

# *Meeting the Needs of Students from Diverse Cultures*

## *A Handbook for Administrators*

*Department of Education  
Newfoundland and Labrador  
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# Introduction and Rationale

*The Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards to race, national or ethnic origin, colour or religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada.*

*Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988*

*Government is committed to work with partners to ensure a ‘welcoming’ society for immigrants, which goes beyond being friendly or hospitable. It means welcoming immigrants into our communities, our workplaces, our homes, and our lives.*

*Diversity ~ “Opportunity and Growth”  
An Immigration Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007*

Multiculturalism is reflected in schools as well as in the larger community. Students from diverse cultures are welcomed and embraced in our schools. We are dedicated to their educational progress and recognize how they enrich our school culture.

For some students, English is a second or third language. Most of these students are newcomers but some may be Canadian born. To fully participate in school and community life in Newfoundland and Labrador, these students may need support in learning English. Consistent English Second Language (ESL) programs and related supports enable them to reach this goal.

Some immigrant students are coming from developed countries and have strong educational foundations while others are arriving from refugee camps or war torn countries. Our role is to offer a quality education that meets the needs of each student.

This publication is intended to guide administrators and teachers in the reception and orientation of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and their families. Moreover, the document provides suggestions for program planning and delivery.

# Registration

A team approach is needed in planning the welcome, orientation, appropriate programming and services for the new student. The team may include a school administrator, guidance counsellor, ESL teacher, homeroom teacher, other teachers, parent, and the student.

## *Reception*

The student, parents, ESL teacher, guidance counsellor and/or school administrator, and interpreter, if needed, should attend the first meeting. The first meeting should set the stage for a warm and supportive environment. At the first meeting

- ensure the student and family complete school registration, data forms, and other related documents on site; provide assistance, including the help of an interpreter, if necessary.<sup>1</sup>
- collect and photocopy important documentation; return the originals to the family and explain the confidential nature of student files.
- provide essential school information in written form and review key points such as scheduling, school floor plan, lunch hour arrangements, transportation, and required items.
- conduct a tour of the school; introduce the family to appropriate staff and to students who speak the same first language, if available.
- decide when the student will start school; leave sufficient time (1 week maximum) to determine and plan an appropriate placement or further assessment.

A Newcomer Profile, such as the sample in the Appendix, should be completed with the parents and kept in the student's file. For refugee claimants and government assisted refugees, the Association for New Canadians can be an important source of information on personal history, culture and special circumstances.

Following the first meeting

- ensure that all teachers who will be working with an ESL student get a copy of *Information and Suggestions for Classroom Teachers*, a subsection of this document.
- ensure that all teachers get a copy of *Socio-Cultural Awareness*, a subsection of this document.

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<sup>1</sup> The Association for New Canadians may be able to provide an interpreter in the St. John's area.

## ***Documents to Determine Status in Canada***

**The student's status in Canada should be noted on the student's registration card.** A student should fall into one of the following categories and should have documents to that effect:

1. **Canadian Citizen:** Should hold a passport, birth certificate or citizenship certificate.
2. **Permanent Resident** (sometimes referred to as landed immigrant): Should hold a Form IMM1000 or IMM5292 or permanent resident card.
3. **Temporary Resident:** A student in Canada temporarily because of parent's employment or study. Parent should have a study permit or work permit. Child may have a study permit.
4. **International Student:** (traditionally called visa student): Student who has come to study in Canada without an accompanying parent or whose parent is in Canada as a visitor. This student is required to pay tuition.<sup>1</sup> This student should have a study permit if studying in Canada for more than 6 months.
5. **Exchange Student:** A student who is in Canada to study as part of a reciprocal arrangement with a student from Newfoundland and Labrador. This student is not required to pay tuition. This student should have a study permit if studying in Canada for more than 6 months.
6. **Refugee Claimants:** This student or family should have a *Determination of Eligibility Letter* or *Certificate of Eligibility* (IMM1442) from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

If a student has no documentation to determine status in Canada, the school should contact the district office. The district may contact Citizenship and Immigration Canada and/or the Association for New Canadians for consultation.<sup>2</sup>

Information on medical history, copies of immunization records, past school records, and an MCP card or proof of health insurance should be provided, as would be the case with any new student.

