

# THE DIVERSITY KIT

**An Introductory Resource for  
Social Change in Education**



**PART III:**  
*LANGUAGE*





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Social Change in Education

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PART III:

LANGUAGE



# The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory

*a program of The Education Alliance at Brown University*

The LAB, a program of The Education Alliance at Brown University, is one of ten educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Our goals are to improve teaching and learning, advance school improvement, build capacity for reform, and develop strategic alliances with key members of the region's education and policymaking community.

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## PART III: LANGUAGE

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a world connected through language. All human beings have the desire to communicate, and this is achieved largely through language. In fact, as Fromkin and Rodman (1998) have observed, “wherever humans exist, language exists” (p. 26). Given the universal nature of language, it might not appear to be worthy of study. But upon closer scrutiny, it is clear that language acquisition and language use are deeply complex phenomena. Language production is not only a physiological event but a process deeply embedded in culture.

In this section of *The Diversity Kit*, we ground our understanding of language in culture and cultural context. The noted sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (1991) has described three connections between language and culture:

- **Language indexes culture:** A language that has grown with a culture is the best language through which to describe and communicate that culture.
- **Language symbolizes culture:** Language reflects the status and social positioning of a culture.
- **Culture is partly created from its language:** Certain cultural events such as rituals, storytelling, folktales, and greetings are deeply intertwined in language. A shift to using a new language will signify a shift in culture.

In this section of *The Diversity Kit*, we highlight the fact that language and culture are deeply intertwined. We also maintain that all language varieties, including what is traditionally referred to as dialect, pidgin or Creole, are equally complex systems of communication that are appropriate to meet the communicative needs of a particular speech community.

In the first chapter, Language, Culture, and Schooling, we introduce the reader to cultural differences in communication style and language use. We consider language attitudes and explore variations in language, including African American Vernacular English.

In the second chapter, we delve into theories underlying second language acquisition, the developmental stages of second language acquisition, and some of the educational programs and models that support bilingualism and biliteracy. In this chapter, we ask the reader to become an “educational linguist” and to explore the ways that language is used in the communities of culturally and linguistically diverse students. We underscore that students’ knowledge of language and language use can be powerful tools that challenge existing social inequities.

Finally, in the last two sections, we explore language as it relates to literacy and language and assessment. We review some of the areas of linguistics that educators need to be familiar with, such as phonology, morphology, and syntax. These areas, along with an understanding of print, appropriate literary styles, and purposes for reading, make up the complex process of literacy acquisition. We present language assessment and introduce the reader to measures that can be used to assess language proficiency. Here, we differentiate between language difficulties—which are common occurrences in the natural progression of second language acquisition—and language deficiencies, with which second language learners are often misdiagnosed, causing them to be disproportionately represented in special education classes.

As with the sections on human development and culture, we urge the reader to engage in ongoing conversations in their schools and communities that address issues of diversity and the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Through the activities and vignettes presented, we ask the reader to explore language variation and use. We also challenge the reader to raise questions about complex social phenomena and inequities, questions that may not offer simple solutions but do illuminate pathways toward social change.

## **Citations**

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# LANGUAGE, CULTURE, and SCHOOLING

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ? *How do cultural linguistic backgrounds influence how students use language?*
  - ? *Why is language such an important factor in the classroom?*
  - ? *What do teachers need to know about so-called “non-standard” varieties of English in order to teach their students successfully?*
-

*[E]ducational failure is often ... language failure... [A] minimum requirement for an educationally relevant approach to language is that it takes account of the child's own linguistic experience, defining this experience in terms of its richest potential and noting where there may be differences of orientation which would cause certain children difficulties in school. (Halliday, 1973, pp. 18-20)*

It has been said that every language represents a way of thinking (Fanon cited in Smitherman, 1998). It is understandable then that language is the most important tool for transmitting culture from one generation to another. In fact, culture and language are so thoroughly intertwined that loss of one leads to loss of the other (Brown, Hammond, & Onikama, 1997; Fishman, 1991; Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Virtually all learning experiences involve language to some degree. Symbolizing is the basis of human intelligence, and language is the primary tool we use to symbolize what we experience and think (Crystal, 1987; Gardner, 1983; Oller, 1991; Vygotsky, 1962). It is no wonder that language plays such an important role or that we tend to regard literacy (or the literate use of oral language) as the essential indicator of an educated person. But language is used in different ways by different cultural groups, and what counts as appropriate usage of language differs from group to group. Languages have evolved to serve the cultural needs of their speakers, and language is the principal vehicle for cultural transmission across generations. Just as culture influences our theories of child development (what we take to be normal and desirable development), culture influences how we use language and what we take to be normal language development (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 1993; Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1971; Nelson-Barber, 1997; Philips, 1983).

To succeed within their own cultural group, all children need to learn not only the linguistic code of that group but the ways in which language is used (Heath, 1986). Language use includes the goals of speaking (i.e., what is accomplished by using language) as well as rules about when children should speak, to whom they may speak,

*Culture and language are so thoroughly intertwined that loss of one leads to loss of the other.*

and the circumstances surrounding what topics are spoken (Bloom & Lahey, 1978). These are the pragmatic or social expectations surrounding language. Children learn these conventions along with the pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar of a language, but these aspects of language are so automatic (and learned so unconsciously) that neither children, their parents, nor their teachers tend to be consciously aware of them. Some researchers believe that language use is the most powerful cultural element in the classroom (Heath, 1986; Villegas, 1991).

*Teachers' first impressions of children are often based on the ways they use language (Ramirez, 1985).*

## The Ability of Language to Shape Life Chances

It could be argued that we do not create language, it creates us. The language surrounding children teaches them who they are, what their place in the world is, and what they need to do to become autonomous and valuable citizens. If they are unable to interact with and negotiate a culture's discourses with critical insight and confidence, they will be less autonomous and more likely to be dependent on others. "Discourses" refers to the daily linguistic interactions, both academic and social, that take place either in or outside of school. People become empowered when they can use and adapt language for

their own purposes, but too often the discourse of the dominant culture (and the school) displaces the discourse of students from minority or nondominant cultures (Gutiérrez, Stone, & Larson, in press).

