumstances in which teachers initially react to a new assessment framework in ways that indicate rejection are not the implication of extra work nor the inability to recognise the potential of new ways of doing things. Rejection most often arises because the teacher has devoted time and care to developing their own detailed assessment system. In a sense, the change implied by a new framework is perceived as a potential threat to their own established professional competence. It entails a change process on their behalf which, from experience, they know to be a lengthy and sometimes stressful undertaking to the point when they may integrate the change into what they have already built up over the years.

Meredith at Daviston, herself a highly experienced teacher which includes 12 years teaching ESL children, also provides professional development in her region on the ESL Scales. She captured this kind of initial rejection by the experienced practitioner when she described a teacher of 30 years' experience to whom she introduced the ESL Scales:

*She assesses all the time, standard class assessment tasks, and all the results are recorded. She had records like 'War and Peace' you know, very detailed and that was on every child. When the parents came for interviews she could tell you exactly where the child was at, here's an example of the work, the whole thing. Every 'i' was dotted. But when it came to the Scales, she backed off. I had thought she's be a good one to give it to because she has these records and she's somebody that's into lists and all those things. But it was just something foreign to her experience.*

*Meredith at Daviston*

In contrast, almost all of the teachers who participated in this study had moved beyond an initial rejection or assimilation of a new framework. They had also moved beyond mere acceptance and most were grappling with the challenge of adapting one or other framework to their preferred ways of working. All the teachers were "outcomes aware" and were synthesising new framework outcomes, indicators and pointers with their own previous teaching purposes and learning goals. A key characteristic of this process was the teachers' **selectivity**. And this was more noticeable among mainstream teachers. Teachers selectively incorporated into their planning and their day to day teaching particular parts of a framework, particular indicators as goals, and particular pointers for specific tasks. This selective process appeared to be based initially upon the teachers' recognition of outcomes that harmonised with their own priorities and, later, upon those outcomes which they saw as valuable but which they had not incorporated in such detail in their own teaching. The acceptance of the significance of accountability, despite their shared concerns about benchmark comparisons between schools, clearly encouraged them to reflect upon their reporting procedures and to match these with school recording policies which included elements from one or other of the frameworks.

However, it emerged from the Case Studies that many of the teachers approached a new assessment framework from the basis of well established and often very thorough personal systems of assessment. They were endeavouring to accommodate the requirements of what appeared to them to be new within what they had already built up. We can illustrate this process with five brief examples of the kinds of personal experiences such adaptation entailed. These experiences, though inevitably special to the particular teachers concerned, fairly reflect the kinds of adaptation issues that many of the teachers identified.

Sara, a mainstream teacher of Year 2 students at St Bertram's, has a great deal of experience as an ESL teacher. She works closely with Carly the school's ESL assistant teacher. Their work is based upon a whole school language and literacy program shaped by the NSW English K-6 School Guidelines. They collaboratively plan teaching activities or 'episodes,' and build up, through carefully worked out assessment procedures, Pupil Literacy Portfolios of each child:

*It's sort of a teaching, learning, assessment cycle where we assess and, on the basis of that, respond with our teaching and record our observations and then evaluate. And then we look at teaching-*

*learning activities which Carly can work on that will help certain children.*

*Sara at St Bertram's*

Sara is clearly grateful for Carly's support in focusing on the specific needs of some of the ESL students and Carly is beginning to use the ESL Scales to inform her own on-going assessment and reporting procedures. However, despite being a facilitator of professional development for her system in the ESL Scales, Sara voices the reaction of many mainstream teachers to a framework of this kind:

*It's idealistic, it really is, from the mainstream teacher's point of view. Whereas from the point of view of the ESL teacher, it's more manageable and necessary. I used to be as sort of tunnel visioned as the ESL teacher, but now in the mainstream teaching, you've got just so much to look at.*

*Sara at St Bertram's*

Therefore, despite or, perhaps, because of their very thorough collaborative assessment and planning procedures based upon a mainstream language and literacy syllabus, Sara prefers to leave the focused assessment of the ESL students to her ESL support person.

A second example of adaptation is provided by one of the pre-primary teachers. In being very keen to establish the credibility of pre-primary provision in her school, Kylie at Banksia has unilaterally developed an assessment system tied to her pre-primary goals which includes the creation of students' sample workbooks with guidance to parents on how to read them, a termly report form which she herself has designed, and an end of year profile of each child for the Year 1 primary teacher. Typical of many of the teachers in the study, Kylie has been eclectic in the ideas and sources she has used for her system. She expressed her motive in the following way:

*I felt guilty at the end of the year when I know that every other teacher in the school is writing reports and doing work packages and under all this stress and I'm saying, 'End of year, it's just great!'. And I thought there's got to be something that goes home from pre-primary as well. Parents expect when I say, 'You should take your children to pre-primary every day,' they expect written feedback. I mean a lot of parents will say, 'Wow, I didn't know you got a report in pre-primary.' And I have said, 'This is from me because this is needed.' Not that reports are enjoyable.*

*Kylie at Banksia*

In endeavouring to make strong links between her pre-primary work and the primary school, Kylie sees the Student Outcome Statements as a potential bridge. She joined a network of pre-primary teachers in her locality to work upon the Student Outcomes framework with the specific purpose of selectively identifying pre-primary outcomes which she could incorporate as objectives within her established program. She has pragmatically sifted through the framework both to confirm that her teaching is on what she perceives as the right track and to build into her own pedagogy particular mainstream outcomes for which she can provide the foundation in her work with pre-primary children.

Turning to a well established assessment procedure in one of the Intensive/English Language Centres, we found that Janet, Marion and Yuen at Greenway had adapted a process of "negotiated evaluation" from the ideas of Helen Woodward (Woodward, H. 1993 *Negotiated Evaluation Primary English*

Teachers Association PETA). Dissatisfied with previous checklisting or standardised tests, staff at Greenway recognised the educational value of immediate and understandable feedback to their ESL students and the direct involvement of the children in collaborative self-assessment. This procedure begins with the simple device of attaching a sheet to the child's desk on which are written both the teacher's and the child's immediate achievements and short term goals. Janet described the negotiated process in the following way:

*At the beginning of a term, perhaps 2 or 3 weeks into term, I choose three children. And I watch these children for 5 school days, it may be a complete week or it may go over five days . . . And during that time I write down all the things that they are actually doing . . . I find that I have to write down what they're struggling with too. And as you write them down you say, 'I'm writing this down. This is what I am seeing you do. this is what I would like you to do next,' or 'this is the next thing that I want you to improve.' That's the negotiated bit . . . On the bottom of each one of these sheets is a space for them to write down anything that they have noticed that they're doing or that you want them to remember, so they write down what it is that they want to do. At the end of the week, at the end of five days, I write a report . . . and I write it in a parent-friendly fashion . . . I say to them, 'go away for five minutes. I want you to write something that you've learned this week. I want you to write what you think you're good at, what you want, what's hard for you, what do you like to do best at school and then what would you like to get better at and how do you think you could do that.' So the child goes away and does that.*

*Janet at Greenway*

The written sheets are subsequently taken home by the child for the parents to see and on which the parents may add their own comments. During a year, the teachers at Greenway will repeat this process with all the children in their class several times. The Greenway teachers have recently adopted the ESL Bandscales as their assessment framework for making judgements concerning their students' readiness for entry to the mainstream. But this latter process is regarded as separate from the on-going negotiated evaluation. Although Janet, for example, may identify some of the things she writes on the child's sheet on the basis of her familiarity with the Observation Guide from the ESL Bandscales, what she identifies with the child as achievements or short term goals emerge directly from what she sees the child doing during particular classroom tasks. Negotiated evaluation appears to spring from the teacher's perception of the child's spontaneous output or learning needs rather than from outcomes criteria within a comprehensive assessment framework.

A fourth illustration of the adaptive interface between well established assessment procedures and a particular framework is also provided from another Intensive/English Language Centre. Sue, with 15 years teaching experience in Britain and New Zealand in addition to Australia, first became familiar with the Curriculum and Standards Framework ESL Companion Document and the ESL Scales in 1996 through professional development which also explored the possible relationships between these two documents. However, Hillsdale ELC had in place a particular Language Assessment Policy built around detailed weekly anecdotal records of each child. These records feed into a regularly completed Assessment Form derived from the Victorian Course Advice, ESL Essentials which, in turn, are based upon the ESL Framework of Stages. (The latter was developed out of the Australian Language Levels Guidelines).

Anecdotal records are at the heart of the very thorough assessment that Sue undertakes and these rely on the thematic focus of Sue's teaching as the criteria against which the students' on-going progress is documented. Perhaps not surprisingly, of her classroom based assessment Sue asserts that '*Most of it is in my head*'. And, when talking about the detailed anecdotal records, she echoes some of the pressure that other teachers in the study expressed about the demands of recurrent assessment:

*I find a difficulty with those, I don't know whether it's the way I am in the classroom or what, I feel I'm head down tails up most of the time, and the children are fairly demanding, so to actually sit in a lesson and have time to actually write something is quite difficult, because there's always someone who needs some sort of help or other, unless it's a time that they're all busily doing something and maybe you can walk around and write something then, or else I write after class.*

*Sue at Hillsdale*

This tension between seeking to maintain a thorough check upon her students' progress and managing the teaching/learning process in the classroom emerged again and again for many of the teachers who revealed exceptional commitment to the educational success of ESL children. However, Sue's assessment procedures also included the compilation of a 10 page Exit Report on each of her students who were about to enter the mainstream. This Report is largely informed by the ESL Scales. And Sue was working on a way of directly relating the ESL Scales to the ESL Companion of the Curriculum and Standards Framework in order to refine the Report and respond to her system's requirements. Her strategy was entirely understandable and echoes the efforts of the teachers in Western Australia who placed high value on documentation which related the Phases in First Steps to the Levels in the Student Outcome Statements. This effort to synthesise a known assessment framework with a more recently introduced one is an extension of the teachers' obvious need to reduce the seeming complexity and scale of the assessment process to what seems feasible to a teacher in the immediate classroom and school context.

For a final example of adaptive accommodation we can return to where we began; with a mainstream teacher. Unlike Sara at St Bertram's, Nicole is a relative novice in her second year of teaching at the time of the study. She bases her work with a class of Year 2 students at Weaver Primary School on her own interpretation of Concept Based Learning. For Nicole, like other recently graduated primary teachers in Western Australia, First Steps provided her with a range of teaching strategies which she has found immensely useful. However, in her assessment, she relies only indirectly upon the Developmental Continua in First Steps:

*I do use the Continua, but I think it goes a lot deeper than just using First Steps and doing what works best. I tend to look a little beyond that and use the First Steps pre-primary books because they've got lots of ideas that are good for language experience activities. It's also intuition. You can't just rely on a checklist because obviously the checklists aren't suitable for every child. But I use the strategies of First Steps to teach the content of understandings from all my other subjects. You've got continuity from your language in the morning to your other subjects.*

*Nicole at Weaver*

Nicole is therefore concerned with her students' language development across learning areas whilst, in her language pedagogy, she deliberately focuses upon very specific indicators of skill achievement. Although she is not familiar with "negotiated evaluation", Nicole intuitively recognises the value of encouraging her students to reflect with her on what they have achieved and what they might focus upon next. To do this, she uses a fairly simple list of a few basic goal statements, such as 'has a go at hard words' or 'sound out words' and sits with a child while he or she is completing a particular task:

*Its like a reading conference because they read to me and I look out for these things while they are reading. What I write next to the first star will be something I have chosen as an improvement in their work and I explain it to them. Next to the second star, the student chooses something which they have done well in and I write that down. The 'One Wish' is a negotiated goal which we agree on for the future. We write it like a goal, their goal for reading. If I had a smaller class I'd try to do it every fortnight with a new book just so they keep monitoring themselves and so that I had a good handle on where they were at.*

*Nicole at Weaver*

Nicole is taking this idea further by developing tasks which require the students to reflect upon their achievements within a particular theme which is part of her program. And she is beginning to write up the achievement criteria on such tasks on the basis of a synthesis of her thematic content derived from her own Concept Based Learning framework and some of the indicators from First Steps which she sees as directly related to the task.

Describing an individualised whole curriculum plan for one of her ESL students, Nicole summarises the distinction she wants to maintain between her assessment and her day to day pedagogy:

*This is directed at what she is doing and what strategies we are actually using in the classroom for her. You need a big focus like this for her, whereas the Continuum is an account of where she's getting generally. Although it's pretty detailed, it's still an account of achievement and not what we need to focus on with her from day to day.*

*Nicole at Weaver*

Nicole's concern for 'a big focus' in on-going assessment which covers all the learning areas is a concern that reverberates in the reactions of some of the other teachers, particularly the mainstream pre-primary and primary teachers. Despite the conspicuous attention in their teaching upon beginning literacy, they appear uncomfortable with frameworks that appear to address distinct learning areas, such as a mainstream English framework. Following a construction activity in her classroom at Oxford Street, Clare describes the children's subsequent discussion of the language needed to write about the activity:

*So we've taken down and watched what happened. They had to sequence the steps . . . (They had to make) a plan for the orientation, that's what we had to do first. So they wrote this and they had to explain why we've done all this, so when I did this I was expecting to look at actual specific skills as well as content. So I suppose some of these would come under what would be in the Science Curriculum and Standards Framework but a lot of them would be English Curriculum Standards Framework as well . . . Often the language, the vocabulary, structures and language skills you want the children*

*to develop are generated from the topic, for example, focusing on the explanation genre in a technology-focused topic.*

*Clare at Oxford Street*

Kylie expresses this prevailing view among the teachers that there is an inherent unity of learning experiences when comparing her teaching program with First Steps:

*I think mine is entirely different but it fits in well . . . that's the beauty of pre-primary, because you do everything. It's the same with the Student Outcome Statements. I can say I am using the Outcome Statements without even thinking about it because that's just the way pre-primary is. It is everything integrated and you can't say, 'Right, this activity today, we are going to make an animal out of different materials and it's just art.' But it's not. They are using scissors and paste and wool which involves a physical skill. They have to put three plates together so that's like sizing, it's Maths. They're painting, so they're distinguishing colours, and that sort of thing. And they are often talking to each other and to me and that's oral language.*

*Kylie at Banksia*

Not only were teachers uncomfortable with the requirement inherent in the frameworks that they focus their attention on seemingly discrete, subject specific assessment, but the ESL specialists in particular were concerned that outcomes indicators required a focus upon discrete components of language development. Stephanie, the ESL specialist working with Clare at Oxford Street expressed this concern when talking about the English Curriculum and Standards Framework:

*You know they assume that children have all those skills, so you might have to place the child on Level 2, say, if they're grade three or four in terms of Listening and Speaking. Yet you know there's a whole lot of things that they can do with social language that may not be presenting in classroom language. They have a whole lot of skills and they shouldn't be there (at Level 2) you know, because they're somewhere in between. They're only there in one component of their language development.*

*Stephanie at Oxford Street*

For the ESL specialists this was a recurring issue. They shared with the mainstream teachers a view of pedagogy that addressed children's learning in a holistic, integrated way whilst also being particularly alert to the seemingly superficial or partial account in certain frameworks of the subtleties of language development which they saw as typifying ESL students, particularly in the early stages. Janet at Greenway expressed these common concerns in the following way:

*We believe very strongly in building up the children's identity . . . creating situations where they can come at things at their own speed and not feel embarrassed and not be laughed at and not think they are a failure. So we give them things they can do.*

*ESL kids come in with nothing basically, and make huge leaps that aren't reflected if you say, 'Yes, he came in Level 1 in February and here he is in December in Level 1.' So what? It doesn't tell you a thing. It doesn't plot the kids' huge jumps in language and it doesn't inform the teaching. They are not going through the same steps as the mainstream children are . . . You don't want a deficit*

*model where it says down at the bottom that ESL children can't do this, this and this.*

*Janet at Greenway*

Elizabeth at Harthill referred to some of the subtleties in the language development of her ESL students when trying to relate these to the Oral Language Development Continuum from First Steps. She was talking about contrastive pairs of words which appear late in her students' language:

*(English speaking children) could say 'this' and 'that' like they're two different words, and 'here' and 'there' . . . (If ESL children) are here longer they would be immersed in the language, they would be like an English speaking child. But I still think it doesn't really show the stage they are at. In their own language they're really probably beyond that.*

*Elizabeth at Harthill*

Rose, also teaching at Harthill, referred to what she saw as crucial but which appeared to be overlooked in the First Steps Oral Language Development Continuum: '(T)hey may be participating more and their language developing but the quality of their language isn't being assessed.'

One of the key issues for several teachers when adopting an assessment framework was not only its apparent superficiality in terms of what the children actually learn from day to day but also its seeming insensitivity to variations in pace of learning:

*It's very hard to record a lot of the types of things that they are learning, and a lot of it is subtle . . . but sometimes they learn quite a lot in a short time, other times it's a little bit over a long period of time.*

*Linda at Harthill*

That frameworks of achievement in English appeared not to tap into the children's emerging conceptual growth greatly concerned Maree who was aware of her students' capacity to interpret and express concepts in Torres Strait Islander Creole. And, Minh believed that what was important for the students in her bilingual program was that they knew particular concepts regardless of whether they communicated about them through English or Vietnamese.

As we have seen, virtually all the teachers in the study contrasted the criteria of achievement in English frameworks with what they regarded as more fundamental objectives in their teaching and their students' learning. Elizabeth highlighted this contrast in the following way when referring to the framework she was using with her mainstream pre-primary class:

*Even though it's just meant to be on English, I also think about their social and emotional maturity. And I think about their motor skills, because I feel that in the Intensive Language Centre there are smaller groups of children and things are going at a slower pace for those little ones. Maybe their English could cope with Year 1, but I just think they could do with a little bit of extra help or a little bit more confidence.*

*Elizabeth at Harthill*

We have seen that June and Stephanie at Oxford Street were working within a very comprehensive assessment system, despite their different views on the ESL

Scales. In fact, we discovered that June considers her students' language development in much finer detail than any practical assessment framework could realistically expect! Stephanie compared their system to the framework which they were endeavouring to incorporate:

*If you look at all of those (the information sources used by June), you've got very fine indicators leading towards the outcomes, so it's just much more detailed. (Whereas if you use outcome statements) all that you're assessing is those indicators leading towards this outcome. If they can do the activity it doesn't matter what comes before, and the reason they can do it is because of everything that's come before.*

*Stephanie at Oxford Street*

Stephanie has hit upon a central distinction many of the teachers made between their pedagogy and assessment. June's classroom pedagogy is seen by her as a dynamic process wherein plans based upon themes, topics, and specific goals are turned into action and constantly evaluated by her. And this inevitably entails on-going changes in direction, reaction to difficulties, and rethinking of what is really possible next time round. For June, these are priorities against which even her rigorous assessment procedures must be balanced:

*This is why I've learned with my diary entries, my own ones, it's better for me to do them after the day is finished, because the minute I write down what I want to achieve for that day something always seems to happen. So while I'm writing down what actually happened during the day I evaluate the types of activities and questions used and then on scrap paper I plan further activities and questions I need so I can build on from the day before's activities.*

*June at Oxford Street*

In general, there may appear to be an inherent paradox in what many of the teachers see as a desirable assessment framework and the fine detail of their language pedagogy. We have seen that the teachers question, from their perspective of the broader objectives of pre-primary and primary education, the discrete focus on a single learning area that many of the frameworks represent. On the other hand, we have seen that the ESL specialists in particular reject those frameworks which fail to provide achievement criteria which are sensitive to the particular nuances of language features and literacy attainments typical of the ESL learner. In fact, some of the ESL specialists appear to doubt whether **any** formal assessment framework can capture such things. If we relate both perspectives to the prevailing pedagogy of virtually all the teachers, we find that, although contextualised within thematic, topical, or genre-based approaches, learning activities very often focus explicitly upon quite precise formal characteristics of language and upon discrete components of literacy skills. This appears not to represent an inconsistency on the teachers' part, but a distinction between a pedagogy which is most appropriate to initial literacy within the broader educational development of their students and assessment which is most appropriate to the particular students whom they teach. It is a distinction between a particular pedagogic priority and both the breadth and the subtleties of student achievement.

So far, in exploring the teachers' experiences in endeavouring to adapt a particular framework or, in many cases, more than one framework to their pedagogic priorities, we have seen that new frameworks were almost always seen through the window of a familiar and established set of assessment practices typically located very close to on-going classroom work. Adaptation involved

selectivity. The teachers took from the frameworks what they saw as in harmony with both their pedagogic priorities and their present, sometimes informal, assessment procedures. On the basis of differing circumstances which included the specific context of the school, whether they were working in a mainstream or ESL classroom, the perceived range of learners in their classrooms, their relative familiarity with one or other framework, and the extent of their teaching experience, the teachers differentially adapted to the frameworks and differentially selected from them.

We have also seen that teachers distinguished between the pedagogic process which they were managing in their classrooms and the products of students' learning which might be related to the criteria inherent in one or other assessment framework. They also distinguished between what they asserted as their broader and integrated pedagogic purposes in relation to their students' social, emotional, physical and conceptual learning as compared with what appeared to them as the discrete subject-specific outcomes in the English frameworks. ESL specialists in particular were alert to subtleties in their students' language development which appeared to be only partially accounted for in such frameworks.

Because of these inevitable variations within the process of adaptation, the Case Studies reveal a group of teachers generating relatively unique, context-sensitive assessment systems which often resemble the original frameworks only indirectly.

Finally, however, two further variables which appear to intervene between teachers' pedagogic priorities and assessment of ESL children in particular need to be mentioned. These two issues were also identified by Sara and Meredith when, on the basis of their significant experience in teaching generally and their familiarity with the ESL Scales, they provided professional development to other teachers in the use of the Scales.

The first intervening variable can be described as the teachers' questioning of seemingly unnecessary complexification of their work. Sara discovered that many of the mainstream teachers challenged the need for such an assessment framework which focused on ESL children. While recognising the potential of a framework in the earliest stages of the child's learning of English - a view shared by some of the teachers who participated in this study -, they believed that relatively proficient ESL learners could easily participate in the mainstream and, thereby, be assessed against mainstream criteria. The use of an ESL-specific framework was also seen by teachers as reinforcing the "difference" of ESL children or creating a divide between ESL specialists and mainstream teachers. Yuen at Greenway Intensive Language Centre touched upon this perception when talking about her use of the Bandscales when reporting to the mainstream teacher:

*I don't mention the Bandscales Level because the mainstream teachers don't know anything about the Bandscales, or most of them don't. I write in Bandscale language basically what they can do and what they can't do . . . I'm terrible with thinking of ways to say things, so I use the observation list at the back of the Bandscales . . . so they sort of give you ideas on how to describe what you're trying to say.*

*Yuen at Greenway*

The second intervening variable which has an impact upon teachers' adaptation to a new framework is related to the resistance against apparent complexification. And this variable was, perhaps, the most common focus of concern among the teachers who participated in this study. As Sara in her professional development days discovered, primary teachers appeared already

overwhelmed with documentation and found the struggle to relate the State version of the English Profile to the ESL Scales more likely to add to their confusion than resolve it. We might describe this reaction as a symptom of documentation overload. Rose at Harthill, working on the other side of Australia from Sara and her colleagues, spoke on behalf of many of the teachers in an admission of frustration:

*I've actually had children reading at my desk while I've had the First Steps Reading Continuum open, and I've just been jotting down ideas or things that I've noticed, like 're-reading' or whatever. Then once they've gone away I've quickly highlighted it. Whereas before I would have used miscue analysis or running record sheets and then go back and do that all over again, but this time I just didn't have enough time.*

*Rose at Harthill*

What happens to a new assessment framework when teachers perceive themselves under the pressure of the rush of day to day teaching coupled with documentation overload? Meredith recalled the result in her own initial reactions and later when providing professional development on the ESL Scales:

*A lot of us have found that even though the Scales aren't meant to be a checklist the easiest thing to do is use them as a checklist. So, at first, we were all photocopying the different outcomes and pointers for the various levels for each child and using a highlighter to mark those things which the child could do and, in another colour, those things which we were aiming for. I was there forever photocopying and photocopying and then ruling the lines and cutting and pasting, had glue everywhere. We've been waiting for it to come out on disk . . . but a lot of people are highlighting . . . (In her in-service with teachers, she tells them) It's meant to be an assessing and programming tool for the teacher: 'Where are they going next? How are we getting them there?' So that question: 'I've got 100 ESL children in my school and I've got to put everyone on the Scales!' No, you don't even have to put them in every Strand . . . break it down into manageable chunks. And that's the biggest hurdle we've got to get through. There's this tremendous fear. And no matter how many times we've run these days, that question comes up. 'But I still have to . . .' So, it's a worry.*

*Meredith at Daviston*

There is good evidence that teachers place high value on a framework which overtly addresses pedagogy in terms of teaching strategies. Sara noticed the popularity of the English K-6 Literacy Strategies that Work among her colleagues in New South Wales while Joanne, Leigh and Nicole in the Pilbara, for example, appeared to value the strategies provided by First Steps more than they did the Developmental Continua. But the providers of professional development who participated in this study discovered from their colleagues that an assessment framework which is seen as an added complication to pedagogic priorities or which is perceived as "yet another" documentary intrusion upon pedagogy is more often reduced to a role for which it was not intended. It is accepted reluctantly, put at a distance from the "real" work of the classroom and, thereby, only partially accommodated so that its impact is reduced to what is just about manageable as a perceived **addition** to pedagogy.

## **Being 'Up Front' With Frameworks**

We ended the last section on a somewhat negative note. It is time to consider how the teachers in this study related the frameworks to their pedagogy most directly. The Case Studies reveal the teachers selectively using the frameworks, often to a different extent, as resources in four major decision-making areas: (i) to diagnose learner needs or gaps in the children's learning; (ii) as a basis from which to plan their programs or part of them; (iii) as a source of possible teaching strategies where a framework provided these; and (iv) as a check on their coverage of areas of achievement in their day to day and more formal assessment records. Teachers varied in the relative weight they gave to a framework in serving each of these decision-making areas.

All the teachers initially relied on observation and informed intuition to diagnose specific areas of learning need. Aimee, for example, referred to this process as 'kid watching', but she used First Steps to complement the process:

*I look at where the kids are and mentally put them into groups. I'll select a few of them that I'm really concerned about and I'll focus on them in all their areas and then I might just get out my First Steps 'Continuum and just look at that and think, 'That kid's not doing that or that kid's doing that.' And it might just be their behaviours, just by how they'll write their name, their ability to sit for five seconds or not, you know, all those sort of things. You just automatically do it. Then I'll be more specific and look at the major teaching emphases and see where to go.*

*Aimee at Southern Primary*

From identifying areas of need, Aimee uses the framework to inform her planning. Leigh at Weaver similarly regarded First Steps selectively as an aid to planning but also as a source of possible teaching strategies:

*I tend to focus on a bit from here and a bit from there using First Steps. With First Steps you can get what you need and find what you want to target with them. So then I would think, 'Okay, what can I do to develop this area and these children here?' So I might then go to First Steps and find all the activities I can do to increase their ability level in a particular thing.*

*Leigh at Weaver*

This view of First Steps as a source of ideas for teaching was commonly held by some of the teachers who were becoming familiar with it. It was seen as a reminder of many of the teaching strategies they already used but also as a resource of strategies linked to specific areas of need. Laura discovered First Steps through the Net Process and compared it with the ESL focus of the Bandscales:

*I saw First Steps as a great tool: a great way to formalise what you had already been doing . . . The best thing about it was that it had strategies for taking the children on from where they are to moving them beyond that . . . I think the two can go hand in hand. The Bandscales . . . do not go into those specifics and I don't think that they really have to go in there. I think it's good that the Bandscales look at the ESLness of it, not at the skills that every child goes through.*

*Laura at St Cecilia's*

The confirmatory aspect of a framework like First Steps was particularly valued by Deidre in her work at Greenvale Special School:

*And the staff are quite thrilled because it goes down to such a basic level that they say, 'Oh, look, our students are on this, they're doing it.' Because all the other documents don't cater for such a basic level. But when you look at First Steps Reading, the starting point talks about pre-reading behaviours and turning pages and all that and they say, 'Oh, look, they can do it, they can do it, yes, yes.' Even if it was just chanting rhymes. 'Oh, we do that.' So that was good. So they're trying to use more mainstream things like that.*

*Deidre at Greenvale*

For Deidre, in confirming the achievements of some of her students, the framework served as a basis for reflecting upon what was achieved and as a signpost for other things on which her teaching might focus. Like Deidre, almost without exception, the teachers in this study referred to one or other new assessment frameworks as an aid to their planning. When talking about the English Curriculum and Standards Framework, for example, June values its scope for planning and she identifies what, for her, is a related and important purpose:

*It helps planning. When I'm sitting down. That's where those things have been useful: this is the outcome, and I sit there and think, 'Right well, if I know I'm going to have to assess.' And you have to be accountable, I find it quite beneficial having those. 'How will I approach this?' I write down the activities I'm going to use; it gives me a base. And then I find out, well maybe they haven't absolutely understood that, and then I'd slot in another type of activity.*

*June at Oxford Street*

For June, her teaching activities do not derive from a framework but she does identify from her own teaching repertoire those focused activities which may lead her students towards specific outcomes within a framework. Joanne at Nyamal, working with K-2 Aboriginal ESL students, makes a similar distinction between the process of her teaching and its products in terms of her students' outcomes. She values the Student Outcome Statements as a source of criteria for student achievement across learning areas and, thereby, as both a planning and assessment guide:

*Student Outcome Statements will become my planning tool whilst First Steps will be my teaching resource, particularly in terms of strategies . . . I will primarily use Student Outcome Statements to assess the children's outcomes from lessons.*

*Joanne at Nyamal*

For Marion, however, the Bandscales are seen to contribute to her broader objectives mainly as a reference point. But she sees this framework neither as a comprehensive planning tool nor as a source of actual teaching strategies:

*After you've looked at it, you would think, 'Where am I going to go now, what do I have to do next?' But I'm not sure how you do it, whether you do it sort of intuitively or from your own goals or whether you'd actually read on and say, 'They need to do this next.' I suppose you're sort of aware or you check and see what they should be doing in the next stage if you weren't sure. But you're not actually teaching to the Bandscales. I don't think it's designed to do that, you're mainly teaching to your goals from the program.*

*But I suppose you could look at it, there wouldn't be any harm looking at it and seeing where they should be.*

*Marion at Greenway*

This on-going interaction between a framework's criteria of achievement and one's own teaching objectives is expressed in some detail by Nicole who, like Joanne, distinguishes the main contributions of two separate frameworks to her pedagogy:

*I used the Outcome Statements as my aims. I used them in my planning and I used them for my objectives for each of the things we did. It's complicated, but I used the Outcome Statements for where I wanted them to be. I use objectives such as my pointers that will help me get to the Outcomes, but then I've got First Steps as my strategies. I teach through the concepts, the genres, the lists and whatever else. In using First Steps strategies I'm still using my knowledge of student behaviours and teaching activities, but that becomes an incidental thing because I know it, because I'm familiar with it and you can see that they're having to have those language skills and they're achieving those outcomes.*

*Nicole at Weaver*

Nicole largely bases her planning on broader primary goals, then plans her teaching activities, and subsequently selects the outcomes from the framework which her activities may enable the students to achieve. Her reference to the framework serves as a confirmatory check on the kinds of things her students might learn having worked through the activities:

*It takes hours and hours and hours to do, but it's the most effective way for me to do it with those children and it's real, I can use real things with my themes where all the children are able to do something. I've chosen my concept which I'm looking at this term and I've brainstormed every single thing that I can think that's related to it and is relevant to my children in the class. Then I categorise it all into the eight learning areas and you make links between them. I've looked at the activities that could be generated from my brainstorm and then I look at whatever Outcomes that I could achieve by doing these activities.*

*Nicole at Weaver*

In essence, Nicole moves from her own plans, through her teaching activities, to assessing against selected outcomes in a framework which the activities might generate. Other teachers appeared to work in reverse, starting their planning on the basis of a framework and selecting teaching and learning activities which would lead their students towards the achievement criteria in the framework. The teachers at Greenway use the Bandscales in this way, as Janet exemplifies:

*(A)ll of us here at Greenway use it as our planning format . . . When I plan I look at the specific language structures that I want the kids to learn. I look at the vocabulary, I look at the language patterns, I may look at grammatical features as well. I look at any general knowledge I want them to learn and really, for these kids, it doesn't matter whether I teach about Pharaohs or that I teach them about water systems in Australia, so long as it's part of their interest and basically related to the curriculum. The socio-cultural aspects we like to build in. There's a whole lot of skills that we want them to be able to learn. And communication strategies, there's a whole lot of*

*spelling stuff, writing stuff, and reading stuff that I want them to actually be able to do. So I write all that stuff down, then I figure out about 28 activities that I could do during the couple of weeks that would teach those things.*

*Janet at Greenway*

Many of the teachers in the study, in addition to using a framework as a complementary reference point within their planning, also used it as a check on the range of achievements they were identifying in their assessment records. Working with both the ESL Scales and ESL Companion to the English Curriculum and Standards Framework, Jenny reflected upon her own Assessment Records and the ESL Essentials recording formats:

*I noticed that I didn't do much in this area (Aesthetic Communication Goals), because another teacher might do the art or something and then I'd say to the teacher, 'Do you think you could put some comments down about how they're responding in that kind of way?' Because I notice that I rarely have comments in that area . . . Also I noticed that I didn't have much in oral language, and I guess it was more my reflections on the students I could write in there because, you know, like with Leila I'd noticed that her manner is very aggressive and I might notice at the beginning of next term that she's not doing any of this behaviour, so it's more easy to see.*

*Jenny at Hillsdale*

The wish to exploit a framework in order to confirm the appropriateness or "validity" of what one was assessing arose most often when teachers confronted the task of reporting to their school or, in the case of an English/Intensive Language Centre, to the mainstream teacher. Marion highlights this value of a framework when talking about the Bandscales:

*So last term the Deputy Principal collected all the Bandscales sheets and they were doing a survey to see where the children were and how they were progressing and whether it's going to be useful. And now the next step is whether we can actually use the information in the Bandscales when we're reporting to mainstream teachers, because when the children exit, we write a completely separate report for the mainstream teacher. We've found that often some of the descriptors in the Bandscales are very useful . . . so we quite often take (a descriptor) and write it in the report because it gives a very good description of what the child is actually doing*

*Marion at Greenway*

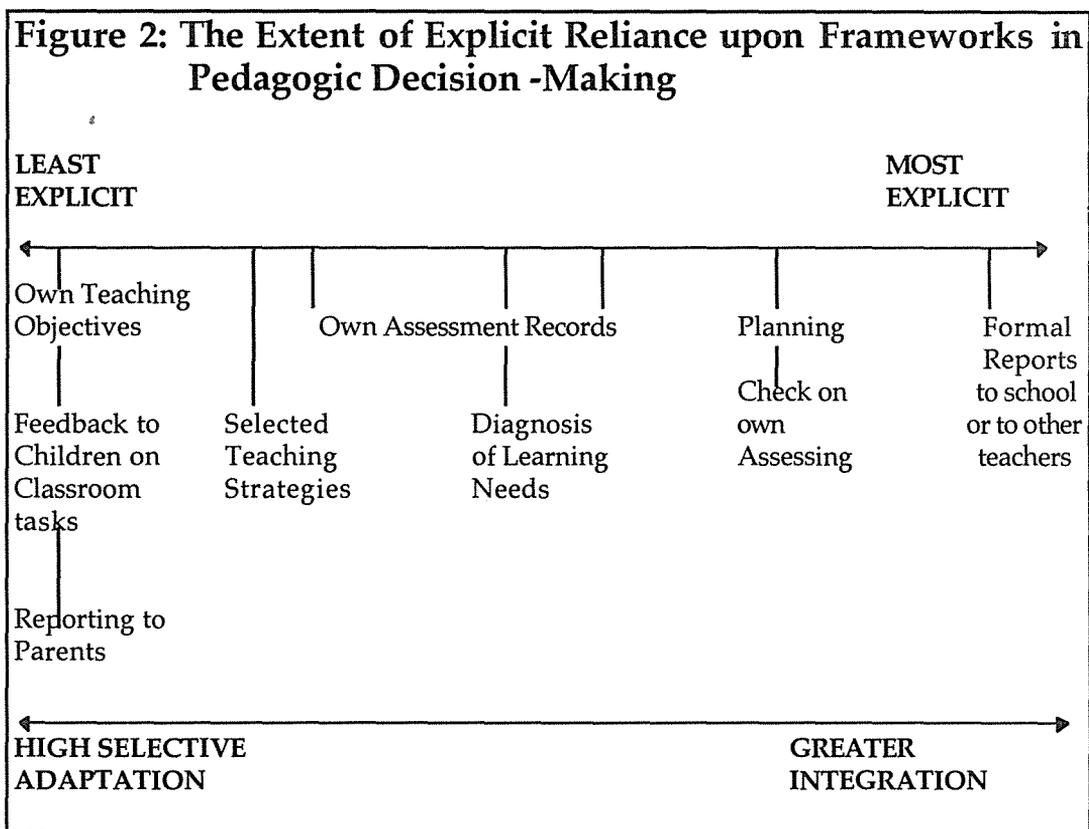
We also saw earlier that Kylie was particularly keen to exploit both the comprehensiveness and the potential of a common language offered by the Student Outcome Statements for pre-primary teachers when communicating with the mainstream primary teacher.