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1. Exceptions may be made with regards to tuition payment, depending on the student's circumstance and length of stay. Contact your district office for more information.

2. The Association for New Canadians handles settlement of refugee claimants and government sponsored refugees.

## ***Initial Assessment***

An ESL assessment should be completed within the first week of the student's registration.

For a student with major gaps in schooling, achievement assessment should be initiated and completed within two weeks of the student's registration. In the case of an ESL student, an ESL teacher may assist with all aspects of the assessment. A final decision on grade placement should be reserved until assessment is complete. This should be explained clearly to parents and students.

The following should be assessed for immigrant students:

- 1) **English proficiency of students whose first language is not English**, carried out by an ESL or language arts teacher, where an ESL teacher is not available.<sup>1</sup> The assessment, while not necessarily done through a formal assessment tool, should consider the student's ability in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- 2) **Mathematics achievement**, to determine appropriate topics or courses and to gain insight into the student's previous schooling. This assessment may consist of any or all of the following:
  - A review of previous school records
  - Anecdotal information from parents/caregivers
  - A test of basic mathematical operations and concepts using paper, pencil, and manipulatives
  - A test of numeracy skills, such as matching numbers to pictures or completing a pattern or number line
  - Observation of the student completing tasks such as sorting shapes, measuring, connecting dot-to-dot, etc.
- 3) **Literacy skills in the first language and educational background**. A student's first language literacy level may be determined through any or all of the following:
  - An interview with the parent and student
  - A review of previous school reports
  - Assessment of student skill in copying text
  - Assessment of the student writing in the first language (Note the ease with which the student writes and holds a pencil, the length of the passage, and fluency of writing; seek the opinion of a translator if possible.)
  - An informed judgement based on the student's past living conditions and country of residence

Assessment need not be a long, formal testing procedure. The tasks and procedures used will vary according to the age and language level of the student. Lack of a formal assessment tool for ESL learners should not prevent an informal needs assessment, as well as planning and delivery of appropriate programming to develop language, literacy and numeracy skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Some students may speak a variety of English which differs significantly from Standard Canadian English. Administrators may refer these students for English proficiency assessment, if deemed helpful.



## ***Placement***

A student is normally placed in an age-appropriate grade. In extreme cases, such as the case of a student who has had little or no prior schooling, administration may consider placing the student up to two grades behind his/her age group, with the parents' consent. In this case all factors such as physical size, maturity, likelihood of social integration and the effect on the student's self-esteem should be considered. Both academic and social integration must be taken into consideration. Should the student's subsequent progress or behavioural adjustments be deemed as warranting a movement upward in grade placement, administration may make that decision in consultation with the parents and teachers.

If placed in a grade level above the student's academic achievement level, a plan for literacy and numeracy catch-up must be put in place.

The student's English proficiency should not influence the choice of grade placement. However, English proficiency may be a factor in course selection at the high school level. At senior high schools, courses should be selected in conjunction with subject teachers; enrolment in specific ESL courses can be recommended by the ESL teacher, where available. At all levels, program decisions are shared and regular communication among teachers is encouraged.

## ***Curriculum Implications***

Unless the student has arrived with documentation or evidence to suggest otherwise, an ESL student should be placed on the prescribed curriculum. Classroom teachers will meet with the ESL teacher, where one is available, to discuss teaching strategies and expectations. See *Information and Suggestions for Classroom Teachers* in this document, for suggested strategies.

A lack of facility with English alone is not reason to take a student off the prescribed curriculum. Allowances should be made for the student during the language learning process; the student should be included in prescribed outcomes to the extent possible and such that the outcomes meet the student's needs.

Courses from the Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) Program may be offered to students with major gaps in literacy and numeracy achievement due to limited prior schooling or lack of quality schooling. These provincial courses are designed for academic bridging of immigrant students who are age appropriate for grades 3-12.