Success in education is highly dependent on people's ability to display knowledge, usually through the spoken or written word. Teachers' first impressions of children are often based on the ways they use language (Ramirez, 1985). In later stages of education, verbal contact through formal or informal assessments is the main link between students and those who decide their educational fate. In fact, formal education is largely a process of teaching the rules for using words and other signs used in academic meaning systems and then judging how well those rules have been learned. Beyond school, the life chances of students are determined by their ability to interact with the discourses around them. The structures of these interactions and activities are based upon assumptions and expectations about language and communication. Much of the discourse that controls outcomes for children is shaped by (and shapes)

institutions over which culturally and linguistically diverse parents have little influence. Schools need to be more linguistically flexible than other institutions if they want to improve the life chances of language minority students.

## Cultural Differences in Communication Style and Language Use

Communication styles vary across cultures, and communication norms are expressions of each culture's values. Cultures have informal rules that govern speaking, listening, and turn-taking behaviors. However, teachers sometimes overlook how a child's culture's own expectations for communication and interaction may be very different from the dominant patterns in schools. They regard children who come from non-dominant linguistic and cultural groups as unresponsive, disruptive, or slow learners. When the cultural communication styles of students within a school are diverse, no single style of communication should be deemed the only acceptable one in the classroom.

Children whose ways of using language differ from those approved in school may find school language conventions baffling. Such children have learned different conventions than those required for participating in the classroom. If their teachers do not have information about their students' cultures, they may believe the children are shy, slow, or nonverbal (Dumont, 1979; Labov, 1969; Philips, 1983). Studies with American Indian students and African American students have shown that students' levels of verbal responsiveness depend on social circumstances, how questions are posed, and who is posing the questions (Labov, 1972; Swisher & Deyhle, 1992). Other research with Hawaiian and Navajo students has shown how different classroom organization patterns can lead to good or poor student participation (Au & Jordan, 1981; McCarty & Schaffer, 1992).

There are numerous examples of ways that students differ in language use. For instance, conventions for telling stories—an activity all children are asked to do as early as kindergarten—vary tremendously (Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981). Some cultures or cultural groups use a

*When the cultural communication styles of students within a school are diverse, no single style of communication should be deemed the only acceptable one in the classroom.*

**topic-associating**

An episodic style to telling a story in which a string of personal anecdotes makes up the discourse.

**topic-centered**

An approach to telling a story that establishes a primary topic and structures the story around it.

*topic-associating* or episodic style, in which a string of personal anecdotes makes up the discourse. The theme of a string may not be immediately clear to the listener because there is no evident beginning, middle, or end. Dominant-culture teachers in the U.S. are often more comfortable working with children who use a *topic-centered* style. A topic-centered approach to telling a story establishes a primary topic and structures the story around it. Teachers need to be aware of the different possible ways of telling stories if they are to understand children from nondominant cultural backgrounds.

Howard Smith (1998) cites Shirley Brice Heath's comparison of the storytelling styles of two communities, one African American and one white:

People in both Trackton and Roadville spend a lot of time telling stories. Yet the form, occasions, content, and functions of their stories differ greatly. They structure their stories differently; they hold different scales of features on which stories are recognized as stories and judged as good or bad... [The white] community allows only stories which are factual and have little exaggeration; the other uses reality only as the germ of a highly creative fictionalized account. (p. 184)

As Heath notes, these communities share a common emphasis on storytelling but differ in how they understand what a story is and how it ought to be told.

The need to understand students' storytelling approaches is just one reason why teachers need to understand *sociolinguistics*. Sociolinguists study language forms, language use, and the relationship between language and society (Crystal, 1987). Without some sociolinguistic knowledge, teachers may perceive differences in children's language as deficits and thereby perpetuate biases in judgments about what children are capable of learning. Ethnographic research is one way teachers can learn about the discourse styles of their particular students and communities.

**sociolinguistics**

The study of language forms, language use, and the relationship between language and society.

 **ACTIVITY:** Exploring Storytelling

- *Invite class members and their families to a culture-sharing evening. Have a storytelling hour, during which family members can tell stories that were told to them as young people.*
- *Reflect on the forms and structures of the stories you heard from members of different cultural groups and consider this information when listening to class members.*
- *Take an opportunity to share stories from your community—past or present—with colleagues in your school. Take time to discuss the differences in storytelling you observe.*

*Some cultures embrace indirectness and ambiguity, while others emphasize directness and confrontation (Lustig & Koester, 1999).*

### ***Direct and Indirect Speech***

Another instance of cross-cultural difference that sometimes causes tremendous misunderstanding among people is the varying degrees of directness in interpersonal communication. Some cultures embrace indirectness and ambiguity, while others emphasize directness and confrontation (Lustig & Koester, 1999). In the United States, the norm is to be direct, whether this makes someone else uncomfortable or not. In fact, many Americans from the dominant culture would think it disingenuous to communicate any other way. However, this valued style of communication is in distinct contrast to what Mexican Americans or Micronesians, for example, have learned. People from those cultures are likely to go out of their way to avoid confronting someone with negative information. They might go to a relative and hope that the message gets around to the target person. From their perspective, everyone can save face through the indirect communication of a complaint. An European American might be befuddled or annoyed and ask, “Why didn’t they tell me directly if they have a problem with something that I have done?” (Lustig & Koester, 1999, p. 93). It isn’t hard to see why misunderstandings arise among students or between teachers and students who have been socialized to two such different communication norms. When confronted directly with a criticism or correction, especially in front of others, a student from a culture that privileges indirect communication might feel far more embarrassed than his or her teacher realizes.

