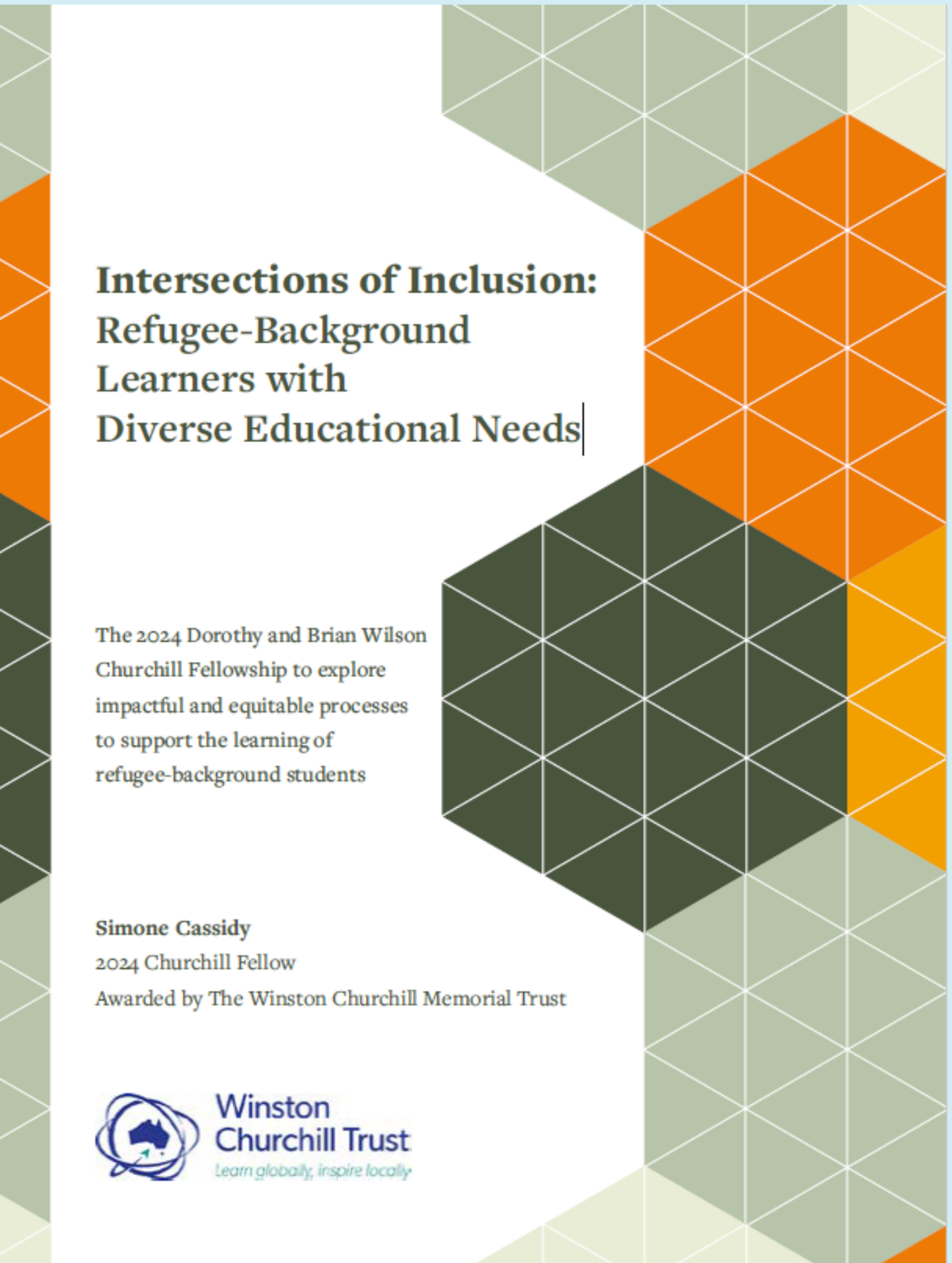


Building the Picture: Creating Holistic Learner Profiles to Explore Additional Learning Needs in EAL Learners

Simone Cassidy

"What seems absolutely clear is that classic ways of assessing what the child knows, what can they do, are remarkably unhelpful when you've got young people whose learning background is atypical."

Dr Tony Cline, Professor of Educational Psychology, University College London

Key Question



If an EAL/D learner is struggling at school, how do we explore the possibility of learning difficulties/ neurodivergence whilst remaining cognisant of the time needed to learn a new language and that other impacts, such as trauma, could be at play?



Possible barriers to an EAL student's learning

EAL support, teaching strategies and classroom environment

- Quality and consistency of EAL support
- Explicit teaching of language and vocabulary
- Opportunities to use and practise English (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- Access to appropriate curriculum and differentiated support
- Use of visuals, modelling and hands-on learning
- Teacher knowledge and understanding of EAL learners
- Classroom environment (e.g. clear instructions, language load, peer support)

Prior schooling and educational experiences

- Years of schooling and age of school entry
- Gaps or interruptions to education
- Quality and consistency of previous schooling
- Familiarity with classroom routines and expectations
- Literacy and numeracy background
- Experience of different education systems
- Digital literacy and familiarity with technology for learning

Home language capability

- Proficiency in the student's home language(s) (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- Literacy skills in the home language (where language has a written form)
- Level of academic language in the home language
- Opportunities to use and maintain the home language

Wellbeing and emotional factors

- History of trauma, loss or displacement
- Current mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Experience of bullying, racism or discrimination
- Feelings of safety, belonging and connectedness at school
- Impact of stress, anxiety or other emotional factors on learning (e.g. concentration, motivation)
- Access to appropriate wellbeing support

Learning differences or developmental conditions

- Possible neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g. ADHD, autism, language disorder)
- Cognitive functioning and processing skills
- Memory, attention and executive functioning
- Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia)
- Social communication and interaction

Health and medical conditions

- Hearing and vision (e.g. undiagnosed hearing loss)
- Sleep and fatigue
- Physical health and chronic medical conditions
- Neurological conditions (e.g. epilepsy)
- Impact of medication
- Access to healthcare and specialists
- Impact of health on attendance, participation and learning

Multilingual learners: Barriers to understanding and assessing learning needs

EAL/D Impacts

- Assessor not confident to use an interpreter/assess bilingually
- Assessor not familiar with typical language acquisition for EAL/D learners
- Lack of English proficiency masks other challenges
- Limited understanding of student's skills in first language

Possible Trauma Impacts

- Trauma as an explanation for all learning/ social challenges
- Disrupted Education/limited formal schooling as an explanation for all learning/ social challenges

Family Impacts

- Family unfamiliar with health and education systems
- Unclear history of early childhood development/ understanding of childhood milestones culturally bound
- Settlement challenges may lead to frequent moves – school changes can make monitoring a child's progress more difficult
- Concerns around stigma

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and youth justice: a prevalence study among young people sentenced to detention in Western Australia, 2018

Table 6 Diagnostic features of young people completing full fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) assessment