Immigrant students who meet the normal requirements for student support services should be put on track to access those supports.

# Orientation

## *First School Day*

The following suggestions are made for the classroom teacher:

- Introduce yourself to the new student and print your name and the names of a few classmates who sit nearby on the student's notebook for reference.
- Practise and use the correct pronunciation of the student's name.
- Provide the student with alternate activities in case the student is unable to take part in some regular activities. The student should be included in regular activities as much as possible.
- Ensure that the student has texts and school supplies, knows where to find the washrooms and knows how to open his/her locker.

Peer mentors should be assigned; the following activities are suggested for the peer mentors:

- Introduce the new student to teachers.
- Show the new student around the school, including the washroom, lunchroom, locker area, gym, guidance office, main office, etc.
- Accompany the new student during recess and lunch.
- Ensure that the student is on the right page, following along with a reading, etc. during class.
- Read aloud to the student or engage the student in a board game or other interactive activity.

## *Staff Orientation*

An orientation session, directed by school administration or the guidance counsellor, is helpful for all staff members. The session may include information about the student, such as:

- family circumstance
- educational background
- language background
- English proficiency
- religion
- political background
- geographic and cultural information

## *Class Orientation*

Before the new student joins a class, the student's classmates need an orientation and to be encouraged to welcome the new student. The session may include information on the following:

- language background
- English proficiency
- geographic and cultural information

Classmates can benefit from brainstorming ways they can welcome the new student and exchange information on language, culture, hobbies, religious practices, etc.

## **The ESL Learner**

The educational profile of immigrant students will vary. For example, while some students have successfully completed courses and programs at or beyond grade level in their country of origin, others may be in a school setting for the first time. Likewise, the previous language learning experiences of ESL students may vary, ranging from little or no formal instruction in any language, to detailed study and proficiency in several.

Immigrant students undergo a period of transition as they become familiar with the expectations, routines, and customs of a new language and culture. However, their reactions to that transition may differ. For some, especially those who have witnessed traumatic events, it can be a very difficult process, while for others it may be relatively smooth.

ESL students are in the process of learning a second language. For most, language learning is a long-term endeavour, characterized by periods of rapid learning and slower progress. ESL learners may pick up conversational English relatively quickly; however, research indicates that it takes several years to achieve the level and sophistication of English needed to succeed in academic subjects. Long-term planning as well as more immediate survival and learning strategies will be required. A structured ESL program will support the student in academic success and integration into the mainstream.

Functioning for the entire day in a new language is challenging and often mentally exhausting. Learning another language, therefore, requires time, commitment, and understanding on the part of learners and educators.

ESL students also share many characteristics with their peers. Like other learners, ESL students have a wide range of academic abilities, strengths, needs and personal interests.

## **English Second Language and Newcomers Programs**

Where numbers warrant, ESL courses and programs are provided by ESL teachers. In other instances, individual students are supported by an appropriate program plan designed at the school.

The *Program of Studies*, published by the Department of Education, includes descriptions of ESL courses and LEARN courses as well as lists of authorized resources. LEARN courses are compacted, bridging courses for newcomers with major gaps in education. School districts may also offer locally developed courses designed to meet the needs of specific groups of newcomers.

The *Program of Studies*, ESL and LEARN Curriculum Guides, Guidelines for Delivery of ESL Services and Professional Development Resources can be found on the Department of Education website.

## Socio-Cultural Awareness

Culture influences a wide range of behaviour. Cultural norms are deeply ingrained and acquired in a subtle manner at a young age; they are often difficult to articulate or recognize even in oneself. Teachers need to accept differences but, at the same time, foster student awareness and facilitate adjustment through sensitive explanations and models of new cultural behaviours. The misinterpretation of cultural norms and signals is a common occurrence when working with immigrant students. Patience, open-mindedness and tolerance are essential.

Many of the following topics are identified as key areas for cross-cultural understanding in *A Resource Guide for Educators of English Second Language Learners* (New Brunswick, 1996).