The Case Studies suggest that the participating teachers appeared to most directly refer to the frameworks in their decision-making when they undertook formal reporting to the school through the Principal or, particularly in the case of pre-primary teachers or teachers working in English/Intensive Language Centres, when reporting to mainstream teachers. From the comprehensive Pupil Literacy Portfolios of Carly and Sara at St Bertram's, or the Assessment Records of June, Clare and Stephanie at Oxford Street, through detailed reports to mainstream teachers at Greenway Intensive Language Centre, Jenny's 10 page Exit Report at Hillside or Kylie's own profiling at Banksia, to the mapping of all their students

against Student Outcome Statements and First Steps for school records undertaken by Joanne at Nyamal or Leigh and Nicole at Weaver, such formal reporting requirements encouraged the teachers to use frameworks as reference points.

This was far less the case when reporting to parents. The teachers typically compiled portfolios or sample books of individual student's work with the teachers' classroom-based informal assessment sheets attached to them and/or completed locally designed school report forms, or even devised their own, in which the perceived "technical language" of the frameworks were generally seen as inappropriate for describing the achievements of their children to parents.

To summarise the apparent extent of the teachers' explicit reliance upon one or other of the assessment frameworks in this study, Figure 2 locates aspects of decision-making in their pedagogy in relation to such frameworks:



Generally speaking, the participating teachers were accommodating one or other framework within their pedagogy. We said at the start of this chapter that the accommodation process entails acceptance of an innovation like an externally designed assessment framework as the first phase of such accommodation. Virtually all of the teachers had moved into the second phase which entailed significant adaptation. A prevailing feature of this adaptation was the teachers' selective use of the frameworks on the basis of how these harmonised with, or offered refinements to their own established pedagogic purposes, plans, and practices, including how they previously assessed their students' learning.

It appears that teachers were more likely to regard the frameworks as least directly relevant to their own broader program goals or objectives, their informal ways of providing feedback to students on specific tasks, and the ways in which they reported to parents. In these aspects of their work, the teachers exercised

the highest level of selective adaptation of the frameworks. Those frameworks that offered teaching strategies appeared to be valued either as a resource to be mined selectively, as in the case of relatively novice teachers, or as a confirmation of familiar teaching approaches and strategies as in the case of the more experienced. The majority of the teachers, however, did not regard the frameworks as having any direct relevance to **how** they taught.

All the teachers developed their own assessment records on the basis of a synthesis between their previously established system and selected aspects of a framework. Teachers were typically eclectic in this selective process and often called upon more than one framework for the purpose. However, many of the teachers recognised, within their assessment practices, the potential contributions of a framework to their diagnosis of individual learner's needs and in identifying groupings of learners who appeared to require particular intervention or focused work. Frameworks appeared most valuable to the teachers in their planning decisions and as a reference point for their coverage of students' achievements in their own assessment records.

In general, frameworks were most explicitly referred to when reporting to the Principal and the school and when providing reports to teachers who would become responsible for their students, particularly in the mainstream. It was in these aspects of their work that the teachers appeared to find it easiest to integrate the frameworks. There was a difference here, however. Only the main Phases or Levels or main indicators from frameworks formed the basis for reporting to the school and, thereby, to systems and here there was very little adaptation in the language used within the frameworks. On the other hand, reports to colleagues and mainstream teachers relied on much more specific detail from the frameworks and sometimes involved adaptations in the language of the frameworks in order to express student achievements in ways that were judged to be more familiar to colleagues. There was some doubt among many teachers that the frameworks actually provided a "common language" about student achievements which teachers would share. Despite this effort at precision in reporting for the benefit of colleagues at the same level of detail which the frameworks seemed to require, several teachers in the study expressed the doubt that other teachers would interpret the language of the frameworks in the same way as they themselves did or that they would read the reports with the same care that went into their construction.

## **The Good, The Bad, And The Implausible**

This final section considers the teachers' perceptions of the limitations and benefits of the frameworks in relation to their teaching. There is little doubt that many of them believed that an externally designed framework intruded upon their pedagogic priorities in ways that either distorted their own preferred rhythm of working with their students or, more deeply, imposed upon the learning process a seemingly artificial predictability. These two tendencies inevitably led to the kind of uncertainties expressed by Elizabeth at Harthill:

*If they're doing that helper chart and they're reading left to right and, yes, I think they can do that, and then I might look at them in another situation and they're not, and I think, 'Well I've highlighted that they can.' . . . I can't really highlight things if it's just one little incident. I think, 'I'll just leave it,' because then the Year 1 teacher can think, 'Of course they can do that.' . . .*

And, later, when talking about a particular framework of learning achievements, Elizabeth identified what was a recurring paradox for several teachers:

*I thought they were good, but I just thought they looked like, to be quite honest, just a bit too much hard work. And then I found that trying to use them didn't really show enough of the children's global development.*

*Elizabeth at Harthill*

When appreciating that the ESL Framework of Stages provided her with 'more of an idea of the capabilities' of her Kartujarra-speaking children, Joanne at Nyamal spoke for several of the mainstream teachers when she related the criteria in one of the frameworks to the actual pace of learning in her students: 'I think the ESL children display the First Steps indicators but I just think we have got to take more time to just realise they may not develop as quickly.'

That an assessment framework might distract teachers from the inevitable diversity among children in the nature and pace of their learning was captured with some irony by Janet:

*This thing about needing time, and this is a crucial thing for when she's (an ESL student) in the mainstream school, that sometimes they need the time to get it wrong, stop, get it right, go away, come back and get it right, rather than have the pressure of, 'Come on, I want your answer. Would you hurry up, I'm waiting for you. Do you mean? What about this?' And the child never has the opportunity to process what she wants to say. And she's very much at that stage, and given the opportunity, then she can really say what she wants to, but if you interrupt her and want to sort of push her along, then she can't. She's very much sitting in.*

*Janet at Greenway*

Many teachers contrasted what was valued as learning achievements within a framework and their students' diverse prior learning experiences. Maree, working with Torres Strait Islander students, identified the specific uses of language within certain genres as one of the taken-for-granted features of a framework:

*To many of the children, lists, recipes, etc. are things these children have never sighted until coming to school. This is very difficult to overcome as the Net validation is in June, in the second year in school. So that means that in 18 months these kids are expected to recognise the different genres. These two aspects (the indicators also) are going to be very difficult for children of non-literate background. It would be better later. I teach to this, but not in 18 months.*

*Maree at Andelu*

Similarly conscious of the linguistic identity of the Cocos Island Malay-speaking students in her pre-primary class, Kylie identified the assumptions about learning which she saw as inherent in the Student Outcome Statements in a more direct way:

*You know it's quite a racist little document isn't it? 'You do it our way or you don't do it,' all that sort of thing. I mean education is quite like that isn't it . . . 'You're here to do it our way. Don't speak your own language, don't think in your own language, think my way.'*

*Kylie at Banksia*

Those frameworks which were regarded as using mainstream criteria against which to evaluate the development of the English of their ESL students were

often seen as highly inappropriate. But it was the **consequences** for the education of ESL children from the wider application of such frameworks that deeply concerned many of the teachers. Erika articulated a widely shared reaction when talking about the Net process in Queensland:

*I'm very concerned that ESLness is confused with remediation. The sorts of things that the learning support teachers do with them worries me. You think this child can't comprehend and it is showing up in the comprehension tasks, but, hang on, they are ESL. And you know, some of the tasks they set for them are for mainstream English-speaking background students.*

In addition to the possibility that the use of a framework may intrude upon the diverse learning processes of different children or provide a biased picture of their achievements against inappropriate criteria, several of the teachers felt that criteria which they regarded as important indicators of language development appeared to be overlooked by the frameworks. Rose at Harthill made the distinction between a child's achievement in communicating and **how** it was done when she said: '(T)hey may be participating more and their language developing but the **quality** of their language isn't being assessed.' And Nicole wanted greater specificity than the frameworks on which she relied were providing:

*I don't think First Steps is anything really new compared to what people have been doing for years and years in teaching. It's just giving different names and you'd be still using the same sort of activities. There's nothing in First Steps to tell us that, in Year 2, every child should be able to read these 100 words or that every child should be able to identify these 40 sounds, so there's not that structure unless I've missed something along the way. I need to know where these children should be at.*

Nicole at Weaver

This suspicion that an externally designed framework might actually hide more than it revealed about students' language learning was also echoed by Minh regarding the Net process in relation to the emerging bilingual students whom she taught:

*If the children do manage to pass the Net, I feel in a few years' time as they move further up in the upper primary to years 5, 6 and 7, that will be where the trouble will begin to surface. They haven't got a leg to stand on. Sooner or later they're going to fall, because they can't even walk properly yet. They've had to learn to run before they could walk.*

Minh at Lachlan Street

Turning from the possible impact upon teachers' perceptions of their students' achievements during learning, what kinds of intrusions did the teachers identify in terms of their day to day rhythm of working? The Case Studies revealed a further paradox wherein teachers wanted an assessment framework to be sensitive to both school context and differential learning among students whilst, simultaneously providing a uniform system which enabled the assessment process to be more manageable and smooth in its running. Stephanie worked hard with the seeming complexities of an emerging system at Oxford Street:

*I mean it's the same sort of information, it's just you get more of a sense of that development (with a uniform system). It's easier to see. People have been assessing children on all of those sorts of things, but we haven't yet achieved a uniform format through the school and we*

*haven't yet come to a decision about what that format will actually be.*

*Stephanie at Oxford Street*

And Nicole offered the kind of argument in favour of a uniform system that appeared to her to be entailed in the accountability function of an assessment framework:

*It should be something that every school uses and it doesn't change from school to school so that everybody had exactly the same records in their school and everybody collected data based on this thing. So next year if I'm in a different school, I don't have to learn how to use their reporting criteria . . . and this is how my Admin's accountable to the Super and this is how the Super's accountable to our Director General. So that every single person in the State is using the same thing.*

*Nicole at Weaver*

The more effort several of the teachers put into detailed assessment using one or other of the frameworks, the more concerned they became about the actual value of doing so. This sometimes resulted in scepticism. For example, Meredith echoed a view held by some of the ESL specialists working as support to mainstream teachers:

*So I thought, 'I'll use the Scales here and I'll show this teacher where he's at . . . I gave them to the teacher and said, 'Look, when you get time to read through this, this is where I think Slavko's at. If you have any queries or you think I've missed some pointers just use a different colour and give it back to me.' About two weeks later she said, 'Oh, it's very detailed, couldn't understand a lot of it, but it's very comprehensive and I'm sure you're right with where you say he is, thank you.' And that was it . . . She basically wasn't going to do anything with it. Didn't want to know.*

*Meredith at Daviston*

It was the workload implications, however, that virtually every teacher in the study identified as an undesirable impact of adopting one or other of the frameworks. Leigh accepted that she gained from her initial conscientiousness, but eventually had to balance the seeming demands of a framework with what was plausible for her:

*Well I used to use these sheets (First Steps Developmental Continua) and I used to spend hours ticking this off and ticking that off and trying to work this in. It helped me look for things. I used to hear teachers saying, 'Oh, it's all up here, it's in my head.' I used to wonder how they just knew where the child's at and what they can and can't do. But I can actually do that now and working through all the checklists and all the information that I thought I had to collect was far too much.*

*Leigh at Weaver*

On the other hand, several of the ESL specialists in this study discovered an additional imperative for themselves in making a framework context-sensitive and understandable to other teachers:

*The whole reason I started highlighting the Bandscales was because I was spending so much time basically rewriting the Bandscales, so*

often that I could leave it . . . for someone else to pick up and work from.

Laura at St Cecilia's

Plausibility of the implementation of a framework within the day to day reality of teaching proved to be a constant criterion against which the teachers judged it. And Stephanie, aptly summarising the views of many of the teachers, seriously doubted the plausibility of the use of frameworks across the learning areas for which K-3 teachers were responsible:

*If you multiply the outcomes by the number of Key Learning Areas by the number of the children in the room who are probably over a range of three Levels, say, we might grade 3/4, but we have children at Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4, then with that class of 222 children you'd be assessing many thousands of outcomes; it's an impossible task . . . I can't assess all the time, I've got to teach!*

Stephanie at Oxford Street

The participating teachers, in accepting and endeavouring to adapt a framework to their own working context, were probably more aware of limitations than teachers who are relatively unfamiliar with one of the recently introduced frameworks and who have not yet confronted the task of gradual adaptation. However, within the Case Studies, many of the teachers identified positive benefits accruing to their own teaching from their interpretations of the frameworks.

A key influence upon the teachers' positive evaluation of a framework was their identification with it. If they felt it affirmed their own teaching priorities or appeared particularly sensitive to their students, or especially if they had participated in some way in its design, teachers welcomed the framework. Aimee, for example regarded her students' interpretation of visual media as a crucial learning objective and she therefore highly valued the Viewing strand in the Student Outcome Statements. She regarded the particular framework as enabling her to be creative and flexible in her teaching because it captured something about which she was particularly enthusiastic:

*A living text; viewing is the world we live in. It is everything we do and see: how we interpret and construct the world in which we live . . . The classroom implications for viewing are that by assessing children in making critical judgements of the living text the transition to making critical judgements in reading and writing will be eased.*

Aimee at Southern Primary

This sense of professional ownership was often conveyed by ESL specialists when talking about a framework specifically designed for ESL students. Meredith, for example, noticed when providing professional development to teachers in her locality on the ESL Scales that:

*There's been very good feedback from the training days. There's a feeling that ESL teachers now have something to justify their existence. We've got a concrete thing to put the students on now . . . I haven't seen a lot of mainstream teachers jumping up and down saying, 'Oh yes, thank you, isn't this wonderful.' But the ESL teachers are happy because they have got something concrete now that applies to them.*

Meredith at Daviston

Although some teachers in the study were concerned that an ESL-specific framework might create a professional distance between the mainstream teacher and the ESL teacher, such frameworks were generally seen as a practical contribution of something extra:

*If teachers were worried about the child's progress on the First Steps Continuum I was able to say to them, 'Look, I know that you cannot see any movement through the Continuum, but have a look at this. This is how far the child has moved through the ESL Bandscales.' That might be two or three stages within the year.*

*Laura at St Cecilia's*

The possibility of providing confirmation of learning despite its not being revealed sufficiently by some other framework was made even more strongly by Erika, working as an ESL specialist in support of several mainstream teachers:

*I want to tell the teachers, 'Well, OK, they've been caught in the Net, but look at all the things they can do and let's take them from here and lead them further; not look at them and say, 'Look at all the things they are not doing yet, but they will be doing them in the future. It takes time, it's like wait time, you know, when the children come and they don't speak for ages and ages and all of a sudden it all happens. Give them that opportunity, make them comfortable every step along the way. Always be positive'. You have to with ESL children. If you are withdrawing them they think, "There's something wrong with me." "I have a learning problem." And it's not true.*

*Erika*

That certain frameworks were seen as sensitive to individual learning differences was regarded by many as a crucial characteristic. Nicole interpreted this to mean that she could work flexibly within the apparent requirements of a framework:

*I think the Student Outcome Statements are brilliant for me because they go across the curriculum which is how I like to work . . . I prefer them because you can develop a more appropriate program especially with children who have such a diverse experience . . . You can plan your program in a variety of Levels or to a variety of Outcomes. It's basically designed for individual achievements . . . There's flexibility for me as a teacher who is capable of writing an objective or pointer . . . It is my interpretation based upon the example given in the pointers.*

With this concern for individual differences, Nicole was also particularly impressed by the ESL Framework of Stages which provides a detailed description of the English development of ESL children:

*They're great because with profiling using First Steps or the Outcome Statements, we start at Level 1. Well, that's fine for children who have had a previous schooling experience before they hit Year 1, but these children and their cultural differences, they haven't had the background experiences that the majority of children have when they come to school . . . There's nothing in the Outcome Statements to say that a pre-Level child is doing something. Whereas the ESL Framework has got three Levels and they look specifically at the ESL child and their experiences before they come to school and basically you can see where they've been.*

*Nicole at Weaver*

Nicole's reaction in her discovery of what she regarded as an ESL-specific framework is echoed by most of the relatively novice teachers who had little ESL professional development. Joanne, in her first year teaching a class of Kartujarra-speaking Aboriginal students, felt that the seeming precision of a framework enabled her to better understand the beginnings of literacy in her students:

*First Steps has been invaluable for these children particularly as it is developmental. It assists your planning really well and you can see what strategies the children have got in literacy . . . and it gives you direction.*

*Joanne at Nyamal*

And she saw the ESL Framework of Stages as complementing First Steps by informing her about ESL children in particular: 'I found it good . . . although it's very different, just to get more of an idea of the capabilities that ESL children have got.' As we saw earlier, Jenny used the ESL Scales to check her coverage of the students' achievements in her own assessment. And she also regarded the ESL Scales as a source of invaluable information about the language capabilities and development of young ESL learners:

*What they do really well is they talk about the type of students you'll get in this level and what you can expect from them, and so I guess it makes you realise that if they're not paying attention and not focused it's OK 'cos that's what children at this stage do. OK, it'll give you the characteristics of the learner. And then it has lots of ideas and strategies to incorporate (in your teaching).*

*Jenny at Hillsdale*

As a mainstream teacher being initially unfamiliar with working with ESL students, Leigh recognised this potential of an ESL-specific framework for her:

*I want a framework that gives me an understanding of what an ESL child is. I mean just knowing that you can't speak a language, being someone in another country, that you don't understand anything. Just identifying them, finding out some of their character traits of what I could look for. And I'd like strategies to help me know what I can do. And goals for your own planning and also information on how I can get help or where I can get help.*

*Leigh at Weaver*

In addition to being able to be more informed about the prior linguistic experience and likely patterns of language development among ESL children, a teacher like Clare, who has 6 years experience yet only recent professional development in the use of a framework, sees it as providing her with a degree of certainty and sense of direction in her work. And she feels that the apparent "middle way" in terms of the kinds of learning outcomes that the assessment framework focuses upon will give a common direction to the teaching of English more widely in her State:

*I actually like the Curriculum and Standards Framework document because I think there was a need but nobody really knew in which direction (to go). I feel I have more of a direction now. When I left college, the approach, which is still being used but it's more directed now I think, was whole language and process writing and all of that. And I like doing it too but I found, especially in that big school I was in, that people were doing all sorts of things. You had people only doing phonic approaches and you had people doing things at the other extreme. And then you had this sort of in between and I think*

*that the Curriculum and Standards document is good for that. Not that it really gives you an idea of the way things should be taught but at least you realise there's a common sort of goal. I don't know, I just feel that maybe that's what we need because you feel like you're working towards something and everybody has the same goal. And there's a concern too with children once they get to secondary school, with the Curriculum and Standards Framework you know that they've been covering the same sort of things as children everywhere else.*

*Clare at Oxford Street.*

This shift towards a relative uniformity, particularly in how student achievement is to be described, was also valued by Stephanie at the same school:

*Well we started working with the National Profiles and Statements first and we're becoming quite familiar with those and actually like them and Victoria decided to change and we thought, well, even though it's not a requirement of the Catholic Education Office, we felt that, you know, if the children do move around from school to school, we thought they would be better if they got a common language (in exit reports).*

*Stephanie at Oxford Street*

Kylie shared Clare's positive view of the potential of a commonly adopted framework in providing a direction in her work that would relate what her students' achieved to their future learning. She saw the Student Outcome Statements as having an integrative influence upon pre-primary and primary education:

*I think it will draw pre-primary back into the school . . . I am quite happy about it because I truly believe that pre-primary is part of the school and should be included . . . I want to make sure my children are included in the same kind of assessment as the primary children.*

*Kylie at Banksia*

Although almost all the teachers made a clear distinction between what a framework might offer for assessment purposes and what it might or might not imply about actual teaching practices, the frameworks which provided guidance about teaching strategies, as we have seen for those teachers who worked closely with First Steps, were also highly valued by a number of the teachers in the study. In this way, Barry particularly valued the NSW Early Learning Profiles and Choosing Literacy Strategies that Work in his pre-primary teaching:

*I think it's been a helpful book because it brings a lot of those ideas together. I find it particularly helpful because you've got your objectives in there, and some activities that go with it, and so it virtually programs for you.*

*Barry at Daviston*

Marion spoke on behalf of many of the teachers, however, in distinguishing between what, for her, a useful framework could offer that is genuinely new as compared with its incidental benefit as a confirmation of how she already worked as a teacher:

*When we first had a look at the Bandscales we were all a bit wary of it because it was quite a daunting document . . . But I think most of us found that it fits in with what we are already doing. We don't have to change our teaching. We don't have to change our goals,*

*and we don't have to change the outcomes that we're doing. It just fits in with what we are already doing. I think it makes the evaluation easier because it gives you these concise little descriptions of what the children are going to be doing at that level, so it makes the outcomes and the reporting at the end easier.*

*Marion at Greenway*

Her colleague, Yuen, echoed this recognition of the extra precision in her assessment that a framework which focused upon the achievements of ESL children could provide. Recalling her experience as a mainstream teacher before working in the English/Intensive Language Centre, she said:

*The sad thing is the teachers in the mainstream just don't realise. Even as a mainstream teacher myself I don't think I was ever aware of what a long way our ESL children have come . . . These methods are more disciplined, they ensure that all the children are assessed and you do cover all aspects that you should be reporting on and should be teaching.*

*Yuen at Greenway*

However, Maree, working with Torres Strait Islander children at Andelu on the Cape in Queensland, recognised a particular tension between wanting her students to succeed on a State-wide implementation of an assessment framework and the ramifications of that success. She raised what was, for her and probably for many of the teachers in this study, a fundamental question concerning the consequences of the particular use to which a framework might be put:

*(G)ood results prove what a great program we've got going, if we didn't have good results we'd get more intervention funding. It is a real Catch 22 situation.*

*Maree at Andelu*

In this chapter, we have traced the impact of particular assessment frameworks upon the teachers' daily classroom pedagogy. The chapter explored in detail how the majority of the teachers were accommodating the frameworks within pedagogy and the extent to which they more or less explicitly relied upon them. The chapter also identified the teachers' perceptions of the limitations and benefits of the frameworks in direct relation to their teaching. As a conclusion to the examination of these issues, the main findings from the Case Studies are summarised in the following section.

## **The Relationship Between Assessment Frameworks and Classroom Pedagogy: The Main Findings**

- Largely because of the relatively recent implementation of the National and State frameworks, most of the teachers who participated in this study were in the process of gradually relating the assessment frameworks to the purposes, plans, and practices of their classroom pedagogy. Almost all of them had attended professional development activities related to the frameworks and several of them were sufficiently familiar with them to be able to provide professional development to colleagues in their school or district. The majority of the teachers were working with more than one framework and were endeavouring to relate them.
- Certain overall similarities in the English language and literacy pedagogy of the teachers could be identified although variation in classroom practices

existed on the basis of a number of factors including: the specific school context; the particular characteristics of the students in the classroom group; whether the teacher worked with pre-primary or primary students; whether the teacher was an ESL specialist who acted in a support role or worked within an English/Intensive Language Centre or was a mainstream teacher; and the extent and nature of teaching experience, particularly with regard to ESL students.

- Assessment of learning outcomes was seen by all the teachers as less of a priority than their established teaching objectives and the management of the teaching-learning process in the classroom. The extent to which they accommodated a particular framework within their pedagogy depended upon their judgement of its positive contribution to these priorities.
- All the teachers were "outcomes aware" and were synthesising new framework outcomes, indicators, or pointers with their previous teaching purposes and learning goals. A key characteristic of this process was the teachers' selectivity in interpreting and making use of the frameworks.
- Most of the teachers made the distinction between pedagogic processes and the achievement "products" from teaching and learning. For some teachers, an assessment framework which addressed both was highly valued. For many, pedagogic practices were seen as entirely independent of the primary function of an assessment framework.
- The study revealed a gradual process of accommodation to the externally designed frameworks within which the teachers were at different phases of accommodation. All of the teachers accepted the importance of one or other framework in relation to their work. The majority were in a process of selective adaptation of the frameworks so that they harmonised with their established purposes, plans, and classroom practices including those assessment procedures which they had built up over a period of time prior to the introduction of the external frameworks. A minority of the teachers had more fully integrated one or other assessment framework into their pedagogy on the basis of having adapted it so that it was seen by them as sensitive to the context in which they taught and the students for whom they were responsible.
- At the heart of their assessment practices, all the teachers relied upon relatively spontaneous but experientially informed judgements about their students' progress in language and literacy in order to group them, provide particular intervention, and give immediate feedback on classroom tasks. These judgements were typically based upon observation and on-going "anecdotal" note-making which typically synthesised evidence from several moments of contact with each student. Observation and note-making provided the bases for more reflective or formal assessment.
- Many of the teachers had established detailed assessment systems which were the filter through which they interpreted and eclectically selected any aspect of assessment which contributed something new to their already established system. In doing so, they typically imposed upon the original assessment framework understandings and functions which may not have been intended by its original designers. As a result, several of the teachers devised assessment criteria and practices that, in their specific refinements, went beyond an original framework.
- In contrast, a minority of the teachers selectively worked upon the

frameworks in order to reduce their seeming complexity and to make them more manageable in the context of the day to day pressures of classroom teaching. The teachers in the study who were providing professional development to colleagues on one or other framework discovered that this sometimes resulted in a reduction or distortion in its intended use. Those teachers who were new to a framework sometimes perceived it as a complicated addition to pedagogy rather than related to it.

- Both ESL specialists and some of the mainstream teachers pointed to specific limitations of National or State frameworks for English which did not identify the particular prior experiences, language and literacy developmental processes, and specific needs and achievements of ESL children. They believed that these frameworks failed to reflect or inform the appropriate purposes, teaching strategies, and assessment criteria which teachers may rely on when working with ESL students.
- Some of the teachers perceived the focus of a framework, whether it focused on mainstream English or ESL, as being far narrower than their own pedagogic goals and the more precise learning achievements of their learners.
- On the other hand, many teachers questioned the perceived complexification of their work entailed by a particular framework. Many also questioned the practical feasibility of fully implementing the requirements of assessment frameworks in the context of having responsibility for all learning areas in the K-3 curriculum. Those teachers providing professional development in a framework to colleagues in their district or school identified what can be described as “documentation overload” among primary teachers which led them to reject or merely assimilate or subsume new frameworks into their current ways of working to the extent that the framework ceased to have any influence upon their pedagogy.
- The plausibility of the implementation of a framework within the day to day reality of classroom teaching proved to be a constant criterion against which the teachers judged it.
- The teachers identified four related contributions which a framework might make to their pedagogy: (i) to help diagnose learner needs or gaps in learning; (ii) as a basis from which to plan their programs or part of them; (iii) as a source of possible teaching strategies where a framework provided these; and (iv) as a check or confirmation on their coverage of aspects of achievement by their students in their own spontaneous day to day judgements of progress or in their more formal record keeping. Teachers varied in the relative weight they gave to a framework in serving these areas of decision-making.
- There was variation in the extent to which the teachers explicitly relied upon frameworks in their pedagogic decision-making. In general, least explicit reliance of a framework was revealed in how the teachers described their own teaching objectives, the ways in which they provided immediate feedback to their students’ achievements in classroom tasks, and in the ways they reported to parents. In these areas, teachers exercised highly selective adaptation of the frameworks. Their most explicit reliance on a framework was revealed in formal reporting to the Principal or school or when reporting on a child’s progress to other teachers. In these activities, teachers appeared to be integrating the frameworks more directly into their broader pedagogy.
- All the teachers kept detailed assessment records for themselves of their students’ progress. In contrast to their more informal ways of assessing and

providing feedback to students and reporting to parents, these records reflected a balanced synthesis between previously developed ways of judging student progress and certain refinements seen to be provided by the new frameworks.

- Some teachers complemented their teaching strategies from those suggested by some of the frameworks. Many of the teachers found that the frameworks contributed quite significantly to their diagnosis of learning needs. Most relied upon the frameworks to a fair extent to inform their planning and serve as a check upon the points of focus in their own assessments of student achievement.
- Teachers asserted the positive contribution of a framework to the extent that it: (i) affirmed their own teaching priorities or confirmed their established ways of teaching; (ii) appeared particularly sensitive to their own students' development in language and literacy (especially in the case of ESL-specific frameworks when used with ESL students); (iii) informed them of the prior linguistic and cultural experiences and the on-going patterns typical of ESL children's development in language and literacy; and (iv) provided greater precision in how they assessed or, more particularly, in **what** they focused upon in their assessments.
- Some teachers valued the "common language" and uniformity which the frameworks appeared to provide for assessment and for the identification of teaching objectives. On the other hand, many assumed that other teachers would be likely to interpret achievement indicators in a framework and the language in which they were phrased in different ways from their own interpretation. A high proportion of the teachers did not believe that the frameworks could, or should, facilitate uniformity across a system, State, or the country in language and literacy pedagogy.
- Many of the teachers in the study expressed concern regarding the purposes which a widely implemented assessment framework might serve. They were particularly alert to educational policies resulting from the gathering of data through the use of an assessment framework which, to them, may result in inaccurate constructions of the language and literacy development of ESL children and subsequent inappropriate or discriminatory intervention.
- Highly experienced researchers in second language evaluation, Genesee & Upshur (1996), identify four defining characteristics of effective classroom-based assessment: (i) that it is integrated in the cycle of teaching purposes, planning, and practices so that it leads to an on-going improvement in teaching and learning; (ii) that it is based upon the teacher's familiarity with, and competence in using a variety of different methods of assessment; (iii) that it is based upon careful and systematic judgement and record keeping; and (iv) that it enables teachers to use the results from assessment to "modify and improve the learning environments they create".
- This study reveals that, among the 25 teachers who participated, there is good evidence that their assessment practices are effective in relation to these criteria. It appears that the introduction of the new assessment frameworks might have contributed to the effectiveness of these practices to a varying extent. It is too early in the implementation of the recent National and State frameworks to claim this with any certainty. A longitudinal study of a representative group of teachers who have adapted and integrated one or other framework within their pedagogy over a longer period of time would provide clearer evidence. However, it would be virtually impossible to isolate

the influence of a teacher's assessment practices alone, in whatever form, upon students' learning outcomes. That teachers will be enabled to become, in Genesee's and Upshur's words "agents of change in their own classrooms" through using the assessment frameworks appears largely dependent upon two interrelated factors: teachers' good efforts to adapt the frameworks so that they are accommodated within their classroom pedagogy and the purposes and value given to these frameworks by education systems across the country.

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# Chapter Five

## The Teachers' Views of the Assessment Frameworks

Catherine Hudson

### Introduction

This paper discusses the teachers' views about the assessment frameworks that are being used with young ESL learners in the Primary School. Although the reactions of the individual teachers to the frameworks are complex and reflect the cognitive style, biography and work site situation of the teacher concerned, this chapter will attempt to locate the major trends in the teachers' thinking about the frameworks. The work of Hall and Hord (1987) throws particular light on the nature of the range of teachers' concerns as they reflect on the frameworks in the Case Studies. Hall and Hord describe a continuum of Stages of Concern as teachers move through the change process (Hall and Hord, 1987, p.60). They also relate this to the level at which the teacher is using the innovation, and drawing on earlier research describe this in the following way:

*At the beginning of a change process, the typical "nonuser" has concerns that are relatively high in Stage 0 Awareness, Stage 1 Informational, and Stage 2 personal. Nonusers are typically more concerned about gaining information about the innovation (Stage 1) and about how change will affect them personally (Stage 2). As they begin to use the new program or innovation, Stage 3 (Management) concerns become more intense; and, when teachers become experienced and skilled with an innovation, the tendency is for concerns at Stages 0,1,2, and 3 to decrease in intensity while those in Stages 4, 5 and 6 become more intense (Hall, George and Rutherford 1979).*

*(Hall and Hord, 1987: 60 )*

In Stage 4 (Consequence) attention is focussed on the impact of the innovation on the students; in Stage 5 (Collaboration) there is a focus on coordination and cooperation with others regarding use of the innovation; and in Stage 6 concerns focus on exploring a wider impact of the change and on designing major changes or more powerful alternatives.

The paper will first discuss trends emerging in the teachers' views about the frameworks and young ESL learners. It will then examine the teachers' views of the impact of the frameworks on the teachers themselves. The paper will end by presenting the teachers' views on their vision of the ideal framework they would like to use with their ESL learners, independently of whether it would be ESL specific or not.

## The Frameworks and Young ESL Learners

### 'Placed' not 'Displaced'

In Chapter 2 we have seen that Australia has followed international trends in making assessment 'an all pervasive process involving the on-going monitoring of learners' performance as they engage in curriculum tasks'. This has led to the production of 'progress maps', or frameworks 'which are intended to act as an interface between the institution and the classroom, mediating between the demands for accountability on the one hand and the need for diagnostic information about the learner on the other'. We have also seen in Chapter 4 that the teachers in the Case Studies had, in terms of at least one of the frameworks, entered a more advanced phase of accommodation, in which they were trialing and adapting the framework within their established assessment procedures. Thus, although as we shall see later, many of the teachers were still concerned with the relationships between the new frameworks themselves and with their own earlier assessment systems, many of the teachers had also reached a level of concern about the impact of the frameworks on their learners and had definite ideas about changes and alternatives.