## VIGNETTE: Communicating Bad News

*I was visiting an island in the Pacific whose indigenous culture has remained relatively intact despite incursions by Europeans and Americans over the past centuries. As a speaker at an educational conference, I was thrilled to have several days to meet educators from this island, and many others throughout Micronesia, and learn from them how they taught in culturally relevant ways. Of course, I wanted to send post cards of this lovely island to family and friends; I sneaked away to the post office one afternoon to buy some beautiful stamps depicting local arts. I stood in line for nearly half an hour, along with perhaps 20 locals, tourists, and conference guests. As I neared the counter and the lone postal clerk, I heard murmurings to the effect that there might not be any stamps. The Arizona tourist ahead of me turned around and announced in tones that everyone could hear, "They are out of stamps, and there won't be any until three o'clock this afternoon when the plane from Hawaii arrives!"*

### DISCUSSION

- **If you had been behind the writer in line, how do you think you would have felt when the Arizona tourist made the announcement?**
- **Have you ever been in a situation like this one? If so, which of the people mentioned in the scene did you behave most like?**
- **Can you think of an instance in which some of your students have spoken more or less directly than you would have in their situation?**

There are, of course, many other revealing examples of cross-cultural variations in language use. Any diverse classroom may represent a mixture of cultures, each with its own beliefs about how children should communicate. Some cultural groups emphasize listening over speaking and believe that wisdom entails speaking very selectively (Philips, 1972). Other groups (such as the dominant U.S. culture) believe that power and knowledge come through active use of language in social situations (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff, 2000). Some groups use language with children primarily to socialize them to expected behaviors. Others attempt to get small children to talk about what they observe or experience in ways that are similar to how language is used in schools (Snow, 1983). Some cultures may believe that children should speak one at a time (as is common practice in U.S. classrooms), while others believe children may speak at the same time (Au & Jordan, 1981). Some cultures believe that questioning an adult is a sign of critical thinking (as in U.S. dominant culture), while others believe that questioning an adult is a sign of poor upbringing and lack of respect (Eggen & Kauchak, 1997; Greenfield, Raeff, & Quiroz, 1996). Understandably, these differences can have a profound effect on how comfortable a child feels within the language practices of his or her classroom. Teachers will be in a much better position to get children to participate in classroom talk if they understand how talk takes place in their students' homes. If children have not been expected to use language in "school" ways at home, they will need time to learn those ways. Teaching new ways of using language need not result in a devaluation of children's own ways with words.

*Cultural differences in styles of expression and communication can affect parental involvement in schooling as well as student behavior.*

Cultural differences in styles of expression and communication can affect parental involvement in schooling as well as student behavior. Schools today often expect parents to participate in parent-teacher conferences and, at times, on committees that set educational policy or support the school in other ways. The intent behind these expectations is positive: schools want to foster participation and empowerment of parents. They want schooling to reflect parents' priorities and for parents to have an investment in their children's education. However, because of the special esteem accorded teachers in many other cultures, members of those cultures may believe that decisions about practices and policies should be left to professionals. Parents holding these cultural values are puzzled when a school tries to involve them in goal setting at parent-teacher conferences and decision

making on advisory councils. Teachers, on the other hand, may think such parents are uncaring or unconcerned about their children's education. If the parents speak little or no English and the teacher cannot speak the parents' language, communication problems are compounded. However, it is more often the values and intentions underlying the language—rather than the language difference itself—that cause misunderstandings between home and school (Trumbull, Greenfield, Rothstein-Fisch, & Quiroz, 2001).

In the vignette below, one teacher bridges the gap between the cultures of her students—who are mostly Latino immigrants—and the culture of school, with its requirements for a very particular kind of discourse.

## VIGNETTE: The Field Trip

*Ms. Altcheck's fourth-grade class was preparing to take a field trip to the Ballona Wetlands Park near their Los Angeles school. They were lucky enough to have a wildlife docent from the park come to their classroom twice before the trip. When he asked the students what they knew about various animals they would likely see on the trip, they routinely answered with stories about animal experiences with their families. On the second visit, he let a couple of stories go by and then issued the admonition, "No more stories!" Ms. Altcheck knew that what he wanted was a "scientific discussion" with no "extraneous" commentary. She wasn't surprised, though, when his next question was met with silence. Why? Her students are largely from immigrant Latino families, and their cultures do not always stress the separation of content knowledge from social experience.*

*Later, Ms. Altcheck invited her students to tell their stories that related in some way to the planned field trip. As they talked, she constructed a T-chart on the board with key elements from the students' stories on the left. Then, she asked them to help her extract the "scientific information" from their stories. For example, she used a student's comment that "the hummingbird's*

wings moved so fast” to draw out information about the bird’s metabolism and feeding habits. The students were participating, and the science lesson was taught in a culturally responsive way.

## DISCUSSION

*The classroom extension below shows a reconstruction of the T-chart Ms. Altchech and her students developed. Through her instructional strategy, Ms. Altchech helped students move from a familiar discourse style to the more academic style expected in the classroom. She used their own strengths and values (including a strong orientation to family) to shape the instruction. She allowed students to relate their stories—stories that often involved trips or other family activities. The result was a high level of student engagement, ready identification of students’ prior knowledge, and a joint construction of the “scientific knowledge” that was the goal of the lesson.*

### FIGURE 1

#### Classroom Extension

STUDENT EXPERIENCE	SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION
<p><b>Carolina’s Story</b></p> <p>I was playing in the garden with grandmother and I saw a hummingbird near the cherry tree.</p> <p>The bird “stood in the air.” I tried to go close to the pretty little bird, but it kept darting away.</p>	<p><b>Hummingbird</b></p> <p>Brownish with bright iridescent green and red coloring around head and neck</p> <p>Wings beat rapidly</p> <p>Bird can hover and fly in any direction</p> <p>Has to eat frequently because it uses so much energy in its movements</p>

## ***Language Attitudes***

Attitudes toward language influence our perceptions about other people's social identities, social status (Fishman, 1991), and intellectual abilities (Ramirez, 1985). All speakers use one or more dialects of the language they speak. Regional dialects have traditionally symbolized allegiance to a region, conveyed positive and shared connotations associated with valued traits, and signaled social bonding within class and ethnic groups. Accents and dialectal variations, however, have also had negative connotations, and in many societies they are impediments to social, educational, and economic opportunities.