- **Immigration status:** Avoid assumptions about immigrant students; some may be refugees, others are not. For some, a change in country has been precipitated by very difficult circumstances; others move for economic reasons, employment, travel, and education opportunities.
- **Public and private behaviour:** Cultural understanding may vary with respect to punctuality, school attendance, values, privacy, and public behaviour. Teachers should obtain information on practices in the student's first culture and carefully explain new expectations to students and parents.
- **Relationships and roles:** Relationships between children and adults and between males and females, including in-school interaction, may be different.
- **Teaching practices:** The organization of schooling and teaching practices are often unique to a country or region. It will take time for students to adjust to a new school system. Provide specific oral and print information and explain how the school day and calendar, classes, instruction, and student reports are organized.
- **Play:** The roles and forms of play vary from culture to culture. The use of play in instruction and informal activities as well as the school's guidelines for appropriate playground behaviour should be explained to parents and students.
- **Holidays and observances:** Teachers should know the most significant observances of immigrant students. For example, students may need to be absent from school for certain religious holidays. Ensure that the student and family are also knowledgeable about common holidays and observances in Canada and in this province.
- **Naming customs:** Parents and children may not have the same family name and the position of names may be different from English. Try to introduce students and family members using correct names and pronunciation.
- **Body language:** Aspects of body language, including gestures, touch, personal space, and eye contact vary. Take time to learn and discuss key areas of difference, particularly those that may lead to significant misunderstanding.
- **Dress:** Clothing and accessories can have cultural and religious meaning. Respect these differences and provide opportunities for students to explain their dress. Help students and families learn appropriate clothing for school, school functions, and climate.

- **Food:** Food, meals, meal schedules, and eating experiences vary greatly. Certain foods are prohibited in some cultures. Provide support for students as they introduce and are introduced to new foods and practices. Recess time, eating in a cafeteria, bringing lunch from home, and class social events may be new for some students.
- **Symbols:** A positive symbol in one culture may represent something quite different in another. This may influence student response to common symbols, as well as the ability of students to identify and use symbols and symbolism in academic tasks.
- **First language use in the home:** Although a student may be a second language learner, conversations and activities at home take place almost always in the family's first language. In this fashion, cultural identity is partially preserved. Teachers should not expect nor encourage English to be the dominant home language.
- **Activities and outings:** Certain activities, outings or other special events may cause concern for some students and their families. For example, participation in sports such as swimming, field trips such as those to places of religious significance, and overnight travel should be carefully explained to parents. Parents should be informed of school practices and school personnel should acknowledge the need for occasional exemptions or exceptions.

# Information and Suggestions for Classroom Teachers

## *A Warm and Encouraging Environment*

Students learn best in a warm, supportive environment where their attempts to communicate are valued. Risk-taking in the second language is encouraged, and as long as errors do not impede comprehension, communication should not be interrupted to correct them. Teachers and other students should also be sensitive to the personality and cultural background of the ESL student.<sup>1</sup>

The following are suggested:

- Prepare other students for the arrival of a new student - pronounce the student's name properly; locate the country of origin; ensure a place close to the front of the class; arrange a peer mentor; label classroom objects and school rooms.
- Encourage participation, acceptance, and respect.
- Help students with essential survival expressions such as, "Washroom, please."
- Provide guidance in the selection of courses. At the high school level, students may experience more success in their first year with courses that are less language-dependent.
- Include ESL learners in classroom and extracurricular activities (e.g. classroom helper, sports teams, school choir).
- Ensure access to bilingual dictionaries, children's dictionaries or picture dictionaries and encourage their use.
- Initiate conversation with the student outside the classroom; every conversation is of value to the student and the teacher.
- Use the immigrant student's knowledge of culture and language to enhance learning for other students; encourage the student to share information about his/her home country with the class and/or at a school assembly, teach the other students a few words of his/her native language, take part in a multicultural event, etc.
- Seek information about the student's first language and writing system in order to better understand its influence on the student's progress in English.
- Support continued first language use by the student; recognize that student conversations with family and friends will likely be in that language. Build the student's pride in his/her heritage and pride in being bilingual, an asset to anyone.
- Allow students to write in their first language (personal journal, study notes) or read a book in the native language during silent reading period.