Many of the mainstream teachers in Primary and Pre-Primary schools wanted to see progress mapped for *all* learners. These teachers felt that the mainstream frameworks in their existing form did not allow them to show this progress for their ESL learners. Nicole in the Pilbara, a young mainstream teacher without ESL training, likened the confusion and angst this caused her to hitting her head '*against a brick wall*'. Leigh, another mainstream teacher in the Pilbara, noted for example that one of her ESL students, Tanya, was in '*no Phases at all*' on the First Steps Continuum. She welcomes access to an ESL framework - The ESL Framework of Stages - because though they might be '*off the Continuum*' they might be '*on Level 1 on the ESL*'. '*So, they're still placed. They're not displaced*'. Chapter 7 will examine the varying positions, as to whether the teachers want children placed on ESL specific frameworks or not. This section, however, will try to capture a cross-section of the teachers' concerns about where they perceive a lack of fit between the pattern of development in their ESL learners and the pattern described by the mainstream frameworks being used in their contexts.

### 'They have learnt to run before they could walk'

Many teachers questioned the validity of the mainstream frameworks for their ESL learners, given their age and stage of development. Some teachers explain that in order to fit the childrens' performance to the frameworks, the curriculum has had to be changed in ways that they feel are inappropriate to their present and future educational needs.

In the pre-primary mainstream context the three teachers who had used First Steps found the Continua inappropriate for pre-primary children. Kylie, a pre-primary teacher in the Pilbara explains the difficulty she had placing the children:

*I put them on the Writing Continuum once and thought, "This is a waste of time," because the bulk of them were in no Phase at all for Writing.*

Linda, a pre-primary mainstream teacher in Perth with 50% in her class who speak a language other than English at home, seriously challenges the validity of using the framework in that context. She believes that First Steps is not appropriate from the Pre-Primary point of view, '*I haven't really found it to be at this [Pre-primary] level, terribly useful.*' She finds that methodologically it does not make sense in terms of what the children do at pre-primary. She is expected

to see children doing things several times, she explains, before marking them off on the First Steps continuum, but writing for example is not done continually in the pre-primary classroom. Elizabeth, who works at the same school shares her views.

As with the teachers in the primary years, Linda wants to see children moving along the Continuum but,

*Most are still in the beginning phase and I think that's why it hasn't been so useful because they're not really moving on very much.*

She thinks the idea is 'very good' because it is developmental, but more appropriate in primary.

Linda feels the Oral Language Continuum is difficult to use, 'sometimes you really don't feel that you can mark off anything at this stage'. Because it is difficult to mark off the key indicators, with the ESL children she will mark off any of the indicators. Elizabeth, who works at the same school as Linda, does the same.

Linda also feels that First Steps is having a detrimental effect on the real focus of her program which is the 'social side'. The program is being pushed towards primary activities such as writing,

*Because there's been an emphasis on the writing etcetera, they are doing more of that now than they used to.*

While Kylie welcomed the Student Outcomes Statements, though not First Steps, as bringing the pre-primary into the primary school involving an end to marginalisation of the pre-primary program and a possible conversion of the primary to the integrated approach, for Linda the move to the 'proper work' done in the primary poses a threat to her perceptions of appropriate teaching goals at that age.

The pre-primary is not the only context in which teachers are finding that the curriculum is being changed in ways which are inappropriate to the stage of development of the learners in order to see that the children are 'placed'. As discussed Chapter 3, Queensland has a formalised assessment procedure associated with the framework, and Erika, a visiting ESL teacher, expresses concern about this procedure driving the ESL curriculum. For the ESL teacher, classroom organisation and management are central to their conception of what the ESL curriculum is. ESL support can take place at a number of levels, either in the mainstream classroom or in withdrawal. Meredith at Daviston explains the frustrations involved in trying to get ESL support integrated into mainstream planning in a systematic way. This involves moving the focus away as Meredith shows from 'Can you fix the problem?' to collaboration between the ESL and Mainstream teachers. Erika, as visiting teacher, feels that her place is in the mainstream classroom and that in most cases the place of the child is in the mainstream classroom. However, she notes that as a result of the pressure and panic associated with the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, ESL children are being seen as 'not succeeding in the classroom', as having learning problems and increasingly being referred to her for withdrawal. Erika does not see a good fit between the expectations of the Net Process and the expected development of ESL students. She feels it should be put 'on hold', that the ESL child in Year 2 needs 'time'.

In the first year that the Year 2 Diagnostic Net was implemented in the Cape, Maree who is a mainstream teacher explains that all her students were 'caught in the Net'. Her response was a radical one. She introduced the *Home Language Program* which involves teaching literacy through the use of Torres Strait Creole, the home language of the students.

Minh, an ESL teacher running a bilingual program in Queensland, plans her program in collaboration with the mainstream teachers. She finds that as a result of the mainstream Year 2 Diagnostic Net she is adapting her curriculum in ways that she feels will not ultimately benefit her students. She finds that she is slowly putting more and more emphasis on the teaching of English at the expense of Vietnamese, so that the children will be placed at the expected level in the Year 2 Diagnostic Net validation exercise in reading and writing. There was no exact point at which she thought:

*'Now I will focus more on English'. I 'm not aware of it and now I think I see myself sort of slowly, slowly heading that way with all the performance standards and tests that are coming in.*

Minh is concerned because the time frame for the bilingual program is very short. It is only funded until the end of Year 2. In that time she sees it as essential to develop their Vietnamese and to spend time developing their concepts in their first language so that they will have 'a leg to stand on' in the long run. Her concern is with the upper primary years when the concepts and tasks get harder. However, now she finds that the Year 2 bilingual program is taking a focus towards supporting students with the Year 2 Diagnostic Net in English, rather than developing Vietnamese:

*Just to get them to pass the Net. The parents are not going to worry about their children, in four years time. They want their child in year 1 to do well, and in Year 2 to do well and the teachers too you see.*

Minh feels that the children should be strong in their own language so that they will be able to fully comprehend all the concepts that they're going to come across. However, she fears that with less of a Vietnamese focus in the Year 2 bilingual program the children will be left to fall later on.

*Sooner or later they're going to fall because they can't even walk properly yet. They have learnt to run before they could walk.*

### **Oracy - 'A huge difference'**

The trend running through most of the Case Studies in all contexts is the emphasis on oracy in the junior primary curriculum, and the necessity to capture development in oracy in the frameworks. This can be seen working at two levels: the high profile given to oracy for all learners in the early primary curriculum, and the high profile given to oracy for young ESL learners as they begin learning literacy in a school environment dominated by a language other than their home language. Many teachers felt that the frameworks they were using did not have the capacity to map their ESL learners' development and progress in oracy, and some teachers felt that this was critical for understanding their development in literacy. At the highest level of Hall and Hord's Stages of Concern (1987:60), the user explores the 'possibility of major changes or replacement with a more powerful alternative' and this is seen to follow a stage of collaboration with others 'regarding use of the innovation following the stage of taking cognisance of its impact on the students'. The examples in the Case Studies of changes or alternatives to existing forms of the frameworks tended to follow this pattern and to be tied to the teacher's perception of the role of oracy in assessment with young learners.

Janet, at Greenway Intensive Language Centre in Perth, has been a collaborator in developing frameworks for many years. She explains the importance of recognising oral language development in young ESL learners when she discusses her reservations about the new Student Outcomes Statements:

*SOS was written for mainstream kids, for first language speakers...In Level 1 it assumes 5 years of oral language development in English, it starts from that point. The Speaking and Listening outcomes, it's very visible, they are quite advanced language concepts, whereas the Reading, Writing and Viewing ones start from a point that seems to indicate that that's a new thing. The Level 1 outcome for the substrand Linguistic Features and Structures says, and I quote, 'That children will draw on an implicit knowledge for the linguistic structures and the features of their own variety of English', but children who come in with no English don't have an implicit knowledge of English. So it's a wrong assumption, it's a false starting point, you can't draw on implicit knowledge if you don't have an implicit knowledge. It isn't where they are.*

Joanne, a mainstream teacher in the Pilbara, without Janet's long experience and expertise in ESL, identifies a similar concern. She explains that she is using an alternative ESL framework for assessing oracy, The Highgate Continuum. She is using this in place of the First Steps Oral Language Continuum:

*A concern that I have is that we're assessing these children the same way as mainstream children and yet the oral language is ESL. You can't accurately assess these ESL children on the Oral Language Continuum as it is because they are excellent in oral language in their language but English is their second language. It is not specific enough for Aboriginal children.*

Joanne explains that she can see some development in reading and writing, but was unable to pick up development on the First Steps Oral Language Continuum:

*I think it is picked up on the Continuum in terms of oral language using the Highgate Continuum. The way they speak didn't relate to the First Steps Oral Language Continuum and you need to show some progression. You need to be able to see that a child is developing, particularly in oral language, from when they came to school and not speaking English.*

Joanne is also aware that the development in oracy goes further to effecting progress on the Writing, Spelling and Reading Continua:

*The way they say a sentence in their language is different to the way we would. And straight away they have difficulty with the sound for letters which they use in their language. This is something that is a huge difference from mainstream children, the phonic side and the grammar and this affects their writing.*

Maree, a mainstream teacher in the Cape, also talks about the difficulty of separating the stage of oral development in the second language from general progress in literacy. Oracy is not assessed in the existing form of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, and yet Maree emphasises the importance of second language oral development in beginning literacy:

*In the Continuum and the validation task there is nowhere you can say anything about the children's development in oracy. Somewhere on the Continuum we need space to show oral language skills. It's all interrelated and this would make it a more valuable thing to measure. You could look at their literacy skills and see that these are not the problem. Maybe they don't have the language to contribute to the writing task in the first place.*

Maree's redesigning of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net is partly an attempt to compensate for this lack (an enterprise in which she had much support from her

school, system and language experts). She explains that the children are often not shown to reach the expected Phase in Reading because their use of Creole forms and pronunciation tells against them in the validation exercise. She duplicates the Diagnostic Net validation process in Creole, and shows that the children's development in literacy in Creole is higher than that shown in their results in the validation in English literacy.

Laura, an ESL teacher at St Cecilia's in Brisbane describes the interrelationship between second language oral development and placing ESL children on the reading continuum:

*Even some children who have been here for up to a year haven't got the output skills to be able to tell you exactly where they are at. How do you judge the reading comprehension and output of a child when they can't talk freely to you.*

Laura uses the system she has designed to record ESL progress on the Bandscales to point out to the teachers the influence of oral proficiency development on reading and writing. She finds this useful in explaining to teachers why the students do not seem to be progressing when seen only in relation to The Year 2 Diagnostic Net Continua.

Minh, an ESL teacher at Lachlan St, comments that her students would not have the oral language in English to describe their processes and strategies in the Numeracy validation. She is concerned about schools lacking the necessary resources to carry out the Numeracy validation in the spoken home language of the child.

Rose, a mainstream teacher in Perth, feels that the First Steps Oral Language Continuum needs '*additional categories*' to identify quality of language. Like Joanne above, she feels it is not '*specific*' enough. She feels that the Oral Language Continuum does not diagnose the problems and '*that's where most of our children you know really need the assistance.*'

Most teachers in the pre-primary were particularly concerned about the capacity of the First Steps Oral Language Continuum to map the progress of their ESL learners. Unlike Joanne who found the ESL framework, the Highgate Oral Language Continuum, helpful for planning and assessing, Elizabeth a pre-primary mainstream teacher in Perth found that it looked like '*too much hard work*', and was limited in terms of global development. She felt that there was nothing however on the First Steps Oral Language Continuum for the ESL children which '*showed their development from just one word*'. After discussing her difficulties with colleagues in a professional development session, she designed an alternative framework. On an A3 sheet she put together the First Steps Beginning Language Phase (the first two years for the English native speaker) and the Early Language Phases, adding additional indicators she had noticed herself. In this way she felt she could map the progress of her less advanced ESL children.

While most of the teachers tended to discuss speaking in terms of oracy, listening was also brought out as an issue. Laura, an ESL teacher in a mainstream school discusses how the level of listening affects the concentration span of her student Thuy, and that though she seemed to be comprehending she was '*really struggling in many ways with the classroom*' particularly with new topics. Laura reflects that this lack of concentration span is also put down to '*naughtiness*' :

*A teacher might make a comment about a student, 'Such and such always comes back and asks again. They never just listen in the first*

*place. You're able to say, 'Hang on, is it that they're not listening in the first place or is it that they're still working through the stages of becoming a second language learner'. Then you're able to show them the child's progress and say, 'Look, it's actually documented here in the Bandscales that this is a step that children go through. They go through the stage of asking for repetition before they move on to being confident enough to do it for themselves.*

Laura felt concern that though a low level of English listening proficiency might not be such a problem in Year 1, it would be so in Year 2 as the child had to listen to extended talk and complex ideas.

Minh assesses her students informally in listening in both English and Vietnamese. She is concerned about some of the children's low level of proficiency in listening in their home language, citing lack of comprehension of locational phrases which would be crucial in developing concepts necessary for progress in the Junior Primary School.

Maree, a mainstream teacher in the Cape, is very conscious about the role of listening and this understanding seems to have provided her with extra motivation in setting up her alternative framework. She relates that she was told by an elder in the community that he did not understand what 'was going on' in class until he reached Year 10. She states that he simply could not understand what the teacher was saying. She is strongly conscious of the implications of this for developing literacy in English, which is what the community have told her they want for their children.

#### **'That exactly what she's done'**

In contrast with the lack of fit many of the teachers identify between the performance of their ESL learners and the descriptions in the mainstream frameworks, many of the teachers, both mainstream and ESL, commented on the closeness of fit they found in the ESL frameworks. While seeing this validity, as Chapter 7 will show, this did not mean that all the teachers in the Case Studies saw the need for an ESL specific framework.

Joanne, a mainstream teacher in the Pilbara, when introduced to the ESL Framework of Stages by her District Literacy Adviser comments on the fit she found between the performance of her ESL learners and the descriptions:

*I found the ESL Framework good because the pointers were very specific and I found there were some pointers that I noticed with my children. Just an indication of what a child who doesn't know much English displays. I mean I don't know because I'm not from a non-English speaking background.*

Nicole, another mainstream teacher in the Pilbara undergoing the same experience finds:

*There's nothing in the Outcome Statements to say that a pre-level child is doing something. Where the ESL Framework has got three Levels and they look specifically at the ESL child and their experiences before they came to school and basically you can see where they've been. You can see what sort of things they can do and you can fit them into either B1, B2 or B3 which links to Level 1 of the Outcome Statements.*

Jenny at Hillside Intensive Language Centre in Victoria comments on the fit she finds between the ESL Scales and the performance of her new arrival ESL learners:

*What they do really well is they talk about the type of students you'll get in this level and what you can expect from them and so I guess it makes you realise that if they're not paying attention and not focused that's okay cos that's what children at this stage do.*

Meredith, an ESL teacher in a mainstream school in New South Wales describes a similar fit between performance of her ESL learners and the ESL scales. She finds that they are 'good' for pinpointing *'exactly what they can do, where they're at'*.

Laura, an ESL teacher in a mainstream school in Brisbane discusses the fit she finds between the descriptions in the Junior Primary Speaking levels in the Bandscales and the performance of her learners. She refers to a descriptor in Level 4 describing the wish of the ESL child to be given the opportunity to express themselves without interruption or correction from peers or the interlocutor:

*'Isn't that a true step that they go through. They really like to think that they can do it and hate to be corrected. He would sit there and he'd block out what everyone else was trying to help him with'.*

Janet an ESL teacher at Greenway Intensive Language Centre in Perth feels that:

*'the usefulness of these Bandscales is that there are certain things that jump out and you say, 'that's exactly what she's done'.*

### **'I'm not sure whether he is ESL or not'**

The uncertainty about how to identify if a learner is ESL or not is a trend in many of the mainstream teacher case studies. This uncertainty goes to the heart of many of the teachers ideas about what kind of framework they would like to see for assessing ESL learners, as we will show later. The teachers are not alone in their confusion, both governments and ESL experts in Australia have had great difficulty in how to identify and classify a student as "ESL" in the last two decades. Leigh in the Pilbara states:

*It took me a while to work out that Michael was really ESL. A lot of these children are sort of ESL basis, but I 'm not too sure how much he understood because he was so quiet and you put it down sometimes to their shyness. They seem to do what you're asking them to and I think they become very skilled at looking at what the others are doing and quickly do just that. Because Year 1 and 2 is informal in a way, they can get away with it.*

In speaking of Alfred, Leigh says:

*I can't say for sure because I've got no proof but I believe he speaks an Aboriginal language at home.*

We learn in Aimee's case study that she does not think that the Aboriginal children speak either an Aboriginal language or Aboriginal English, though one of them speaks very little and does not tell news to the class.

Barry, a mainstream teacher in the pre-primary in New South Wales, states about Robbie who has an aboriginal background:

*He speaks a bit like an ESL child. Leaves out 'a' and 'the'. But I'm not sure whether he is ESL or not. I mean being Aboriginal might be considered ESL at times'.*

The fact that ESL funding in Queensland has only very, very recently been provided for Aboriginal school students provides a context for Barry's views.

Barry goes on to say, *'In thinking about it, what's true ESL anyway?'* Clearly this is a critical question, since these mainstream teachers clearly lack classificatory guidelines for identifying whether their students are 'ESL' and the tools for initial assessment of ESL student needs. This can be contrasted with the guidelines and tools Erika, the visiting ESL teacher, has access to. Leigh points to her lack of training in ESL, appreciates the understanding she gains when introduced to the ESL Framework of Stages by her District Advisor during this project.

### **'You get glimpses'**

The concern for many of the teachers is a larger one than identifying the language background of their learners. It concerns wanting to understand their cultural background, and the need to understand the implications of a low or non-print English literacy background in a school context.

Both Leigh and Nicole in the Pilbara are explicit about their lack of training in ESL and their need for developing understanding about the experiences and language performance of their ESL learners. Joanne in the Pilbara states, *'I mean, I don't know because I'm not from a non-English speaking background'*. Joanne states that if she knew the language of her Aboriginal learners she would understand the *'reasons for the way they speak in relation to the Oral Language Continuum'*. She would like to understand more about their cultural background and particularly about the genres that are important in their culture.

Maree at Andelu feels that the Developmental Continua she is using lack sensitivity to a low or non-print English literacy background in her students. She discusses the way the Reading Continuum assumes that the children have been exposed to lists, recipes and books: *'To many of the children lists, recipes etc are things these children have never sighted until coming to school'*. She is frustrated that so many of the indicators assume that the children were writing narratives.

Leigh in the Pilbara states her concern that as she gradually begins to identify a student as having real ESL needs due to lack of progress (*'you just know there's something wrong'*), she is hampered in increasing her understanding by the difficulties she experiences in setting up easy communication with the children's parents. The point she makes below goes further than solely to the difficulties involved in identifying Alfred's home language, and far beyond her ability to make a telephone call (though this can be difficult enough for a teacher teaching all day in a primary school, even if they have the knowledge of the parent's language). She may also be hinting at the belief that a telephone call is not the most effective way to find the information she needs. Given the difficulties with establishing communication, she does not refer to any assessment tools at her disposal which would help her with diagnostic understanding:

*He shows all the indications of having another language at home, but really to know whether that's right I'd have to ring home or I'd get the Aboriginal Education Workers to go out there and try and find out. Well it's very difficult to get the parents in and for years I have tried and tried and tried.*

Minh at Lachlan St, an ESL bilingual teacher working with a group of Vietnamese children who have a low literacy home background, throws some light on Leigh's difficulties by describing the complexity of the problem in her context. She points out that many of her parents would not have finished primary school, and so the Department's solution of devising reporting documents in academic Vietnamese hardly helps communication between home and school. Minh, unlike the teachers in the Pilbara, speaks the home language but she still feels that as an educated teacher her understanding of the home culture of her learners is partial.

*But you know when opportunities come up you get glimpses of it. When a parent comes up for an interview and we want to check if this is the present address. We will show her the address because we know that she may not be able to say the name of the street, or can't associate 'written down' with the sign of her street. Or the calendar. 'Now which date would suit you', I might ask. They get lost. They can't read the calendar. Or they come up and ask about something in the newsletter which goes out in Vietnamese.*

Leigh states, 'I want a framework that gives me an understanding of what an ESL child is'.

### **'I don't think it is fair'**

When reflecting on the need to recognise oral language development in her ESL learners, Joanne, a mainstream teacher in the Pilbara, comments on the possibility of benchmarking and comparisons:

*I'm concerned about benchmarking and comparisons. Do you compare ESL children to mainstream children across the State? Is it fair to say that an Aboriginal Year 1 child or, say, you've got a Year 3 Aboriginal child who is Level 1, whereas the mainstream child is Level 3? Is it fair to make that comparison when you have got English as a barrier. But you have to be aware of discrimination so you've virtually got to treat them all the same.*

While Joanne is aware of the dilemma of inclusivity, the teachers in Queensland dealing with the impact of The Year 2 Diagnostic Net validation are keenly aware of issues of access. Maree at Andelu in the Cape is particularly concerned because the children are required to perform the tasks in their second language, in a remote community where English is used only in the classroom. She points out that Torres Strait Creole is used at home and in all transactions, a situation her visiting ESL adviser believes is better described by the term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) rather than English as a Second Language (ESL). Maree states:

*There is this whole thing of equity in education. I suppose if children get 'caught' in the Net then OK. Then the school gets funding and you can employ teacher aides to teach them reading, which is all very helpful, which people see and that's great. But still there is the old who passes and who fails and it doesn't matter how the Department say 'No, you don't pass and you don't fail and it's not a reflection on....' When you are looking across the Cape and across the Torres Strait so many schools are 'caught' in the Net. Whole schools are 'caught' in the Net. So why are whole schools 'caught' in the Net?*

*It can be to do with teaching, or it can be to do with Literacy background. Or it can be children are not being given the chance to express their real skills because English is the language the children are expected to perform in, whether it is their first language or not.*

While Maree finds the 'Continuum an extremely valuable assessment tool' for mapping development and for identifying gaps in her teaching of literacy skills, together with the three other Queensland teachers she is not happy with the Year 2 Diagnostic Net validation exercise. Maree's close feeling of identification with the parents within the Aboriginal community exacerbates the feelings of alienation and dissonance felt by Maree in relation to the State validation process: 'What I am saying is what we are doing helps them to be better in English but the results disappoint the parents'..

Many of the teachers in the Case Studies seem to have quite positive attitudes to the new mainstream frameworks. In the case of the Pilbara the positive advocacy of the District Officer, Eliza appeared to play no small part in this. However, these teachers did not have a State assessment procedure associated with the frameworks as did the teachers in Queensland. Maree from Queensland seems to echo in her attitudes research findings in the UK and US about the effects of imposed testing (in Queensland's case an imposed assessment procedure) on Primary teachers. Maree seems to feel some of the guilt, anger, anxiety, alienation and dissonance that M.L. Smith (1991) found when she looked at the effect of the introduction of testing on teacher's lives and practice in an elementary school (Gipps et al, 1995:173), or that Gipps and others found echoed in their study of British teachers and national assessment of seven-year-olds (Gipps et al, 1995: 174).

Like Laura, the ESL teacher at St Cecilia's School, Maree rejects the 'one-off' character of the validation. She feels that counting word endings in the reading task which do not exist in Torres Strait Creole, as is done in the Net validation exercise, is *'biased against their language skills and I have a bit of a problem with that'*. Maree feels that the Year 2 Diagnostic Net does not depict the stage of literacy that the children have in fact reached:

*So maybe if they could read in Creole we may get a true picture. They have competency in Creole, not in English. They work hard and listen to me in a language which is not their first language. They show skills at the right level, but the Net does not give a clear picture of them.*

She explains that many children do not reach the expected Phase of reading because of *'minor meanings. This concerns me because I don't think it is fair.'*

Erika, a visiting ESL teacher, is concerned that the Year 2 Diagnostic Net validation is too early for her students. She thinks that the children should be given time. Her greatest concern is that the validation exercise is producing panic in the teachers who then refer the children either for inappropriate testing for learning disabilities or for withdrawal with the ESL teacher. Erika comments,

*If you are withdrawing them they think there's something wrong with me. I have a learning problem and it's not true.*

For Erika the conflation of 'ESL'ness' with remediation is her greatest concern and she has designed her ESL reporting system using the Bandscales to offset what she sees as an increasing impact of the validation.

Minh is concerned with the impact of the Net validation process in the long-run. The sacrifice involved in increasing the focus on English in her bilingual program at the expense of Vietnamese to ensure success on a formalised assessment exercise in Year 2, might not be judicious:

*Even if the children do manage to pass the Net, I feel, in a few years' time as they move up further in the upper primary to years 5,6 and 7, that will be where the trouble will begin to surface. By then it's too late for anyone to do anything.*

## The Frameworks and The Teachers

### 'Fitting them all together'

In Chapter 2 we have seen that Australia is characterised by a 'proliferation' of frameworks. In some states there are not only multiple mainstream frameworks, but also multiple ESL frameworks. Across mainstream and ESL teaching contexts many of the teachers were preoccupied with finding ways to link the original reference point with the innovation or innovations. In doing so they expressed the high value they placed on maintaining continuity and consistency in their thinking, particularly in the initial stages of concern.

Nicole, a mainstream teacher from a Pilbara primary school describes the Student Outcomes Statements as '*brilliant*' since she is able to link their broad outcomes across the curriculum framework with her own integrationist Concept Based Learning Program. When discussing the mainstream frameworks Nicole and Leigh, another mainstream primary teacher from the Pilbara, explain that they have made the link by assigning different purposes to the frameworks. In their case, First Steps will be used for teaching emphases and strategies and the newer Student Outcome Statements will be used for goals and planning. Eliza, the District Officer for Language and Literacy, plays an important support role in supplying additional linking concepts. Through Eliza, Leigh sees that she can call on First Steps to draw out the pointers in SOS that are relevant to her when drawing up her 'Language Profile'.

Clare, a mainstream primary teacher in Melbourne, seems to have made a similar fit by separating the new and the old according to purposes. She makes relatively positive statements about the new Curriculum and Standards frameworks. Though it does not give her an idea of '*the way things should be taught*', it helps her realise there is '*a common goal*'. '*I just feel that maybe that's what we need because you feel like you're working towards something and everybody has the same goal*'. However, while Clare uses the Curriculum Standards Framework for her planning, she continues to use the older Victorian English Profiles Handbook for her assessment record. She states that '*because I was familiar with that I tended to use it again because I knew it was covering the things that I'm looking for*'. This reaction is well explained in Chapter 4's chapter as fitting with the first phase of adaptation as entailing '*reducing the intended scope of the change so that it can be subsumed easily within how the teacher already thinks about their work*'.

Joanne, another mainstream primary teacher in the Pilbara, shows how a concept such as '*developmental*' helps her to make the link. She perceives that First Steps and the Student Outcome Statements are '*very similar*' in being '*developmental*' and envisages little difficulty should she make the switch in the future.

Aimee, a mainstream primary teacher from Perth, finds a First Steps/Student Outcomes Statements linking document from the Education Department suitable for use.

The links made between the frameworks are not necessarily permanent. Even within the time of the project some of the teachers rearrange their thinking about the initial links they made between the frameworks as they proceed with using them. As Leigh in the Pilbara moves from the stage of making an initial fit between the concepts in the Student Outcomes Statements and her own earlier system, she evaluates the '*impact*' of the Student Outcomes Statements on her assessment and begins to subject the framework to some scrutiny. Towards the

end of our study of Leigh, First Steps has, for her been upgraded from its role as strategy resource to giving her the specificity within a Level to show how her children progress. With SOS *'they are all Level 1'*; but *'I need First Steps because I can see that my children are progressing through the Phases'*.

During the project the Pilbara mainstream primary teachers are introduced to The ESL Framework of Stages by Eliza, and the Case Studies provide a close-up view of teachers thinking about new frameworks in the most initial phase. While Nicole and Leigh describe the framework positively as *'great'* and *'brilliant'*, their preoccupation again seems to be with how they will link the new framework with the other frameworks they are using so that they can get a consistent, workable system. Nicole explains:

*So what I was going to do, and it will take me forever, is to use the ESL Framework as well and link it to Outcome Statements and look at what strategies I'm using from First Steps to come up with an assessment checklist that 's right for the ESL children.*

Although Leigh does not have ready access to the assessment concepts necessary to assist her to scrutinise the ESL Framework of Stages, she realises that something is amiss and recognises that the ESL Framework is to do with broad objectives, with learning (it is in fact a curriculum framework), and that she would need an extra assessment framework. She can also see that the parents would not *'want to see two pages of this kind of thing'*. So for reporting she would have to see how to fit it in with SOS and First Steps. She would:

*put in a box and change it a little bit and tick that he's an ESL child. Like I could have a little box there that says, "Level 1 in relation to First Steps," or "ESL Level such and such related to the ESL framework or whatever".*

The reliance on the support of Eliza for working out the concepts on how to link the frameworks is clear when Leigh says:

*I might have to do a different one for Alfred and somehow dovetail it so that I can tick it's Level 1 ESL or Level 2 ESL, so I've got to come up with a document that's going to show him on the continuum, whether I put First Steps or even have another space down here for a Stage just for him which would be ESL. That's something I've got to look into and I don't know how to do it yet. District Office will probably help us to come up with something.*

After this she discovers the ESL Scales and shows an ability to be positive about yet another framework, pointing out that it harmonises with SOS: *'It has similar outcome statements. It's really quite exciting'*.

In the ESL Intensive Language Centres teachers were similarly searching for continuity and consistency between frameworks. In Melbourne Jenny and Sue had positive attitudes to their older reference point, the ESL Scales. Sue seems relieved that the *'fuller'* pre-literacy B Scales from the ESL Scales will be salvaged for use with the new ESL Companion. Jenny will continue using the ESL Scales because she is getting to a stage of *familiarity* with them. When she is confident that she knows what reaching 75% of a level implies she will see if she can *translate* this into the new system, *'cos they do come together quite well'* (it is a requirement of her centre that students master at least 75% of the outcomes for the level in the ESL scales deemed appropriate for their age Grade before exit). She will see if she can *'overlap the two'*.

Marion at Greenway Intensive Language Centre in Perth went through a process at school meetings with her colleagues which altered her views about the

Bandscales. At first the teachers found *'were all a bit wary of it because it was quite a daunting document'*. They then found that there was a consistent match between the Bandscales and their goals, their teaching and their outcomes:

*I think most of us found that it fits in with what we are already doing. We don't have to change our teaching. We don't have to change our goals, and we don't have to change the outcomes that we're doing, it just fits in with what we are already doing.*

In this way Marion found continuity and consistency between the old and the new. In addition, she also found that the Bandscales had an added positive feature, since they added to the ease of the framework she was already using. The Bandscales made the time consuming Negotiated Evaluation easier, because they contained the language the teachers needed for their descriptions.

For Yuen at the same centre, who came to the Bandscales framework used at Greenway from a mainstream context, the important linking concept was provided by a diagram, included in the Bandscales' volume, showing ESL Bandscales Development in relation to Mainstream Language and Literacy Development:

*As a mainstream teacher whenever I got ESL children coming in, I always saw them as 'oh gee they're very weak in their literacy'. So straight away I see them as being low, going into a remedial group. But the first thing that hit me when I saw this diagram was that ESL children are not at the bottom, here, but coming from the side.*

With this concept Yuen was able build her views on assessment into a harmonious unified system, consistent with what she felt was a more developed interpretation of her past views and providing her with a blue print for a proposed alternative to the present system used in mainstream contexts (see below). Both Yuen and Marion have direct access to support with their thinking about the frameworks through Janet at the same Centre, who has spent years working on frameworks and who has devised the overall framework used at Greenway.

In the Case Studies we see that it is the ESL teachers in the mainstream, who need to have the expertise in understanding and communicating the linking concepts between mainstream and ESL frameworks as part of their role. Meredith at Daviston Primary School in New South Wales is a highly trained ESL specialist and provides professional development in the ESL Scales. In her area she is the Eliza and the Janet we have seen assisting teachers with concepts in the other studies. She reports little success drawing the mainstream teachers into engagement with her ESL framework. Even with her advanced concepts, Meredith has found the process of making links between the ESL Scales and the Early Learning Profiles to be quite confusing. Meredith has a Department linking document, however with her knowledge and expertise she subjects it to scrutiny and is not content. She states that the process of fitting it all together has been a *'nightmare'*.

*B3 in the Scales fits in with Levels 1 & 2 of the Profiles, although I don't really see how 'cause I think there's a big jump up here. So if it all fits in, if you're on B1, and even B2, you must fit in here to Foundation and Transition. There must be a correspondence there. Looking at the diagram, this is what you would assume. And if you're B2 you might still be there moving in to Level 1 and B3 should correspond across, which I don't think it does, there's a pretty big jump.*

*So it's a nightmare trying to put it all together.*

For Erika and Laura in Queensland who do not have access to a linking document of any kind, linking the frameworks involved independently devising recording and reporting documents based on the Bandscales. They used these to assist them in explaining to the mainstream teachers the extra dimension that they feel is added by an ESL framework to understanding the ESL learner's performance. Laura provides continuity by duplicating the system of showing progress that the mainstream teachers use with the Developmental Continua. She highlights the descriptors in different colours to show the date. Both teachers report that this was successful, though Erika states that this initially works effectively only *'if there is a sense of trust and respect between the classroom teacher and myself'*. Although both Erika and particularly Laura are aware of where their students sit on the mainstream framework, they do not try to directly link the frameworks. Rather they seem to be thinking of them as separate systems. This is sometimes called the pluralist solution (Barrett, 1987), a *'live and let live philosophy'*, which could possibly be seen as allowing the ESL teacher to offer understandings without openly engaging with the legitimacy of the mainstream framework.

### **'Hours and hours and hours and hours'**

The theme of time appears again and again in almost every study as teachers seek to adapt the frameworks to the demands of the practicality of the teaching situation. The concern becomes more critical as teachers actually put the frameworks into use, as opposed to considering possible future use. Fullan (1991: 128) points out that according to Doyle and Ponder (1977-8) most teachers are governed by *'the practicality ethic'*. Nicole, a mainstream teacher in the Pilbara, states in reference to the Student Outcome Statements, *'It takes hours and hours and hours and hours to do'*. It would be tedious to repeat the number of times the teachers allude to the time consumed in using the mainstream framework. Stephanie, an experienced ESL teacher in Victoria is concerned about the time involved in the use of the Curriculum Standards Framework. Without caution she states *'you'd be assessing many thousands of outcomes'*. She says, *'I can't assess all the time, I've got to teach'*. Leigh in the Pilbara states that she would rather spend the time planning.

As a result we have seen in Chapter 4 the ways in which the teachers have adapted the Frameworks. Leigh, for example, has internalised the indicators in First Steps and simplified them to Phases thus avoiding the *'laborious filling in'* of indicators. In the ESL context Carly and Yuen regret that the practice of using check lists is frowned on when using ESL frameworks.