	Total completing FASD assessment (N=99), n (%)	Diagnosed with FASD N=36, n (%)	Not diagnosed with FASD N=63, n (%)
Neurodevelopmental domains impaired*			
Academic achievement	61 (62)	31 (86)	30 (48)
Attention	54 (55)	26 (72)	28 (44)
Executive function	53 (54)	28 (78)	25 (40)
Language	45 (45)	25 (69)	20 (32)
Memory	38 (38)	20 (56)	18 (29)
Motor skills	29 (29)	18 (50)	11 (17)
Cognition	21 (21)	13 (36)	8 (13)
Communication†	6 (6)	4 (11)	2 (3)
Brain structure/neurology	1 (1)	0	1 (2)

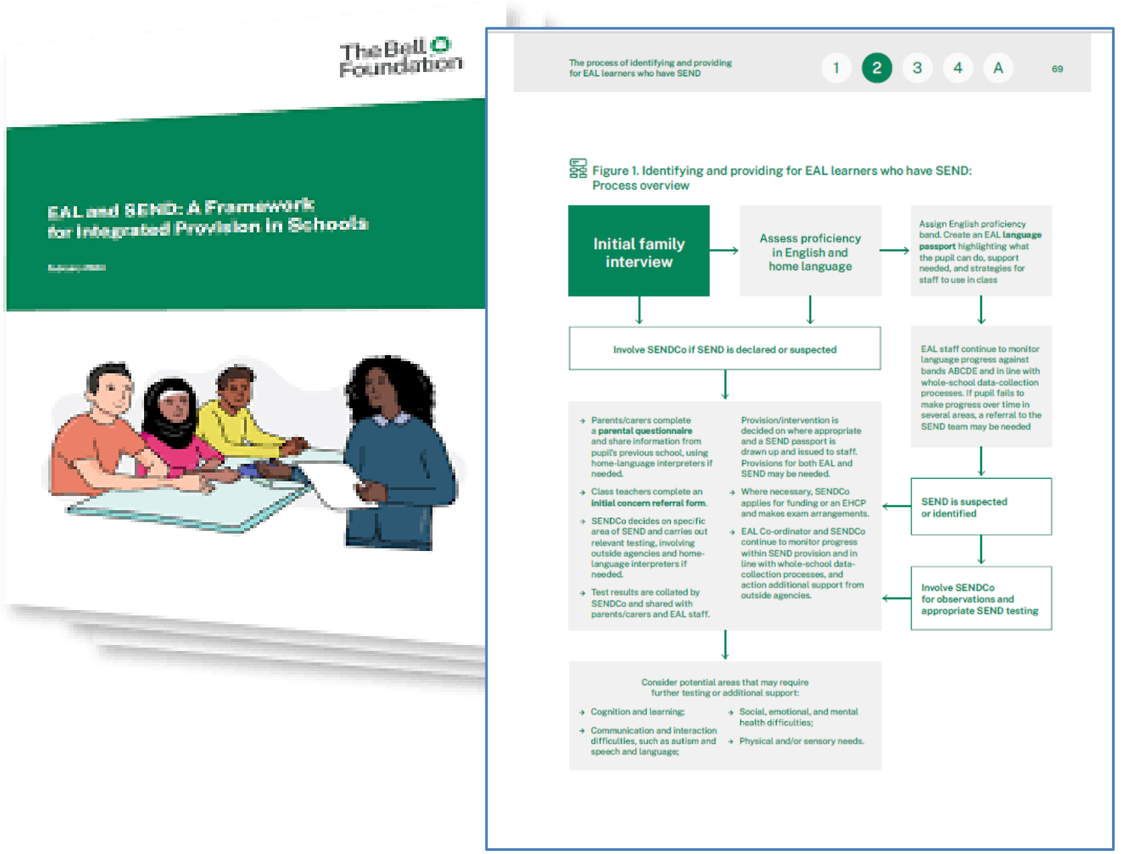
How might EAL/D teaching expertise support the exploration of learning challenges for EAL/D students?



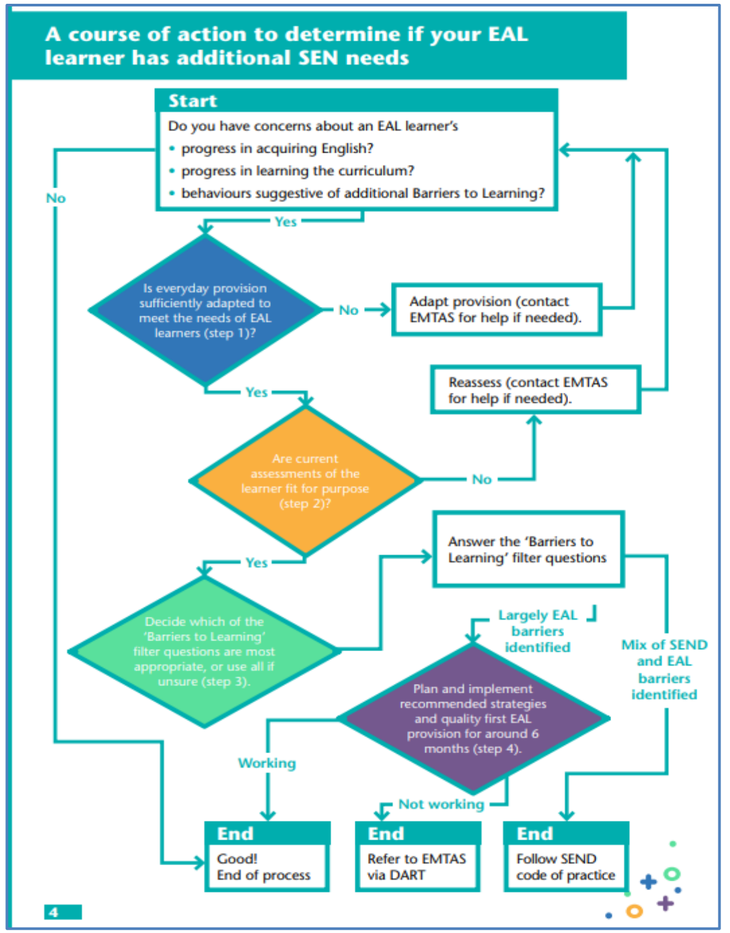
- ✓assess English language skills and monitor progress
- ✓report on English language attainment as *less than/as/greater than* expected
- ✓establish trusting relationships with families to foster collaboration between school and home
- ✓Observe/monitor student wellbeing and connect students to wellbeing supports
- ✓build capacity of mainstream teachers to ensure EAL/D teaching strategies are used across the curriculum
- ✓Use professional judgement to inform decisions to refer for formal assessments
- ✓Use professional judgement to contribute to school decisions to 'impute disability' (Victoria)