Attitudes and values attached to some facets of language (e.g., regional or national accent) are evident and widely acknowledged. These are often captured in humor and parodies. However, people are rarely aware of the depth of reactions to divergent language styles and the speakers who use them. "The ideal of linguistic democracy, in which the speech of every citizen is regarded with equal respect by all others, is perhaps the most unrealistic of all social ideals. Speech is one of the most effective instruments in existence for maintaining a given social order" (Christian, cited in Peñalosa, 1980, p. 183).

In general, those who achieve the highest degree of economic success in U.S. society tend to have the least regionally-accented speech (see Peñalosa, 1980). The significance of this reality has not gone unnoticed among speakers of different varieties of English. Few television newscasters, for example, speak with a distinctive accent, and some have consciously eliminated certain regional characteristics from their speech.

Language attitudes – both positive and negative – also operate within the classroom and can affect the teaching and learning process. Language plays a major role in establishing the social identities and relationships of teachers and students in the classroom. As Ramirez (1985) has observed, the initial impressions teachers form about students are often based upon features of their speech. Once established, these views appear to remain relatively fixed and may influence teachers' expectations of students. Moreover, negative teacher attitudes may reinforce similar student attitudes toward their own or others' nonstandard language use. Thus, students may be subjected to teacher, peer, and internalized prejudice because of the dialect they speak (Hall & Guthrie, 1981).

*Attitudes toward language influence our perceptions about other people's social identities, social status, and intellectual abilities.*

## Language Varieties: Dialects, Pidgins, and Creoles

### Dialects

*A language is a dialect with an army and a navy.*

Max Weinreich (quoted in Fromkin & Rodman, 1998, p. 399)

As the above quotation suggests, the line between what counts as a language and what counts as a dialect can be a fuzzy one. Linguists often refer to a dialect as a variety of a language that is distinguished from other varieties of the same language by features of phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. Pace of speech, volume, and other nonlinguistic behaviors—such as how close one stands to a conversational partner—are also likely to vary. Discourse conventions may be different in a dialect—for instance, conventions that govern the structure and narration of stories, the rules of conversation, and the uses for written language. In fact, the traditional definition of dialects holds that they are mutually intelligible versions of the same language. For example, despite variations in pronunciation or usage, a speaker of Southern U.S. English can generally understand a speaker from the Northwest. However, in the case of Chinese, different varieties, such as Mandarin and Cantonese, are usually considered to be dialects even though they are not mutually intelligible in spoken form. (The fact that they use the same characters means that they *are* mutually intelligible

in written form.) And while Swedish and Norwegian are mutually intelligible, they are treated as separate languages for sociopolitical reasons. So, the common definition of dialect has numerous exceptions; for that reason, we refer to a particular language or dialect as a “language variety.” We use the term language variety, then, to cover any form of a language, whether a geographical or social dialect, a patois, a Creole, or some other code of a language. Most speakers of a language use a variety that differs in recognizable ways from the so-called “standard” form; none of these varieties is in any sense inherently inferior to the standard variety in grammar, accent,



or phonology. At the same time, these sociocultural and geographical variations within a language signal matters of great importance to those who use them. Varieties serve valuable group identity functions for their speakers; they express interests that are closely linked to matters of self-respect and other psychological attributes.

Varieties may be distinguished by their use by a particular group of speakers who are separated from others geographically or socially. For example, in the United States, we might distinguish at least the following regional dialects: Southern, Mid-Atlantic, New England, New York City, Midwestern, Southwestern, Appalachian, and Northwestern. There are other dialects representing smaller numbers of speakers within these regions. In Pennsylvania, for example, Pennsylvania Dutch speakers speak a dialect influenced by German. Hawaii has its own variety (Hawaiian Creole English), and Alaska has many varieties of English among the communities of Alaskan Native peoples. An example of a language variety that is based on social group rather than region is African American Vernacular English. We explore this more fully below.

Teachers need a basic understanding of what a dialect is—that it represents a functioning, rule-governed language system not a substandard language in any linguistic sense. There is a tendency for people to confuse the social status attached to a dialect with its linguistic adequacy or value, but this is a mistake that teachers need to avoid. Otherwise, teachers may make false judgments about students' language skills or intelligence. In fact, sophisticated language skills are needed to master any variety (Rickford, 1998). Although teachers do not routinely get the opportunity to learn about language structures and usage the way linguists do, they need to become linguists of a sort to understand how language comes into the learning process. In particular, they need to understand what constitutes a language deficit versus a language difference. “A child doesn't need to know any linguistics in order to use language to learn; but a teacher needs to know some linguistics ... to understand how the process takes place—or what is going wrong when it doesn't” (Halliday cited in Farr & Trumbull, 1997, p. 11).

*There is a tendency for people to confuse the social status attached to a dialect with its linguistic adequacy or value, but this is a mistake that teachers need to avoid.*

## ACTIVITY: Exploring Language Variation

- *Think of an instance when you received a phone call from someone who used language in a way that was different from your own use. What questions did his or her language use raise for you? Have you ever noticed a difference in language use over the phone and later met the person? Have assumptions based on their language use been confirmed or contradicted in person?*
- *Have you ever encountered someone in a group setting, noted their ways of using language, and then had an opportunity to work with them beyond that original group setting? Did your perception of them change when you saw how they used language differently in a different social setting?*
- *Have you ever found yourself adopting a dialect or local language variation to fit in with the conversation of others? Have you ever been made aware that you were doing so unconsciously? How does it feel to speak like others do or to speak differently from those in a given social setting?*

While most of us recognize that learning a new language presents challenges, we may not realize that for some children learning a new language variety is one of the most daunting tasks they face in school. There are rarely programs or practices in place to help these children with this task. In addition, their teachers may not understand that their students' home languages are perfectly systematic, logical systems. They may hear these as merely deviations from "Standard English" and strive to override them with corrections. So called "Standard English" is simply one form among many equally valid and complex varieties of English. What is grammatical to a person depends on what dialect(s) he or she has learned (Crystal, 1987).