### **'Glue everywhere'**

In Chapter 4 we have seen how the teachers have spent a great deal of time working through the frameworks to make them more manageable. Though many of the mainstream teachers appreciate the insights they receive from ESL frameworks, most believe that the frameworks would have to be adapted for use, or are as Elizabeth feels *'just a bit too much hard work'*. Leigh sees that the parents would not *'want to see two pages of this kind of thing'*, when she considers the ESL Framework of Stages in relation to reporting. These views of the unmanageability of the ESL frameworks the mainstream teachers have access to, in their present form, are echoed by many of the ESL teachers in relation to the one they are using.

Stephanie, an experienced ESL teacher in Victoria though not very familiar with the NLLIA Bandscales would not use it, *'It's a bit daunting really, such a big book, and also the format'*.

Laura in Brisbane has considerable knowledge of the concepts of profiling. She has adapted the Bandscales to produce workable long term monitoring recording formats and a one page report scheme for the classes above year 3. Once Laura worked out the procedure and adapted the format, she reflects, it all became quite easy and saved her a great deal of time. However she feels that the recording formats found in the Bandscales volume are not time efficient and need to be more *'user friendly'*.

Sue and Jenny at Hillside English Language Centre in Melbourne are very much concerned at the pragmatic, technical level of making the new Frameworks, the less new and the recently new, easy to use. The teachers echo the concerns about manageability we have seen in the other contexts. Sue comments on the ESL Companion, *'quite a silly book this is'*, as she refers to its unwieldy nature: *'You've got 10 documents and you want to use one'*. Jenny likes the way the Victorian English Profiles Handbook are *'easy to use, because of the checklists they contain'*. She finds the ESL Scales more complex to use because they are *'more broken up'*

Meredith a very experienced ESL teacher at Daviston Primary School in NSW runs professional development sessions on how to use the ESL Scales. She feels the reaction has been positive: *'There's a feeling that ESL teachers now have something to justify their existence. We've got a concrete thing to put the students on now'*. However, Meredith provides a graphic picture of the problems teachers are having dealing with the perceived unmanageability of the ESL frameworks in their present form. The teachers are caught between the belief that the ESL Scales should not be used as a checklist (see Carly on the ESL Scales and Yuen on the Bandscales) and the need for ease in using the framework. In attempting to develop a system of long term monitoring of achievement according to the outcomes, she and her colleagues have put hours into their efforts to highlight and adapt, by cutting and pasting:

*I was there forever photocopying and photocopying and then ruling the lines and cutting and pasting, had glue everywhere.*

She finds that the original ESL Scales' document is not very practicable in its existing form:

*Because the difficulty with the Scales is flicking constantly through to find what you need. And quite often the Scales have got it all in levels with oral interaction, reading, writing all together. But if you want to compare Reading and Responding Level 4 with Reading and Responding Level 5, you've got to flick over 10 pages to find it. The original's not terribly practical to use.*

Meredith quotes her teachers on the unmanageability of the assessment demands on the ESL teacher, making it clear that this issue of manageability is a very significant one for her teachers causing not a little anxiety and stress :

*I've got 100 ESL children in my school and I've got to put every one on the Scales!....But to break it down into manageable chunks. And that's the biggest hurdle we've got to get through. There's this tremendous fear. And no matter how many times we've run these days, that question comes up. Every time. 'But I still have to'. So it's a worry.*

Meredith does not think that the ESL scales can be given out *willy-nilly to classroom teachers because it's too much to wade through. It's a pain for us to wade through.*

Laura in Brisbane feels the same about the Bandscales, stating that they would constitute far too much of a workload for mainstream teachers.

### **'The same understanding'**

Some of the teachers in both ESL and mainstream contexts were concerned about the interface between the levels described in the some of the frameworks and their professional judgement. We have seen that Jenny, an ESL teacher in Hillsdale English Language Centre using the ESL Scales was giving herself time to become confident enough to make the judgement required by her school policy:

*whether a student is 75% on a (particular) level which is what they're supposed to be and I don't want to start a new system until I feel I can just translate this...*

Yuen at Greenway Intensive Centre in Perth finds that the children's development seems to perfectly match the descriptors in the Bandscales, so that she can see their progress with relative ease. However, as a mainstream teacher newly using an ESL framework she reports initial dilemmas with judging the levels:

*I think initially I stumbled a little bit. I was really umming and ah-haring and guessing which level, whether they are in a level or not. Things like I was placing all my children on Level 1, even when they weren't there. I didn't realise you could put them on zero. At first I found the descriptors all very confusing.*

Joanne, a mainstream teacher in the Pilbara, feels that a lot of discussion between teachers in the school will lead to a common understanding of the levels. She refers to the different interpretations made of the First Steps Phases and feels that adequate discussion should prevent the same initial difficulties happening with the Student Outcome Statements:

*If the Student Outcome Statements are not discussed properly, they'll be like First Steps where everybody had different opinions of what it means for a child to be at this indicator or whatever, and that would be a concern with Student Outcome Statements or ESL Scales or whatever because everybody doesn't have the same understanding of them.*

Marion at Greenway Intensive Centre in Perth found it difficult to place children in one level. Marion feels that the decision is based on *'the interpretation of the Bandscale itself'*. She feels that *'the pressure is on us to make the decision about one level'*, but believes that the children sometimes appear to be between levels. She describes having made an official recording of the level and one for her own purposes: *'I think I probably put them across the two levels just for my own information just so that I knew that she had made some progress.'*

Meredith at Daviston, a professional developer in the ESL scales, clearly does not share the linking of the levels in the ESL Scales with the Early Learning Profiles made by the Department. She perceives is concerned that the Department's linking document does not accurately match the ESL Scales and the mainstream scales.

### Professional leadership

It is clear that the arrival of the frameworks has added to the profile of some of the ESL teachers. The ESL teachers' role involves them in having an understanding of both ESL and mainstream frameworks, and often an advanced knowledge of the concepts underlying assessment. Stephanie, for example, is an ESL specialist and curriculum coordinator at Oxford Street Primary School, where the majority of the students are of ESL background, although they were almost all born in Australia. Stephanie leads the professional development in her school on both mainstream and ESL frameworks.

Laura in Brisbane had had experience of profiling in Victoria in the early 90s before she came to Queensland and had the confidence to design a recording system for the Bandscales. This meant that she had a folder of impressively highlighted Bandscales records to show mainstream teacher's using their highlighted Developmental Criteria records. She also had professional development as an ESL teacher on First Steps before it was adapted for the Early Years Diagnostic Net and this meant that she became key teacher in the junior primary for the Early Years Diagnostic Net when Laura's school took it on. The mainstream teachers make appointments with her before making reports to *'talk about what they were going to put on the reports to send home to the parents'* and she refers them to her alternative assessment ESL framework, the Bandscales. Such was her profile with the mainstream teachers that they accepted her idea of using the Bandscales to report on the children in the years above Year 3, when the teachers found the Queensland Student Performance Standards their school had started to use inappropriate for ESL learners.

Erika, a visiting teacher in Brisbane, also had long experience with ESL frameworks beginning in Victoria in the early 1990's. She designed a manageable reporting framework which enabled her to communicate her insights about ESL progress to mainstream teachers using the Year Two Diagnostic Net. She states that she *'hits them with it at the right time'* and the mainstream teachers find it useful in their reporting.

Elizabeth at Harthill felt that the Oral Language Continuum was inappropriate for her pre-primary ESL learners. She consulted her colleagues and designed what she sees as a more appropriate framework (described in Oracy - *'A Huge Difference'*). Unlike the Highgate Oral Continuum which she thought looked too time consuming, she produced an A3 single page document which she obviously feels is manageable.

Janet at Greenway Intensive Language Centre in Perth has had many years of acting as collaborator in developing curriculum and ESL assessment frameworks. Because of Janet's wide knowledge of, and experience with, assessment frameworks, she is able to subject the new Student Outcome Statements to scrutiny and challenge, writing a response to the Department which she hopes will affect policy. She proposes that there is no conflict between the ESL Bandscales and the Student Outcome Statements, that the Bandscales fits under the Student Outcomes Statements (a political pluralist solution) and that they should be exclusively used for the first twelve months after arrival. Janet has also designed a system of long term diagnostic monitoring which is used with the Bandscales by all the teachers in her Intensive Centre context.

Due to Maree's concern at the impact of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net on her learners, she took leadership in exploring ways to design an alternative system. She was able to get the backing of the system, and of experts in education and linguistics to get considerable funding to direct the Home Language Project. As

with Elizabeth at Harthill, she went through Stage 5 of Hall and Hord's Stages of Concern, Collaboration, in which she consulted experts and colleagues to find ways to give a more accurate picture of what she saw as her students real stage of literacy. As a result she then went on to their highest stage, Stage 6 and designed an alternative, though compatible framework for assessing her students in their first language, Torres Strait Creole. Although at the time she had no access to any of the ESL frameworks, she is now part of a committee which is going to produce a version of the Bandscales for learners who speak Torres Strait Creole as their first language.

In an era of accountability, in depth knowledge of the frameworks is an important base for influence both within the system as a whole and within the base school.

### **'In terms of accountability it's pretty well sewn up'**

Both Kylie and Leigh, mainstream teachers both believe that The Student Outcomes Standards (WA) will be obligatory in the future. Leigh states:

*They are probably going to be a universal thing so you've got to learn it and you've got to get there.*

Kylie, in the pre-primary states in similar vein:

*I'm under the impression that they're going to come in and there's going to be no if's and but's, "you'll do it. You'll use them."*

The question arises whether specific contexts will be able to maintain control over their system of accountability in the future. Janet, in WA believes that her centre already has a satisfactory, and appropriate system of assessment in her intensive centre context

*But as far as I'm concerned, it's based on a valid system of planning which is the Australian Language Levels, which is I think, just about spot on in terms of how it makes you hold things together. It's based on the things in Bandscales, which I think are pretty valid as well, which is similar to the ones that we've devised as well. I think that's valid. It's evaluated through Negotiated Evaluation, which once again I think is a very valid and sensible way to go. So I think in terms of accountability it's pretty well sewn up.*

Janet believes that she has:

*An assessment tool which would then allow you to evaluate what the children have learned and then you can use that as a basis for planning. So it's a whole cycle: plan, teach, evaluate.*

At the time of the case study Janet appears to have had a great deal of control over the frameworks she has decided are appropriate for her context. She is able to say: *First Steps has had no impact on my teaching full-stop.* The Student Outcome Statements as a State imposed Framework seems to pose a greater threat. Hence, Janet is involved in writing documents clarifying the need to exclude the very New Arrival ESL student from the auspices of the new mainstream framework.

## **Ideal Frameworks**

### **'I would love to see'**

Chapter 2 refers to McGaw's (1997) view that the national profiles should be treated as first specifications to be refined in the light of classroom use over time. She also refers to McKay (1994) discussing the ESL frameworks in a similar vein. What, then do the teachers see as the ideal framework.

Following up on the theme of time, Sue using the ESL scales at Hillside Intensive Centre in Victoria expresses the need for a manageable framework:

*It's just so time consuming, all this. Sometimes I've, sometimes I wonder, is there an easier way.*

Laura using the Bandscales as an ESL teacher in a mainstream school in Queensland expresses a similar need:

*a more user-friendly recording format needs to be developed and put into circulation. The formats in the Bandscales' book are not time efficient. A reporting format would also be useful.*

Laura found the need so critical that she designed a Bandscales recording system of her own highlighting progress in varying colours according to date, as do her mainstream teachers with their mainstream Developmental Continua framework. Erika, a visiting teacher, also identifying a need for a time efficient reporting Bandscales' format, adapted the reporting system in the Bandscales' book selecting only one page of the suggested formats,

Minh, an ESL teacher in Queensland would like to have a package attached to the ESL framework similar to that provided for the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, 'to show how you assess ESL children'.

Nicole, a mainstream teacher in her second year of teaching in the Pilbara, wants to have an inclusive framework that accounts for the achievements of her ESL children. 'Its got to have that. All of it's got to have an ESL influence'. She appreciates the broad outcomes in the Student Outcomes Statements which give her the power to create pointers appropriate to her Aboriginal students. Nicole has had access to the ESL Framework of Stages, but not to the ESL Scales or Bandscales. She is inspired to take on what she sees as a very time consuming enterprise. She plans to use the ESL Framework of Stages which she would link to the Student Outcome Statements, draw on the strategies she is using from First Steps and design an ESL framework which could be incorporated into the Student Outcome Statements:

*So what I was going to do, and it will take me forever, is to use the ESL framework as well and link it to Outcome Statements and look at what strategies I'm using from First Steps to come up with an assessment checklist that 's right for ESL children.*

Many of the teachers in the Case Studies had definite ideas about the kind of ESL framework they would like to have. Rose, a mainstream teacher, wants a fine grained framework. She would like a framework that would reflect the progress and specific developmental patterns of the children who are bilingual, particularly 'the quality of their language' in oral performance.

Despite concerns many of the teachers have expressed about First Steps in the Case Studies, it seems to set the pace in including a professional development focus, particularly in the strategies associated with the framework. Joanne would

like a framework, as we learn in her case study, 'very much like First Steps which informs her knowledge of both ESL and mainstream children's language development, which provides assessment continua, which guides her planning, and which offers a resource of teaching strategies directly related to specific aspects of language and literacy development'.

*This type of thing works really well with maybe, yes, a few more pointers and things that are ESL based with a developmental progression for the ESL child.*

Leigh, a mainstream teacher, presents a picture of a richly contextual framework, with linking curriculum and assessment and with a strong professional development focus:

*I want a framework that gives me an understanding of what an ESL child is. I mean, just knowing that you can't speak a language, being someone in another country, that you just don't understand anything. Just identifying them, finding out some of their character traits of what I could look for. And I'd like strategies to help me know what I can do. And goals for your own planning. And also information of how I can get help or where I can get help.*

We have seen earlier that Leigh wants see the ESL children firmly located on the framework so that she can map their progress, rather than as Laura, an ESL teacher, describes as 'stuck' on a mainstream framework:

*I see it in line with First Steps. I want something different from Outcome Statements because it's too broad, but something that actually puts children in phases where you can see them progressing and moving though it might be slow or it might be quick. And I'd see the same things with any ESL child and where you can actually be excited to see them moving on, you know, and gaining more grasp of the language and the culture, and moving more in the new environment in which they are.*

In common with the mainstream teachers above, some of the ESL teachers in mainstream schools expressed a wish to see strategies included in the ESL frameworks. Laura states:

*I would love to see the Junior Primary and Primary Bandscales developed to include suggestions for teaching children at each level - both in the ESL teacher's context and in the mainstream. This is where the First Steps/Early Years material is wonderful!*

Though Meredith, an ESL teacher in a mainstream school in NSW, finds the ESL Scales useful for assessment, she indicates that she would like to have the strategies for moving the learners on from level to level written in:

*They are good when you want to assess a child and find out exactly what they can do, where they're at. But they don't give you any strategies for how to get them from A to B. They tell you what B is, but you have to work out how to get them there. That's a bit of a problem. But they're good in terms of if you've got work samples and you want to annotate them - pinpoint exactly what they're doing and where they're at. But then it's hard because you're left up to your own devices with what you do to move them.*

The two teachers in the Case Studies who were working with the first language of the ESL learners saw the need for a framework to assess the learner's first language. Maree, a mainstream teacher, felt that the need for equity in the Queensland Year 2 Diagnostic Net was sufficiently critical to design a framework

to assess the children's literacy development in Creole. In doing so she adapted the Year 2 Diagnostic Net framework.

Minh, an ESL teacher running a bilingual program in a Queensland mainstream school would like to design a duplicate of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net Continua for Vietnamese, *'looking at it from a Vietnamese first language perspective'*. She would *'liquid paper out all the bits that don't translate into first language to make them more bilingual'*. She would use this instrument with the students in her bilingual program, who mostly comprise students who were born in Australia but speak Vietnamese at home.

In the mainstream pre-primary, Linda and Elizabeth expressed the need for a framework fitted to the pre-primary context. Linda feels that a framework for a pre-primary child without a focus on the social and emotional areas is of little use.

Elizabeth, a pre-primary mainstream teacher, felt that the need for a framework which captured the oral performance of her ESL pre-primary students was sufficiently important to re-design the First Steps Oral Language Continuum.

Elizabeth also wants to see more importance put on process rather than production in a framework sensitive to the pre-primary context, since this is what she feels is important for assessment in her classroom. She makes her statement in the form of a poem she gives to the researcher, *'Is There Anything in Your Bag Today'*.

*I've learned about a snail and a worm  
Remembered how to take my turn,  
Helped a friend when he was stuck,  
Shared and played with the blue tip-truck.  
Looked at words from left to right,  
Agreed to differ, not to fight.  
So, please don't say.  
'What? Nothing in your bag today?'*

*Yes, I played the whole day through,  
I played to learn the things I do.  
I discovered a problem, found a clue,  
And worked out for myself just what to do.  
but all of this is in my head,  
And not in my bag, like you said.*

In the intensive language centre, Janet expresses the need to have the ESL framework she is using more specifically tailored to her new arrival context. In her context she needs a framework which allows for five years oral development in a language that is not English; for discrepancies between cognitive and linguistic levels, she describes how this works both ways for children with high and low literacy backgrounds; for accelerated progress in English in the new arrived ESL learner. She is satisfied that the Bandscales do that. However, she feels that the descriptions more accurately describe ESL performance in the mainstream rather than in the intensive centre context. Given the support in the intensive centre, the ESL learners are able to do things that they are described as having difficulties with in the mainstream context:

*So we were saying that some of the things that it says here, won't be able to do this or this, we were saying will be able to do this or this because of the context of ILC (Intensive Language Centre).*

Janet has also identified a need for a fine-grained assessment tool for on-going diagnostic purposes in her ESL context and has designed a system of Negotiated Evaluation. She uses the Bandscales as an framework to interpret ongoing assessment.

Some teachers want the frameworks to be inclusive of the diverse range of backgrounds and needs that exist among their ESL learners. Maree, in the Cape, wants to have low and non-print English literacy backgrounds taken account of in the Year 2 Diagnostic Net. She also wants the stage of second language oral performance taken into account in its reading and writing framework.

Deidre, an ESL teacher in a special school, wants a framework that will describe the performance of her students with learning difficulties and show what they *can* do. She discusses the staff's reaction to meeting First Steps on a recent professional development day:

*And the staff are quite thrilled because it goes down to such a basic level that they say 'Oh, look, our students are on this, they're doing it'. Because all the other documents don't cater for such a basic level. But when you look at First Steps Reading, the starting point talks about pre-reading behaviours and turning pages and all that and they say, 'Oh look, they can do it, they can do it, yes, yes'. Even if it was just chanting rhymes. 'Oh, we do that'. So that was good.*

And so we have returned to the point at which we began. The teachers want *all* their learners in their great diversity to be placed on the progress maps. In relation to this project they want *all* their ESL learners to be included, to be '*placed*' not '*displaced*': those with non-print English literacy backgrounds, those with low or high literacy backgrounds and those with learning difficulties. The teachers in general did not want to see the ESL learners '*stuck*' in the lowest or lower levels of the mainstream frameworks, when they could see that they were actually making progress, sometimes very rapidly. They want to be able to identify them as ESL learners, understand their diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, and they want to be able to show what they can do. We have just seen that Leigh, a mainstream teacher in the Pilbara, wants a framework for her ESL learners where she can map progress and '*can actually be excited to see them moving on*'. There is strong evidence that this is a sentiment with which all the other teachers in the Case Studies would strongly agree.

## **The Teachers' Views of the Assessment Frameworks: Main Findings**

### **The Frameworks and Young ESL Learners**

- All teachers want a framework that clearly shows the progress of all learners including their ESL learners.
- Many teachers were concerned that the mainstream frameworks did not show what their ESL learners were able to do especially in relation to the children's particular age and stage of development. These frameworks made it appear as though they were not progressing in English.
- Many teachers felt that the mainstream frameworks were driving the curriculum in inappropriate ways towards a focus on short term assessable goals rather than the long term needs of their ESL students.
- There was a strong belief that the mainstream frameworks did not take account of the contribution of oracy to beginning literacy and, in particular,

that they failed to indicate the development of oracy typical of young ESL learners.

- Several teachers felt that the importance of listening in English needed to be taken into consideration in assessing literacy development and some appreciated the specificity of the descriptions of listening for ESL children in, for example, the ESL Bandscales.
- Many teachers appreciated that the ESL frameworks clearly indicated and reflected the performance of their ESL learners.
- Some mainstream teachers reported difficulty in finding out about and understanding the background and experiences of their ESL learners. They also reported initial difficulty with identifying their students as ESL learners and gauging how critical the ESL factor was in their students' learning and performance. Mainstream teachers who had obtained access to an ESL framework were very positive about the way it solved the dilemmas posed by the mainstream frameworks in relation to their ESL learners.
- Some teachers expressed concern about the equity issues in the context of externally imposed mainstream frameworks. They were pleased if their students' received extra assistance as an outcome of assessment but were worried that the parents perceived their children to be failing. They were further concerned about possible inappropriate decisions being made about remedial interventions for ESL children.
- Several teachers, especially the pre-primary teachers, felt it was unfair and inappropriate to assess children in a second language so early in their exposure to the new language.

### **The Frameworks and the Teachers**

- Virtually all the teachers placed a high value on finding continuity and consistency between their original reference points in assessment and a new framework and often endeavoured to make links in a variety of ways. When dealing with a number of frameworks teachers linked them together in ways that were coherent for them and with their established system of curriculum implementation. Sometimes this meant that frameworks were assigned or confined to a purpose that may not have been intended in their original design.
- Many teachers relied on advisers and colleagues to provide concepts and links which helped them to interpret a framework and their confusions were often resolved through discussion with other teachers within and, especially, between schools.
- Teachers who were positive about the potential of a framework tended to be those who were well supported by their school communities and specialist advisers.
- Teachers in States that imposed State-wide assessment procedures felt a great deal of resistance to such procedures due to their perception of the harmful impact on the students' self worth and the parents' belief in the achievements of their children.

- Almost all the teachers were concerned with the workload involved in using the frameworks and the seeming intrusion of constant record-keeping on their planning and teaching time.
- Several of the mainstream frameworks and the two national ESL frameworks were seen by several teachers as not manageable as resources for on-going, regular assessment in their existing forms.
- Some teachers were concerned about consistency of interpretation of the language of the frameworks across their system.
- In depth knowledge of the frameworks on behalf of certain mainstream and ESL specialists had enabled them to take professional leadership within their school and their local system in addressing the needs they perceived for accounting for the performance of their ESL learners.
- Certain teachers who perceived a framework as inadequate or inappropriate to their particular students undertook the design of their own alternative frameworks.

### **The Teachers' Ideal Frameworks**

The majority of the teachers in the study shared the following beliefs concerning the kind of assessment framework with which they would most like to work:

- A framework that provides a strong link between teaching (including goals and planning) and assessment.
  - An ESL framework that has a strong professional development focus, particularly for mainstream teachers, by providing an understanding of the varying backgrounds of ESL learners and by proposing strategies for teaching to the various levels of development in the framework.
  - A framework to assess or, at least, understand the major characteristics of the first language of ESL learners, particularly those in bilingual programs. This would include provision for assessing literacy in the first language of ESL learners.
  - A framework which details the development of oracy in English as a second language and which accounts for the role oracy in the development of reading and writing at particular stages.
  - A framework which is sensitive to different teaching contexts. For example, the contextual differences between pre-primary, mainstream primary, and Intensive Language Centre teaching in terms of environments, priorities and procedures.
  - A framework which is inclusive of the range of ESL learners and does not characterise such learners as if they were a homogeneous group. Inclusion would need to take account of such variables as, for example: children who are new arrivals, those who have been born in or spent a long time in Australia, those with specific learning difficulties, and those with non-print literacy backgrounds as compared with children from strongly print-based literacy backgrounds, etc.
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# Chapter Six

## Constructing ESL Learners: The Purposes and Consequences of Assessment

Caroline Barratt-Pugh

### Introduction

The purposes of assessment and the ways in which it is carried out, determine to a large extent our children's future. Sally Tomlinson (1992) wrote about the potential of assessment:

*In the final decade of the twentieth century the distribution of life chances in urban technological societies will depend more than ever before on credentials obtained in educational systems. Schools will increasingly act as selection agencies - determining the kind and amount of knowledge and skills children are offered, assessing and recording the levels of acquisition of knowledge and rationing the qualifications which allow entry to higher education, training and employment. (Tomlinson, 1992, p.389)*

Thus, given the power of assessment, increasing emphasis on the accountability of schools and the monitoring of standards through assessment, this paper describes the purposes of assessment that the teachers identified and how they collected evidence to inform their judgements. Given that assessments are based on underlying assumptions about teaching and learning, the design, implementation and use of assessments has important consequences for all learners, particularly in a multi-ethnic society. The second half of the paper explores the possible consequences of different types of assessments used by the teachers for ESL children.

### Why and How Do The Teachers Assess?

The purpose of assessment is multi-functional and interrelated. The teachers in the Case Studies collected data in a number of ways as a means of monitoring their own teaching, reporting to parents, making decisions about the children's future and meeting the demands of the school and system. Frequently a range of assessments, collected in different ways were used to inform each purpose. Thus the process of assessment is complex, often involving a combination of ongoing informal and fairly structured formal judgements, leading to a detailed and comprehensive view of the children's achievements. By identifying the different purposes and relating these to particular types of assessment practices, there is some danger of oversimplifying and underrepresenting what teachers actually did. However, it is possible to make general distinctions between different purposes and to some extent summarise what teachers did in order to meet the requirements of each purpose.

### To Monitor Progress and to Inform Classroom Practices.

A major purpose for assessment as revealed by the Case Studies was the concern to find out about the children's progress over a given period of time and at given stage in their learning. Several teachers stressed the need to consider children's performance in a range of contexts. For many teachers this enabled them to plan appropriately, group the children according to particular criteria and identify children who needed special help.

The following five methods of assessment, used to monitor progress and inform classroom practices were identified from the Case Studies:

- i) general observation, joint discussion and anecdotal notes.
- ii) observation of specific classroom activities.
- iii) use of specific criteria.
- iv) use of specifically designed tasks.
- v) discussion with the ESL children.

The use of the following five methods varied across the Case Study teachers.

I will describe and discuss each of these in turn, starting with the use of general observation and joint discussion, which teachers' used to monitor student progress and inform pedagogy. The majority of teachers in the study used informal general observation of classroom activities as part of their daily teaching. This was often referred to as a means of building up '*in head knowledge*' of their ESL students through continuous assessment. This informal observation took many forms, ranging from the '*mental noting*' of anything that seemed to be significant about the ESL child's learning and behaviour to the specific focus on particular aspects of language and literacy.

In some classrooms informal observation was verified or extended through extensive consultation with another adult. For example, in contexts where teachers worked with assistants or an ESL specialist teacher, assessment was often used to identify individual needs and co-ordinate team teaching activities or withdrawal groups. For many teachers this joint assessment was also seen as the opportunity to create a picture of the whole child. Clare at Oxford Street talked about the importance of joint assessment in gaining a full picture of the ESL child from different perspectives. Clare and Stephanie, the ESL specialist teacher at Oxford Street, placed an A in a circle on their unit outline to identify those tasks to be assessed. Having decided which activities would be used to assess the children, they observed and made notes about the children's performance, focusing on different students. After each observation they compared notes and used these to add information to a checklist which gave them a comprehensive picture of each ESL child.

In classrooms with bilingual teachers or bilingual assistants, often work was translated and discussed in relation to developing competence in two languages. Minh who was responsible for the Vietnamese half of the bilingual program at Lachlan Street Primary, continually observed and informally assessed the ESL children:

*All of the things they do for me are used for assessment. When I notice something important I usually write it down. I mainly assess their concepts what they haven't got and what they have got (in Vietnamese).*

Rather than relying on memory alone, in order to monitor progress and inform planning, many teachers recorded their informal observation in the form of anecdotal notes, kept on loose pieces of paper, daily record books or in booklets

for each child. Jenny at Hillsdale English Language Centre explained how she tries to be systematic in her observations:

*I use anecdotal records mostly, otherwise it's hard to remember. They're just rough notes probably, and I've started this system so that I can see how often I actually notice a child. (I write) the date and whatever it is: process writing, oral language, reading, handwriting and I'm keeping those kinds of things in a book at the moment.*

Using the same book Jenny and the bilingual assistant, Ibrahim, write notes about one-to-one reading with the children.

The second method that teachers used to identify their ESL students' progress, was the assessment of specific ongoing classroom activities. Having gained an overall picture of ESL children in the class, several teachers spoke about the ways in which this helped to confirm their general observations about the children's progress. The observation of specific classroom tasks enabled many teachers to ascertain how the children were coping with school generally and with group and individual tasks. This seemed to give some teachers confidence in the appropriateness of their teaching and learning activities. Thus informal observations were often complemented by focusing on specific activities which were part of everyday classroom life.

For example, Sara at St. Bertrams assessed all the children in the class continuously within the context of regular classroom activities. She recorded the teaching episode to be assessed, justified her choice and then identified how the assessment would be carried out. Joanne at Nyamal chose a number of activities to assess each day, which were designed to reveal whether the children had achieved specific outcomes. Marion at Greenway explained how she used particular activities to assess her students' oracy:

*For example, when they are having their news telling in the morning while they're in their little groups, or when they've picked out their best one to speak to the class, I'll go and sit down at their desk and jot down how the child is speaking. What sort of language, proper sentences, whether they are missing out the prepositions and things like that, whether they are using past tense or future tense, if they are using any colloquial terms.*

The classroom tasks that teachers used varied. Some teachers felt it was important to assess ESL children using general classroom tasks as a means of measuring them against their monolingual peers. Others felt it was important to assess ESL children using tasks and assessment criteria which took account of the process of second language development. Maree at Andelu Campus and Minh at Lachlan Street Primary stressed the importance of creating contexts through which children can reveal their achievements in both English and their home languages.

The third method of assessment that many of the Case Study teachers used to monitor progress more systematically, was the documentation of children's achievement's against specific criteria. These criteria were often compiled by teachers to meet their particular needs and derived from a number of different sources or modified from a published document. Several teachers felt this enabled them to assess children more systematically and in more detail. Others felt that by using the same criteria for all children, they were being equitable in their judgements. Others argued that this ensured all children are assessed on a regular basis and at their own level of competence.

For example Janet, Marion and Yuen at Greenway Intensive Language Centre used a typed form which is divided into six learning categories which are taken from the Australian Language Levels Guidelines (1988). Under each heading there are minor categories. Each week the teachers choose between two and three children in their class and focus their observations on these particular children in a variety of activities. As they observe and interact with the children they note down their achievements and understandings on the form, which is stuck to each child's desk. This particular method of assessment was referred to as Negotiated Evaluation, as the more fluent children are invited to contribute to the process of assessment.

Many of the teachers used different forms of checklists. For example, Clare and Stephanie at Oxford Street complete a checklist about a particular genre by extracting information from their observations and anecdotal records. Leigh at Weaver Primary School developed her own checklists which relate to specific aspects of language. During the study she completed a checklist for each child about their knowledge of the alphabet and sound-symbol relationships. On the left hand side of the checklist there are three boxes with different levels of sight words. As the child reads the words correctly they are ticked off. On the right hand side is a list of letters, followed by five columns which reflect the level of achievement. Leigh completes checklists about once a term.

Jenny at Hillsdale English Language Centre uses checklists at the end of a unit of work. The checklist consists of six statements about the unit of work. Jenny refers to some of the children's completed unit worksheets which she has commented on, to fill in the checklist. As well as using a tick or a cross she occasionally makes a written comment. June at Oxford Street sometimes works with Stephanie, the specialist ESL teacher, to design an appropriate checklist for a particular element within a unit of work. The checklist covers a range of information about conceptual understanding, language use and confidence. On the basis of observation, work samples and joint discussion, June completes the checklist for each child. Nicole at Weaver Primary School occasionally uses a checklist as she works with individual children on their reading. Aimee at Southern Primary school uses a 'tick' checklist in a range of curriculum areas which include such areas as viewing and newstelling.

The fourth method of assessment that some teachers used to monitor progress and inform their classroom practices is based on the assessment of specific tasks to gain particular information about their children. For example, Rose at Harthill and Marion at Greenway used cloze and miscue analysis tests. Some teachers used specifically designed tasks or tests to elicit particular information about the students' spelling performance, letter-sound correspondence and sight word recognition. These were often carried out individually with each child. Rose at Harthill sends a *My Words and Sound Book* home for the children to practice. In term four of Year One, Erika, a peripatetic ESL teacher in Queensland, gives the ESL children a reading and writing task at the year level expected of them. Some teachers used published checklists, tests and procedures which come from a range of sources. For example Kylie at Banksia Pre-Primary has adapted a Pre-Primary Assessment for School Beginners which was designed for children 'at risk'. She feels it is useful for all children. She uses a number of sources to complete each section which include, Language, Cognitive, Motor and Social / Emotional development. Barry at Daviston Primary School uses a Kindergarten Screening Procedure to assess his students language development. He sits with individual children as they work through the program which includes tests related to reading and writing.

The fifth method of monitoring progress and informing classroom practice involved talking to individual or groups of children as they complete activities. Barry at Daviston Pre-Primary explained that he likes to talk to the children about their work 'so that I can hear and see their responses and also note particular responses'. He felt this enables him to identify children's understanding of the process as well as the product. Several teachers also involved children in the assessment process to help them see their own progress, evaluate their own work and identify future goals. For some teachers this involved talking to individual children about their progress. For others it involved encouraging the children to write their own comments.

For example, Joanne at Nyamal establishes reading goals with the children for particular periods of time. As the children read to Joanne they are given the opportunity to consider if they achieved their goals. Aimee at Southern scribes the children's comments onto their Work Samples cover sheet. On completing written tasks, children in Leigh's class at Weaver Primary are encouraged to evaluate their work. June at Oxford Street asks the children to write a written evaluation of their work completed as part of an assessment activity. Nicole at Weaver Primary explains how she involves the children 'I like to conference with the children a lot to find out how they are feeling about things.' Towards the end of the Kindergarten year, Carly the ESL assistant at St. Bertrams conducts reading and writing interviews with each child. Her questions focus on attitudes, experiences and strategies. The children in Janet and Marion's classes at Greenway Intensive Language Centre are encouraged through discussion to make a written contribution to their report. Janet explained the process:

*I say to them, 'go away for 5 minutes. I want you to write something that you've learned this week, I want you to write what you think you're good at, what you want, what's hard for you, what you like to do best at school and then (as a forward looking thing) what you would like to get better at and how do you think you could do that.*

In many schools teachers used their 'in head' knowledge (informal observations, shared perceptions, anecdotal notes) and more formal assessment sheets, not only as a means of developing their own understanding of the children's progress and impact of their teaching, but as a starting point for their report to parents.

### **To Report to Parents**

All the teachers in the study reported to parents in one form or another. Reports varied from single sheets with a series of statements in each curriculum area, with different levels that were ticked by the class teacher, to documents describing what the child had achieved in each curriculum area, to statements about the child's general progress. The content of reports ranged from teachers' general comments based on their own classroom assessments to the presentation of results from a particular framework of assessment. Some reports included a mixture of these. In some cases reports were translated and parents were invited to respond. These 'formal' reports were often substantiated by sample packs of children's work, sent home at various times during the year.