❌ diagnose disabilities

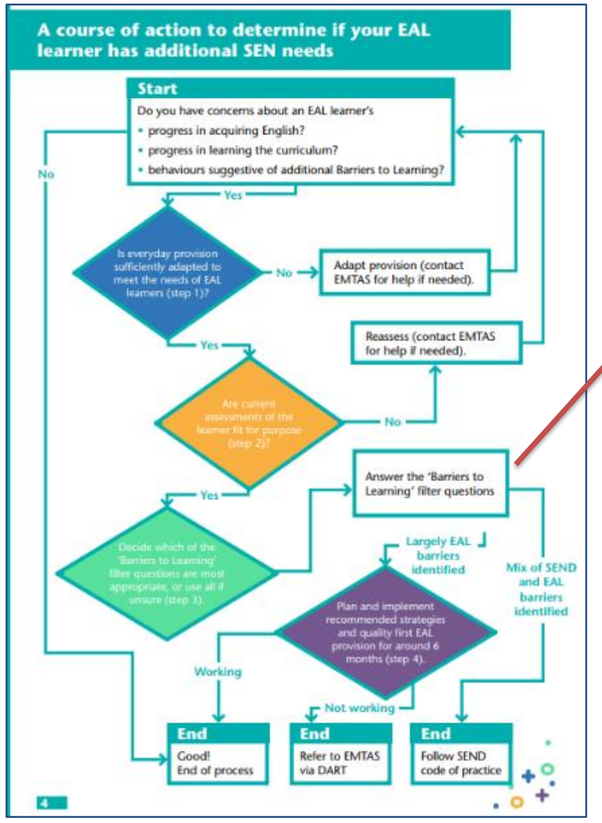
Documented Processes:



1. EAL and SEND: Guidance for Integrated Provision in School, The Bell Foundation



2. Assessment and Pupil Profiling for EAL Pupils (APPEAL) Tool, Wiltshire EMTAS.



Barrier to Learning 2: Difficulties with listening - understanding and memory		
Questions to Ask	Yes (Add comments)	No
2:1 Is the language of instruction used by the teacher matched to the EAL Learner's stage of English development? (E.g. avoiding complex instructions and/or ambiguous language.)		
2:2 Is the content of the discussion culturally familiar to the EAL Learner and within their experience? (E.g. Unfamiliar vocabulary, differing cultural norms.)		
2:3 Is the EAL Learner receiving an appropriate level of visual aids to support their understanding of verbal language?		Please refer to Wiltshire EMTAS Good Practice guidance leaflet - rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk
2:4 Does the EAL Learner show the same level of difficulty listening and understanding in the language(s) used at home?		
2.5 Has the EAL Learner had an age appropriate hearing check?		
2.6 Does the EAL Learner struggle to retain and understand verbal instructions?		
2.7 Is the cause for pupils not following verbal instructions due to something other than their cultural norms/customs regarding social interaction? (E.g. A pupil may not wish to follow a verbal instruction to work with members of the opposite sex, as this is not permitted in their culture.)		
Further assessment needed?	**Yes**	**No**
A majority of **yes** responses may indicate that the young person's difficulties could be due to SEN and so the SEN code of practice should be followed. A majority of **no** responses in this section indicate that classroom practice should be reviewed and an EAL assessment may be needed.		
Action: (What? Further referral, target setting, discuss with other service etc.) Who? (e.g. SENDCo, Parent/carers) When by, Date:		
Review date & What change we expect to see:		
Additional resources and further information: • Wiltshire EMTAS Good Practice Guide – rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk • Pauline Gibbons 'Learning to learn in a second language' • Alice Washbourne 'EAL Pocketbook' • SSENS team – http://rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk/Services/4107 • Twinkl-bilingual labels, word mats		

Case Study: Ahmed's Story

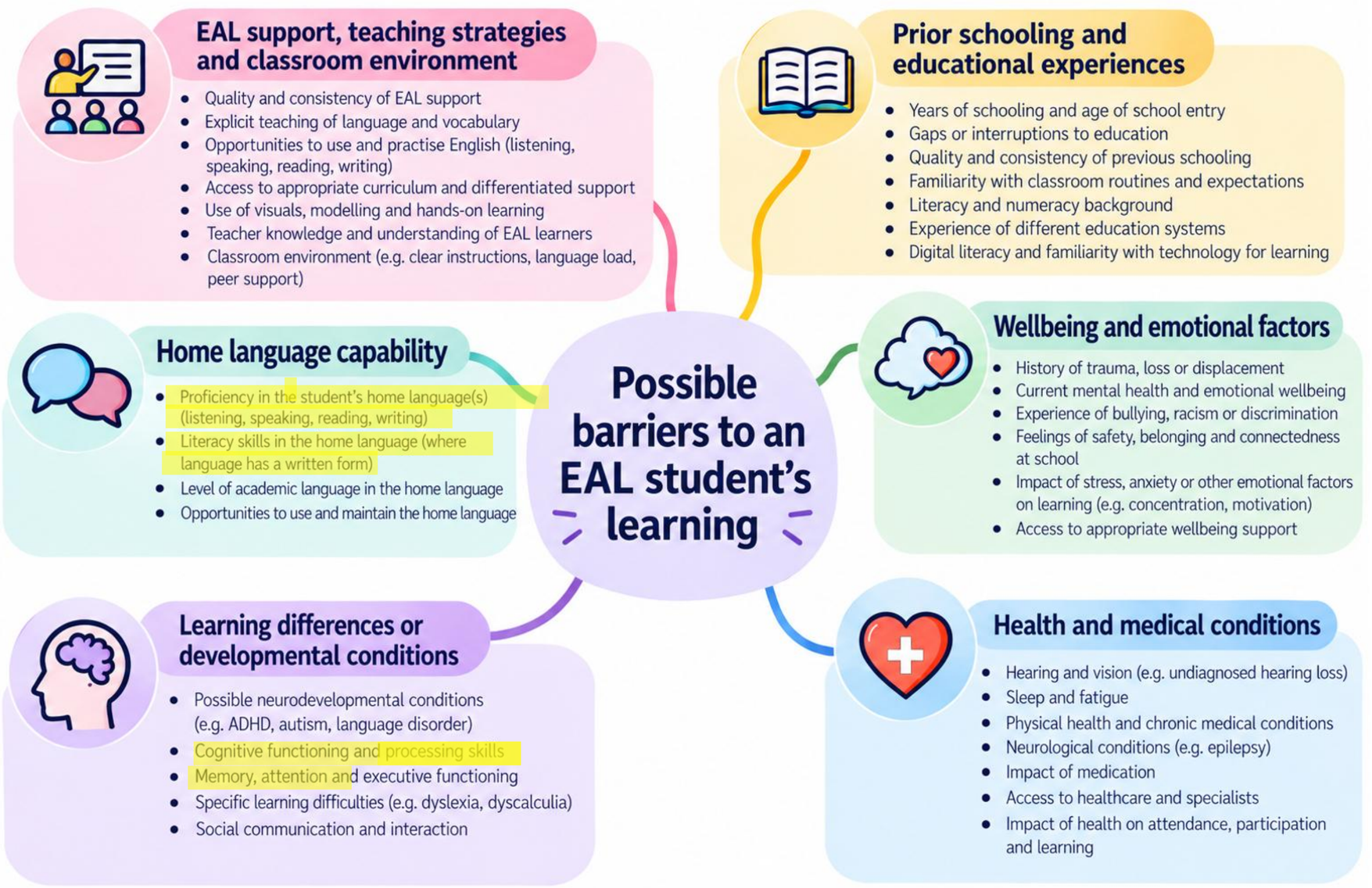


Ahmed is a year 7 student. In 2024, Ahmed arrived in Australia from Afghanistan with his family. He spent his first 2 years in regional Victoria and then moved to Melbourne (2026). Very little information was shared from his former school about his learning progress or attainment. On enrolment at school in Melbourne, Ahmed's father reported that Ahmed likes school, always tries hard, and has literacy in the family's first language, Dari.