As with languages, many people do master more than one language or language variety, and it is not necessary to get rid of one to learn another. Because our schools focus so intensely on helping English language learners master English or helping nondominant speakers master the standard form, we often forget that children have already mastered complex linguistic systems that will continue to be meaningful and useful in their personal lives.

Language varieties come into the work of the school in one way or another. Children may have two or more varieties that they use in their everyday communication—one used at home, another in the peer group, and a third at school. Largely because of the school's influence, this last one may come to be very close to the standard variety. At the same time, many children arrive in schools with little or no contact with the "standard" form that is used as the language of formal education. Often these children are penalized (socially and instructionally) for speaking a variety that is accorded low status in the school. Some language varieties that have routinely been disparaged include Appalachian, Southern, and African American Vernacular English.

Decisions about whether to require students to speak and write the standard variety in school are fraught with controversy. Insistence on Standard English may add a layer of demands that make acquisition of other skills more difficult for students. In addition, students who choose to use Standard English must often confront peer pressure and accept corrections they may interpret as



*If Standard English is to be required, students need to understand the value and purpose of learning it in terms that are meaningful to them.*

insulting to their own speech patterns and identities. However, if students do not learn Standard English, their life opportunities may be limited (Christian, 1987). If Standard English is to be required, students need to understand the value and purpose of learning it in terms that are meaningful to them (Christian, 1987). Nevertheless, students may still be faced with a dilemma. As Chaika (1982) observes, the speech of children and adolescents resembles that of the people with whom they identify. Because language is an integral part of identity, students may feel conflicted adopting a new variety not spoken by family or community members with whom they identify.

Sociodrama is a technique that has been reported to help students develop proficiency in Standard English appropriate to various situations, without relying on excessive use of grammar and pronunciation exercises (Chaika, 1982). In a typical sociodrama exercise, students are

asked to assume roles and act out situations in which they would be using standard forms of the language (e.g., interviewing for a job, complaining to someone in authority, and speaking in a style suitable for the assigned role). A similar technique can be applied to writing (e.g., newspaper articles) and used in combination with group work and peer editing. The role-playing context acknowledges that choices can be made about when to use a particular language variety. In this way, students do not get the message that only one variety is legitimate.

With greater understanding of the issues surrounding dialects, teachers are more likely to respect and value students' language and to seek strategies that help students become bidialectal, if that is the goal agreed upon by the school and the community. There is no educational or linguistic reason a student should not maintain use of his or her home language while acquiring additional varieties.

## CASE STUDY: African American Vernacular English (Black Language)

Many African American children speak what has been called variously “African-American Vernacular English,” “Black English Vernacular,” “Black Language,” or “U.S. Ebonics” (Perry & Delpit, 1998). This variety, like all other natural linguistic systems, is rule-governed and capable of serving all of the intellectual and social needs of its speakers. Black Language has multiple forms—oral and written, formal and informal, vernacular and literary (Perry, 1998). Its forms and ways of being used have been influenced by West African and Niger-Congo languages (O’Neil, 1998; Smith, 1998), as well as by the social circumstances surrounding the histories of African Americans in the United States. For example, deletion of the final consonant in a consonant cluster (wes’ for west or col’ for cold) brings English words more in line with the form of words in some West African languages (Smith, 1998). In addition, words and phrases have been coined in order to keep some things private from the dominant white culture (particularly during the time of slavery). The oratorical devices (e.g., rhythm, rhyme, metaphor, repetition) used by African American preachers are distinctive elements of Black Language as well (Perry, 1998). In fact, many other discourse conventions distinguish Black Language, including particular structures for storytelling or narrative writing (Ball, 1997; Heath, 1983; Michaels & Cazden, 1986).

Black Language is strongly valued by many African Americans as a symbol of intimacy and solidarity—it represents “intergroup distinctiveness from the white community” (Beebe, 1988, p. 65). Differences between Black Language and Standard English are constantly reinforced and apparently increasing. One reason is that students who do not identify with speakers of Standard English are not likely to emulate their speech patterns.

As with children whose storytelling and conversational styles differ from those of the





dominant U.S. culture, with speakers of Black Language, teachers need not negate the value of Black Language in order to introduce new language skills. Carrie Secret—an Oakland, Calif. teacher—encourages her elementary students to use English (or Standard English) when they are writing, but she also acknowledges the value of their language (which she calls Ebonics):

We read literature that has Ebonics language patterns in it. For example, last year in fifth grade we read Joyce Hansen's *Yellow Bird and Me* and in fourth grade we read her book *The Gift Giver*. The language was Ebonic in structure. The language was the bonding agent for students. The book just felt good to them. (Secret, 1998, p. 81)

**Figure 2** on page 22 outlines some of the issues involved in teaching students who speak Black English and suggests some strategies for addressing them.