Samples of work take different forms but were used by all the teachers in the study. These usually took the form of writing samples but drawing was included for some of the younger children and Aimee at Southern included work related to viewing. The majority of teachers collected samples over a period of time, ranging from a term or a whole year, depending upon the context and their use. In addition to collecting writing samples in English, Elizabeth at Harthill includes samples that children have written in their home language which My, her

multilingual assistant translates. Maree at Andelu Campus encourages the children to write in Creole and English. The samples are written in, stuck, stapled or loosely placed in 'scrap books', 'writing folders' 'assessment books', 'files of work', 'exercise books' or 'learning journals'. Sometimes these are sent home as 'sample packs', or samples are selected from these to complement the report.

Assessment through the use of work samples takes various forms. Many of the teachers, write notes on the children's work after it has been completed. Jenny at Hillsdale English Language Centre refers to the way in which the picture or writing was completed as well as the content of the writing. Clare at Oxford Street makes notes about language skills in relation to a particular genre. Their comments vary according to each child's level of achievement and their perception of what is important at a particular stage. Other teachers, analyse the writing samples against predetermined criteria. Joanne at Nyamal explains the procedure she uses:

*I write the descriptions of the task, followed by several outcomes of the lesson and then basically I tick as to whether the child has done it or not. This form of assessment is pinned to a sample of work and included as a collection of on-going dated samples across the learning areas from the beginning to the end of the year.*

Carly, the ESL assistant at St Bertrams falls somewhere in between the above two examples. In her initial analysis Carly makes notes on each writing sample using pointers from the English K-6 syllabus as a guide.

Some teachers felt that the assessed writing task used for reporting must be completed independently. As Rose at Harthill explained, this represents what the children can do without help. She describes independent writing as 'a raw sample of their writing, without any intervention'. Once a week the children are encouraged to write in their Have-a Go- Pads rather than in their Daily Writing Pads. At Oxford Street the samples of work from assessed teaching activities are completed without any help from June or Stephanie.

The reports to parents had several purposes. As well as informing them about their child's progress and achievements they are often used as a means of encouraging parents to help their children at home. June and Stephanie at Oxford Street explained that their reports to parents were designed to 'inform, involve and make public statements about the kinds of learning that occurs in school.' At Hillsdale Language Centre the parents are asked to complete a Parent Opinion Survey as to how they feel the Centre prepared their child for mainstream school. Kylie thought it was important for parents to recognise the importance of Pre-Primary education. So, she sends a work sample book home to parents at the end of each term which contains 12 selected assessed pieces of work. Leigh at Weaver felt, 'You need to send something to help the children as well. It would be good to have a parents' section.'

In some schools parents are encouraged to respond to reports and if necessary their responses are translated. Stephanie at Oxford Street explained that in the report to parents, the school aims to translate some of the sample materials into the three most commonly used languages. However, with a recent reduction in funds the school finds it easier to translate sets of indicators (which form part of the report) only once, and then continue to use them year after year, rather than attempt translate more individual reports, which might vary from year to year.

However, some teachers argued that reports are not successful as a means of informing parents about their children's progress. Laura at St. Cecilia's

commented that neither the Queensland Student Performance Standards which was introduced at St. Cecilia (for all classes above Year three) or the Year Two Diagnostic Net, are appropriate for reporting to parents. She paraphrased all the Writing ESL Bandscales from Levels one to six to use as a reporting format instead of the Student Performance Standards reporting format. Laura did this in order to help the teachers make comments that were accessible to parents and reflected what the children had achieved. Nicole at Weaver Primary supplements the school's report sheet with a folder of work samples. Even so, she would still prefer to select important tasks the children have done and comment on why they have done the task and what they have learned. This would inform parents about the purpose and outcomes of the activity, giving them insight into learning and teaching in the classroom context.

Maree at Andelu claimed that the Department's reporting document for the Year 2 Diagnostic Net is not appropriate for the parents: *'it makes little sense to any English speaking parents, let alone a parent with a non-English speaking background'*. In an attempt to overcome this difficulty, Maree uses her own records to show the parents how their children have progressed in both English and Creole. Minh agreed with Maree and felt that, even though the Year 2 Diagnostic Net Report on Literacy is translated into Vietnamese, many parents still have difficulty understanding it. In addition Minh felt that some parents *'are embarrassed to admit that they don't understand it because it is written in Vietnamese'*. In order to compensate for the limitations of the formal report, Minh shows the parents samples of the children's work through out the year.

On the other hand Leigh at Weaver Primary felt that some parents should take more responsibility for getting information about their children's progress. Leigh felt that she had tried hard to accommodate Tanya, who has recently arrived from Serbia, through the use of Serbian, and even though the parents have appreciated what she has done, Leigh felt that *'because they are in Australia they need to get a report in English'* and find a way of interpreting it. When talking about an Aboriginal child she commented:

*I always sent his reports home but (can) never get them to come up for an interview. If they don't come up, then I can't explain. So, if they are not interested in coming when I request them to, then I can't concern myself with that.*

It appeared that on the whole most teachers felt that reporting to parents was a positive and important part of the assessment process. It was seen by many teachers as part of their accountability. It gives parents an opportunity to share and celebrate their child's progress, to be involved in decisions about where to place their child, to discuss ways of supporting learning and to learn about the nature of teaching and learning in formal contexts. By translating reports teachers felt that they were more accessible to parents and this also signalled recognition of the children's linguistic backgrounds.

As well as using assessment in order to report to parents, in many schools the assessment was used to make decisions about resourcing the needs of ESL children and their future placement.

### **To Make Decisions About Each Child's Future.**

Decisions about resources and placements were made in a number of different ways using various assessment procedures. At Greenway Intensive Language Centre and Hillsdale English Language Centre, on the basis of extensive assessment information and in consultation with parents a decision is made about the child's readiness for a mainstream school. At Greenway the teachers

used the Bandscales as a means of ascertaining a child's readiness for a mainstream school. Elizabeth at Harthill is required to assess the children in the Pre-Primary at the end of the year for placement in the Intensive Language Centre at her School.

Some teachers identified a dilemma they face in relation to making judgements about children that determined their future support. If an ESL child is seen to be achieving at a particular level then in some cases support is withdrawn, freeing resources, validating the teaching program and potentially enhancing the child's self concept. But as the curriculum becomes more demanding the ESL child may actually need extra support. Conversely, if an ESL child does not appear to have reached the desired level, support is maintained. Thus giving the ESL child extra support but potentially creating a deficit view of her or his achievements and undermining the teachers program. Maree at Andelu expressed her dilemma about the results of the Year Two Diagnostic Net Validation, she wants:

*Good results in the Diagnostic Net Validation to prove what a great program we've got going, if we didn't have good results we'd get more intervention funding. It's a real Catch 22 situation.*

In some schools with an ESL specialist teacher decisions were made in conjunction with other teachers on the basis of a range of assessment practices. These shared assessments were used to determine which ESL children need support, the level of support needed and when to give classroom teachers full responsibility. Meredith the ESL teacher at Daviston uses her anecdotal records to target individual children for further attention:

*It's just something I do informally. I try to target the kinders from term 2 onwards. I know who is ESL in the kindergarten from the enrolment form. Often the teachers will say to me 'I've got someone who really needs help'. So it's a prioritising thing - who really needs it? So your third phasers quite often don't get a look in, unless you're doing a whole class method.*

Erika, a visiting ESL teacher in Queensland, identifies those ESL children who seem to have learning support needs rather than ESL needs and removes them from her list of visits. She felt that the learning support factor overrides their ESL background and it is not appropriate for her to work with these children. Erika then proceeds with initial diagnostic assessment. This includes the preparation of a Bilingual Learner's Profile, which includes information about home languages, religion, educational background, competence in mother tongue and initial assessment across the four language modes. She felt this information was very important for the mainstream classroom teachers so they do not make inappropriate assessments and design unsuitable intervention programs, when ESL children appear to be achieving less than their peer group.

Informal decision making was often carried out in conjunction with more formal measures. For example, at St. Bertram's a team of people, including the Assistant Principal and ESL Co-ordinator, monitor children identified by the classroom teacher as having special needs and consider a range of measures which may include diagnostic tests and an intervention program. Carly and Sara use The Early Literacy Assessment Program developed by the local diocese. This is completed through classroom observation, work samples, oral re-tellings, writing and literacy interviews with each child. In Queensland support is determined by the Year Two Diagnostic Net. All children, including those who are funded for ESL support and who are identified through this assessment process are then funded for intervention programs.

Sometimes teachers were able to use their assessments to ask for specific help. When Barry at Daviston is concerned about the ESL children's speech he can refer them to the speech therapist. The speech therapist at Greenvale Special School conducts diagnostic assessments of the children's progress and draws up a detailed, individual program for the guidance of the generalist teachers as well as the ESL teacher. As Deidre, the ESL teacher Greenvale Special School works with individual children on their programs she assesses their progress using particular activities. She notes down what the child can do and any particular difficulties encountered. The Learning Support teacher at St. Joan's, where Erika works as the ESL specialist teacher, used the Waddington Diagnostic Reading Test with a child she was concerned about. However, Erika pointed out that she felt this test was quite inappropriate for the particular ESL child.

Once a decision has been made about the child's next placement, many teachers pass their assessments onto the appropriate teacher or school. During the study Jenny, at Hillsdale Language Centre and Olivia the mainstream teacher at the receiving school, met to discuss a particular child's exit report. At Greenway Intensive Language Centre the teachers write reports for mainstream teachers based on their negotiated evaluation and their Bandscales assessment. They would like to refer more directly to the Bandscales but felt this may not be useful for mainstream teachers who are not familiar with the Bandscales. If their students move into the next phase in the Intensive Language Centre, the new teacher receives a report folder for each child which contains all their negotiated evaluation reports and the parent report. Laura at St. Cecilia's uses the Bandscales to explain to mainstream teachers why an ESL child may not be moving through the Developmental Continua used in the Year Two Diagnostic Net assessment. Kylie at Banksia Pre-Primary felt that it is important to provide the Year 1 teacher with a detailed profile of each child before they enter the primary school. In order to demonstrate the learning outcomes at Pre-Primary level and promote continuity.

### **To Provide Information for the School Principal**

In several schools Principals collected assessment information about each class in the School. In some schools the teachers were asked to report against Phases and Levels within particular assessment frameworks. These included published frameworks, frameworks derived from curriculum documents and eclectic school designed frameworks. Some principals used the information as a means of profiling the whole school. Others used this to look for patterns across the year groups.

At Oxford Street Primary the school is working towards collating assessment information from the classroom teachers on to a computer to develop a profile of each child's progress in oracy and literacy. At Weaver, Harthill and Southern Primary schools the teachers are asked to tell the Principal the proportion of children in their classes who have achieved a particular Phase on the First Steps Continuum in language and literacy. At Harthill Primary all the information is fed into a computer and the teachers receive a print-out of each Continuum for the whole class. Rose felt this gave her a *broad idea where the children are in relation to each other*. Elizabeth who is also at Harthill commented that it confirms what she already knows. In addition, the print out for each year group is used by the Principal to map the development of the school as a whole. At Southern Primary School progress in written development is monitored by class teachers by updating the First Steps Writing Developmental Continuum for each student in term three. The Writing Phases showing all key indicators are entered into the computer using Pro Star and the information is used to generate a series of tables and graphs depicting the percentage of children in each phase at each year level.

Some teachers' commented that this may lead to the impression that the assessments were objective and therefore somehow more valid than other types of assessments.

At Greenway Intensive Language Centre the Deputy Principal was interested in developing a way of exploring the Bandscales from each Phase to see if there are any patterns within or across the classes. Although the Principal at Oxford Street did not require assessment information from each class, the school as a whole has a comprehensive assessment policy which is used for reporting to parents and informing planning. The school collectively decides which written genre will be the focus of assessment each term.

### **To Provide Information for the Education Systems at a State Level**

The following descriptions are examples of the way in which schools are required to report to the Department of Education in different States as described by the teachers. In Queensland teachers are required to assess children in year two using the Year Two Diagnostic Net process, based on the First Steps Writing and Reading Developmental Continua. All children in year two are required to perform a range of state wide specifically designed assessment tasks. The tasks are designed to enable teachers to map children on the Queensland adaptation of the First Steps Continuum. Many of the teachers involved in the process felt that not only is it inaccessible when used to report to parents, but it is an inappropriate means of assessing the development of ESL children. For example although Laura at St Cecilia's sees First Steps as '*a great teaching tool*', she is not happy with its use as a formal means of assessment:

*I didn't like the validation process. I found that it was artificial and in some ways unnecessary. We found that the children were not comfortable in a situation that was not their normal classroom situation. Obviously you can't but help put pressure on children. We found that the results of the validation process were not always as accurate as we thought they might be.*

Erika, an ESL specialist teacher in a number of Queensland schools, also had some concerns about the Year Two Diagnostic Net process and results:

*I want to tell the teachers 'Well OK they've been caught in the Net, but look at all the things they can do and let's take them further; not look at them and say, look at all the things they are not doing yet, but they will be doing those in the future.'*

Maree at Andelu argued that the results of some aspects of the Year Two Diagnostic Net are based on a false premise, because they do not take into account the relationship between the children's first and second languages:

*If the children are reading and if an 'f' is missed off the end of a word, or an 'ed' or an 'ing' that is a wrong word and it is considered an error, and yet they are not part of Creole. We're expecting a perfectly syntactically correct sentence that they've picked up from reading the book, but because they've left off an 'ed' or 'ing' or something like that that's counted as an error. That to me is biased against their language skills and I have a bit of a problem with that.*

In New South Wales, schools were encouraged to begin to implement the Early Learning Profiles developed by the Department of Education as a means of supplementing the State version of the National English Profile. Many schools across the state participated in a departmental project which involved a great deal of record keeping and documentation. Daviston Primary school were involved in this process but subsequently not included in the 'official' project.

Barry commented 'It was kind of mandatory for the beginning of the year last year then it just fritted'. Many of the teachers at Daviston felt this undermined their attempts to understand and implement outcome based assessment. However, in spite of the resulting loss of morale for the staff and feelings of bewilderment, Barry once more tried to use the Early Learning Profiles.

For the purpose of reporting to the District Office and through it to the Education Department in Perth, Nyamal Primary school has adopted 13 Performance Indicators, the first of which refers to literacy development. Joanne was very aware of the possible impact of reporting and accountability if comparisons are made between her Kartujarra speakers and mainstream students in urban areas:

*I think the pressure is becoming more relevant these days with accountability. I think people are getting a bit worried about it ..... I don't feel pressure from outside influences. I'm realistic because I know it's their language barrier that's one reason holding them up and the other barrier is health. I know they are very capable of learning and it's going to take longer because of the language.*

For reporting purposes the Principal required a clear overall picture of the children's achievements as a Year group rather than detailed information. Early in term four, Joanne completes her own copy of the school's Information Management System booklet, providing the Principal with a summarised account of the children's progress during the year. Joanne's report is combined with the reports of the other teachers and translated into graphic summaries of achievement against the Indicators. The graphs indicate, against the school's chosen assessment frameworks, the proportion of students in each year who are attaining the different developmental Phrases.

In summary it is evident that the teachers in the Case Studies used a complex web of assessment practices to serve a number of purposes. The majority of teachers were constantly evaluating, modifying and extending their assessment practices in order to further identify their student's achievements and represent their progress as accurately and effectively as possible. The complexity of this process in which several assessment practices inform different purposes can be represented in the following continuum.

**Figure 6.1: Model of the Relationship Between Different Methods of Assessment and the Decision Making Process.**

	Informal Assessment	←	→	Formal Assessment
METHOD	Ongoing classroom assessment tasks of ind. children			Specific ass. based on frameworks General ass. based on frameworks
PURPOSES	Monitor progress inform pedagogy			Report to parents & teachers Inform other schools Report to state
IMPLICATIONS	Increase t'er knowledge			Inform and make decisions involving future placement Resourcing Comparing Informing Public

## Some Potential Consequences of Assessment.

As can be seen from the above description, teachers in the study used a range of assessment practices for a number of different purposes. The types of assessment used were influenced by the teachers' perceptions of ESL children, the rights of parents to know about their child's progress and the information requested by the Principal and the System. It is arguable that the purposes and methods of assessment play a major part in **constructing particular views of ESL children** which in turn determines to a great extent their educational experiences. While recognising that the ways in which ESL children are perceived change according to the context in which teaching and learning takes place, it is possible to deduce five views of ESL children from the Case Studies:

- ESL children as no different from other children
- ESL children as distinct but subsumed in mainstream frameworks
- ESL children as distinct from other children
- ESL children as contributors of a first language
- ESL children as emergent bilinguals.

These views are related and sometimes overlap.

### ESL Children as No Different from Other Children

When considering the purpose and methods of assessment, some teachers felt it was unnecessary and inappropriate to make a distinction between ESL children and other children in the class. Kylie at Banksia Pre-Primary argued that a common assessment tool across the school ensures that the pre-primary is seen as part of the whole school. Aimee at Southern Primary used common assessments to help her identify differences between 'poor', 'average' and 'good' students. Barry at Daviston Kindergarten, was able to talk at length about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of many of his students, but felt it was not necessary to make a distinction between ESL and monolingual English speaking children in his program or assessment:

*There's not much difference particularly I feel in kindergarten, not much different to how I assess the others, because they're all learning at pretty much the base level, then I don't think their assessment at this stage needs to be very different.*

When describing two Aboriginal children in her class, Leigh highlighted the difficulty she found actually identifying ESL children:

*It took me a while to work out that Michael was ESL. A lot of these children are sort of ESL basis, but I'm not too sure how much he understood because he was so quiet and you put it down sometimes to their shyness. He (Alfred) shows all the indications of having another language at home but really to know whether that's right I'd have to ring home or I'd get the Aboriginal Education Workers to go out there and try to find out. Well it's very difficult to get the parents in and for years I have tried and tried and tried.*

On the other hand, Leigh felt that she could make some assumptions, especially in relation to Aboriginal children:

*I knew Alfred was ESL because of where he comes from, because of his behaviour, because of his brother and sister in the bigger school. You know, they sort of cling together. Yes, a lot of these little sorts of traits. I can't say for sure because I've got no proof, but I believe he speaks another language at home.*

However, even though Leigh identified some of her learners as ESL, she endeavoured to provide the same learning experiences and assessment for all her class as she feels the ESL children do not want to be made to feel different:

*I have found that the ESL children don't want something different, they want what other children have had. He (Alfred) wouldn't understand a lot of this but he still does the things that other children do and to give him something completely different, I have found that they feel strange. Last year with ESL children I tried to give them something more basic and more simplified, but they didn't want it, they wanted what everyone else was doing.*

Consequently, in order to ensure inclusivity and equity, gain comparative data and make children feel comfortable in the classroom context, some teachers viewed their ESL children as individuals, but within a 'mainstream' frame of reference. The ESL child's progress is assessed in relation to the achievements of English speaking children in their class. Although this enabled teachers to maintain a sense of overall development within their class, to what extent can the ESL child use prior knowledge and experience to demonstrate their level of understanding? To what extent might this make the ESL learner invisible?

Children's resistance to being identified as 'different' and teachers concern about the dangers of making children feel 'different' might suggest an interpretation of 'difference' as something which is undesirable. Several researchers have found that consequently, some children attempt to deny their cultural and linguistic background and strive to minimise its impact in the classroom context a number of ways. Others may be seen to resist the cultural norms of the classroom by asserting their cultural and linguistic background in ways that are sometimes interpreted as undesirable or disruptive (Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988). On the other hand some ESL children appear to live relatively comfortably between two cultures. However, regardless of their responses, can the full potential of ESL children be met in contexts which do not take account of the cultural and linguistic differences between children?

In addition, if an ESL child seems to be having particular difficulties or is felt to be 'falling behind' her or his peers, some teachers have the option of using diagnostic tests and/or bringing in a specialist, such as a speech therapist or an education support teacher. As a result some children may receive individual attention and support for identified needs, but within the 'norms' of their English speaking peers. Consequently, to what extent might the diagnostic assessments and subsequent interventions be appropriate, given their design for English as a first language speakers? Thus while ensuring ESL children are seen as part of the 'mainstream' culture of school, there is also a danger that in doing so, their achievements are underestimated and any difficulties are misinterpreted.

### **ESL Children as Distinct but Subsumed in Mainstream Frameworks**

In several schools teachers argued for the need to recognise differences between ESL and non-ESL children within the methods of assessment they were using. In many mainstream schools assessment frameworks tended to be those designed for English first language speakers. These were often supplemented with a range of informal assessments, which complimented, extended or challenged findings. Although frameworks based on monolingual English speaking children, were seen as providing detailed information about each child, several teachers commented on their limitations and the consequences for their ESL children. Some teachers argued that the frameworks which are normed on Anglo English speaking children do not allow for the accurate mapping of the progress of ESL learners, thus potentially misinterpreting or failing to represent genuine progress.

Consequently, some children appear to have made little progress during the year because these 'general' frameworks are not 'fine-tuned'.

In addition, Leigh at Weaver Primary found that what the ESL children can achieve in English appears to be below the average for her class. Nicole argued that ESL children do not appear to achieve as much as their peers because assessment indicators do not take into account the process of learning a second language. In this way Nicole sees the mainstream framework as discriminatory, creating a deficit view of ESL learners. This may lead to the beginning of a cycle in which the child is continually trying to 'catch up' with his or her peers. This potentially evolves into a 'self fulfilling prophecy' of failure. These results which suggest certain groups of children are underachieving have been linked to the development of negative stereotypical views of particular groups of children. In some cases this appears to have led to not only under-assessment but also under-performance (Smith and Tomlinson, 1989). Explanations of this 'failure' are often embedded in particular views of different groups of children. In essence, teacher attitude and expectation are seen as major factors in student performance and attainment. Leigh explained her view of Aboriginal children and the dilemma she faces when making decisions about what and how to teach:

*I am aware that they do more hands on activities in their culture and they learn by their experiences. And that's how their classroom is out there in the wide world, whereas we bring them in and sit them at a desk with a pencil and paper. So I know that's not normal with them so I had that in the back of my mind. But at the same time I'm not out there in the bush so I've got to develop their skills within the environment that they're in so that they can actually cope with mainstream and eventually get a job there. They (Aboriginal children) can be as bright as any child here you know but their background is different. Alfred comes to school with a little bit of English but you notice that a lot of the Aboriginal children will have limited English, enough to get by, enough to fool the teacher most of the time because they are very quiet. You could be fooled into thinking well he's either really behind, but then I would think perhaps being an Aboriginal child, you get familiar with them in this school, maybe he didn't go to pre-school.*

A group of teachers in Western Australia were concerned about the consequences of using the State designed Student Outcome Statements as a framework of assessment for ESL children. They felt that because the Student Outcome Statements are written for English first language speakers many of the underlying assumptions are not relevant to children in the early stages of ESL learning. Consequently their achievements are subsumed and their needs unrecognised or placed within a general category of needing remedial help. In addition, by not recognising the potential difference between cognitive level and linguistic encoding in English, the ESL child's conceptual understanding is at best ignored and at worst assumed to be at a much lower level. As a result this may lead to intellectually inappropriate and undemanding activities. Janet at Greenway Intensive Language Centre explained this in relation to writing:

*There's this huge discrepancy between cognitive and linguistic levels that in the first 12 months ESL learners don't show their true cognitive level because of the linguistic barrier. Frequently they write stuff here that looks like they are five years old and you see them write in their own language and you realise they have this sophisticated understanding for writing, so you're making the wrong assumption.*

The teachers also argued that using Student Outcome Statements to report to parents may give a false and potentially damaging profile of the child, leading to pressure and stress. Such misrepresentation also impacts on the child's self esteem and future placement. Kylie at Banksia Pre-Primary described how she felt the Student Outcome Statements position ESL children in relation to ethno-centric norms, consequently denying children access to learning through their home or community language:

*You know it's quite a racist little document isn't it? 'You do it our way or you don't do it,' all that sort of thing. I mean education is quite like that isn't it? I mean we have three girls in one group and they often sit there and speak in Malay. My aide, not the one I have now, she quite often said "No girls, talk in English'. But I don't I say to them 'Hey what are you saying to each other?' Maybe the aide thought we're all here to speak English. 'You're here you learn English.' But that's such a racist argument isn't it? 'You're here, you do it our way. Don't speak your own language, don't think in your own language think my way.'*

Minh talked about the dilemma she faced when considering the use of mainstream frameworks that are used as a basis of future support. Minh felt that the Year Two Diagnostic Net is not a fair representation of what ESL children can do. But, even when some ESL children are deemed to be achieving at the expected level on the Year Two Diagnostic Net this can result in the withdrawal of ESL support. Minh argued that the assessment process does not identify features of ESL that need some form of intervention. Thus help with specific aspects of literacy is not deemed necessary and some aspects of learning English as a second language for Vietnamese children are rendered invisible. Minh was particularly concerned about the grammatical aspects of learning a second language:

*The children are expected to get things like past tense, plurals. And what's not taken into consideration are all the cultural backgrounds that children come from. Because the Net is a first language process, these kinds of things are not even considered if a child is to have intervention. They come up in the next phase, but no one has been alerted that the children need to get there from the Net process. I think these things need to be taught to these children. It needs to be made explicit and I think they just assume that the children know all this and let mistakes happen.*

If the year two children reach a particular level of achievement in the Year Two Diagnostic Net, then it is assumed that they do not need any more ESL support. Consequently, Minh felt that some children may not reach their full potential. Referring to Vang, she argued:

*He has so much more potential and if that support continues he will actually achieve a lot more than he could do without that support. He's one of those children that will manage, he will just cope in the mainstream with other support. But with it, he will be one of the bright ones at the top.*

Minh also pointed out that schools have several weeks in which to prepare the children for the Year Two Diagnostic Net, which includes teaching the children a bank of sight words. She explained that the extensive setting up of the context for the Diagnostic Net Writing tasks is not typical of normal classroom practice. In addition, as the Year Two Diagnostic Net requires children to write in English, Minh uses some of her time with the Year Two ESL children to teach them to write in English. Consequently, to some extent teachers are 'teaching to the

assessment tasks' and the time the Vietnamese children spend working in their mother tongue is reduced.

Laura viewed the introduction of the Year two Diagnostic Net as a political move 'I felt that it was more of a political move than anything else to show the parents what we were doing'. However, rather than accurately portraying the children's achievements, Laura found that:

*The results of the validation process were not always as accurate as we thought they might be. Some children, many children did not produce writing like we expected that they would, from their normal writing. It was one-off. Even when we did the reading validation we found the children did not read as well as they might in other situations.*

Consequently Laura argued that, as well as putting pressure on children, which may lead to anxiety and therefore lower attainment, the Year Two Diagnostic Net may also lead to misrepresentation of the children's achievements and subsequent application of inappropriate support strategies for ESL children:

*It's not that the child is academically struggling; the child is there because the child has only been in the country for a short while, because the family speaks another language and the children are just moving through the phases of becoming a second language speaker. So it's not something to panic about, it's not something to attack with what we used to call 'remedial skills'.*

Erika has also pointed out that the Year Two Diagnostic Net process and results are often interpreted in terms of what ESL children can not do and have not achieved. This may portray ESL children as deficient in their language development, who fail to achieve the 'norms' identified in the Diagnostic Net. Finally, Maree was concerned that the Diagnostic Net does not take any account of the children's use of their home language. All non-standard forms of English are seen as 'errors' or 'mistakes'; the possible influence of the child's first language is not taken into account. Maree stated 'That to me is biased against their language skills and I have a bit of a problem with that'.

In addition, Nicole at Weaver Primary identified the potential mismatch between what she has taught and what is required, when she uses the Students Outcomes Statements to report on a number of areas:

*If you haven't taught lots and lots of that particular strand, when the whole school data is collected, there's a weakness because of the gap between what is to be reported and what you've done, I mean that's going to happen in anything.*

Consequently children may be assessed on areas in which they have little knowledge. However, it appeared from some of the Case Studies that not only was the relationship between what is taught and what is assessed problematic, but also the content and criteria of the assessment frameworks. Several teachers found the cultural bias of tests and assessment frameworks a cause for concern. Elizabeth at Harthill explained that ESL children may not manifest particular behaviours because they are not culturally appropriate. Maree at Andelu argued that children were 'caught in the Net' because of their lack of familiarity with texts rather than their lack of progress. Thus, she suggested that children come to school with different understandings about literacy, which may not be recognised within assessment frameworks. Consequently children are being judged on oracy and literacy behaviours which may conflict with their own experiences, or of which they have little knowledge. Thus the resulting record of a child's

achievement may be based on false assumptions which may lead to inappropriate decisions.

Some teachers commented on the danger of unfair comparisons within classes, across classes in the same school and across schools. Maree questioned the use of a framework which actually reveals whole schools as failing, *'whole schools are caught in the Net'*. Consequently, whole groups of children, when matched against a particular set of norms, which may be culturally and linguistically inappropriate, are never seen to be achieving at the required level. It appears that such assessment tends to highlight differences between groups, rather than highlighting equivalence and even similarities and commonalities within diversity. This inevitably constructs a divide between those who are deemed successful and those who are not, based on a particular set of assumptions about what should be assessed and how this is best carried out. The consequence of this for staff, parents and children may be far reaching in relation to policy and planning, staff moral and commitment, the children's sense of self and parents perceptions of their child's progress.

### ESL Children as Distinct From Other Children

Having identified the potential limitations of 'mainstream English' frameworks, several teachers argued that it is crucial to use frameworks that recognise the process of learning a second language. They argued that these methods of ESL assessment take into account not only the process of second language development but also other variables that might impact on the learning process. Many teachers felt that recognition of the specific nature of English as a second language enabled them to more accurately map the ESL child's progress. Nicole at Weaver Primary felt that the ESL Framework of Stages would inform her about the factors that could affect the ESL child's learning and *'the characteristics of the ESL child'*.

Both June and Stephanie at Oxford Street Primary identified several aspects of the nature of learning English as a second language, which they took account of when planning their program. These included the identification of specific aspects of learning English as a second language which they argue need to be explicitly taught, such as vocabulary, grammatical forms and different discourse structures:

*When some child doesn't tell me 'ambulance', which unfortunately it's like that with a few of them, it just makes me more aware that yes, I need heaps of clues. When they choose the wrong word we sit down and talk about it. I just realise how much they need to have input, like articles, they just don't use them. So you know that they don't have that ease with the grammar.*

Although both teachers agreed that the methods they use to teach English as a second language are equally appropriate for monolingual English speaking children, Stephanie commented that there are some differences which they need to pay explicit attention to:

*Well they (ESL students) don't use some structures, syntactically and structurally. We have to encourage a lot of structure, and that's built into our teaching and reading and writing and that sort of thing, we deliberately model those sort of structures.*

Janet at Greenway described how ESL Bandscales recognise the process of learning English as a second language as distinct from learning English as a first language:

*It enables teachers to better understand the language learning processes and to assess and record their progress in English and English across the curriculum. It provides a valid means of reporting to other teachers, to parents and learners and to administrators. It 'fills the gaps' in Student Outcome Statements in relation to ESL learners so that their needs and their performance are not subsumed but are recognised and valued.*

Thus, the ESL children are made visible and distinct from non-ESL children. This perceived 'difference' is interpreted in many ways, each having a different consequence. For some ESL children this means access to a Language Centre, for others it means withdrawal from or support within the 'mainstream' classroom. In Language Centres children are taught in relatively small groups and detailed insights into their particular needs influence teachers practices and assessments. Consequently teachers in Language Centres argued that they are able to recognise and accommodate individual differences, which include different experiences and levels of oracy and literacy.

Yuen at Greenway felt that the Intensive Language Centre has an important role to play in social and emotional development. Yuen explains:

*Socio-culture has to be looked after before the linguistic. When they come here most of them are stressed. So things like they have to be happy, they have to be motivated to learn, to be comfortable at school and if they're naughty they have to learn to be good first, before I can work out on the linguistic side*

The Deputy Principal at Greenway Intensive Language Centre felt that initial interviews with parents and children helped her to distinguish between pre-literate and literate children. This is an important distinction as it enabled the teachers to take into account the differential experiences of the children. Teachers at the Intensive Language Centres argued that one of their goals is to prepare the children for mainstream school, orienting children to 'cultural norms' and expectations. Thus viewing them as needing a basic level of English and an understanding of school behaviour before they can access the mainstream. For some children this means leaving their immediate environment to be bussed to another area to be with children who also speak English as a second language.

Janet also commented on the appropriateness of mainstream school for new arrivals:

*I watch kids come into the classroom and I can only speak for what happens here, and what I get from other people who are doing the mainstream class, where teachers are unsympathetic, or the class is too big or a million reasons why the child has been shattered. And frequently I've picked up the trauma at the end, after the children have been to a mainstream school sometimes for a term and nothing is working. And I get the kid and it takes me ages to undo the damage to the self-esteem, that that children have. We believe very strongly in building up the children's identity .... not protecting them in the sense of shielding them, but creating situations where they can come at things at their own speed and not feel embarrassed and not be laughed at and not think they are a failure.*

Hence, Intensive Language Centres are seen by many of the Intensive Language teachers in the Case Studies as providing a safe and secure environment in which ESL children can work at their own pace and build up their self-esteem while growing in confidence.

Some of the mainstream teachers in particular, revealed a dilemma about categorising ESL children as 'different' or 'special'. On the one hand they wanted children to have the support they needed, but found that some children felt excluded from mainstream activities if they were withdrawn from the classroom. Separating and providing extra help for some children may also lead to ESL children being labelled as problematic - and in addition the ESL specialist teacher perceived as responsible for the ESL children's language and literacy development.

In addition to this, some teachers found it hard to differentiate between ESL children when using ESL assessment framework's. They argued that the very category ESL children suggests a homogeneity which does not account for the diversity within and across groups of children. This leads to an underlying assumption that the experiences of different ethnic groups of children within the education system are similar and that fair assessments can be made. It is possible that some frameworks actually endorse this by suggesting a common pattern of development.

Maree at Andelu pointed to the need for frameworks that make distinctions between Standard Australian English and Torres Strait Creole. In this context English may be acquired as a foreign language, as the languages of the community do not necessarily include English. Who is identified as ESL may also be problematic. For example in some contexts children who speak Aboriginal English are simply considered to be 'poor' users of standard Australian English. Consequently, they are not given support and frequently marked down on assessments which are carried out on the basis of standard Australian English. Because of some of the superficial commonalities across the dialects or languages is it possible to misinterpret the children's level and range of understanding, stigmatise aspects of the children's dialects and at worst regard some dialects as 'non-languages'. Thus the construction of a unilateral view of 'ESLness' may enable teachers to map the development of some ESL children while not recognising the development of other ESL and EFL learners.

### **ESL Children as Contributors of a First Language**

Regardless of the method of assessment, several teachers considered the role of the child's first language to be important but problematic. They identified issues related to their role, parental expectations, diversity of languages and availability of appropriate bilingual adults. Janet at Greenway felt that in the early stages of development *'the only way teachers can know what NESB children can do with language is to observe them in a first language situation'*. She was particularly concerned about ESL children who are literate in their first languages. She felt that to assess them using the Student Outcome Statements on the basis of English alone would be a misrepresentation of their knowledge skills and understanding. She felt that the ESL Bandscales do acknowledge that at Level 1 *'being new to English children draw on knowledge of the world in their first language'*.