Ahmed understands simple spoken instructions in English but relies on gestures and single word answers when responding. He has very limited literacy. In class, Ahmed is willing to copy from the board, but his writing is slow and laboured. Ahmed struggles to get started with reading tasks and frequently asks to leave the room to go to the toilet or get a drink.

As the year progresses, Ahmed doesn't seem to be making gains in literacy and rarely initiates spoken conversation in English. When his teacher checks in with him, Ahmed always says that he's fine.

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

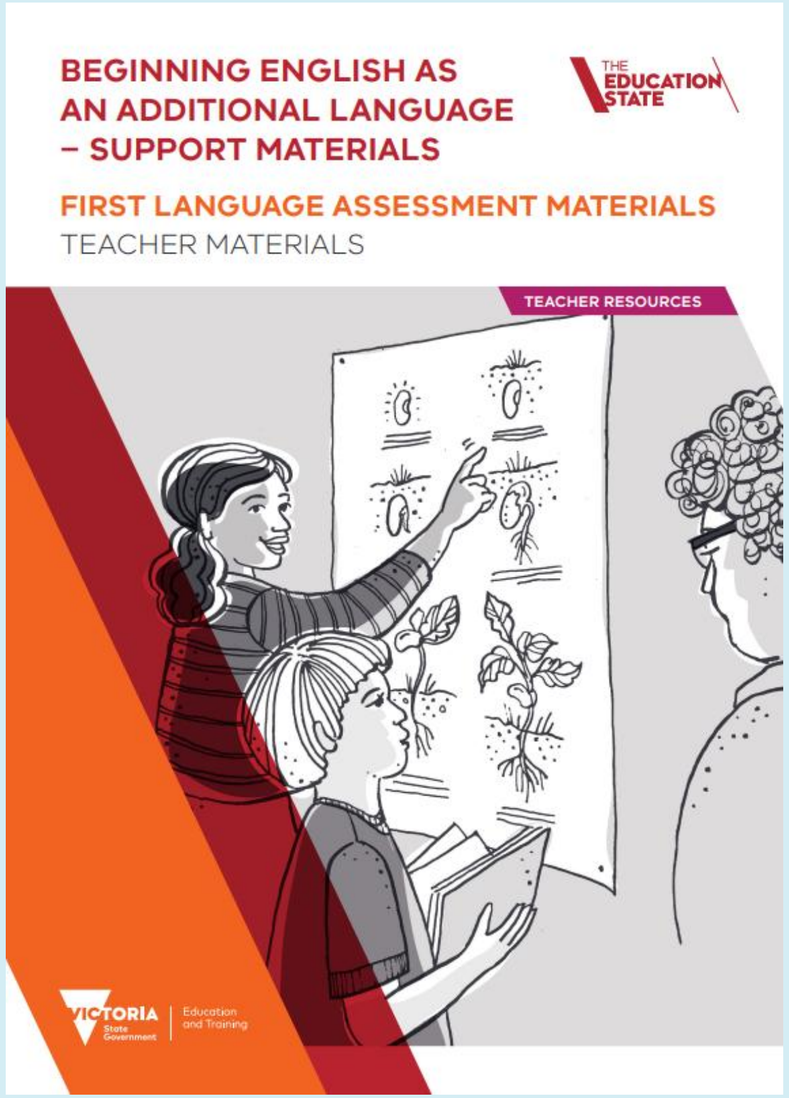


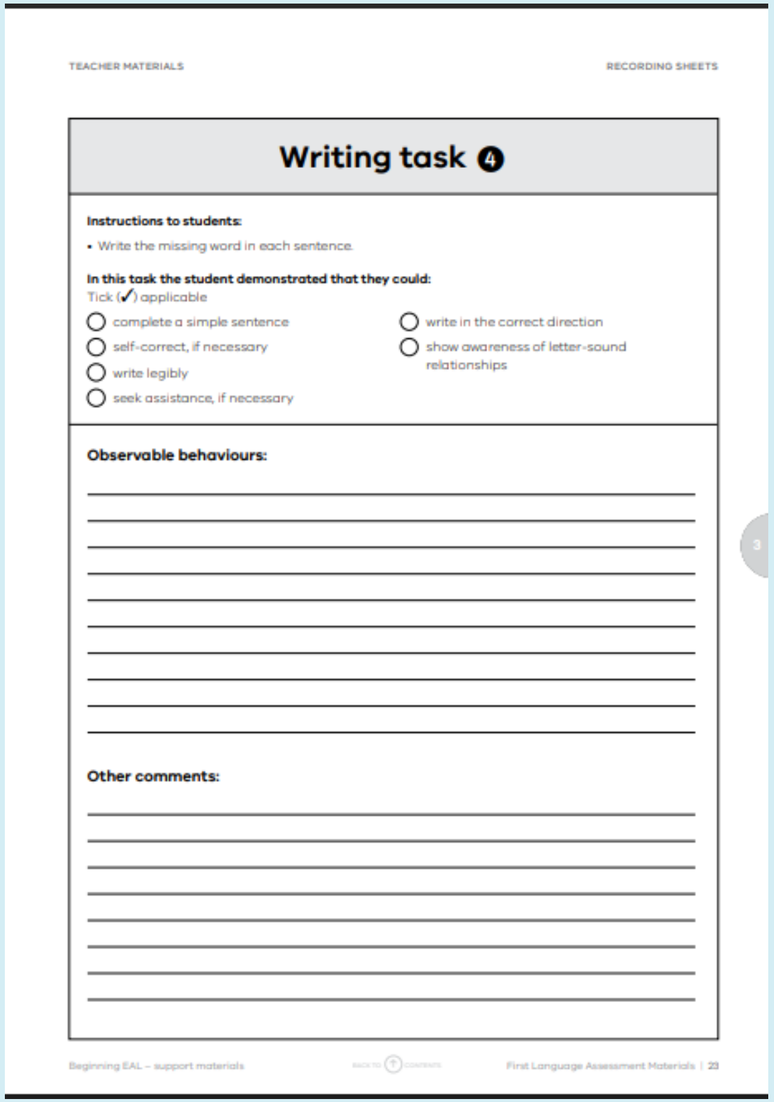
1. Home Language Assessments

2. Learning differences/difficulties

3. Collaborating with families.

1. Home Language Assessments





TEACHER MATERIALS RECORDING SHEETS

Writing task 4

Instructions to students:

- Write the missing word in each sentence.