**FIGURE 2****Black English—Dialect Issues in Instruction**

<b>POSSIBLE DIALECT CONFLICTS</b>	<b>POSSIBLE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES</b>
Students omit final consonants or consonants in clusters.	Draw attention to the contrast between students' pronunciation and spelling and Standard English spelling. Generate a list of words with a similar pattern (e.g., cold, bold, mold, fold, hold). Note: This does not require correcting pronunciation but simply pointing out the differences and choices.
Students use complex verb patterns that differ from what Standard English employs (e.g., "He be going..." to indicate a habitual behavior).	Have the class or a small group brainstorm about alternative ways to get across the same meaning. (He often goes..., He usually goes..., He has a habit of going). Have students choose the best forms for their intended meanings. Discuss when Black English or Standard English would be more appropriate or expressive.
Students omit the copula (the verb "to be") or the "'s" possessive in places Standard English would use it. (e.g., "She thrilled about her brother good luck" vs. "She is thrilled about her brother's good luck.")	Again, using Carrie Secret's strategy, help students make explicit the differences between the two dialects and make conscious choices about when to use either one.
Students use Black Language style in a situation where Standard English would be more socially effective (e.g., writing a request for information to a public agency, preparing to give a plea to the school board for additional resources for a special program).	Use sociodrama to have students take on different roles, highlighting how one would communicate effectively in different situations. Sometimes Black Language will be more effective and sometimes Standard English will be; identify which applies where.
Students use rhetorical features in writing that are considered "oral" strategies from the dominant dialect's point of view (e.g., repetition of phrases or themes).	Have students read their writing aloud and discuss whether or how this is effective to their purpose in writing. The student's strategy could be powerfully effective depending on his or her intended audience.

While Black Language provides an important example of student dialect and how teachers might respond to it, teachers need to learn about the norms of whatever varieties their students speak. Appalachian, for example, is spoken by many families; research suggests that students who speak it, like students who speak Black English, often encounter misunderstandings and misjudgments about their abilities (see, for example, Heath, 1983).

### **pidgin**

A simplified language that has developed as the means of communication between speakers of two or more languages who do not know each other's languages.

## **Pidgins and Creoles**

A *pidgin* is a simplified language that has developed as the means of communication between speakers of two or more languages who do not know each other's languages. The word itself is thought to have come from the word "business" as pronounced by Chinese speakers trading with English speakers. Pidgins retain important content words (nouns and verbs) and usually maintain the basic word order of the target language (e.g., subject-verb-object in a pidgin version of English) but eliminate the small grammatical words (prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and some pronouns). Tense may be indicated by context or words like "before," "after," or "by and by." Number is usually implied in the context. So, for example, a person might say, "Farmer sell vegetable bymby (by and by)," to mean, "The farmers will soon be selling their vegetables."

When a pidgin becomes a speaker's first language through intergenerational mother tongue transmission, it is called a *Creole*. A Creole generally derives from a pidgin. Once it is acquired as a true language of primary communication, a Creole begins to become more complex than its parent language. Additional grammatical features are added, such as verb tenses, prepositions, conjunctions, plural markers, and articles—if those exist in the language that forms the basis of the pidgin or Creole (Crystal, 1987; Carr, 1972). A Creole is a fully functional system with the creativity of any natural language. Whether or not the Creole has the social status of the "preferred," high-status variety, it is an adequate language variety that requires the same linguistic skills any other language requires.

### **Creole**

When a pidgin becomes a speaker's first language through intergenerational mother tongue transmission.

An excellent example of the Creolization process is the movement from pidgin English to Hawaiian English Creole in the last century. There is evidence that a Hawaiian pidgin was the original pidgin produced in the early 1800s after the influx of English-speaking traders. Its use continued until around 1890, after the immigration of speakers of many other languages. This pidgin, as its name implies, was based not on English but on Hawaiian (Roberts, 1995). Although commonly called “pidgin” by Hawaiian citizens, the present-day vernacular language is a Creole—a form of English influenced by Hawaiian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and at least two Filipino varieties. There may be a small number of speakers of true pidgin English; Carr (1972) suggests that there were still some in isolated areas as late as 1972. Many Hawaiian speakers move back and forth between Creole and the more standard form of English. As we have observed, language use is contextual, and speakers choose the variety that fits whatever context they are in.

Understanding the nuances of student language is essential to all good teaching. Language affects all aspects of schooling—how students participate in classroom discourse, how they develop their skills as independent learners, and how they demonstrate their knowledge and abilities. In the following sections, we discuss at greater length three key elements of how language affects schooling—second language learning, language and literacy, and language and assessment. These are only some of the significant arenas in which awareness of the role of language in the classroom pays off. Nevertheless, understanding the role of language in these arenas will provide educators with some insight into the rich potential for teaching effectively by keeping the influence of language in mind.

# LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ? What are some of the major theories surrounding second language acquisition? How long does it take to acquire conversational fluency in a second language? How long does it take to acquire academic language proficiency?*
  - ? What are the general stages of second language acquisition?*
  - ? In what ways can educators facilitate and support students as they acquire a second language?*
  - ? What do some of the educational programs that support second language learners look like?*
-

In this chapter of *The Diversity Kit*, we provide you with an overview of some of the major theories of second language acquisition in their historical contexts. We highlight some of the most important contributions that have added to our understanding of the process of second language acquisition, the relationship between first language and second language, and the ways educators can facilitate that process for second language learners through specific instructional strategies. We also explore the terrain of bilingual education in that context. Throughout this chapter we suggest activities that will stimulate your curiosity and that will further explore both the process and context within which people strive for bi- or multilingualism.



Just recently, U.S. census data revealed that nearly one out of every five children between the ages of 5 and 17 comes from a home in which English is not the primary spoken language (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2001). This reflects an increase of over 50% from the 1990 survey (see Crawford, 2001 for summary). This statistic is surely not surprising to anyone living or working in an ethnically or linguistically diverse community in the United States; however, there remains widespread misconception among the general population about how languages are learned and what can be done in an educational setting to facilitate language learning and bolster support of English language learners in the United States.

Complicating the issue of education for culturally and linguistically diverse students is the fact that mainstream teachers are largely white and monolingual. Teachers are often not trained (and likewise not supported) to educate an increasingly diverse student population (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 1999). Hamayan (1990) suggests that in order for second language learners to be successful academically, teachers must better understand the process of second language learning.