Elizabeth and My, her multilingual assistant who is a trained teacher from Vietnam, at Harthill Primary felt that recognition of the child's first language is important. My acts as interpreter, guide and evaluation as well as reading to the children in their home languages. She is also seen as an important link between home and school as she interacts with many of the parents who do not speak English. Consequently, the children see an adult in a position of power using their home languages, they see their home languages valued and they are initially given the opportunity to learn through their home language in particular activities. My also translates writing done in home languages which gives Elizabeth the opportunity to consider their development as bilingual learners. However, My ultimately sees her role as helping the children's transition from their home

languages to English. She does not use written forms of the children's home languages, *'because they come here to learn English. So I tend to want them to speak English.'* In effect the children's language is seen as a means to an end rather than an entity in its own right.

Yuen at Greenway Intensive Language Centre identified a consequence of not being able to assess the children's achievements in their first language. Yuen explained that she was unsure if Abraham has copied some writing without understanding, or whether he knew what he had written in his first language, but could not read it in English. This makes placing him at a level on the ESL Bandscales very difficult:

*If he does understand in his first language than I would know he is a stage ahead, 'cos at the moment I'm just assuming he is just writing because everyone else is writing.*

Yuen felt that by knowing something about the children's home languages and levels of literacy she is better able to understand the complexity of learning English. As a result she has different expectations of each child and assesses them accordingly.

However, Yuen had mixed feeling about the use of the children's home languages in the classroom. She recalled her own experiences on arriving in Australia aged 10, with little ESL support. She felt that there was little understanding of her home languages and culture and as a result she suffered a great deal. At the same time she (like My) felt that English was the key to survival and success. She recalled friends of her parents who *'had nervous breakdowns, so it is English that is important, because they couldn't cope, they got teased at school, they were just too shy to say anything.'* Yuen saw herself as the children's opportunity to learn English *'I'm one of their tools.'* She also felt it would be unfair to only use the languages she can speak as some children would feel left out. Yuen did not want other children to feel excluded. So, although she tends not to use the languages she can speak, she does not discourage the children from using their home languages in play situations, but would ask children with same language background to use English in the classroom. The result being, that children may begin to associate the classroom with speaking English and the use of their home language as only appropriate in particular contexts. In this context, English is likely to assume the dominant status and the expanded use of home languages may be restricted.

Minh described in detail the value and benefits of the Vietnamese - English bilingual program at Lachlan Street. The consequences of the program were manifest in a number of ways. These included: the children's self esteem; the development of oracy in two languages; the development of concepts in the children's first language and the *'filling in of gaps'*; teachers perceptions of bilingual children and parental involvement. However, the children are only *'formally'* assessed in Vietnamese on the Year Two Diagnostic Net in Numeracy. Minh acts as an interpreter, translating the Numeracy English tasks for validation. All other formal assessments are carried out in English, even though the Vietnamese children spend some of their time developing oracy in their home language with Minh. Minh makes her own informal assessments of the children's progress in Vietnamese and uses these to inform her assessments of the children's English. Consequently this gives Minh and other teachers insight into the ways in which the children are utilising both languages in their learning. However, by using Vietnamese mainly as a window on to the children's use of English the development of Vietnamese may not be seen as significant. Consequently, with the exception of Mathematics, what seems to count when assessing achievement is development in English.

## ESL Children as Emergent Bilinguals

Maree at Andelu identified a general consequence related to all four of the above positions. She argued that, unless the child's cultural and linguistic background is included in the assessment, it is not possible to get an accurate picture of what the learner can do. Consequently, decisions about the children's future and reports to parents and other teachers do not reflect the child's full repertoire of language and literacy. Therefore limiting their potential and undermining the use and value of home languages.

Maree's knowledge of Torres Strait Creole enabled her to identify features in the children's literacy that reflect both languages. Maree maps the children's progress in both languages using the Queensland adaptation of the First Steps Developmental Continua. However, because she is not convinced of the cultural appropriateness of the framework she superimposes an assessment criteria for those ESL features she has identified in her teaching. By doing this, she can identify the interplay between the two languages which reveals the complexity of the children's knowledge and use of language:

*Although (Rowena) does not contribute in English as confidently as she could, when she says anything it is appropriate and even though she works in Creole, she understands the task in English.*

This also gives Maree insight into the process of learning in two languages and the children's developing metalinguistic awareness. Maree illustrated this with reference to a text that Tim has translated into Creole immediately after writing it in English:

*There is lots of experimentation and risk taking here. He has worked on this by himself, totally independent. He has experimented with capital letters and names in a big way.*

Both Minh and Maree felt that assessing the children in their home language and English enabled them to challenge the process and results of the Year Two Diagnostic Net validation, which Maree felt 'sets the children up for failure'. By testing the children in two languages Minh is able to ascertain 'whether they understand the concept or just don't understand the language.' Because of the linguistic and conceptual differences between Vietnamese and English, testing in both languages also makes the process more equitable because Minh can ask the same questions but in a way which the children will understand.

When Maree assessed the children in Creole using an alternative Year Two Diagnostic Net book, she found that in many cases their level of achievement in their first language was higher than in their second. She also found that some children were transferring their knowledge of Creole to their use of English. She saw this as a positive sign of development. When reporting to most parents Maree felt that she can now say with confidence that their children are making progress in literacy, because she bases her assessment on both Creole and English. By identifying what children can do in two languages and how they are doing this, she added a another dimension to the assessment process and outcomes. In effect she is assessing the children as emergent bilinguals, in which both languages are seen to contribute equally, but differently to the learning process.

Maree felt that the consequences of working in and assessing two languages are far reaching not only for her understanding of what the children have achieved, but also in relation to the children's perceptions of themselves as learners. At the very beginning of the program 'they had absolutely increased confidence straight away' and later, 'Tim likes to write in Creole because he's proud of Creole'. However,

Nicole at Weaver Primary recalled a different reaction from Richard, who comes from a community in which Nyangumarta is spoken and who has access to the Nyangumarta language at school:

*Our Aboriginal Language specialist here has been coming in and giving the lessons with us for about four visits this term. Because the same things in the reading and writing are done in these lessons as we do, there's continuity. But Richard (one of the ESL children) at the beginning of the year just blew his top. He just wouldn't listen and I think he saw it as a shame thing because we knew he could speak in that language, yet he was not willing to do it yet. But last week when he came in, he was the first to put his hand up and respond and he was just amazing. He wanted to do it and I think he recognises now that we're not worried that he can speak in another language and that it's his first language.*

Who is involved in the language program and how much time is devoted to it also seems to have important implications. Nicole at Weaver outlines some of these:

*We want to learn it too so we can be part of his world and understand. And I think that's a really important thing with those children, respecting their first language. And when they know that you're going to respect it but you want to help them to be able to speak in our first language, they just take that on. They should have more in their first languages in Years 1 and 2. For me, being their teacher, I should be able to speak it too and I need to have an understanding and that would come from our whole class being exposed to it. If these children in our class had more exposure in these sort of lessons, I think that would have a huge effect. And they can make a connection between their vocabulary and English. With the Aboriginal Language Specialist here they have a perfect sort of modelling of the words in both languages.*

Clearly, Nicole saw her own knowledge and use of the children's first language as a means of gaining insight into cultural norms and values and 'breaking down a few barriers.' By learning the children's home language within the classroom context, she potentially changes the classroom power relationships with regard to who has the knowledge and expertise about the language. In addition, Nicole saw the children's use of their home language as a means of increasing their development in both languages as well as giving equal status to each.

Maree highlighted the importance of community involvement in the School's Home Language Program. She explained that the Andelu community was an initial inspiration for the Home Language Program and an elder from the community teaches at the school. Some of Maree's planning draws on the real-life experience of the community and when appropriate, particular activities are only carried out in Creole. Consequently, Maree felt there is an important link between the children's experiences at home and at school and that the community language and culture is valued, enabling children to achieve in both languages.

Viewing children as emergent bilinguals, creates a context in which they are seen as learning through two languages while simultaneously acquiring a new language. This is different from viewing children as needing to acquire a second language before they can continue their education or 'catch up' with their peers. It is a fundamentally different way of conceptualising the relationship between language, learning and assessment. Peter Figueroa (1992) argues that:

*Any statement about achievement implies assumptions not only about such matters as ability, opportunity, motivation, will, control, effort and performance, but also about the quality of the judgement, about the quality of the assessment procedures and all of the assumptions built into them. Ultimately, a power relationship between those making the assessment, or those who control the assessment and those being assessed is taken for granted. (p.403).*

Many of the teachers in our study revealed the problematic nature of this power relationship in which the ESL children come from a different linguistic and cultural background to the people who determine the type and purpose of assessment frameworks. Maree captured this in one of her final comments:

*There is this whole thing of equity in education. It (assessment) can be to do with teaching, or it can be to do with literacy background. Or it can be children are not being given the chance to express their real skills because English is the language the children are expected to perform in, whether it is their first language or not. It (assessment) is supposed to be an evaluation of literacy skills. If tested in their own language it can show that they have greater skills than if they are tested in English. If we can show here that kids can do this, if they are allowed to do this in their own language then this should be an impetus for the Department to be looking at the use of first language to enhance their literacy. Basically, what I am saying is I want the Department to take notice of our results.*

## **The Purposes Teachers Give to Assessment: Main Findings**

- The teachers in this study assessed ESL children for a number of purposes. These included:
  - For information which identified the children's progress and the effectiveness of their own teaching.
  - For reporting to parents about the children's progress and level of attainment.
  - For making decisions about children's future placements and special needs.
  - For informing future teachers about the children's level of attainment.
  - For giving individual or whole class profiles to the School Principal and for reporting to the Department of Education at a State level.
- All the teachers in the study used a variety of assessments to serve the above purposes. These ranged from informal ongoing assessments of everyday classroom activities to semi-formal assessments of specific classroom activities to formal assessments designed to measure specific attainments.
- All the teachers in this study used assessment to monitor children's progress and to some extent to validate their teaching. Observation, interaction and anecdotal notes seemed to play a major part in many teachers' understanding of their students' attainments. In order to gain a comprehensive picture of each child, in many classrooms these types of assessment were supplemented by the assessment of particular classroom activities and specially designed tasks. Many of the teachers used checklists, pro-formas and annotations on children's work to help make and record their judgements.
- In some of the Case Studies, the children were involved in monitoring their own progress. For some children their evaluation formed part of their report to parents. For others it was used as part of a cycle of planning and

assessment or as a means of helping them to monitor their own progress and determine their next stage of learning. This included encouraging children to make written or oral comments about their own progress, evaluate particular aspects of their work and identify future goals.

- In several schools judgements about children's progress were arrived at through detailed discussion with other teachers, the ESL support teacher and the classroom aide. Where there were bilingual teachers or aides, often the discussion included reference to the child's achievements in their home language. All but one of the ESL specialist teachers felt they made a welcome and significant contribution to the mainstream teachers' assessment.
- All formal assessments were based on the child's use of English, with the exception of two schools. In the school with the Home Language Program, informal assessment, reports to parents and information for the school Principal was based on English and the children's home languages. In another school the Year Two Diagnostic Net Validation for numeracy was carried out in Vietnamese. However, even in the latter school where the children were learning in two languages the Year Two Diagnostic Net Validation for literacy was carried out in English, as a requirement by the system.
- Reporting to parents was seen as a significant part of the assessment process by all the teachers. This took many forms and often happened more than once a year. Teachers identified several purposes for reporting to parents. These included not only reporting on progress but also informing about teaching and learning, involving parents in the process of assessment through encouraging them to respond to their child's report and asking parents to do particular tasks with their children at home. These tasks were often related to the development of reading.
- Teachers in the study viewed parents' access to and involvement in their child's assessment in different ways. This varied from having in-depth discussions with parents about their child's future and needs, to writing reports in the child's home language and interpreting parents' responses, to a feeling that parents should take responsibility for understanding reports written in English and approaching the teacher about their child.
- Several teachers expressed concern about the accessibility of the information that some formal reports contained. Even when reports were translated often the language used was seen as inappropriate. In one Case Study the teacher felt that many parents were 'too embarrassed' to admit that they could not understand their child's report.
- Some teachers also expressed concern about reports to parents which identified their child as not meeting the 'norms' of their year level, and therefore perceived to be failing. They felt this could undermined the child's achievement and misled parents.
- Teachers' agonised over assessments which were related to decisions about their ESL student's needs and future placement. Teachers were acutely aware of the complexities of assessment and often viewed this use of assessment as problematic. Several mainstream and ESL specialist teachers identified the difficulties they faced about which ESL children should have support, how much support they should have and the nature of that support.
- In some schools teachers had to complete assessments to report to the School Principal. There were two distinct forms of assessments for this purpose

identified in the Case Studies. In some cases reports to the Principal were made up of ongoing classroom assessments which served a variety of purposes. In other schools teachers undertook specific assessments, usually derived from a particular framework, which were common across the whole school.

- The information given to Principals was interpreted in different ways. In some cases it was used to develop a profile of each child's progress in oracy and literacy, in other schools it was used as a means of monitoring development within and across year levels. The latter purpose sometimes took the form of computer print outs created by feeding the information into a computer program which generated a series of tables and graphs.
- In some states Principals were required to report to the state education systems. In one state teachers implemented a Year Two Diagnostic Net Validation. All the four teachers in this state expressed some concerns about the nature, results and consequences of this process. In another state teachers expressed disappointment at the Education Department's response to their involvement in the implementation of the Early Learning Profiles. Finally, one teacher recognised the need for accountability but was concerned about the possible effects of making comparisons at a state level, between her Aboriginal ESL students in a rural community and students in mainstream urban areas.

### **The Consequences for ESL Children: Main Findings**

- It is clear from the Case Studies that teachers use of particular assessment practices arise from a combination of contextual factors, particular beliefs and day to day practical considerations. From an analysis of the assessment practices carried out by the 25 Case Study teachers it is possible to identify the following five views of ESL children which appear to be constructed through the use of particular assessment practices:
  - ESL children as no different from other children
  - ESL children as distinct but subsumed in mainstream frameworks
  - ESL children as distinct from other children
  - ESL children as contributors of a first language
  - ESL children as emergent bilinguals.While recognising that these views are not static and are interrelated each one has consequences for ESL children.

- **Perceiving ESL children as no different from other children** appears to be encouraged through the use of common assessment practices for all children in the class. Teachers identified the following consequences of this view:

It enables comparisons to be made between children of the same age, ensures that all the children are measured against the same criteria and ensures that ESL children are not made to feel different.

Conversely, it assumes that children are at similar starting points, have shared learning experiences and are engaged in similar processes of development. As a result the ESL child becomes invisible, assessed only in relation to the mainstream norms which may consequently obscure more than they reveal.

The adoption of intervention programs or support mechanisms for ESL children who are perceived to be 'falling behind' may be inappropriate if

they are based on the results of mainstream assessment frameworks, because they normed on monolingual English speaking children. As a result some children may be mis-labelled from a very early age as having special needs.

ESL children's responses to this particular view of them will, of course, vary. These may range from negotiation between two cultures to the denial of their home background and rejection of their educational experience.

- **Perceiving ESL children as distinct but subsumed in mainstream frameworks** appears to be encouraged by the use of teacher based ongoing assessment practices which take account of the process of ESL, in a context in which mainstream frameworks are used for making comparisons between classes and across schools. The following consequences of this were identified by the teachers:

If ESL children perform at the same or above the level of their peers, mainstream frameworks are seen as a useful means of making comparisons between children.

If whole groups of ESL children appear to be achieving below their peers when assessed on mainstream frameworks, this potentially creates a deficit model, which may lead to negative stereotypical views of particular groups of learners and particular schools. Ultimately this may influence both performance and attainment.

If ESL children are measured on indicators which assume a use of English from birth and against criteria which are rarely fine grained enough to capture the complexities of learning English as a second language, some children, particularly in the early stages of ESL development may appear to have made very little progress. This undermines and diminishes their attainments.

If mainstream frameworks do not allow for the difference between linguistic encoding and conceptual understanding, inevitably the ESL child's level of knowledge and understanding is underestimated. This may lead to inappropriate and intellectually undemanding activities.

If mainstream frameworks are based on ethno-centric views of literacy and assume that children have shared experiences and common cultural understanding, then the diversity in ESL children's interpretation of and responses to language and literacy practices may not be taken into account. In effect the ESL child's understanding may be being assessed against inappropriate criteria.

If the results of assessments based on mainstream frameworks are used to make decisions about future support, although all the ESL children are being assessed against the same criteria, the level, amount and type of support may be based on misrepresentations of the ESL child's achievement, as the process of second language development is not taken into account.

If ESL children appear to be successful against mainstream criteria (which is seen as a desirable outcome for teachers and children) their support is withdrawn. If however, they do not appear to be at the appropriate level of attainment then support is maintained, potentially undermining

confidence in the teaching program and of the children. Thus, using mainstream frameworks to determine future support creates a dilemma for some teachers.

If mainstream frameworks are the only means of reporting and making decisions then teachers own judgements may be undermined. Teachers intuitive knowledge and day to day observations of children as ESL learners are not included. As a result, everyday assessments may be informed by teachers recognition of the process of ESL, but whole class attainment and comparisons across schools are based on a monolingual view of development.

If the results of assessments based on mainstream frameworks are used to report to parents this may lead to a variety of responses. These include making comparisons between children and schools, anxiety about progress, pressure on individual children and blaming the teacher for 'poor' results.

- **Perceiving ESL children as distinct from other children** emerges from the use of ESL frameworks of assessment as well as in-formal classroom based assessment which take account of the children's use of English as a second language. Teachers identified a number of consequences which arose from the use of specifically ESL designed frameworks:

They enable ESL children's progress to be accurately and fully mapped, ensuring that support mechanisms and decisions about their future placements are appropriate.

They can be used to compliment mainstream assessment frameworks by identifying additional features of development, thus creating a fuller picture of the child's achievements.

They can be used to support an argument for the withdrawal of ESL children from the mainstream classroom. Which may re-enforce the view that ESL children are the responsibility of the specialist teacher, creating feelings of alienation and isolation.

They may present a homogenous view of ESL children. The distinction is made between pre-literate and literate ESL children, but on the whole seem to present a uni-dimensional view of learning English as a second language. This makes it difficult to distinguish within groups and across groups, take account of English as a foreign language or recognise the differences between Aboriginal languages and dialects of Aboriginal English.

They provide support for the construction of ESL children as distinct from other children, which has lead to debates about the most suitable teaching context. Several teachers argued that Intensive Language Centres provided a supportive context in which, initially, social and emotional needs could be met, while helping children to begin using English before giving them access to the mainstream curriculum. Others argued on the basis of educational, social and equity grounds ESL children should have access to the mainstream school within their community.

- **Perceiving ESL children as contributors of a first language** emerges from the teachers' use of the children's first language as a means of creating a picture of the whole child and gaining insight into the child's understanding in

two languages. The following consequences were identified by a number of teachers:

If the children's home language is used as a means of easing the transition between home and school, it demonstrates to the children that their linguistic and cultural background is valued, but inevitably English is perceived to be the dominant language in the school context.

If the children are involved in working in their home language but literacy assessment at the state level is carried out in English, this may suggest that English and their home language are differentially valued.

If home languages are used to report to parents several responses can be identified. These range from initiation and involvement in home language programs to the view that children come to school to learn English, as English is a central means of accessing 'mainstream' opportunities, which are based on levels of achievement in English.

- **Perceiving ESL children as emergent bilinguals** emerges from teachers involved in bilingual programs in which children are taught and assessed in English and their home language. Several teachers identified the consequences of teaching and assessing in two languages:

It reveals the complexity of the children's linguistic knowledge and use of two languages. It gives insight into the process of learning in two languages and the children's developing metalinguistic awareness. Thus assessing the children's competence as users of two languages.

It enables the children to reveal their level of conceptual development in the language in which they are most fluent or which is most appropriate. To some extent overcoming the difficulty of differentiating between conceptual understanding and linguistic encoding and the influence of cultural bias. Thus the process of assessment appears to be more equitable.

It appears to give some children more confidence and enables them to access a broader curriculum. It seems to increase the teachers' knowledge and insight into cultural norms and values as well as redefining who has the knowledge and expertise.

It enables reporting to parents to include reference to the children's success in their first language and encourages discussion about the relationship between both languages to be promoted.

It encourages community involvement in the design, management and implementation of the bilingual program. This may lead to the development of an appropriate curriculum and the fostering of links between home and school which enables the children to draw on their linguistic and cultural background.

It enables the Education Department to consider what children can achieve through learning in two languages. This highlights the need to reconsider the nature of language and literacy learning and methods of assessment for children who speak more than one language. Ultimately, it may challenge the power relationships between those who make decisions and those who live with the consequences.

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## Chapter Seven

# Is There a Need for a Distinct ESL Assessment Framework?

Tom Lumley

The focus of this chapter is what emerges from the Case Studies about the need for an ESL-specific framework for assessing the language and literacy development of ESL students. This necessarily includes consideration of how the teachers see their ESL students in relation to mainstream (non-ESL background) children.

The cases reveal a diversity of complex views on this issue. The views of the teachers in this study can perhaps most simply be described as representing various points on a continuum, although there are numerous qualifications to the position of each teacher, conditioned by a wide range of factors including training, experience, exposure to different materials and teaching context. In broad terms, however, the continuum can be described as follows:

- Teachers who consider an ESL-specific assessment framework essential for ESL learners or who reject a mainstream English assessment framework for their students.
- Teachers who consider an ESL-specific assessment framework necessary or feasible in certain circumstances, generally as an addition to mainstream frameworks.
- Teachers who perceive little need for a separate ESL-specific assessment framework.

These are simplifications, of course, and as with most continua, there are elements of overlap between the different positions the teachers represent. This chapter will examine each of these broad positions in turn.

### **Teachers who consider an ESL-specific assessment framework essential for their ESL learners**

A significant number of the teachers represented in this study are in no doubt about the need for an ESL-specific assessment framework and the inadequacy of mainstream assessment frameworks for describing the English development of their learners. This group includes the teachers who work in intensive/English language centres, two teachers who work in a pre-primary centre and the two teachers who work in bilingual programs. They discuss the importance of the students' backgrounds, the need to recognise students' cognitive ability and ability to communicate (orally and in writing) in their first language as well as their progress in English, and the relationship between mainstream and ESL-specific frameworks.

#### **Intensive/English Language Centres**

Janet at Greenway Intensive Language Centre (ILC) in Perth is unequivocal in her position. She states that she does not find the mainstream First Steps

Developmental Continua useful in her teaching: *'First Steps has had no impact on my teaching full-stop.'* She has been teaching ESL children for many years, her practice was formed before First Steps was written, and she finds little new in it. More significantly, in terms of her assessment practice, she would not use this mainstream framework with her ESL learners *'because of the discrepancy between what kids actually show you they can do with language and what is actually in their heads'*. This for her is a question of avoiding serious misrepresentation of what the children are capable of doing *cognitively* with language. She gives the example of a child she teaches who is able in his first language to write *'a page of lyrical, beautiful, narrative writing, with full stops, capital letters and absolutely beautiful script, but who nevertheless be placed at Stage One of First Steps for his English writing'*. She feels her students are demeaned by the implicit link made in the mainstream scales between cognitive ability and English language ability. Likewise, neither she nor her colleagues at the ILC consider the draft Student Outcome Statements, written for students with English as their first language, appropriate for their students. This is a view they hold strongly, and they have prepared a statement setting out why they do not consider this mainstream assessment valid as an indication of the language development of newly arrived ESL children. Again, the issue is the role of first language. Janet comments in explicit terms how this is most noticeable with the Speaking and Listening Outcomes, which assume at Level 1

*'5 years of oral language development in English ... it's a wrong assumption, it's a false starting point, you can't draw on implicit knowledge if you don't have an implicit knowledge. It isn't where they are.'*

She contrasts this with the Outcomes concerned with literacy: *'whereas the Reading, Writing and Viewing ones start from a point that seems to indicate that that's a new thing'*. As she says, this is often not the case for ESL learners:

*'Frequently ... they write stuff that looks like they are about 5 years old and you see them write in their own language and you realise that they have this sophisticated language understanding for writing, so you are making the wrong assumption.'*

She quotes from the Student Outcome Statements to support her point: children *'draw on implicit knowledge of the linguistic structures and the features of their own variety of English'*, commenting that *'the newly arrived ESL child does not have an implicit knowledge of English'*.

The Student Outcome Statements (S.O.S.) are also unsatisfactory for Janet because of their inability to reflect the dramatic and swift progress ESL children make in English. This crucial point will be made again and again in this chapter by the teachers. Any assessment and reporting system can only provide useful information if it suits the population for which it is used. A more finely grained scale is needed with ESL learners than that provided in a mainstream framework, in order to actually describe the stages of progress that these students go through. The lowest levels of the mainstream framework build on the first five years of experience children have in English, rather than starting with the level children demonstrate in reality when they are second language learners in English.

*'In the first 12 months the newly arrived NESB child makes very rapid progress in English ... However, most, if not all of this happens within the first level of S.O.S., i.e. S.O.S. doesn't identify these stages for NESB children at this time because the descriptions are so broad.'*

Another reason why this is so important, in Janet's view, is accountability: ILCs need a way of reporting to parents and systems that allows them 'to plot kids' progress accurately ... to justify our own existence'.

Janet therefore uses in her assessment practice the ESL Bandscales and their accompanying Observation Guides, in combination with Negotiated Evaluation. She contributed to the development of the ESL Bandscales, and is clear about their value, in her view. For Janet, they provide descriptions of the stages of English language development of ESL learners that the mainstream frameworks fail to recognise. She is aware of incremental stages of English development that are simply not captured in mainstream frameworks:

*'(ESL) Bandscales is a document written specifically for assessing and reporting on ESL students ... It enables teachers to better understand the language learning processes of these learners and to assess and record their progress in English and English across the curriculum. It provides a valid means for reporting to other teachers, to parents and learners and to administrators. It fills in the gaps in Student Outcomes in relation to ESL learners so that their needs and their performance are not subsumed but are recognised and valued.'*

She finds that the Observation Guides which accompany the ESL Bandscales help her focus more usefully on the characteristics of ESL learners than do the First Steps indicators. The Observation Guides list features or aspects (not levels) of language use (in each of the four macro-skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing) that teachers can select for the focus of their assessments. The Observation Guides thus act as a link between the language use of the children and the descriptions of (that is, the levels) contained in the ESL Bandscales themselves.

Janet's colleague at Greenway, Yuen, also uses the ESL Bandscales and the accompanying Observation Guides. Yuen makes this comment about the Observation Guides:

*'At the back of the Bandscales are the Observation Guide points and I find those to be far more useful [than First Steps indicators], so ... at the beginning of the term I say, "Right, for this group of children these are the things I will focus on when I observe".'*

Yuen has only worked for a short time at the ILC, but sees the need for an ESL-specific assessment framework not only in the ILC where she now works but also in mainstream schools. She comments about the mainstream school where she used to work:

*'We didn't use the (ESL) Bandscales. We should. We really should. The children who've just arrived from Intensive Language Centres or children who come from ESL background should be placed on that until they've reached level 8 (on the Bandscales), before they go into the mainstream assessment things, like the West Australian Student Outcome Statements ... As much as they say that they don't think it is (just for English speaking children) it is definitely a mainstream assessment. It doesn't cater for ESL children.'*

For her the ESL Bandscales acknowledge properly the situation of ESL students, including both their relationship with and the nature of their difference from mainstream students. Yuen refers here to the diagram presented in the ESL Bandscales which shows that the process of learning English involves transfer of skills and knowledge about how to communicate already obtained in one language into their new second language:

*'The first thing that hit me was that ESL children are not at the bottom, here, but coming from the side. It is the time between children learning a new language until they have acquired native-like competence'.*

At Hillsdale English Language Centre in Melbourne, Jenny also perceives the need for an ESL-specific assessment framework, although not in such explicit terms as some of the teachers so far discussed. At Hillsdale the teachers use not the ESL Bandscales but the ESL Scales, and its Victorian adaptation, the ESL Companion to the English Curriculum and Standards Framework. Jenny talks a lot about the background of their students, many of whom have had no exposure to literacy, and the huge influence this has upon their language development. There is really no debate about whether or not an ESL-specific framework is necessary, since this is a stated requirement of the assessment procedures used at Hillsdale. This is the case, therefore, for her colleague, Sue, too. There is no First Steps to consider, and the Victorian equivalent of the Student Outcome Statements, the Curriculum and Standards Framework, now includes an ESL Companion. Nevertheless, Jenny comments on the value of the ESL Scales for her:

*'What they do really well is they talk about the type of students you'll get in this level and what you can expect from them and so I guess it makes you realise that if they're not paying attention and not focused that's okay cos that's what children at this stage do. Okay, it'll give you the characteristics of the learner'.*

For Jenny, then, the ESL Scales successfully represent the stages of development that ESL learners go through, and also allow teachers to record students' progress, which would not be possible with a mainstream framework. The case study shows an example of how she is able to use her assessment made using the ESL Scales to provide a detailed picture of the English development of one of her students to the mainstream teacher into whose class one of her students, Abdullah, has moved.

### **The Pre-Primary Centre**

Elizabeth is a teacher in the Pre-Primary Centre at Harthill Primary School in Perth. She uses First Steps in assessing her students, but expresses dissatisfaction with the Continua for ESL learners. She focuses particularly on the Oral Language Continuum, which she considers *'doesn't give a true indication of the level obtained even in the first language because of the distances between English and other languages' conventions*. Discussing Jeffrey, she comments on one of the indicators, *'Shows confusion between pairs of terms, e.g., I/you, this/that, here/there'*, that *'it's not the same sort of confusion as that of an English speaking child'*. Elizabeth puts here a similar point of view to that raised by Janet: *'In their own language they're really probably beyond that'*. For her, the Oral Language Continuum does not recognise the cognitive development that ESL children have already achieved in their first language. Dissatisfied with the lack of compatibility between her assessment of the students and what she was able to say about them using First Steps, Elizabeth attended a session with teachers at the ILC, where she found that they faced similar problems. This experience moved her to start to develop a modified version of the First Steps Oral Language Developmental Continuum including descriptions produced by the ILC teachers more appropriate for ESL learners, which she feels suits her students better.

Sometimes teachers express dissatisfaction with existing mainstream frameworks without having experience of ESL-specific frameworks with which to compare them. Linda, also at Harthill Pre-Primary Centre, expresses a similar frustration to that of Elizabeth, in commenting that First Steps, especially the Oral Language

Continuum, is hard to use with pre-primary children: *'you don't feel that you can mark off anything at this stage. And I know this has been an issue right through the ILC. Oral language has been difficult to evaluate.'*

A similar problem emerges with the description of literacy development. Because all children are considered to be in the first stage of reading, writing or spelling, whether or not they have shown all the indicators at that level, and remain there so long, it becomes very difficult to show progress: *'Most are still in the beginning phase and I think that's why it hasn't been so useful because they're not really moving on very much.'*

### **Bilingual Programs**

Minh at Lachlan Street in Brisbane works in a bilingual program, with students of Vietnamese background. In the State system where she works there is no ESL-specific assessment framework that is widely used, although there is a brief Draft ESL Proficiency Scale that has been recently been used for adding information about proficiency needs to the State ESL Data Base and for allowing very new arrivals exclusion from the Year Two Diagnostic Net. Minh finds this far from helpful in the generality of the language it employs (terms such as *'cognitively demanding'* she finds hard to judge in the junior primary context) and the fact that a single level has to be given across all language skills. Discussing a student, Hieu, she comments:

*'She's got top mark for reading, speaking is quite good, she's just a quiet girl. Listening excellent, but then writing she will be quite low. But when you divide a number into four or so you can't tell. She's actually quite poor in her writing skill. So as I said the scale is quite useless for assessing children for the level they're at and the support that you need to give them.'*

Minh has a particular problem with the language used in the Year 2 Diagnostic Net Report for Literacy and Numeracy, because the language, in her view is not clear to parents, whether expressed in English or translated into Vietnamese for the parents of the Vietnamese speakers in the school: *'It is very nice, it sounds very nice, it sounds beautiful, but I don't think it tells you very much.'* She comments further that the teachers required two inservice sessions before they had an understanding of what the report was *'talking about'*.

She identifies further problems associated with the assessment frameworks she uses for literacy, the Writing Developmental Continuum for the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, deriving from its failure to acknowledge the characteristics of ESL learners. She gives an example of this in her discussion of one of her students, Lan, where she points out that features such as *'past tense, plurals'* and *'the cultural background that the children are coming from'* are not included in the crucial stage of the Continuum, Phase B, Experimental Writing, the stage at which children are deemed still to require extra support (backed by State funding). It is only at the next Phase that such features come up, but by then it is too late for children such as Lan to benefit from ESL support. Minh feels that the problem lies in the descriptions contained in the Phases of the Continuum, and that features typical of ESL learners need *'to be made explicit'* to mainstream teachers, who otherwise, Minh feels, will *'just assume that the children know all this and let mistakes happen.'*

In this situation, Minh feels that *'either the National ESL Scales or the Bandscales would have been more appropriate'*. She feels that the ESL Scales have value for reporting purposes, although she comments that they don't *'really tell me about the students' progress and their learning'*, which to her is a vital function of assessment. By contrast, on the basis of some professional development with the ESL

Bandscales, she considers them more useful, expressing a sentiment like that put forward by the teachers at Greenway ILC in Perth: they *'actually go through step by step'*. Minh seems to be saying here that the descriptions offered in the ESL Bandscales relate closely to her understanding about how ESL develops. However, because the Region where she works is not using the ESL Bandscales she has not adopted their use. She would be willing to do so, but is not prepared to spend the time and effort in doing so unless the information is to be valued and used for benefit of the students.

The mainstream Diagnostic Net is the target of a different kind of dissatisfaction for Maree at the Andelu Campus of Ichuru State School on Cape York. She has neither training as an ESL teacher nor familiarity with any ESL frameworks, and comments favourably on the Writing Continuum for ongoing assessment of her students: *'I find the Continuum a really valuable assessment tool for seeing where children are going, seeing what gaps are in my teaching, seeing development in literacy skills.'*

However, operating as she does in a bilingual setting, where her students use English as a foreign rather than a second language, Maree perceives the need not so much for an ESL-specific assessment framework as one which takes into account the reality in which the students live and thus includes not just acknowledgment of, but actual assessment in Torres Strait Creole as well as in English. Again, her motivation is to allow the true progress the students have made to be recognised. She gives the example of Rowena, who made no progress that was observable according to the Writing Continuum for a long period, and then showed dramatic improvement:

*'She has gone from writing three words to self correcting (an indicator from Phase C, Early Writing). My analysis is that everything she did she got wrong and to cope with that she just did not do anything. Last year she would not try. So she spent two years refusing to do anything and then within one month she learnt to write a very long sentence. So you see the development there.'*

This comment referred to Rowena's writing at the beginning of the year. By October she was able to write a full length letter: *'Now what we have here is an entire letter that does not have a single mistake. The whole genre is there. She did not get around to finishing it.'*

The point about the example of Rowena is that her writing was done in Creole, and Maree read and assessed it as a piece of Creole writing that would be used by Rowena. Because Maree has a class of students who share the same home language, and because she has taken the effort to learn Torres Strait Creole, and because, equally significantly, she has made the decision to assess her children in both Torres Strait Creole and English, she is able to gain an accurate picture of the development of literacy for the purposes it serves in the daily lives of this community. It is exceptional for teachers to be in such a situation.