In this task the student demonstrated that they could:

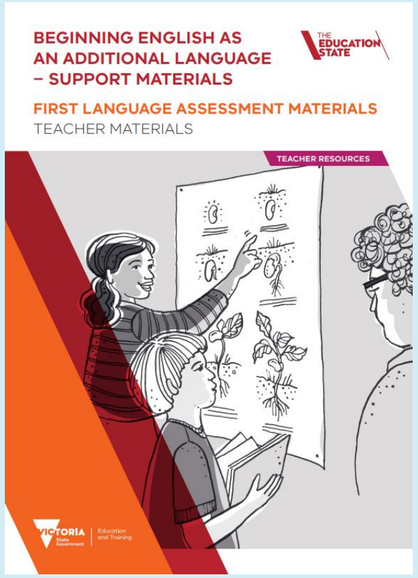
Tick (✓) applicable

- ◯ complete a simple sentence
- ◯ self-correct, if necessary
- ◯ write legibly
- ◯ seek assistance, if necessary
- ◯ write in the correct direction
- ◯ show awareness of letter-sound relationships

Observable behaviours:

Other comments:

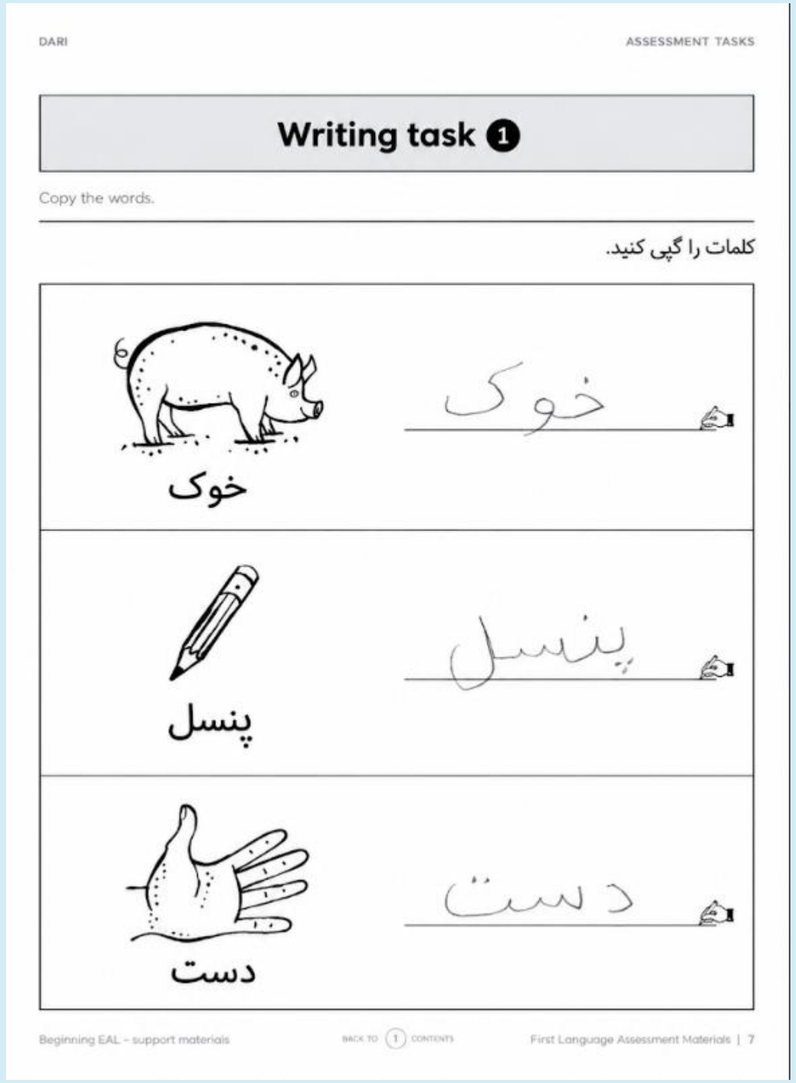
Beginning EAL – support materials BACK TO CONTENTS First Language Assessment Materials | 23



1. Home Language Assessments: Writing

1. What could you ascertain from observing the student complete these tasks?

1. How could you assess their performance if you cannot read Dari?



DARI ASSESSMENT TASKS

Writing task 1

Copy the words.

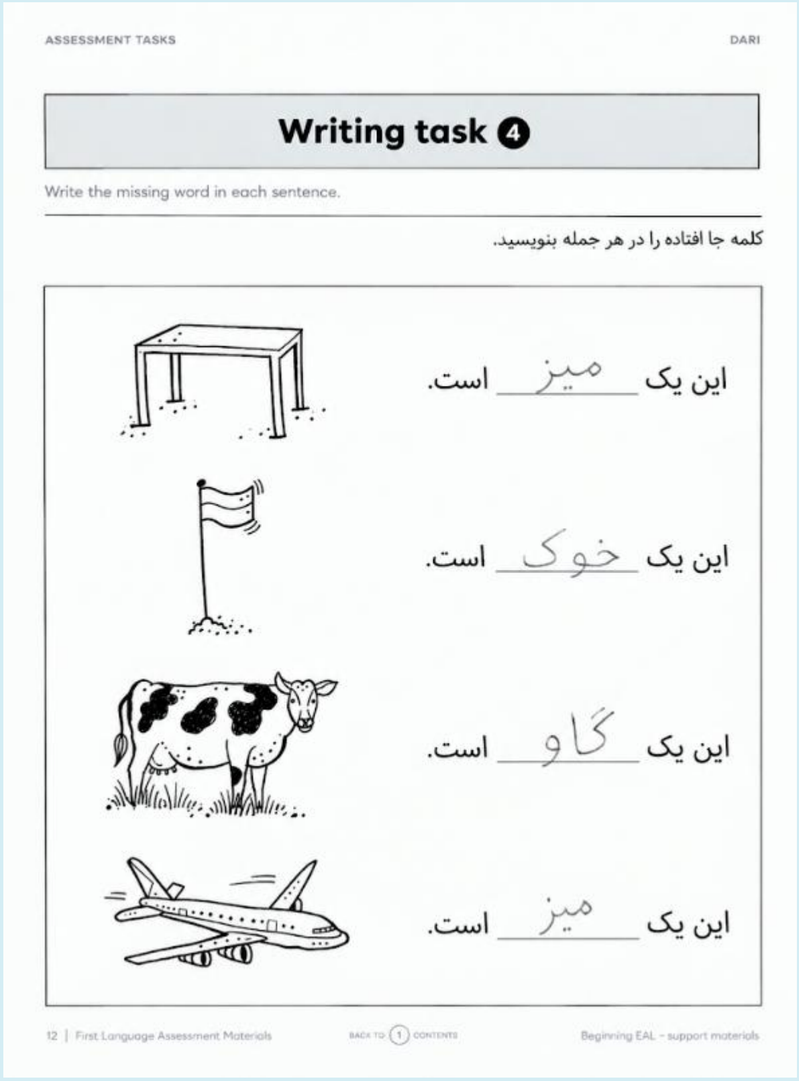
کلمات را کپی کنید.

خوک

پنسل

دست

Beginning EAL – support materials BACK TO 1 CONTENTS First Language Assessment Materials | 7



ASSESSMENT TASKS DARI

Writing task 4

Write the missing word in each sentence.

کلمه جا افتاده را در هر جمله بنویسید.

این یک میز است.

این یک خوک است.

این یک گاو است.

این یک میز است.