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<sup>1</sup> For country/cultural profiles: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Cultural Profiles Project, <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/>.

## ***Classroom Strategies***

ESL students should be included in regular classroom and school activities. When the activity is beyond the linguistic ability of the learner, a modified version should be offered, or individual instruction provided.

The following are suggested classroom strategies:

### **Making language and content accessible**

- Get to know the reading and writing ability of your ESL student. Don't assume a high literacy level because of a relatively good command of oral English; a good grasp of conversational English is not synonymous with a good grasp of academic English.
- Sit the student near the teacher.
- Print clearly rather than using cursive writing.
- Print keywords, page numbers and other important information on the board.
- Provide models of completed assignments, projects, test items, etc.
- Incorporate visuals such as gestures, props, graphic organizers and charts to reinforce or explain key ideas.
- Monitor teacher talk - avoid slang, colloquial expressions, and complex structures; speak clearly, using a normal tone and rate of speed, or slightly slower.
- Recycle new words. Be sure to repeat the key words in several contexts.
- Check for comprehension - use questions that require one word answers, props, and gestures.
- Encourage the student to ask teachers or other students (peer mentor) for clarification.
- Provide notes or allow the student to photocopy notes from a capable classmate.
- Print and explain homework assignments clearly.
- Consider the time and resources needed to complete the assigned work; it may take ESL learners longer to complete certain tasks and/or language tasks may need to be simplified.
- Modify assignments so that the ESL student writes less, does fewer examples, has fewer spelling words, etc.
- Allow open book tests for students at the beginning stages of English.
- Be available for extra support.

### **Peer Help**

- Assign peers who have good communication skills to work with the ESL student.
- Have a classmate ensure that the ESL student is on the right page of text and understands what has to be done during seat work.
- Assign a buddy reader to read aloud to the student for a few minutes each day. The ESL teacher can help with the selection of appropriate books.



**Self-Help**

- Encourage student self-assessment; for example, the student should be encouraged to self-edit written work.
- Encourage the student to use strategies for language learning, such as highlighting new words in a text, and guessing meaning before checking a dictionary.<sup>1</sup>
- Encourage students to take ownership of their studies; ask for help and clarification from teachers and peers.

**Working Independently**

- Set up a computer centre with appropriate software or websites bookmarked.
- Set up a listening centre with books and tapes that can be used by ESL students and others.
- Provide alternate resources at a lower language level that address topics studied in the content areas.
- Provide alternate activities that can engage the student when assigned class work is beyond the student's current instructional level.

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1. Seek more language learning strategies from an ESL teacher. Learning strategies can also be found in *Guidelines for Delivery of ESL Services in K-6*, on the Department of Education website.

## ***Evaluation Plan and Reporting***

An evaluation plan for ESL students should be developed by the classroom teacher in collaboration with the ESL teacher if one is available, and carefully communicated to the student and parents. School reporting procedures - report cards, progress reports, parent-teacher interviews, and grading practices - need to be carefully explained to students and parents.

- Reporting for the ESL students should happen at regular reporting times.
- ESL teachers must provide a report on student progress in English at regular reporting times.
- Letter or number grades need not be given. Assigning failing grades to a student who is unable to fully participate in the course due to lack of English or lack of background education is not recommended.
- In place of a letter or number grade, a comment or anecdotal insert should be included to inform the parents of:
  - a) topics covered
  - b) student's participation
  - c) observed progress or achievement in the subject area
- Flexibility is needed and the best interests of the student must be considered; an approach which will encourage the student and help build confidence and comfort in the new environment is essential.
- When a student is not meeting with success, this should be explained to the parents and the student well in advance of reporting.