Maree's description of Rowena's writing ability echoes comments made by Janet at Greenway ILC, we may recall, when she could see that some of her students were able to write at length in their first language, but only in a rudimentary way in English. Janet's response was to seek an assessment framework that firstly recognised the children's first language background and secondly could successfully capture the stages of development shown by ESL learners. For her, this meant rejecting the mainstream framework (First Steps) in favour of an ESL-specific framework (the ESL Bandscales) which emphasises process. Maree, on the other hand, does not so much reject the First Steps Developmental Continua as add an entire parallel assessment in the children's home language.

What Maree does reject, however, is the Year 2 Diagnostic Net Process, which insists on an English-only assessment and which in consequence seriously misrepresents what her children are capable of. She rejects it because it conflicts so strongly with what she has learnt through ongoing assessment of the children's literacy development in Torres Strait Creole. She sums up the problem concisely, referring to the Year 2 Diagnostic Net Process:

*'It is supposed to be an evaluation of literacy skills. If tested in their own language it can show that they have greater skills than if they are tested in English... If we can show here that the kids can do this if they are allowed to do this in their own language then this should be an impetus ... to be looking at the use of first language to enhance their literacy.'*

So for Maree the issue is less one of using an ESL-specific assessment framework than of explicit recognition and use of the first language, including assessment of literacy in that first language, because that is what is relevant in the EFL context where she works. However, an important point in the case of Maree is that, as is noted at the end of the case study, after this project finished, Maree was not only introduced to an ESL assessment framework, the ESL Bandscales, for the first time, but is now a member of a committee involved in adapting the ESL Bandscales for use with children whose first language is Torres Strait Creole. This shows that once aware of the possibility of using an ESL-specific framework with her children, she embraces this notion.

### **Summary of this position**

In essence, then, the arguments this group of teachers puts forward in favour of ESL-specific assessment frameworks or in opposition to mainstream assessment frameworks are:

- The ESL-specific frameworks acknowledge the contribution of the first language in second language development, and the discrepancy between the cognitive achievements in the first language and the linguistic expression of them in the second language.
- Consistent with this, these frameworks do not assume that children already have five years or more of experience using oral English on which to base their literacy development.
- The ESL-specific frameworks allow the progress of ESL students to be demonstrated, instead of leaving them sitting at the same level for a long time. This assists both in planning and in reporting, allowing ESL teachers in both Intensive/English Language Centres and mainstream settings to show what they are achieving with their students.
- The ESL-specific frameworks describe the features of second language learners rather than first language learners, allowing them to describe students accurately. They thus complement the mainstream frameworks by describing the aspects of ESL learners' development that mainstream frameworks omit.
- In the case of Maree at Andelu Campus, Ichuru State School, where English is a foreign language, the same issues are relevant, but she calls for assessment in the home language, Torres Strait Creole, rather than the adoption of an ESL-specific assessment framework. Once aware of an ESL-specific framework for assessment she will adapt and use that.

### **Teachers who consider an ESL-specific framework necessary or feasible in certain circumstances**

The perspectives presented so far either concentrate on the definite need for an ESL-specific assessment framework or else express a clear dissatisfaction with

mainstream frameworks that teachers are obliged to use with their ESL (and EFL) learners. Each of the schools discussed so far has been populated largely or exclusively by learners whose first language is not English. The second group of perceptions is expressed by teachers who work in contexts where the student population is more mixed. They include both trained and experienced ESL teachers as well as mainstream teachers with no such training, and mainly work in mainstream teaching contexts. They talk about how ESL-specific frameworks can be used alongside mainstream frameworks, or about how they would use them to assist mainstream teachers in their assessments, and sometimes about the difficulties involved in using two kinds of frameworks.

### **Teachers with ESL training and experience**

Laura is a full-time teacher at St. Cecilia's School in Brisbane, where she works mainly as a team teacher in the mainstream classroom, but also as a withdrawal teacher. This experience perhaps gives her a different perspective from that of the teachers so far discussed, in that she spends much of her time planning and teaching cooperatively, rather than taking sole responsibility for her students. The school where she works uses the Developmental Continua in the junior primary years, and Laura herself also uses the ESL Bandscales. She uses the ESL Bandscales descriptors to complement Net Continuum assessments when talking to mainstream teachers, to explain the learning pathway of their students as second language learners. Laura explains:

*'At this stage we can say, "Oh dear, this child hasn't reached the stage we would like him to reach in the continuum". And so I think we have to come to an understanding of why this child hasn't done that, and for an ESL child, I think a great place to look is in the Bandscales, and think well, what are the factors that are stopping him at this stage from moving on through the Continuum.'*

Later she talks about the same child, Joseph, and the difficulty mainstream teachers may have in placing children on scales comprising indicators which assume a high level of developed oral language, a theme that has already been mentioned:

*'Most Year 1 children will come up to you and be able to give you a sentence about their picture, Joseph could not do that, and that's what floors teachers. They say, "I was floored by it. How do you actually talk to a child about this picture?'"*

She herself found reassurance in the descriptions in the ESL Bandscales that this represented a normal stage of development for an ESL child: *'It was actually affirming to read in the Bandscales that the children can only respond "yes" or "no" to questions about their picture'*. Her daily experience of working with mainstream teachers allows her to appreciate situations from their perspective.

Laura is quite clear about when the Diagnostic Net is inappropriate with ESL children:

*'I certainly don't think the Continuum is fair to the newly arrived ESL children ... How do you judge the reading comprehension and output of child when they can't talk freely to you ... If we want to map their progress then the Bandscales could be used. I would certainly be happy to see that children were progressing rather than just thinking that they're "stuck there".'*

Elsewhere Laura comments that she is able to use the ESL Bandscales to show mainstream teachers that their students are progressing even though this does not show on the Net Continuum:

*'If teachers were worried about the child's progress on the Net Continuum I was able to say to them, "Look, I know that you cannot see any movement through the Continuum, but have a look at this. This is how far the child has moved through the ESL Bandscales." That might be two or three stages within the year'.*

What is interesting is both Laura's awareness of the pressures on mainstream teachers and her ability to use her expertise to explain ESL development to them. In order to allow teachers to use the ESL Bandscales for reporting to parents in the middle and upper primary classes, she developed a reporting format with the descriptors for writing summarised on one page. She comments how the need for this arose from conversations with her mainstream colleagues:

*'If you are going to use anything it will be best to use the Bandscales. They said, "Well, we don't know anything about the Bandscales. We can't do that". So I sat down one morning and paraphrased the Writing Bandscales from Levels one to six.'*

What emerges from this is that in Laura's view using the ESL Bandscales may require the expertise of an ESL teacher, or else a simplified version that does not overburden already busy mainstream teachers.

Laura finds there is a place for the mainstream assessment framework in assessing general literacy development alongside the ESL framework which includes more specific descriptions necessary to describe ESL learners' development:

*'I think the two can go hand-in-hand. The Bandscales, as we said before, do not go into those specifics (of general literacy development), and I don't think that they really have to go in there. I think it's good that the Bandscales look at the ESL-ness of it, not at the skills that every child goes through'.*

Laura feels it may not be feasible to expect mainstream teachers to come properly to grips with the demands of mapping ESL students on the Bandscales, because of their existing work demands: *'On top of other frameworks and profiles, I think most teachers would find the extra load too difficult'.*

Meredith at Daviston in NSW is in a position that shares both similarities and differences with Laura. She is part-time rather than full-time, and this makes it difficult for her to involve the mainstream teachers in the issue of considering the special needs ESL students face. She considers many of them fail to recognise these difficulties, asking her instead to *'fix the problem'*. She finds it difficult to interest them in an ESL-specific assessment of their children, describing them as *'not very receptive'*. Like Laura, Meredith is aware of the pressures teachers face, and suspects they may feel threatened by the ESL teacher, but appears disappointed by the lack of interest in what she feels is important work. She echoes a view put forward by several other teachers, that an ESL-specific assessment framework (in this case the ESL Scales) might be able to act as a tool to justify the field and work of ESL teachers. In this sense they fill a major need. She gives an example of a student who could not be placed on the mainstream Early Learning Profiles, but the ESL Scales could describe what he could do. For Laura, the major issue in the acceptance of the ESL Scales will be the level of professional development provided to teachers in using them; without such support she sees little future for them in NSW.

Clare at Oxford Street Catholic Primary School in Melbourne, shows an interesting position with regard to the need for an ESL-specific assessment

framework. On the one hand, she does not wish to differentiate between students too strongly on the basis of their language background and experience:

*'I don't feel like I should lower my expectations for an ESL background child and so I would hope that they would be able to cope with that because I really think the higher your expectations of them, so long as you give them some sort of adequate background knowledge of things, the more they will achieve ... I think in the long run they're going to be competing with everybody else, but think you can take into consideration that they are ESL.'*

She thus includes in her view of assessment a consideration of what her ESL students will need to achieve in the mainstream. On the other hand, Clare is also unequivocal about the problems that may emerge when a mainstream framework is used with children new to English. She illustrates this with reference to a framework she draws on for part of her assessment, the Victorian English Profiles Handbook:

*'the school that I was at (formerly) found that it was a problem because a lot of things are not taken into account in the Victorian English Profiles Handbook. Huge leaps that ESL children are making which might seem like nothing to a mainstream child were not addressed. Well in reading, the Bands were starting at something post-what the ESL children were at.'*

Clare makes two points here that we have already observed amongst other teachers: firstly, mainstream frameworks are often unable to capture the achievements that ESL children make, and, secondly, that they assume a background of some years of constant exposure to English at home.

Stephanie, Clare's colleague at Oxford Street, expands a little more on this assumption in mainstream frameworks that English is a first language, and the way it affects assessment of children, by referring to the different kinds of language that children both need and show at school:

*'Socially their English is fine. It's just the academic, you know, school, the language of the classroom, you constantly have to build up this structure at school and questioning and things like that, and that's where you go back to this sort of thing (the ESL Companion document). That's not in the straight English, the English Curriculum and Standards Framework. You know they assume that children have all those skills, so you might have to place the child in level two, say if they're grade three or four, in terms of listening and speaking, yet you know that there's a whole lot of things that they can do with social language that may not be presenting in classroom language. They have a whole lot of skills and they shouldn't be there you know, because they're somewhere in between. They're only there in one component of their language development.'*

She is clearly concerned that a mainstream framework is unable to reflect the variation in different spheres of language use, social and academic, oral and written, that children have. Stephanie therefore finds the ESL Companion a necessary additional tool for use with the (mainstream) English Curriculum and Standards Framework.

Stephanie then talks of the factors influencing how she uses the ESL Companion, and how she would not consider it useful, nor even appropriate, for all of the ESL background students in the school. This is a significant issue in a school where almost all of the students have at least one, and generally both parents

whose first language is not English, even though almost all the children were born in Australia. She comments:

*'There's children in our school, and even though they're ESL, there's quite a number of them who, if you read the outcome in (mainstream) English, they fit very nicely, regardless of their background. I mean we have children that are already, you know, in, say, our lower primary, in the A2 area. We have many of them moving into that overlap area, the overlap between needing that extra support and moving into the mainstream.'*

Stephanie identifies three categories of students here: children for whom the mainstream framework is appropriate, children for whom an ESL framework is necessary, and a third category, who are somewhere in between the other two. *'Our children are crossing a whole range, which all ESL students do. They're all over the place so what we have to have is something that's going to indicate where they are with each.'* As with the other teachers included so far in this section, it is Stephanie's experience as an ESL teacher that allows her to make these distinctions, which might otherwise not be clear.

Stephanie, like other teachers familiar with more than one ESL-specific framework, expresses a preference for one framework over others. In this case she prefers the ESL Scales over the ESL Companion: *'I think these (the ESL Scales), overall, these seem to be a little bit fuller and more detailed (than the ESL Companion) and I mean why do they bother changing!'* This reflects her concern that there should be a common framework for assessment of all children, and that either the ESL Scales or the ESL Companion would be adequate. This is perhaps not surprising, since the ESL Companion is based to a large extent on the ESL Scales. Stephanie expresses a slightly different view about the ESL Bandscales, which she has chosen not to use, although she is familiar with them. In her view, they are more appropriate for use in an intensive language centre than in the mainstream setting where she works:

*'I thought, "There's some really fantastic things in this but how am I going to use this in the school?" If you're in a Language Centre, I mean, like new arrivals teachers, they just pick it up and go with it, because all their children fit into those early bands, whereas our kids are much much more mixed.'*

This seems perhaps compatible with the view expressed above by Minh at Lachlan St., that either the ESL Scales or the ESL Bandscales should have been used in her previous school. Both these teachers express a need foremost for an ESL-specific framework, with differentiating between those that are available a secondary consideration.

Erika, the visiting ESL teacher in the Brisbane Catholic Education system, talks about the need for appropriate assessment of ESL learners in a variety of ways, and presents a different perspective again. Her first assessment strategy with ESL learners is to select those she considers have the greatest need. Erika highlights the ESL background of children as a fundamental factor in their English language development and considers it essential that this is recognised and understood by their teachers. Her next step, therefore, is to record the children's home language and literacy background and to ensure the mainstream teacher is made aware of it. To do this, Erika uses a Bilingual Learner Profile. In her view, this can help to avoid panic on the part of the mainstream teacher if the child is not developing at the same rate as native English-speaking children, and also the use of inappropriate assessment based on misinformation, such as that she describes having occurred with a student, Stephen. The problem in Stephen's case was that both the mainstream teacher and the special needs teacher believed

Stephen was from an Italian background, whereas his family is Lebanese, and Arabic is used at home. Erika considers this kind of basic assessment can inform (or, as in Stephen's case, misinform - it is not clear how the wrong information came to be recorded) in a fundamental way a teacher's view of a child's language and literacy development.

We have seen a similar process at work in the discussion between Jenny at Hillsdale English Language Centre and Olivia, the mainstream teacher, of Abdullah, a child who has recently moved from the English Language Centre into a mainstream class. In that discussion, Jenny not only mentions that Abdullah was a pre-literate student when he arrived, but spells out what that means:

*'Okay, he was, he's what we call a pre-lit student. Even though he's a Prep, it means that he didn't have experiences in reading Somali or in reading or in writing in his own country. And even though he's well adjusted to school, he hasn't actually had those background experiences so his reading and writing are at a very basic level.'*

It seems reasonable to believe that Jenny would not have troubled to emphasise the significance of this kind of background if she did not deem it necessary.

It is perhaps noteworthy that in the case of both Stephen and Abdullah, there is an element of chance in the fact that their language background is made explicit to the mainstream teachers. In Abdullah's case it happened firstly because he had been a new arrival in an English Language Centre and secondly because this Centre is situated within the mainstream primary school, allowing an easy opportunity for Jenny to talk to the mainstream teacher. In Stephen's case, there had already been inappropriate assessment, the mainstream teacher was unsure what to do with him, and Erika was both available as a specialist ESL teacher, able to carry out her own assessment, and also had a sufficiently close working relationship with the mainstream teachers to convey the significance of this assessment to them, as we shall see.

Erika's next strategy is to make an initial assessment of each child using the ESL Bandscales. She requires an ESL-specific framework for this: her view about the principal available mainstream alternative, Year Two Diagnostic Net, is that it is too early for it to be relevant, and she repeatedly talks of putting this process *'on hold'*. Again, for Erika, the issue is consciousness-raising amongst the mainstream teachers, and allaying concerns about the abnormality of ESL students' language and literacy development, so she presents them with a copy of the ESL Bandscale descriptors for the level(s) which she judges best to describe the student. This is done in much the same way as Laura at St. Cecilia's, also in Brisbane, and it seems to be similarly well received: *'the teachers accept it readily and do not complain about too much paper'*. The implication here, although Erika does not state it, is that it requires ESL expertise (backed by the professional development she has received in using the ESL Bandscales) and experience (as well as, perhaps, time, as Laura points out) to complete such an assessment. Erika comments that despite her professional development and a certain amount of experience with using the ESL Bandscales, and her experience as an ESL teacher:

*'I still go back to the ESL Bandscales book if I'm not sure, because I don't know the scales that well. I think this child's a 3, but let's just check. I'm still developing my expertise in this area.'*

At St. Bertram's in NSW, the ESL Scales were being incorporated into the assessment and reporting procedures the school uses. Sara perceives a general need for using these scales, and was to train other teachers in using the ESL Scales, and Carly, her General Assistant, was keen to familiarise herself with

them, so she could carry out her own assessments of children. Sara emphasises the need for the ESL Scales to be introduced gradually:

*'We're at that stage when we really should be considering them ... What we're asking all schools to do is for the ESL person to work with one or two teachers, not to go in feet first and say, "Here it is", because then it's like the English document, they were just scared off by it. The ESL Scales is a fine document in a lot of ways but it needs to be tried because we need to be able to say, "Look, this works for us and this doesn't." So we're right at the beginning.'*

Sara thus talks here of the definite professional development role ESL teachers have in working with mainstream teachers to assist in the introduction of the ESL framework. She sees an equally clear need for this process of introduction to be handled sensitively and to take place gradually, in order to avoid alienating mainstream teachers.

Sara and Carly see assessment, planning, teaching and evaluation of learning as closely integrated, and they have a clear sense of how this cycle can be carried out. However, Sara feels that this relationship is not necessarily clear to mainstream teachers nor that it is always feasible for them to work in this way. She articulates the problem very clearly:

*'I think that the ESL Scales are looking at it from the perspective that there is that link [between assessment and teaching] and sometimes there's not. It's idealistic, it really is, from a mainstream teacher's point of view, whereas from the point of view of the ESL teacher, it's more manageable and necessary. I used to be sort of tunnel visioned as an ESL teacher, but now in mainstream teaching, you've got just so much to look at.'*

We will return to Sara at the end of the discussion of the final group of teachers, when she summarises the views of teachers who took part in the inservice sessions she conducted with the ESL Scales.

### **Teachers with no ESL training**

Nicole at Weaver in the far north of West Australia differs from the teachers discussed so far in this section in that she is not a trained ESL teacher. She uses two mainstream assessment frameworks with her students, the First Steps and the West Australian Student Outcome Statements. She uses them to complement each other, and initially seemed happy with using them for most of her students, including those of ESL background. However, the issues of identifying progress in the work of the Nyangumarta-speaking children's and of the starting assumptions made about their background emerged as problems for her, as with many of the other teachers, so that she commented about First Steps and the Student Outcome Statements:

*'Well, that's fine for children who have had a previous schooling experience before they hit Year 1, but these children and their cultural differences, they haven't had the background experiences that the majority of children have when they come to school. So they're pre-level 1. But there's nothing in the Outcome Statements to say that a pre-level child is doing something.'*

While this project was in progress she was introduced by the District Officer to the ESL Framework of Stages, and a kind of transformation seems to have taken place in her perceptions:

*'the ESL Framework has got three Levels and they look specifically at the ESL child and their experiences before they came to school and*

*basically you can see where they've been ... So I think in using the Framework I'd be able to find out the characteristics of the ESL child'.*

Even though it is not an assessment framework, Nicole will try to use it alongside both mainstream frameworks to assist her in assessing her ESL children:

*'So what I was going to do, and it will take me forever, is to use the ESL Framework as well (as the mainstream frameworks) and link it to Outcome Statements and look at what strategies I'm using from First Steps to come up with an assessment checklist that's right for ESL children'.*

There are two points worthy of comment here. Firstly, there is an issue which has been perhaps less clearly articulated, although certainly alluded to, in a number of the other studies. That is, that Nicole is about to go through a laborious process of inventing for herself an assessment framework that satisfies her, and that is appropriate for describing her ESL students. This is despite the existence of quite a few ESL-specific assessment frameworks that have been developed both nationally (firstly, the ESL Bandscales and subsequently the ESL Scales) and at state level (various adaptations of the ESL Scales, some more complete than others). These various ESL assessment frameworks have come about through lengthy consultative processes, consuming very large quantities of public money as well the freely given dedication and time of hundreds of ESL teachers throughout the country. In spite of all this effort, unparalleled in the rest of the world, recently-trained teachers like Nicole may feel the need to reinvent a set of descriptions for themselves. Their response is entirely understandable, perhaps inevitable, in the circumstances. Once teachers perceive a need for something, but lack access to all the relevant available materials (in this case an ESL-specific curriculum assessment framework) they will take the most responsible course: invent something that will fill this need.

Examples of adaptation of available materials and frameworks abound in the Case Studies, emphasising the near-universality of this kind of behaviour. Thus we see Clare at Oxford Street Primary School in Melbourne devising a checklist of her own for assessing her students' reading and writing development, which is based largely, but not exclusively on selected parts of one framework she was familiar with, the Victorian English Profiles Handbook. Clare and her colleague, Stephanie, collaboratively make minor paraphrases of indicators from the English Curriculum and Standards Framework and its ESL Companion to suit their particular assessment activities. Maree at Ichuru State School in Far North Queensland (not familiar with ESL assessment frameworks) conducts ongoing assessment in Torres Strait Creole as well as in English, using the Net Continua for reading and writing, because that is what she perceives as necessary in her context. We find she is now to be involved in an adaptation of the ESL Bandscales for speakers of Torres Strait Creole. We see further examples such as Laura at St. Cecilia's in Brisbane paraphrasing the ESL Bandscales for her mainstream colleagues; Elizabeth at Harthill Pre-Primary Centre in Perth working with ESL teachers to produce a modified version of First Steps, appropriate for ESL learners; and Janet and her colleagues, enthusiastic advocates of the ESL Bandscales, finding it necessary to combine them with Negotiated Evaluation, which involves, as its name implies, constant interpretation and negotiation of the process of assessment. We will read how Joanne at Nyamal perceives the need to modify the content of the Western Australian Student Outcome Statements, while Leigh at Weaver has created her own Student Language Profile. There is in fact evidence that almost all the teachers in this study involve themselves in some form of modification of whatever assessment frameworks are available to them, to suit their own teaching context.

Nicole talks eloquently about the difficulties she faces in assessing her ESL students' progress in English using mainstream frameworks alone, and the value she has found in a document that explains ESL students and how to teach them. Her comments seem particularly powerful because she has no ESL training, but has come to understand much about what ESL means:

*'the biggest problem I have is the fact that I'm not an ESL trained teacher. I've had no experience in a language other than English until I came here. I'm probably naive in the sense that I didn't understand the cultures of these children. I've been exposed to Aboriginal culture where I originally grew up, but not the same Aboriginal culture as up here ... I wasn't able before to say enough about my ESL children. I mean, you can make judgements but it's the little things that don't show up on the First Steps Continuum or the Outcome Statements, like Miriam coming up and having a conversation with you. That's a major step for her. ... Where can you write these sorts of developments on your First Steps Continua? You can't do that sort of thing'.*

The second point is closely related to the first, and that is the role of professional development in allowing teachers to become familiar with ESL-specific frameworks. Teachers will vary in their receptiveness to additional frameworks, as we shall see below (and as we have seen in Meredith's experience, above). However, without exposure to them, and an explanation of how they might be used, it is hard for a teacher even to decide whether or not she wishes to take advantage of them.

On another level, of course, it has emerged that teachers do not necessarily stop adapting frameworks, even when ones specifically developed for ESL students become available. This seems to be related to two separate beliefs or behaviours. Firstly, some teachers appear to want to continue adapting level descriptors, checklists, and features of language development to make them fit their own context and their own students, rather than rely on the generalised descriptions found in scales of any kind. This is perhaps consistent with the view expressed by June at Oxford Street that no assessment framework can adequately describe the learning process and language development that any individual child goes through. For June, her own records and knowledge of the child will always be more complete, satisfying, complex and real. Secondly, other teachers select from the descriptions and features included in the various frameworks, mixing mainstream and ESL features, to characterise their students in a way that satisfies them.

Deidre at Greenvale offers a view of the need for ESL assessment frameworks that is somewhat different from the others in the study, because of the context in which she works, the Greenvale Special School for physically and intellectually disabled children. It was noted in the case study that *'instruments such as the ESL Scales are not fine-grained enough to provide the sort of diagnostic information needed at this level'*, so that more specific assessments need to be made by the speech therapist. Nevertheless Deidre does make her own informal assessment of the children's progress, using an eclectic set of assessment criteria. She found that First Steps, the NSW Early Learning Profiles and the ESL Bandscales were relevant in her teaching situation. Of the three, she and her colleagues actually found the mainstream First Steps Reading Continuum the most useful, because of the basic level it described:

*'And the staff are quite thrilled because it goes down to such a basic level that they say, "Oh, look, our students are on this, they're doing it." Because all the other documents don't cater for such a basic level.'*

This did not, however, necessarily hold for the Oral or Writing Continua: *'The Oral Interaction they might look at, but it's a bit above where we're at and the Writing is for the most part right out of the ballpark'*. Deidre thus identifies a role for ESL-specific frameworks with the ESL students in her teaching context, as a supplement to mainstream frameworks.

### **Summary of this position**

The views of those teachers who consider an ESL-specific framework necessary or feasible in certain circumstances can be summarised as follows:

- There is a general need for using ESL-specific frameworks with ESL students, although mainstream and ESL-specific frameworks can complement each other.
- ESL-specific frameworks are most relevant for newly arrived ESL students or those with little experience of literacy or formal education, but remain relevant for many other ESL students.
- Although a variety of ESL-specific assessment frameworks have now been published in Australia, they have not yet been made available to all teachers who might wish or need to use them.
- Experience and/or training as an ESL teacher generally helps in determining which students require ESL-specific assessment.
- There is clearly a role for sensitively managed professional development (and perhaps pre-service training) where ESL-specific frameworks are to be introduced. Where this is feasible, ESL teachers have a definite professional development role in working with mainstream teachers in introducing these frameworks. The process of becoming familiar with a framework includes not only professional development but also a lot of time and self teaching. Teachers' attitudes towards this are influenced by various things including their workload and other aspects of their own teaching situation.
- An ESL-specific assessment framework can only be used successfully in contexts where the teachers are motivated or experienced enough to do so.
- The descriptors contained in detailed ESL-specific frameworks can have a role in allaying worries mainstream teachers may have about the English language development of some of their children.
- There is likely to be selection and adaptation of the contents of any assessment framework, whether ESL-specific or not; in the absence of exposure to or familiarity with an ESL-specific framework, teachers may try to create their own, to suit their students.

### **Teachers who perceive little need for a separate ESL-specific framework**

The teachers so far discussed have generally seen the language background and experience of their ESL students as a crucial factor in their school career. However, the Case Studies also provide evidence that not all teachers are convinced that ESL children should be assessed differently from mainstream children using an ESL-specific assessment framework rather than existing mainstream frameworks. They hold this view even though they sometimes identify problems with the mainstream frameworks. This view appears to be related to the perceptions of the role of language in success at school as well as to the background and experience of the teachers. The group of teachers who will be discussed in this final section is the smallest of the three.

Kylie at Banksia Pre-Primary in northern Western Australia adopts an approach in her teaching which appears not to acknowledge language background or development as a *major* characteristic distinguishing between her children.

Rather, she is concerned with confidence and with socialisation of children in the classroom:

*'By the end of the year I want every child to have the confidence to stand up. How much they say is up to them, but as long as they've got the confidence and say, "Good morning everyone", when everyone says, "Good morning", back, and they're showing something they've brought from home and tell us about it, that's all I expect. I mean, telling news isn't just a language thing, it's a social thing as well. It's developing confidence to talk in front of other people. So, it's just so hard to isolate what it is in pre-primary.'*

With regard to the assessment frameworks, Kylie is very definite about the inappropriateness of First Steps for pre-primary children. She needed something *'much more basic than First Steps. To cover the basics and not only literacy and language.'* Later she comments: *'I put them on the Writing Continuum once and thought, "This is a waste of time," because the bulk of them were in no phase at all for writing.'* For her, unless a child can genuinely be placed on a level of the Continua, there is no point in carrying out the exercise. She is, however, quite comfortable with the Student Outcome Statements, because they provide an integrated framework for all subject areas, and do not separate out language. She rejects any suggestion that a separate assessment framework might be useful for pre-primary students, because in her mind this would marginalise pre-primary education in relation to primary schooling: *'I mean that just isolates pre-primary again, doesn't it?'*

This strong desire for pre-primary schooling to be identified as a mainstream activity is mirrored by her beliefs about the distinctions between ESL students and other students:

*'I don't think I approach ESL students differently. I may spend more time with them and I simplify what I say.' But 'the activities are the same for all the children.'*

Kylie identifies factors other than language background which she considers do affect how children adapt to school:

*'I think it is age that makes a difference, a big difference ... Whether they've been to playgroup ... whether they're first born or last born ... How much the parents have helped them.'*

Consistent with this view, Kylie claims not to assess her ESL students differently from other students:

*'The way I evaluate them is the same. I mean, knowing the child, my expectation might be different. Some of them you know they can do really well. If they do a shocking job, you say, "that's not their work," sort of thing and you know they can do better. It's not a matter of the ESL child, it's the individual child.'*

This last comment is the clearest possible statement that she does not want to consider her ESL students differently from her other students, and she confirms this when asked about the usefulness of an ESL-specific framework: *'I honestly don't think that I need one. Not that I don't cater for them, but I don't want to single them out.'* She continues this line of thinking:

*'Why pinpoint a group of children because they speak a different language at home? Really. I mean, I know, for instance, that ESL children learn better through pictures and doing things, but that's what pre-primary is anyway. That's what they do all the time. We*

*always have pictures and talk about pictures and describe pictures and all that sort of thing. I don't think pre-primary needs to set the children aside. This is for normal mainstream children and it is for ESL children. Pre-primary is just right for ESL children.'*

Kylie does, however, find one significant problem with the Student Outcome Statements, which echoes the criticisms we have already observed repeatedly, that the mainstream frameworks fail to recognise the validity of the use of the children's first language, although she expresses it in a different way:

*'You know, it's quite a racist little document, isn't it? "You do it our way or you don't do it," all that sort of thing. I mean, education is quite like that, isn't it? I mean we have three girls in one group and they often sit there and speak in Malay. My aide, not the one I have now, she quite often said, "No girls, talk in English." But I don't, I say to them, "Hey, what were you saying to each other?" Maybe the aide thought we're all here to speak English. "You're here, you learn English." But that's such a racist argument, isn't it? "You're here, you do it our way. Don't speak your own language, don't think in your own language, think my way."'*

It is quite possible that Kylie would find this concern successfully addressed in an ESL-specific framework, which by its nature makes the assumption that a child's first language is not English.

Joanne at Nyamal, like Kylie, teaches in a 'remote' school in Western Australia, where almost all the children are Aboriginal. She expresses a more equivocal view of the need for an ESL-specific assessment framework for her ESL students. Like Kylie as well as other teachers in the cases, Joanne stresses the need for contextual support in her teaching, to ensure that ESL children are able to benefit properly from the lessons:

*'I think the main importance in teaching ESL children is explicit teaching and role modelling first everything I expect the children to do. I have found if you don't do modelling and demonstration first that it is very difficult for them to understand. Also the use of visual aids is very important ... You can't take anything for granted, you can't presume that they've understood what you've said'.*

She makes use of First Steps and is also 'enjoying the Student Outcome Statements'. Nevertheless, Joanne finds it necessary to use not the mainstream First Steps Continuum for assessing oral language development, but the Highgate Oral Language Continuum, developed by ESL specialists to complement the First Steps Continuum. She explains:

*'It (First Steps) goes from babyhood but it doesn't suit my children because they speak differently in terms of grammar and everything, so the Highgate Oral Language Continuum is terrific. It starts with Beginning, then Developing, then Transitional, so it's done in the same phase-like form, but it's written in terms of outcomes that ESL children might come up with.'*

Once again, like so many teachers in this study, she relates this decision to the assumption made by the mainstream framework of a first language background in English:

*'A concern that I have is that we're assessing these children the same way as mainstream children and yet the oral language is ESL. You can't accurately assess these children on the Oral Language Continuum as it is because they are excellent in oral language in their*

*language but English is their second language. It is not specific enough for Aboriginal children.'*

As we have seen with so many other teachers, Joanne also needs to be able to record progress of her learners, and she places particular emphasis on development in oral language:

*'I think it is picked up on the Continuum in terms of oral language using the Highgate Continuum. The way they speak didn't relate to the First Steps Oral Language Continuum and you need to show some progression. You need to be able to see that a child is developing, particularly in oral language, from when they came to school and not speaking English.'*

Interestingly, Joanne is satisfied with the First Steps Continua for written language: *'I think the Reading and Spelling and Writing are fine because all children are starting in the same place.'* This is a different view from that put by teachers with slightly older children who have experience of literacy in their first language, and a different perspective again from those teachers who make a closer link between the development of oral and written language. Like Nicole at Weaver, Joanne has recently been introduced to the ESL Framework of Stages, and would like not only to tie it to her assessment of her students, but also to modify the content of the Student Outcome Statements (S.O.S.):

*'The ESL Framework says what the children can do before Level 1 (on the Student Outcome Statements). So, the S.O.S. pointers need to be changed to pick this up. You can add your own little pointers for Aboriginal children and I think the ESL Bandscales are something that I'll have to become familiar with. I've found it a good idea of the capabilities that ESL children have got. I think the ESL children display the First Steps indicators but I just think we have got to take more time to just realise that they may not develop as quickly.'*

Exposure to an ESL-specific framework has led this teacher to a talk about the need to be able to record the *capabilities* of ESL students and to recognise that they need more *time* to become familiar with using English.