Scholars in the area of education and linguistics have recently begun to address the problem of adequate teacher preparation programs. While recognizing the limitations of their suggestions on program implementation, Wong Fillmore & Snow

(1999) argue that teacher preparation programs should more systematically provide training to pre-service teachers in the area of educational linguistics. They suggest that adequate training in this area would include second language acquisition theory and a general understanding of linguistics. Brumfit (1997) underscores the need for work to be conducted on teachers' roles as educational linguists. He defines the role of educational linguists as "conscious analysts of linguistic processes, both their own and others" (p. 163). In this chapter we hope to bridge the gap between teachers' understanding of second language acquisition and the needs of second language learners. We also wish to encourage teachers to become educational linguists in their own particular schools and classrooms.

## Theories of Bilingualism and Second Language Acquisition

Significant advances have been made during the latter part of the twentieth century with respect to theories of bilingualism and second language acquisition. The theories have influenced our knowledge about what influences the process of second language acquisition, including the influence of the first language on the second language. Hakuta (1986) suggests that early interest in child second language acquisition and bilingualism was influenced by the work of Werner Leopold. In a lengthy and meticulously documented study, Leopold detailed the acquisition of two languages by his daughter, Hildegard. Leopold spoke exclusively in German to his daughter while his wife communicated to her exclusively in English; he referred to this process as simultaneous bilingualism. Simultaneous bilingualism refers to the acquisition of two languages at the onset of speech. In contrast, successive or sequential bilingualism refers to the addition of a second language after the initial establishment of the first language, roughly around the age of five (August & Hakuta, 1997; Wei, 2000). Leopold's study focused on the details of the development, separation, and interaction of the two languages acquired by his daughter. However, rather

*Simultaneous bilingualism refers to the acquisition of two languages at the onset of speech.*

*Successive or sequential bilingualism refers to the addition of a second language after the initial establishment of the first language.*

than determining whether bilingualism was a handicap or advantage, Leopold's case study revealed that the process of bilingualism is largely influenced by a variety of social and familial circumstances.

Other researchers continued to study bilingualism from the perspective of linguistic interference of the first language on acquisition of the second. For example, in contrast to Leopold's study, which relied on qualitative methods and description of simultaneous bilingualism, Madorah Smith studied child second language development and bilingualism through the use of a variety of quantitative scales and analyses (Hakuta, 1986). Smith studied the differences among individual children, namely, between bilingual and monolingual children. The sample of the study consisted of 1,000 Hawaiian children. Smith compiled lists of children's errors in language use; some of the errors identified included the use of idiomatic expressions not found in Standard English. Not surprisingly, Smith concluded that there were individual differences among the children. The most significant conclusion she made was that mixing languages was not a choice made by the interlocutor (speaker) but rather a reflection of the mental state, or confusion, of the child (Hakuta, 1986). Other researchers of that time drew similar conclusions on the impact of bilingualism on intelligence. Goodenough (1926), for example, concluded that the use of a minority language in the home led to a retardation in intelligence.



Between the late 1950s and early 1960s researchers shifted their attention from a description of language behavior to a more complex analysis of the structure and functioning of the mind. The shift was sparked by the work of linguist Noam Chomsky, who demonstrated that there was an underlying structure of language that could not be accounted for through a descriptive structural analysis, the lens through which prior research on language acquisition had been conducted. The research agenda then shifted away from descriptive structuralism to an area of linguistic inquiry known as generative grammar or "mentalism" (Hakuta, 1986, p. 70). Some of the criticism among researchers trained in positivist research orientation (which uses controlled experimental studies) was that social and contextual variables influenced the data findings, making any generalizations regarding the research

tenuous at best. Subsequent work began, then, to attempt to control for those variables. When this occurred, many of the findings that suggested linguistic retardation and ethnic inferiority were actually reversed. One of the first studies to draw new conclusions from research data was conducted by Peal and Lambert in 1962. The researchers controlled for many of the variables in their sample, including socioeconomic status and criteria for subjects in the sample. Peal and Lambert's (1962) study revealed a positive effect of bilingualism where bilinguals experience "cognitive flexibility" not found in monolinguals. Cognitive flexibility among bilinguals suggests that knowledge of more than one language system leads an individual to a heightened ability in the area of concept formation.

*Instrumental orientation suggests that a person will acquire a second language when the person considers the language to be useful.*

*Integrative orientation suggests that a second language learner identifies with speakers of the target language, and the individual desires membership and inclusion into that particular linguistic group.*

In the early 1970s Gardner and Lambert (1972) focused their attention on the psycholinguistic variables that influence second language acquisition. They postulated that there are two discernable orientations that explain an individual's motivation to acquire a second language: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental orientation suggests that a person will acquire a second language when the person considers the language to be useful. For example, acquisition of a second language may yield an increase in social position or economic benefit. Integrative orientation suggests that a second language learner identifies with speakers of the target language, and the individual desires membership and inclusion into that particular linguistic group. The work of Gardner and Lambert concluded that, generally speaking, integrative orientation is a stronger motivating factor than instrumental orientation. Subsequent research (e.g., Gardner, 1985) has expanded this theory to include the influence of formal and informal environments, language aptitude, situational anxiety, and social and cultural background on the process of language learning. The more recent work of Lucy Tse (1998) supports integrative orientation and ethnic identity as strong motivating forces behind second language acquisition when an individual attempts to acquire the heritage language.

**ACTIVITY:** Interview with a Second Language Learner

**Identify a person in your community who has acquired a second language. Plan a 30-minute interview with that person. Using Gardner and Lambert's theory of language motivation as a framework for the interview, find out what motivated your interviewee to acquire that language. What factors contributed to his or her language acquisition? In what capacity or for what purposes does your interviewee use the second language? With whom does the person use the language to communicate?**

**After the interview, reflect on how the interviewee's perspective supports or challenges Gardner and Lambert's theory of language motivation orientation. Which motivation orientation appeared to be stronger? What surprises did you find?**

It is likely that there were a variety of environmental factors that influenced the above individual's acquisition of the second language. According to Larson-Freeman & Long (1991, p. 227), there are at least 40 theories of second language acquisition. These theories may be viewed as environmentalist, nativist, or interactionist perspectives. In the following section we will explore the cornerstone environmentalist and nativist theories of second language acquisition that have emerged over the past 25 years.

