

# English Language Learners: Questions and Concerns

*Podcast transcript: Kim McGrath, Consultant and Preschool educator, November 2012*

## **Q3: How do you assess and evaluate children's progress with reference to the other competencies if they have limited language capabilities?**

The answer to this question relies simply on what are you assessing or evaluating.

**If I am assessing competency 1**, I am observing the child's actions within a play based context, in order to assess their gross and fine motor skills, their abilities to adjust their actions and respect and follow safety rules.

**If I am assessing competency 2**, then I am observing how the child is using appropriate means to meet his/her needs, how is the child expressing their tastes and interests, feelings and emotions, how are they autonomous in the classroom and how are they demonstrating emotional security. A child does not have to speak in order to affirm their personality.

**If I am assessing competency 3**, I am observing the child within the daily routine and during play based social contexts. I am taking note as to how they demonstrate openness to others. Do they move over to provide another child room to sit next to them? Do they share materials? Do they observe another child busy at play?

How do they participate in the group? Do they sing the familiar songs during circle time even though I know they don't necessarily know what they are saying? Do they follow the routine? Will they try to interact with the other children? Do they try and listen to a story?

How do they try to resolve a conflict? Do they come and see me?

**If I am assessing Competency 4**, I am observing how the child is demonstrating interest in the second language. I am taking note of the child's progress in 2<sup>nd</sup> language comprehension and oral production.

**If I am assessing competency 5**, I am observing what they do during free play, how they interact and engage with the materials, toys and games. I am observing them throughout the daily routine and taking notes on how they approach challenges and solve problems.

**If I am assessing competency 6**, I am observing their working habits. How do they organize themselves with regards to space, time and materials? What resources do they use to carry out a given task, do they persevere, what strategies do they use?

Children will demonstrate a lot of what they know through their actions and their play. However, at times, language is needed to assess a given criteria from one of the competencies, for example when a child is asked to describe the strategies used in carrying out a given activity or project, or when language is needed to validate an observation, you can do either of two things;

- 1) Reserve the right to withhold assessment on the given criteria of evaluation at this point in time until the child has more time to process the 2<sup>nd</sup> language.  
(Basic School Regulations, Article 30.15)
  
- 2) If you understand the child's mother tongue, have them describe the strategies used in carrying out the project in their mother tongue. As the child is given time to become more proficient in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language, this skill will transfer over.

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## **Q4: How long does it take a child to learn English?**

There are many factors that may influence the speed of learning English and the proficiency level achieved.

For instance:

- Mother tongue proficiency (Sousa, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008)
- Time the child has been or is exposed to English (Alberta, 2009)
- Socio-economic status (Alberta Education, 2009; Alberta Education, 2009)
- Degree to which the child's mother tongue and English are grammatically aligned (Sousa, 2011)
- Distance between the child's native and the English culture (Sousa, 2011)
- A child's natural aptitude to process language (Alberta Education, 2009)

All these have an impact on how fast and how well a child will learn English.

The research does suggest, however, that it can take anywhere between 2-4 years for a child to acquire the level of social language and 5-7 years to acquire the level of academic language (Alberta Education, 2009).