There is, however, an apparent conflict in her position, when she is explicitly asked about the need for a separate framework for ESL students. Joanne claims that she *'wouldn't assess them differently from other children but I would have this (the ESL Framework of Stages) here if I needed it.'* It appears that what she favours is an expansion or modification of existing frameworks, rather than a separate ESL-specific framework. Talking of the First Steps, she concludes: *'This type of thing works really well, with maybe a few more pointers and things that are ESL based with a developmental progression for the ESL child.'*

Another teacher in the far north of Western Australia, Leigh at Weaver, has, by her own admission, had no ESL training: *'I haven't had any ESL training so I haven't been so aware.'* It is possible that this conditions her view of ESL learners, and her attitude to mainstream and ESL-specific frameworks. She admits that the assessment of language of ESL learners is not straightforward: *'You know they've got different skills in different areas, so language is really difficult. If they can't read or write they're really stuck in some areas, so they would have to be pre Level 1 or in the Early Language Phase of First Steps.'* Leigh is yet another teacher who feels obliged to modify existing assessment frameworks to create a set of indicators she uses in her own 'Student Language Profile':

*'So most of them are from the Student Outcome Statements, but I have actually put in some of them myself like "pronounces most sounds clearly" because I find in speaking and listening that's*

*important. Alfred doesn't pronounce his words so clearly, so I wouldn't tick him for that. It's in the Oral Continuum for First Steps but it is not put like that, it's not clear, it doesn't say "Should speak clearly" or whatever.'*

This lack of explicit recognition of features of language behaviour that she considers important becomes more of an issue for Leigh when she has to report on her ESL students to parents. Talking about one of her students, Tanya, for example, she says,

*'She's in Role Play, but it's not really true because she's ESL. I think you have to make that known for parents ... If all the other children in the class were in Experimental and she's in Role Play, then I need to be able to explain why. I just need to record that for myself to explain it to parents.'*

Leigh was clearly aware on some level of the distinctiveness of her ESL learners, without relating this to the models of assessment she used. Despite the issues of reporting just mentioned, Leigh at first felt that the First Steps was an appropriate framework for assessment of all her learners. However, like her colleague at Weaver, Nicole, and Joanne at Nyamal, Leigh was introduced by the District Officer to the ESL Framework of Stages during the course of this project. When she discussed this document with her Principal, the reaction was dramatic: *'Oh this is great, where's it been all this time.'* It is interesting that this book, not in itself an assessment framework, caused such a reaction amongst these teachers when they came to consider how they were to assess their ESL learners. Leigh comments:

*'I put Tanya on the First Steps Continuum and it wasn't relevant. It didn't work because she was in no Phase at all. But she was in her first language, coming from Serbia she has had formalised education in her first language. If I go to the ESL Stages and I find she's in Stage A which says she is literate in her first language, she knows some schooling in her first language, she could print, she could copy, she could draw, she could colour in, you know, so there's obviously some skills there ... I think she's trying to talk to me in her own language, though she knows I can't understand but by my questioning and body language or my looks on my face she can actually interpret whether I'm understanding or not.'*

Leigh presents here the view of a teacher who is aware that ESL learners are in some significant way different, but which she finds difficult fully to understand. This is perhaps related to her lack of ESL training. As Leigh articulates clearly, for her the ideal assessment framework is one *'that gives me an understanding of what an ESL child is.'* She is aware that, helpful though she finds it, the ESL Framework of Stages is not an assessment framework, but a document to assist in planning teaching. It is impossible to judge how she would react if presented with an ESL-specific framework such as the ESL Scales or the ESL Bandscales, but it somehow seems unfortunate that she has not had the opportunity to look at these documents. It is very likely that one reason why Leigh does not demand an ESL-specific framework for assessing her students is that she has never had the opportunity to become familiar with one.

The final teacher in the sample, Barry at Daviston Primary School, shares some ground with Kylie at Banksia Pre-Primary. He is a colleague of Meredith, whom we have discussed earlier, in a kindergarten with about 20% of ESL students. As was observed in the case study, *'Barry doesn't see these children primarily in terms of being "ESL learners". They are simply individuals who, like all kindergarten children come to school with a great range of strengths and needs.'* Consistent with this view,

Barry does not discriminate in his assessment between ESL and non-ESL learners:

*'There's not much difference particularly I feel in kindergarten, not much different to how I assess the others, because they're all learning and pretty much at the base level, then I don't think their assessment at this stage needs to be very different.'*

This is as clear a statement as any made in this study of the view that an ESL-specific assessment framework is not needed. Barry is aware of the relevance of some of the other factors mentioned so far by other teachers in the development of English, particularly range of vocabulary and the amount of time ESL students need to become familiar with English, but for him, these are less important than an overall sense that each child is progressing:

*'I think the most important thing, particularly for the kindergartens, is that you remain positive and say, "Oh good, you've done that really well, that's much better than what it was before" and seeing improvement all the time and encouraging the improvements so that they end up feeling positive about themselves. Because I think actually if we could have them being able to listen well and thinking about good learning, then to some extent I think the kindergarten teacher's done their job, even if they can't read. If they feel good about themselves and think that they're still doing pretty well, then in First Grade then they will get on, particularly if they're young.'*

Barry appears quite satisfied with the mainstream Early Learning Profiles, and identifies no real problems with using this framework with any of his learners. When introduced to the ESL Bandscales and the ESL Scales, it is interesting that Barry showed no strong sense of recognition of patterns of behaviour. He maintains strongly that having an ESL background is not a particularly relevant consideration at kindergarten, at the overall level, although he conceded that a more detailed assessment might reveal differences:

*'With my particular ones that I had, spoken English didn't seem to be a problem in general. As I said it became a problem with specifics and for specialised language, but for general talking about general things their English was as good as the others. Of course, I mean if you probe more closely, it may have been different.'*

He takes a somewhat different view from most of the other teachers represented in this study in his attitude towards the role of background knowledge in the first language:

*'I consider that all this is important in thinking about it, important if they come from overseas, when they've come in there about first or second grade, but I think in kindergarten they're doing a lot of learning anyway ... because there are some English background people who don't have a love of books or haven't done much in the book area as well ... they're probably not as disadvantaged as much as those who haven't done anything in the English language.'*

Essentially Barry feels that there is little of value that the Bandscales can add to his picture of his students. Likewise, he felt that the ESL Scales, which he had looked at briefly, were of no particular value. He comments: *'I mean basically there's very little difference between that (the ESL Scales) and what's in there (the Early Learning Profiles).'* Barry's position is unequivocal. Alone of the teachers in this study, he sees no value in a framework which emphasises the ESL background of his students. Some other teachers have declared themselves happy with mainstream frameworks, but have nevertheless either identified specific differences in their ESL learners which need to be taken into account in

assessment or have reacted favourably to being introduced to a document which discusses in detail the characteristics of ESL learners. Barry's view seems to be firmly the result of his perception that language background is only one of many factors affecting development and success at school. He concedes that closer examination of students' language use might lead to a different perception, but perhaps because this is not his field of expertise, he perceives no need to do this himself.

We will conclude this section with a summary of points made by Sara at St. Bertram's in NSW. It will be recalled that she held a number of inservice sessions with mainstream colleagues in the use of the ESL Scales. On the basis of discussions with teachers during these sessions, she identified a variety of objections to an ESL-specific framework that were made. These teachers do not form part of the sample included in the study. Nevertheless, the account of teachers' perceptions found in the cases would be incomplete without their perceptions, which reinforce points made at various points in the cases. The views expressed by Sara's colleagues are:

1. The ESL Scales, being based on indicators and outcomes, resembled a checklist too much to assist teachers in linking assessment and teaching. By contrast, mainstream frameworks that included suggestions for teaching activities were viewed more favourably.
2. The ESL Scales were perceived to have value only for new arrivals, for whom it was possible to develop individualised programs. In mainstream classrooms, the ESL framework was perceived to add little to the indicators included in the mainstream framework. ESL students who had passed the very early stages of proficiency in English simply had to fit into the classroom teacher's regular program.
3. Some classroom teachers felt threatened by an ESL-specific framework. There appeared to be two reasons for this: firstly, they objected to the idea that ESL students should be seen differently from other class members, and secondly, because the ESL framework was perceived as the domain of the ESL teacher, a divide was created between mainstream and specialist teachers. The introduction of yet another document was met with resistance by primary teachers, who commonly deal with language and literacy issues, using a variety of documents and frameworks.
4. The differences in organisation between the ESL Scales and the mainstream English K-6 and its associated Early Learning Profile confused some (although by no means all) teachers.

### **Summary of this position**

The teachers in this final group can be characterised in the following way:

- They do not wish their ESL students to be singled out from other students as a result of the assessment framework used with them, because this would draw undesirable attention to the students.
- Language is seen as merely one of a range of factors affecting ESL students' success in junior primary school, so should not be emphasised at the expense of other, equally important factors. The two pre-primary teachers in this group consider that it is too early for this kind of distinction to be made, although they do not necessarily reject the notion that it might be relevant at later stages.

- The teachers in the Pilbara discussed in this section began the project unaware of any document describing ESL learners. Once introduced to such a document, they found it very useful. This suggests that it was merely this lack of exposure which led them not to seek to use an ESL-specific assessment framework for their ESL learners. With such exposure, backed by appropriate professional development, it seems likely that they would at least use such a framework to supplement their assessments based on mainstream frameworks.
- One teacher sees no value or need for an ESL-specific assessment for his pre-primary children, since for him it adds little useful to the existing mainstream framework.
- The reaction of individual teachers on being introduced to an ESL-specific framework will depend on a complex range of local factors, including the number and nature of documents and frameworks they already use, their perceptions of the role of ESL specialist teachers, and the nature of their own teaching situation, as well as their attitude towards first language as a distinguishing feature of their students.

## **Is There a Need for a Distinct ESL Assessment Framework?: Main Findings**

- The perceptions of the teachers in the study represent a continuum. At one end of this continuum, an ESL-specific framework is seen as essential, while mainstream frameworks are rejected as inadequate for assessing ESL learners. At the other end of the continuum are teachers who see little need or desire for an ESL-specific framework, even as an addition to mainstream frameworks. In between these two positions are a number of teachers who will wish to supplement mainstream frameworks with material from ESL frameworks, or who will use parallel frameworks, both ESL and mainstream, for some or all of their ESL students.
- The most important factor influencing these views appears to be the perceptions held by individual teachers of the role played by first language in children's success at school. It is those teachers, with or without ESL training, who view language background including experience of literacy, as crucial, who will tend to insist on an ESL-specific framework for their ESL students.
- Intensive/English Language Centres are in no doubt of the need for a distinct framework, and this view tends to be endorsed by teachers working in mainstream teaching situations.
- ESL-specific frameworks complement the mainstream frameworks by describing the aspects of ESL learners' development that mainstream frameworks omit. Thus, many teachers in this study value them because they acknowledge the contribution of the first language in second language development and the discrepancy between the cognitive achievements in the first language and the linguistic expression of them in the second language.
- ESL-specific frameworks are also valued because they do not assume that children already have five years or more of experience using oral English on which to base their literacy development.
- ESL-specific frameworks are seen as allowing the real progress of ESL students to be described instead of leaving them sitting at the same level for a

long time. This assists both in planning and in reporting, allowing ESL teachers in both Intensive (English) Language Centres and mainstream settings to show what they are achieving with their students.

- Availability of frameworks and access to professional development in their use seems to influence views about the need for distinctive ESL assessment. Some teachers who have not been exposed to ESL-specific frameworks nevertheless develop informal frameworks for assessing their ESL students taking into account their language background. Virtually all the teachers in the study adapt whatever frameworks are at their disposal to suit their own teaching contexts. Each teacher thus represents in microcosm what has happened on a State and national level with the ESL-specific frameworks: no single document completely satisfies anyone, and they all require adaptation to the local context. The process of becoming familiar with any framework requires a lot of time and effort by each teacher in addition to any professional development that is provided.
- Although all the fully-developed ESL-specific frameworks discussed in this study receive favourable comment, there is a strong tendency for frameworks which emphasise process, and which include suggestions for teaching or other curriculum support, to be preferred. This general preference is further reflected in the favourable comments made about mainstream assessment frameworks which include such material. Brief summaries designed for ESL learners tend to be rejected.
- Teachers who reject ESL-specific frameworks tend to view first language as simply one factor of many influencing children's progress at school and do not wish to single ESL students out on this basis.
- Additional objections raised by teachers opposed to the use of ESL-specific frameworks include the amount of additional work they require, both in coming to terms with understanding them and in implementing them in their daily practice. They already feel overworked, and do not wish to add to their burden more than is absolutely necessary. They need to feel that this work will have value for the students.

# Chapter Eight

## Implications of the Study

### The Focus of the Implications

Each of the previous chapters in this volume addressed a key issue that emerged from the Case Studies of teachers' interpretations and use of assessment frameworks in relation to their ESL students. The main findings from the research are presented at the end of each chapter. These findings provided particular answers to the following questions:

1. What is the general pattern in the use of frameworks for the assessment of the English development of young ESL children in Australia? And, more specifically, to which assessment frameworks did the teachers have access in the particular school systems within which they worked?
2. What is the influence of the teachers' particular working contexts upon their choice and use of assessment frameworks? What facilitated or hindered their use of a particular framework?
3. What is the impact of the assessment frameworks upon the teachers' daily classroom pedagogy? How do new ways of assessing interact with established pedagogy?
4. What are the teachers' views on the assessment frameworks in relation to young ESL learners?
5. What particular purposes do teachers attribute to their assessment and with what consequences for ESL children?
6. Is there a need for a distinct ESL assessment framework?

In this chapter, we offer implications which are derived from the findings. The implications that follow focus upon the central concerns of any assessment process which seeks to obtain accurate information that will serve beneficial educational and social purposes. If assessment procedures are to provide such information they need to be sensitive to the population being assessed, to be manageable for the assessors, and to be appropriate to the context in which the assessment is carried out. In this study we have investigated, in particular, the extent to which externally designed assessment frameworks have appeared sufficiently sensitive to the development of the English of K-3 ESL students and the extent to which they have been accommodated by teachers in their daily work in particular classrooms and schools.

There are limits on the generalisability of findings from a study of 25 teachers. However, the sample comprised of a cross section of teachers with different experiences and training in working with ESL students in a diversity of locations and classroom contexts. They were also working with a representative range of assessment frameworks and were at different stages in the accommodation of these frameworks within their pedagogy. Most of them exercised assessment practices that were effective in relation to criteria derived from research in classroom-based second language

evaluation (Genesee and Upshur, 1996)<sup>\*</sup>. A prevailing characteristic of the sample of teachers was their commitment to making assessment work in positive ways for them, their schools and their students. It was clear from the study that this commitment entailed a significant amount of **personal** professional development in relation to assessment issues and practices. The implications that follow, therefore, are also based upon what emerged from this study as facilitative of their commitment and adaptation to new directions in assessment.

Implications are offered in relation to the following issues in turn:

1. The valid assessment of development in English of ESL children
2. The design of appropriate assessment frameworks.
3. The process of reporting to systems and parents.
4. The needs of teachers in the assessment process.
5. The directions of future research in the assessment of ESL children.

## **1. Implications for the Valid Assessment of Development in English of ESL children**

- 1.1. Most teachers in the study directly or indirectly expressed the implicit value of an ESL-specific framework in contributing to their:
  - understanding of the developmental characteristics of young ESL learners;
  - appreciation of the diversity of the backgrounds of ESL learners;
  - identification of the finer details of the progress of ESL students in English language and literacy;
  - recognition of the extent and kind of support they should provide in order to help such progress.

When ESL-specific assessment frameworks are made available for teachers, alongside mainstream frameworks, a good proportion of teachers choose to adopt them. Given the investment of time, money, and research and design effort that have gone into their development, the ESL-specific frameworks should be more widely available to teachers across systems.

- 1.2. Given the range of contexts in which teachers work and given the diversity of linguistic and cultural experience of different ESL children, the use of only one of the existing mainstream frameworks in a school or system appears inappropriate and inadequate. There is a need for a framework of ESL progress and achievement, either incorporated within a mainstream framework or supplementary and complementary to it. However, either option would also require assessment procedures that are appropriate to the possible heterogeneity of ESL learners in a single classroom and to the students' learning contexts - whether they are learning English as a second or, essentially, foreign language in their community, for example.
- 1.3. An incorporated framework would build upon the features of current ESL specific frameworks which are valued by the ESL profession. Particular features which the teachers identified as missing from current mainstream frameworks and from some ESL-specific frameworks but which they regarded as essential would include:

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<sup>\*</sup> Genesee, F. and G. Upshur. (1996). *Classroom-based Evaluation in Second Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- ways of assessing the specific contributions of children's first language to the learning of literacy in English and to the learning of concepts and processes across the early years curriculum;
  - a fine-grained account of second language speaking and listening development and their contribution to the learning of literacy;
  - ways of identifying genuine learning difficulties of ESL students so that specific learning needs can be addressed;
  - ways of assessing broader aspects of learning in the children's first language where this is possible in a particular context.
- 1.4. Most mainstream teachers felt a strong need to have more information about the ESL students in their classes. In order to help all teachers to identify and, thereby, appropriately assess ESL learners there is a need for whole school procedures for precise **initial** identification of the language background and early literacy experiences of all children on entering the school. The effectiveness of this kind of procedure depends upon a good system of home-school liaison. Schools in the study which had bilingual aides benefited greatly in terms of the information they could obtain and provide concerning ESL children's background capabilities and experiences. Therefore helpful initial information about ESL children in particular is likely to be provided to teachers through strong home-school liaison in which bilingual aides or, at least, ESL specialists are directly involved. However, **all** teachers need to collate and record this kind of information for their own teaching purposes.
- 1.5. Mainstream teachers want to identify genuine progress in the development of English in their ESL students. Both mainstream and experienced ESL teachers want appropriate intervention for ESL students which addresses genuine learning difficulties. Therefore almost all the teachers identify the need for an assessment framework that is sufficiently sensitive to the early developmental patterns and achievements of ESL learners. To be sufficiently sensitive, an assessment framework will also account for the differences between ESL learners. These requirements would reduce the possibility of global intervention strategies inappropriate to specific ESL learner needs being implemented on the basis of students' failure against the criteria of a mainstream English framework. It would also reduce the related possibility of constructing ESL students as stereotypically deficient with the consequent discouragement of such students, their teachers and their parents.
- 1.6. Mainstream teachers in the study who were recently introduced to an ESL-specific framework valued in particular its contribution to their knowledge about ESL learners. From this they began to take account of the specific learning needs of ESL students in their planning and the kinds of classroom activities they provided. These appear to be initial positive reactions to an unfamiliar ESL framework, but they are not sufficient. Through appropriate and on-going school and district support, such teachers need to move beyond these initial reactions to begin to incorporate valid ESL assessment into their established assessment practices in the classroom.
- 1.7. Schools provide the unique opportunity for ESL students to become genuinely bilingual and biliterate. Assessment can strongly support such a process by including reference to the languages with which children come to school and through which they are learning. The study reveals that this is greatly facilitated by employing bilingual teachers or assistants, involving the children in self-assessment, and by involving parents, the extended family and the community in school assessment policies and practices. In some teaching contexts, this may involve a re-conceptualising of the purposes and use of assessment so that it:

- recognises children's attainment in different languages and the conceptual and linguistic understandings from their earlier experiences;
- enables children to use the languages they feel are most appropriate and mobilise each to support the development of the other;
- reveals the nature of children's development in more than one language including the additional metalinguistic awareness, the capacity to transfer concepts and genre conventions, and the code-switching and translating capabilities that such development entails;
- engages direct parent and community involvement in education.

## **2. Implications for the Design of Assessment Frameworks**

- 2.1. The seeming duplication of assessment frameworks has sometimes appeared to be unnecessary and confusing to teachers. There seems to be a need for a period of consolidation wherein national and States and Territories systems, on the basis of feedback from implementation, agree on those particular frameworks which both meet local requirements whilst attaining a high degree of compatibility one with the other. This would also apply in the case of ESL specific frameworks or components of mainstream frameworks which are designed to fully account for the achievements of ESL learners. Such a process of consolidation would need to take account of the previously stated implications in relation to the valid assessment of ESL learners. The process might also include consideration of ways of more directly harmonising current ESL specific frameworks with final State and Territory versions of mainstream assessment frameworks so that they are mutually supportive. An additional benefit would be the reduction of pressure upon teachers in having to apply two separate frameworks or in having to devise their own separate ways of fairly accounting for ESL students in relation to a required mainstream framework.
- 2.2. From this study it appears that an assessment framework can only have an indirect effect upon classroom pedagogy. For teachers to genuinely accommodate it within their teaching purposes, planning, and practices, a framework must appear **plausible** in terms of its accord with established practices, its appropriateness to the specific teaching context and its students, and its value as an informative resource for making fairly rapid but refined judgements about students' achievements and progress. A framework that fails to meet these plausibility criteria is likely to be resisted by teachers or, at best, undermined through its mere assimilation to established ways of working.
- 2.3. A framework which is highly valued by teachers of ESL students appears to be one which:
  - addresses the teachers' own pedagogic priorities and ways of teaching;
  - informs them of the prior linguistic and cultural experiences of ESL children, including those for whom English is essentially a foreign language in their community;
  - provides them with appropriate sources of information about the home language of their particular ESL students;
  - clearly maps their students' developmental processes in English language and literacy;
  - offers suggestions on specific teaching strategies and other curriculum support that can facilitate these developmental processes and, thereby, enable genuine progress;
  - offers precision both in what to focus on in assessment and how to undertake it.

In the process of possibly synthesising current ESL frameworks and relating them directly to adopted versions of mainstream frameworks, an ESL oriented framework could also be refined so that it more directly addresses the above characteristics which some teachers believe are only partially covered at the present time.

- 2.4. Willing accommodation of a new framework is exemplified in this study by a teacher's selective adaptation of it. This adaptation is also symptomatic of the teacher's wish to have a sense of personal investment and ownership in relation to it. The implication for framework design is that it be in a format which is **open** to modification whilst indicating clearly the limits and scope of such modification. Clear identification of what can not be negotiable reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation whilst, in turn, specification of aspects of a framework which are potentially variable encourages genuine accommodation within established assessment practices and overall pedagogy.

### **3. Implications for Reporting**

- 3.1 Teachers were clearly uneasy about some of the purposes which assessment and reporting were serving or might serve. This led to some confusion between the forms of assessment and the goals of assessment. Without exception, however, the teachers recognised the need to be accountable to the school and the system and, particularly, to parents. Systems need to make clear to teachers, as early as possible in the implementation of a framework, the purposes to which their reporting will be put. If this includes subsequent intervention for students who appear not to be progressing, systems need to be sure that such intervention will be appropriate to specific and genuine needs. The inclusion, between the assessment and intervention, of a negotiation process directly with schools and teachers concerning the most appropriate intervention is likely to facilitate acceptance of this use of a framework.
- 3.2. An assessment framework alone can not serve to facilitate uniformity in language and literacy pedagogy, even if this was seen as desirable. On the other hand, if compatibility of assessment and reporting procedures is an objective nationally or within a particular system, the recent growth in their multiple design and the diversity of the contexts and phases of their implementation have undermined this possibility. Also it may be inappropriate in terms of context-sensitivity for a particular framework to be directly transferred from one situation to another. This study suggests that a grouping of teachers working within the same system or school may not interpret and use assessment criteria in a uniform way. Teachers will not interpret the achievement indicators in a framework in mutually coherent and consistent ways unless they have the opportunity to work together when doing so. In circumstances in which individual teacher interpretations are unavoidable, collaborative monitoring undertaken both within a school and across a system therefore appears to be essential if comparative assessment within school or system is to be consistent. However, it is clear that teachers need to be allocated the extra time for such a process to succeed. An additional advantageous outcome of this kind of monitoring would be on-going refinement of both the framework and schools' assessment policies and practices.
- 3.3. Assessment frameworks should require teachers and schools to seek and rely on a range of different types of evidence of children's achievements in language and literacy, including out of school language and literacy practices, in order to obtain a fuller profile of children's language repertoires and, thereby, better inform assessment for reporting purposes.

- 3.4. Designers, administrators and teachers need to be alert to the differences in assumptions, values, language, conceptualisation, and experiences between themselves and the children being assessed. We need to consider, in particular, the impact of different methods of assessment on children, their parents and their communities. By directly involving (where possible) the children and certainly the community in the assessment process, particularly in the early years, the outcomes from this process will have greater potential to capture children's language and literacy achievements in and out of school at a crucial phase in their development. In addition, what may be counted as progress and achievement would be informed from different perspectives. A further advantage would be the strengthening of parental and community understanding of, and participation in their children's education.
- 3.5. Several teachers in this study felt that their efforts to undertake comprehensive assessment of ESL learners were not valued because they did not have direct input into the assessment and reporting policies and procedures of the school, particularly in relation to its ESL population. It appears essential that a school responsible for even a relatively small population of ESL students needs to call upon the expertise of ESL specialists to inform such policies and procedures. However, whole school approaches to ESL students should best be seen as the responsibility of all the teachers.
- 3.6. It may be unrealistic to expect primary teachers to assess their students in all learning areas according to the fine detail required by most of the frameworks. This study suggests that a complete assessment of all areas even once in a year is itself highly demanding. It might be preferable, either (i) to focus upon the crucial areas of the curriculum alone - including language, literacy and numeracy - in the early years, widening the assessment to other areas later, or (ii) undertake a careful synthesis of the key outcomes of the different learning areas in the pre-primary and primary curriculum for assessment purposes. If these options are rejected, teachers are likely to seek ways of reducing the requirements upon them so that they are, in fact, manageable. The result may be a dilution of the valid purposes and comprehensiveness of the frameworks.
- 3.7. The teachers in this study believed that the language and organisation of the assessment frameworks did not provide an appropriate basis for reporting to parents. In addition to being necessarily comprehensive and relatively complex documents, the frameworks also tend to mirror systems' reporting priorities and preferences not least because they are a systems creation. Reporting to parents is often seen by the teachers as a distinct activity from reporting to colleagues and the school or system. There appears to be an urgent need for one or all of the following to occur:
- Immediate professional development for teachers in supporting their efforts to translate the frameworks into parent-sensitive reporting formats.
  - Documentation added to current frameworks which suggests ways in which they can be mined and adapted for appropriate ways of reporting to parents.
  - Adaptation of the frameworks themselves so that their organisation and language are comprehensible to people outside the profession. Such adaptation would entail opportunities for parents to contribute to the forms and procedures of assessment. Given their accountability function, this might be seen as an essential requirement.
  - Serious consideration within systems of the need to translate current and future reports into the language of the parents of ESL students. If one of the purposes of assessment is to clearly inform and involve parents and communities, then this might be seen also as an essential requirement.

Again, the appropriate and recognised reliance upon bilingual assistants and close links between home and school would greatly facilitate such provision.

#### **4. Implications for Teachers**

4.1. Most of the teachers in this study were alert to the subtleties of appropriate assessment for the different students in their classrooms. The study suggests that **all** teachers would benefit from professional development focusing on the learning of language and literacy by ESL learners. Such provision should be a part of all pre-service teacher education and should be provided to experienced teachers who teach ESL students in their classes but who are relatively unfamiliar with their characteristics or needs. Essential elements in such professional development would provide teachers with:

- Information about assessment frameworks relative to ESL students, both mainstream and ESL, on their purposes, strengths and limitations, their classroom and school implementation, and the likely consequences for ESL students in their use.
- Information about ESL children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds including information about the languages they speak and their home and community literacy practices. Such information will need to underline the crucial influence of a child's first language upon on-going progress in school.

These kinds of information must enable teachers to recognise that ESL children are not a homogeneous group and that, for example, there are children in Australia for whom English is a foreign language or that a speaker of English as a second dialect has different literacy learning needs from those of an ESL learner. Such awareness would further inform teachers who are new to working with ESL students that teaching and assessment will need to be appropriately sensitive, not only to different groups of children, but also to ESL children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

- 4.2. There is strong evidence in this study that locally provided professional development through a district office or by an ESL specialist within a school appears to have a significant impact upon teacher understanding of the education of ESL children and, thereby, the adoption and appropriate use of assessment frameworks. Teachers are clearly open to conceptual and practical support given by educational advisers or key people in their schools who can empathise with the procedures and practices arising from, or suited to local circumstances. Understandings of new assessment frameworks and procedures worked out with their colleagues across schools were highly valued.
- 4.3. Assessment and reporting demands are considerable on teachers at the present time, and for them to feel that there is value in carrying them out, recognition has to be given to this work. The process of familiarising oneself with a framework in order to be able to use it properly requires much individual effort **in addition to** any professional development that is provided. The time needed for the appropriate adoption and genuine integration of a new and relatively complex approach to assessment within a teacher's pedagogy is gradual and needs to be seen in terms of years rather than months.
- 4.4. It is clear from this study that, in order to accommodate a new framework within pedagogy, teachers will inevitably and selectively adapt it with reference to their own teaching context, to the children in their classrooms, and to their own

established assessment practices. An assessment framework should acknowledge this adaptation and **explicitly guide** teachers in the process. Such guidance would make clear what may or may not be generally applicable and in what ways they can build upon the practices and procedures they already have in place when using the framework.

- 4.5. Guidance in gradual adaptation needs to reflect the extent of teachers' likely reliance upon those frameworks in subsequent classroom practice. The pattern of gradual reliance upon frameworks revealed in this study suggests that teachers who are new to a framework would benefit from guidance through five phases of accommodation over time:
  1. An initial focus on ways of reporting to the school and the system and ways of profiling children for other teachers.
  2. Ways of using the framework to plan the teaching program and as a check on the appropriate coverage of student achievements in the teacher's own established assessment procedures.
  3. Ways of incorporating outcomes from learning identified in the framework as refinements within the teacher's more formal record keeping or profiling of individual children. And using the framework to diagnose different students' learning needs.
  4. Adapting current teaching strategies and adopting new strategies so that classroom practices are particularly appropriate for different learners, including ESL children.
  5. Building on the framework to report to parents in informative and accessible ways. Synthesising broader and established teaching objectives with specific objectives which can be deduced from the outcomes identified in the framework. Exploiting the framework as an explicit guide to on-going-informal judgements of students' achievements and to the kind of precise feedback provided to students on classroom tasks.
- 4.6. Research in second language assessment suggests that new assessment procedures may have some initial impact upon the content of lessons but a much more gradual and indirect impact upon how teachers teach. It also suggests that teachers will be enabled to genuinely integrate a new assessment framework if they see it as a positive contribution to their own pedagogic priorities. Such integration appears largely dependent upon two interrelated factors: (i) the teachers' willing efforts to adapt the frameworks so that they are accommodated within their classroom practices, and (ii) the teacher's perception of the purposes and value given to these frameworks by the education system. These imply that systems need to promote an assessment policy which can be seen by teachers as equitable for the students whom they teach and, crucially, to recognise formally the time and effort it takes before new assessment procedures can be integrated so that the findings from such procedures can be regarded as valid and reliable.
- 4.7. The reaction of teachers to the introduction of a new framework may depend on the number of documents with which they are already familiar in practice and their willingness to allocate energy from what they see as their prime responsibilities of teaching in order to deal with the implied change in assessment procedures. There is likely to be a limit to what they are prepared to deal with at any one time. There is a case to be made for a system to adopt **one** framework and to adhere to it for a good while. (The implications so far suggest, of course, that such a framework would need to account for the assessment of ESL students.) It is still too early in the classroom implementation of all the current frameworks to obtain a clear picture of how effective they are in relation to the purposes for which they were intended to serve.

- 4.8. In general, ESL trained teachers are likely to find it easier to use ESL-specific frameworks than mainstream teachers and they therefore have a definite role to play in the professional development of their mainstream colleagues. Since ESL teachers may be the interpretative medium in a school between mainstream and ESL frameworks they need to be given the scope and recognition for such a role in whole school assessment policy. However, there is some possibility of tension here. ESL teachers may wish to use their expertise in understanding and applying ESL-specific frameworks to justify a strong distinctiveness in their work from mainstream provision - a stance that underlies the perceived special contribution of English/Intensive Language Centres. This is particularly understandable in systems where ESL funding is under pressure. On the other hand, mainstream teachers may question or even resent such differentiation, not least when they see the education of ESL children as their responsibility and have the appropriate knowledge and expertise to undertake it. A solution to this is not the further erosion of ESL provision but the more explicit recognition of the contributions of ESL trained teachers to the education and assessment of ESL students and, in particular, strong school and system support for direct and positive collaboration between ESL trained and mainstream teachers in these matters.
- 4.9. ‘ There is evidence in the present study that there is an element of chance in the identification and proper assessment of ESL children. This is a major issue of equity which can only be addressed with directed funding. Without funding for specialist ESL teachers who are familiar with ESL-specific frameworks and who can collaboratively contribute, the assessment process may be difficult to carry out in a school with only mainstream teachers who have limited knowledge and training in working with ESL students. Alternatively, if mainstream teachers are to act on their recognition that they are responsible for the teaching and assessment of their ESL students, they will require professional development in the use of ESL-specific frameworks. If such a need is not met, it seems unlikely that students from ESL backgrounds will be properly assessed. Further consequences for mainstream teachers may be uncertainty in trying to meet the specific learning needs of ESL students or the risk of inappropriate intervention.
- 4.10. Since teachers are concerned that the interpretation of student achievements differ between teachers and schools in the early phases of using an assessment framework and, if shared understanding is to develop, professional development which occurs at intervals over a long period appears more effective than a single input at the beginning of implementation. Reasonably regular monitoring of assessment also appears essential to enable relative consistency. Such monitoring would best occur at three mutually informing levels: as a whole school undertaking, as a district network task, and across a particular system. However, this kind of strategy has to be dealt with carefully so that it does not increase the particular pressures identified by virtually every teacher in this study in their efforts to respond to the immediate requirements of assessment.

## **5. Implications for Future Research**

- 5.1 Should appropriate action be taken in a school or system in relation to one or other of the implications outlined so far, such action would clearly benefit from research. Focused research could contribute to identifying the precise nature and extent of the action required and to closely evaluating the process and outcomes from such action.
- 5.2. Research needs to be carried out to provide an account of the heterogeneity of the ESL children in Australian schools. Such an account would inform appropriate

educational provision for those students with, for example, low or non-print literacy backgrounds, those with standard literacy backgrounds in their own language, or those with genuine learning difficulties. It would also identify the relative benefits of appropriate educational provision for students in, for example, immersion contexts, in EFL contexts or in rural communities, and for new arrivals in language centres.

- 5.3. The present study indicates that it would be difficult to prove to any degree of certainty that one assessment framework serves its purpose "better" than another. The inevitable diversity of interpretation, use and context which we have discovered is likely to prohibit such certainty. Even in the longer term, it would be virtually impossible to isolate the influence of a teacher's assessment practices alone, in whatever form, upon students' learning outcomes. Given that the study coincided with the relatively recent introduction of the frameworks, a longitudinal study of a representative group of teachers in all States and Territories who have fully integrated one or other framework within their pedagogy over a longer period of time would provide evidence of the deeper and lasting impact of the current drive for innovation in assessment upon classroom pedagogy. This innovation is a costly and highly significant nationwide experiment. The present study has focused upon the actual commencement of the experiment by teachers in classrooms. Further study of the kind suggested here could properly evaluate the **outcomes** from the experiment in terms of shifts in broader pedagogy and, crucially, changes in the quality of learning among ESL students. In doing this, it will consequently inform any future directions in how we may best trace progress and appropriately support the learning of English, and all areas of the curriculum, by young ESL students in our schools.

## **A Final Comment**

At the start of this chapter, we pointed out that the implications we have been able to draw from the present study are based largely upon what the teachers with whom we worked regarded as facilitative of their commitment and efforts to adapt to new directions in their assessment practices. It is hoped that none of the findings from our study nor the implications offered here may be interpreted as a criticism of the teachers in this study or the schools and systems within which they worked. Indeed, we have tried as far as possible to reflect the teachers' own views in the issues we have presented. Throughout our research, we have been particularly struck by the remarkable degree of care and hard work that the teachers have devoted to tracing the achievements of their students and by the thoroughness of the schools' involvement in this process.

There is also no doubt about the complex demands required of people in systems who seek to facilitate the careful introduction and good management of new ways of assessing and reporting. Their positive help in informing and supporting the teachers' own efforts has been a recurring theme in this study. Teachers, schools, and systems owe a great deal to those people who contributed to the design of the frameworks with which they worked. Designing assessment frameworks is probably a thankless task in the complex arena of educational provision where different interpretations of intent are virtually inevitable. We shall be pleased if this study can make a useful contribution to the work of all these different groups of people and, in particular, to the on-going dialogue between them. Such a dialogue will clearly benefit the educational experience of the significant numbers of young ESL children in Australian schools.