12 | First Language Assessment Materials BACK TO 1 CONTENTS Beginning EAL – support materials



1. Home Language Assessments: Reading/listening



My brother Rahim is greedy. He tastes all the fruit. He eats a lot of it.

en



بَرادَرَم رَحیم پُرخور اَست. او اَز همه‌ی میوِه‌ها چِشید وَ مِقدارِزیادی اَزمیوه‌ها را خورد.

en



“Look at what Rahim did!” shouts my little brother. “Rahim is naughty and selfish,” I say.

en



بَرادَرِ کوچَکَم فَریاد زَد: “بِبینید رَحیم چِه کاری کَردِه! مَن هَم گُفتَم، رَحیم سَرکِش وَ خودخواه اَست.”

en

1. How could you utilise this resource to better understand a learner’s reading comprehension and/or receptive language skills?

2. Learning Differences/difficulties

Differences in cognitive processing (occurring across a range of neurodivergent conditions) include:



- working memory



- speed of processing

- attention



- executive functioning



2. Learning Differences/difficulties: exploration through non-English language dependent tasks

ELT well
Helping teachers support learners

ELT well ⌄ Inclusive Language Teaching ⌄ Understanding Neurodiversity Dyslexia

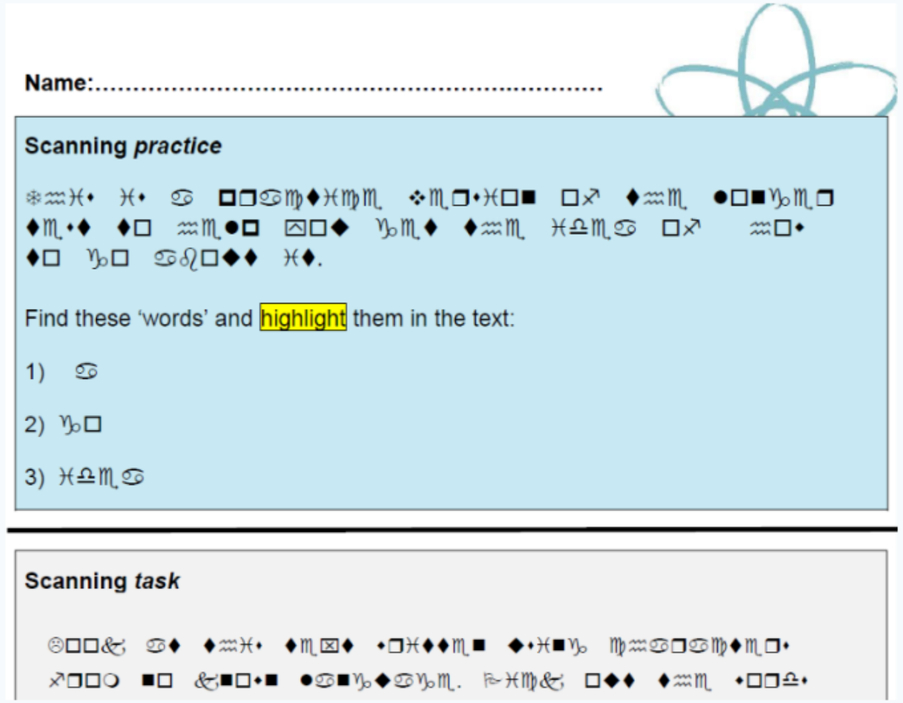
Anne Margaret



I started my teaching caree
Germany, Sweden, New Ze
primary schools, colleges,
kinds of work places.

I became a dyslexia asses
recently I have trained to b
currently work for the NHS
We support Autistic adults
professionals.

Along the way I have picke



Name:.....

Scanning *practice*

❄♒♓♦ ♓♦ ♋ ◘❒♋♍♦♓♍♏ ❖♏❒♦♓◘■ ◘➚ ♦♒♏ ●◘■♑♏❒ ♦♏♦♦ ♦◘ ♒♏●◘ ♈◘◆ ♑♏♦ ♦♒♏ ♓♎♏♋ ◘➚ ♒◘♦ ♦◘ ♑◘ ♋♌◘◆♦ ♓♦.

Find these 'words' and highlight them in the text:

1) ♋

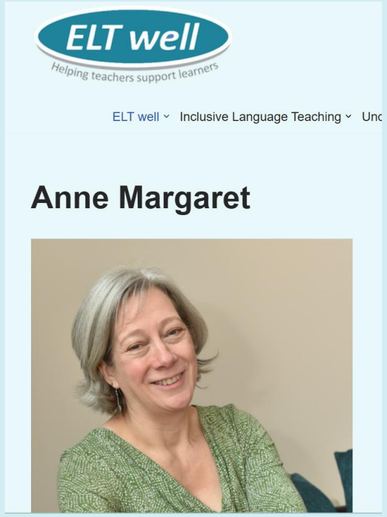
2) ♑◘

3) ♓♎♏♋

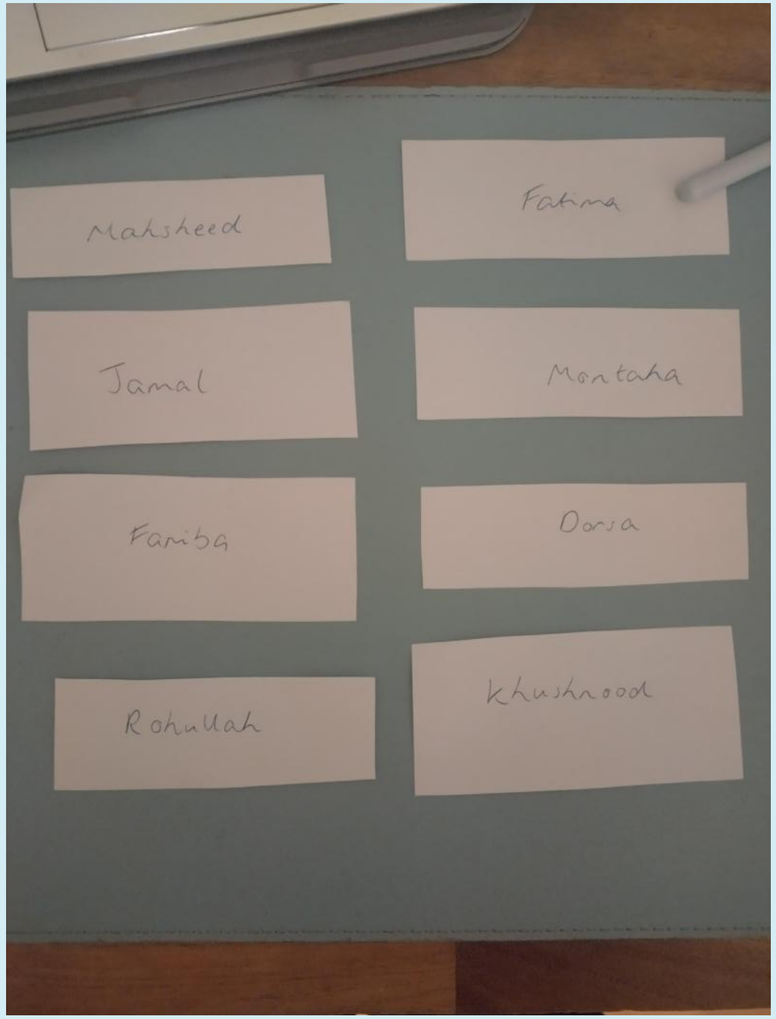
Scanning *task*

☹◘◘&♋ ♦ ♦♒♓♦ ♦♏⊠♦ ♦❒♓♦♦♏■ ◆♦♓■♑ ♍♒♋❒♋♍♦♏❒♦ ➚❒◘❍ ■◘ &■◘♦■ ●♋■♑◆♋♑♏. ⌲♓♍&♋ ◘◆♦ ♦♒♏ ♦◘❒♎♦