## ***Assessment Suggestions for Teachers***

Certain assessment practices, including the following, are particularly helpful for ESL students:

- Provide clear instructions and explain the task carefully.
- Provide models, samples or demonstrations.
- Check for comprehension in various ways.
- Suggest steps to help complete a project and monitor student progress.
- Identify alternate resources such as easier reading materials on the same topic.
- Provide a choice in topics and in presentation formats.
- Ensure that points for language errors are not deducted in content area evaluations.
- Allow extra time for in-class tests or assignments.
- Provide a bilingual, children's or learner's dictionary.
- Ensure that the ESL teacher or member of the ESL team is available during formal examinations.
- Use oral assessments, interviews or conferencing.
- Include assessments which are less dependent on written language (pictures, graphs, diagrams, multiple choice items).

## ***Principles of Second Language Learning***

The following are general principles of second language learning that influence programming.

- **Developing a high level of second language proficiency may take a very long time.** While basic interpersonal communication skills can usually be acquired within two years in a second language environment, a high level of proficiency takes up to seven years for some learners (Cummins, 1982). For the teacher, this means that while an ESL student may appear to be competent in conversation after a year or two, it often takes several years for the learner to achieve the sophisticated level of language required in some academic tasks.
- **Second language learning is a developmental process.** This process is both similar to, and different from, learning a first language. Like infants learning a first language, beginning ESL students often need a period of listening to English before they are ready to produce orally. Learners pass through stages in the acquisition of the second language. Errors reflect the learner's position along the developmental continuum and are an unavoidable and natural part of the acquisition process.
- **Individual differences affect learner success.** Many factors influence learner progress; they include age, motivation, attitude, cognitive style, learning strategies, and aptitude, as well as personal characteristics like extroversion and tolerance of ambiguity. There are certain constants in second language development, but there is also much variability among individual learners.
- **Both fluency and accuracy play a role in the acquisition of a second language.** A focus on both communicative ability and form is necessary to attain a high level of proficiency in a second language. While exposure to language is essential and foremost in developing skills, a learner needs guidance and instruction to develop the skills required for reading, writing and advanced communication.
- **A second language is learned when input is comprehensible.** Students will progress as they are engaged in meaningful language activities, be they oral or written, which involve real communication and in which the student can experience success.
- **First language literacy has implications for programming.** Literacy in a first language will affect the time needed to develop second language skills. Students with limited literacy, as well as those literate in writing systems other than the Roman alphabet, may need to begin with reading readiness activities. Students who are literate in their first language can transfer cognitive and literacy-related skills to the target language whereas a student who is illiterate or has limited prior schooling has fewer skills and less knowledge to transfer and build on; thus, the student will need a well planned, individualized literacy program.

## References

Cummins, J. (1982). *Tests, achievement and bilingual students*. Focus No. 9, Feb. 1982. Wheaton, MD: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

Government of Canada (1988) *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Bill C-93)

Province of New Brunswick. Department of Education (1996). *A Resource Guide for Educators of English Second Language Learners*.

Province of Newfoundland and Labrador (2007). *Diversity ~ “Opportunity and Growth” An Immigration Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador*.

# Appendix: Newcomer Profile

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

All questions are optional, and will only be completed with the parent's/guardian's input and consent.

1. Country of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Country in which the student has most recently resided: \_\_\_\_\_

3. English proficiency:

Native English speaker

ESL Advanced (can speak, read and write in English similar to English speaking peers)

ESL Intermediate (manages well in English, can write a simple paragraph – not at grade level but very readable)

ESL Beginner Level (can manage simple communication; can write a few simple sentences. (e.g., "My name is ...")

No proficiency in English beyond a few words (e.g., may be able to count to ten by memory).

4. Recommended for further ESL assessment:  Yes  No

5. Special dietary considerations (cultural or religious reasons):

6. Other special considerations for religious or cultural reasons (fasting and celebration days, dress, permitted to take part in activities such as music, dance, sports, etc):

7. Exposure to traumatic circumstances that may impact learning or behaviour (describe briefly):

8. Former schooling:

Approximately equivalent to Canadian system<sup>1</sup>

Significant gaps in educational achievement or suspected gaps<sup>2</sup>

Unknown<sup>3</sup>

9. Other relevant information:

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1 If a student arrives from an underdeveloped country or refugee camp it is unlikely that the student's former education is equivalent to the Canadian standard.

2 achievement assessment is required

3 achievement assessment is required