Scanning Task Example



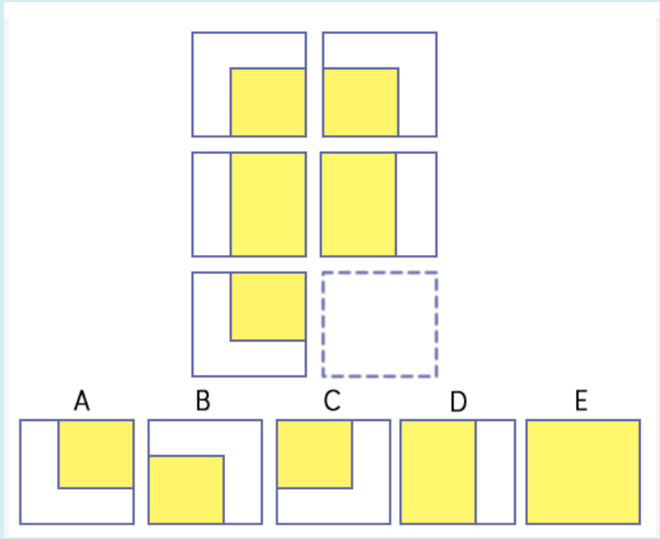
2. Learning Differences/difficulties: Exploration through non-English language dependent tasks

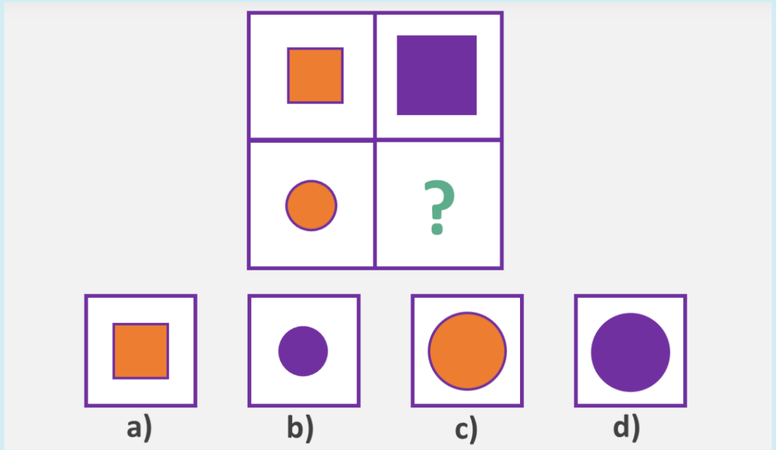


2. Learning Differences/difficulties: exploration through non-English language dependent tasks



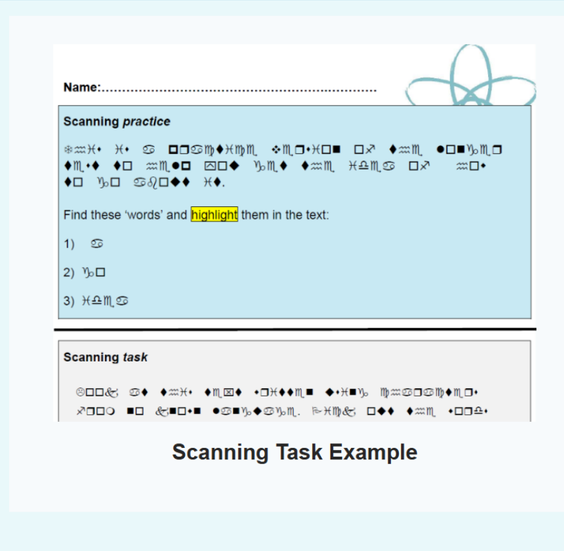
Raven's 2





2. Learning Differences/difficulties: Exploration through non-English language dependent tasks

Ahmed's results


Name:.....

Scanning *practice*

Find these 'words' and highlight them in the text:

1)

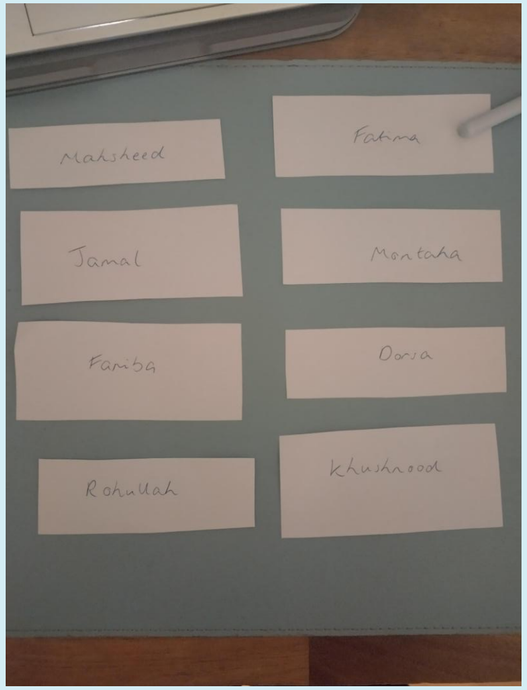
2)

3)

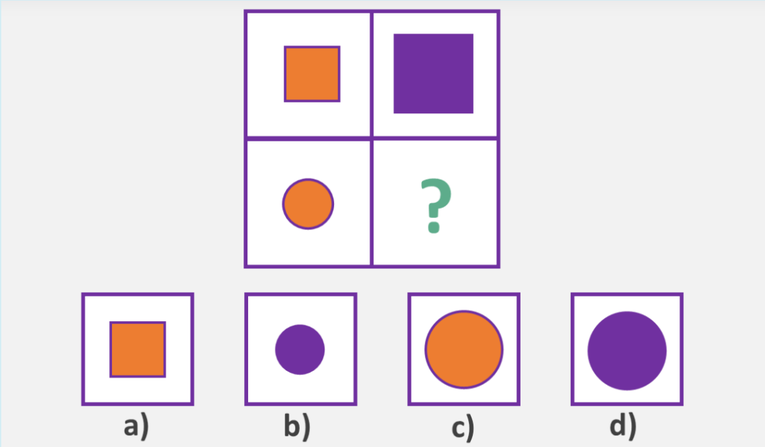
Scanning *task*

Scanning Task Example

Slow initially, but once he understood the task, could complete within the expected time frame.



Significant difficulty and frustration with this task. Unable to consistently complete task backwards with 3 items.



Needed to do the practice items very slowly. Once task was understood, seemed to enjoy the task. Results in low-average range.

3. Collaborating with Families



STUDENT'S LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE	
How long has the student been exposed to English? **Exposure to English before starting school?**	
Overall, how often is English currently spoken at home?	☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Half of the time (50%) ☐ Often ☐ Most of the time
Is the student exposed to English outside home/school? e.g. After school care, sports etc	

Were there any difficulties acquiring language?	No / Yes **Provide details:**
Is there any family history of speech/language/learning difficulties?	No / Yes **Provide details:**

LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION ABILITY	
Does the student have any difficulties in their first language?	No / Yes **Provide details:**
Does the student have any difficulty <u>understanding</u> what is said to them? e.g. Misunderstanding instructions or questions, limited vocabulary knowledge, etc.	☐ No ☐ Yes, in English only ☐ Yes, in English and other language(s) spoken **Provide specific examples:**
Does the student have difficulty <u>expressing</u> their ideas verbally? e.g. Speaking in single words rather than full sentences, grammatical errors, word finding difficulties etc.	☐ No ☐ Yes, in English only ☐ Yes, in English and other language(s) spoken **Provide specific examples:**

1. What prefacing would support the family to engage with these questions?

2. Could these questions be reworded to be less intimidating/stigmatising?

3. Collaborating with Families: Information about Ahmed



- Family report that Ahmed began speaking a bit later than his older brother.
- Ahmed seems happy at home but if he and his brother argue, he gets very frustrated when trying to advocate for himself.
- Ahmed only attended school intermittently in Afghanistan because it wasn’t safe to travel to school. His teacher said he was very shy but tried hard.
- Ahmed’s family live next door to a Farsi speaking family. Dari and Farsi are mutually intelligible (though have some differences) and the two families are friendly. However, other family members often have to explain what is being said to Ahmed, (translating from Farsi to Dari).

Where to from here?

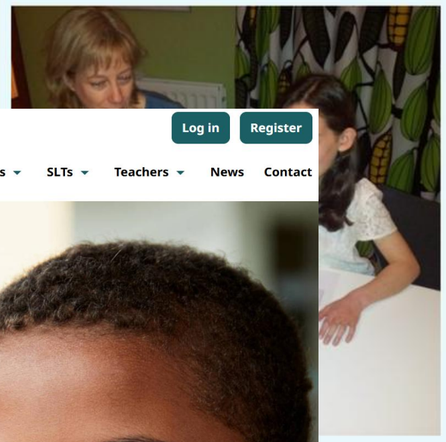


Online training and resources





ELT well **courses enable teachers to support all their learners, to understand their barriers and find the right strate and resources to overcome them.**



Assessing Multilingual Learners

This course is for you if you suspect that one of your EAL / ESOL learners may have dyslexia or another SpLD. Participants find out how to make the most of the CAML materials and explore the key issues that make the assessment of multilingual people different from assessing English-speaking (monolingual) people.

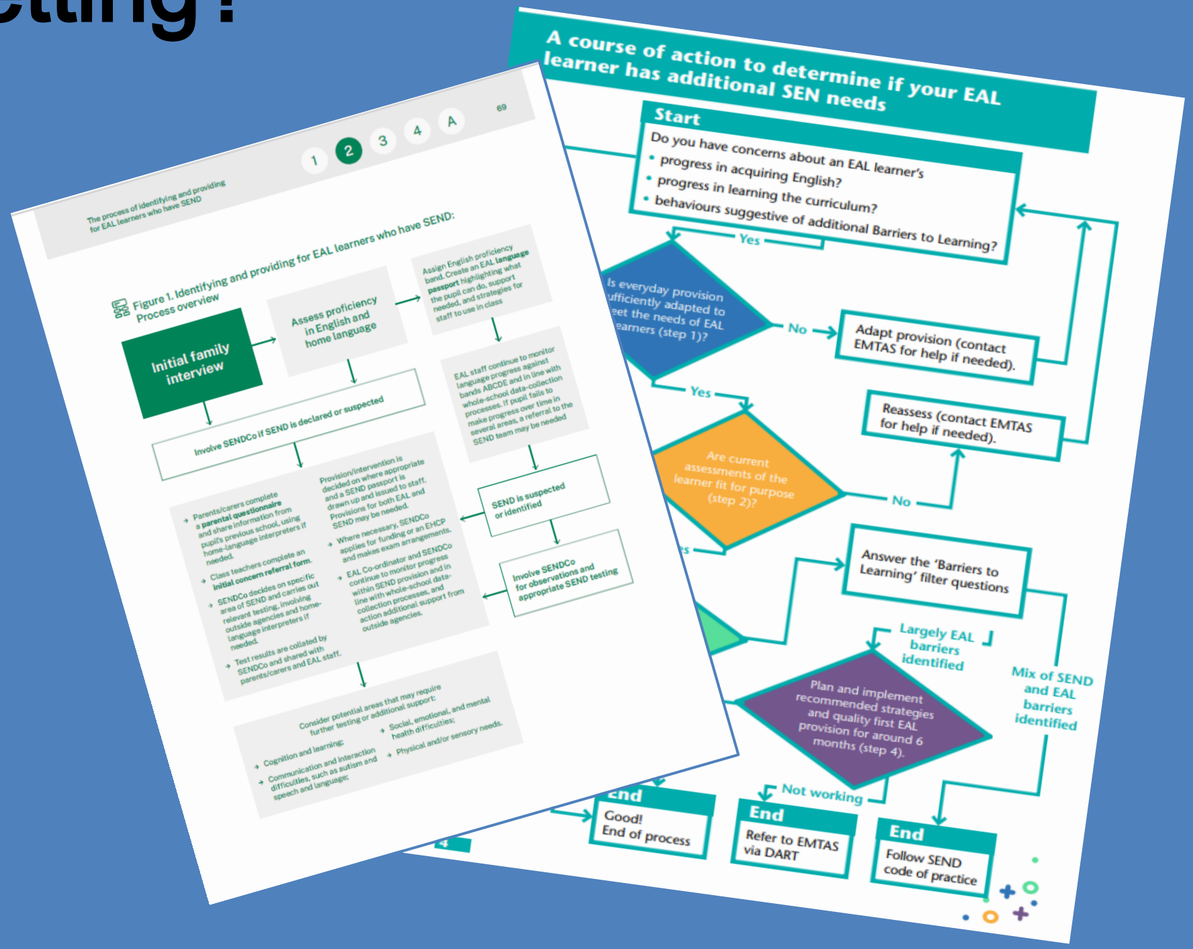
- 5 sessions, each taking about 90 minutes.
- Start any time that suits you – you have 2 months to complete.
- Work through sample case studies to produce a report and claim your certificate
- Price includes a CAML assessment kit

Q-BEx

Q-BEx is a customisable online tool which teachers, SLTs and researchers can use to better understand the language experiences and language

What would true collaboration between EAL and Disability/ Inclusion staff look like in your setting?

Could you work together to create an agreed process?



Please get in touch:

simone.cassidy@dffh.vic.gov.au



or through the following webpage:

https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/simone-cassidy-vic-2024/