### ***Environmentalist Theory***

The work of John Schumann (1978) provided a foundation for theories that explored the environmental factors of second language acquisition. Schumann's Acculturation Model was based on the premise that the extent to which a second language learner adapts to the new culture influences acquisition of the target language. There are clear linkages between Schumann's Acculturation Model and Gardner and Lambert's theories on second language motivation orientation. Schumann's Acculturation Model posited that a group's social and psychological distance from speakers of the target language accounted for lack of proficiency in the target language. The essential factor in the model is the degree to which the second language learner adapts to a new culture, with language being one aspect of culture. In his model, Schumann identified eight factors that influence social distance; these are summarized below. Note that these factors refer to group rather than individual distance.

#### **Schumann's eight factors of social and psychological distance:**

- ***Social dominance*** considers the degree of equality (subordination or domination) among groups.
- ***Integration pattern*** reflects the desire of both the target language and language learner groups to assimilate.
- ***Enclosure*** refers to the degree to which the language learner group exists independently from the target group (as with community functions, religion, etc.).
- ***Cohesiveness*** of the group influences second language learning.
- ***Size*** of the group influences second language learning in that smaller groups are more readily assimilated into the target language group.
- ***Cultural congruence*** reflects the degree to which the two groups' cultures are considered to be similar and to share aspects.
- ***Attitude*** refers to affective factors, including the feeling of language confusion and culture shock or the second language learners' motivation to learn the target language.
- ***Intended length of residence*** refers to the amount of time that the second language learner group intends to remain with the target language group.

Schumann's model highlights the social context in which languages are learned. In particular, Schumann's model has enabled researchers to understand the environmental and contextual factors that impact second language acquisition. However, the model does not attempt to account for a language learner's cognitive processes.



## **ACTIVITY:** Schumann's Social and Psychological Distance

**Sojourners are people who relocate for a brief or limited amount of time. Their intended length of residence in a foreign country is fixed and intentionally shorter than that of immigrants seeking permanent relocation. In this activity, identify two non-native English speakers, one who is a permanent relocatee such as an immigrant and the second who is a sojourner in the United States. Using Schumann's factors of social and psychological distance, interview the two relocatees about their experiences. How has each person's experience, specifically their intended length of residence, influenced his or her acquisition of English? If possible, interview both relocatees at the same time in a focus group interview. How do the two relocatees differ in their orientation? What can they learn from understanding each other's experience, especially as it relates to second language acquisition?**

## ***Nativist Theories***

In contrast to environmentalist theories of second language acquisition, which hold that nurture (experience) is more important than nature in language development, nativist theories hold that acquisition occurs largely as a result of an innate biological process. Nativist theories are largely based on the work of Chomsky in the 1950s. Chomskyan theory suggests that all human beings have an innate ability to acquire language. Chomsky referred to this ‘hardwiring’ of the brain for language acquisition as the Language Acquisition Device, or LAD. Chomsky’s work directly opposed the position of behaviorists such as B. F. Skinner, who had previously suggested that language development occurred largely as a result of behavioral reinforcement in a child’s environment. Scholars of language and the brain generally agree that the human brain is predisposed to process language input according to some preset principles and will formulate rules for the comprehension and production of language.

One of the principal scholars to apply Chomsky’s theory to the process of second language acquisition is Stephen Krashen. Krashen’s (1985) Monitor Theory, derived from Krashen’s Monitor Model proposed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, consists of five interrelated hypotheses. The first of these is the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis. This hypothesis draws a clear distinction between the acquisition of a second language and the learning of a second language. Krashen suggests that acquisition takes place when we learn a language subconsciously and for a variety of different purposes. In contrast, language learning occurs when we focus on various aspects of a language (e.g., grammatical structure, phonology), often in a prescribed learning environment such as a formal academic setting. Gee refers to this distinction as incidental and intentional learning. However, where Krashen views acquisition as an individual psychological process, Gee (1992) extends this to include a social component:

Acquisition is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practiced within social groups, without formal teaching. It happens in natural settings that are meaningful...  
(p. 113)

Krashen’s second hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, suggests that language is acquired in a natural order and that certain aspects of a language are picked up before others. That is, a general pattern is discernible regardless of a person’s first language. The third hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, states that the rules learned about a language can regulate output (i.e., speaking or writing). Three conditions influence

activation of the language monitor: when there is sufficient time to use it, when there is a focus on linguistic form, and when a second language learner knows the rules of the language.

The fourth hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, suggests that in order for language acquisition to occur, learners must receive input that is slightly beyond their current ability level. Krashen calls this  $i + 1$ . This hypothesis has largely influenced teachers who provide “comprehensible input” through a variety of instructional strategies. Note that if input remains at the current level of a second language learner’s ability ( $i + 0$ ), then no acquisition takes place. Similarly, if input is too far beyond a learner’s ability level ( $i + 2$ ), then the second language learner interprets the language as merely incomprehensible noise or babble. Therefore, teachers of English language learners must know the ability level of each student in order to provide the right level of input—input that is comprehensible, but slightly beyond the level of the student. Finally, the Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that an individual’s feelings—such as boredom, anxiety, or lack of desire—may block language input into the brain. Thus, when the affective filter is raised, language input, even if comprehensible at  $i + 1$  input, cannot reach the LAD.

Krashen’s work on second language and his Monitor Theory have been widely linked to classroom practice. The Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), originally developed for foreign language learners in the United States, was based on Krashen’s work on second language acquisition. The underlying principles of the Natural Approach are (1) that a student’s production of the target language will follow pre-production, (2) that the environment and affect will impact that production, and (3) that for input to reach the LAD, it must be made comprehensible to the learner.

## ACTIVITY: Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

**Think about your own language learning experience (a first and/or second language). Using Krashen's distinction between acquisition and learning, what do you believe was the acquisition component of that experience, and what was the learning component? Share a personal example with the class. Were your experiences similar to or different from others'?**

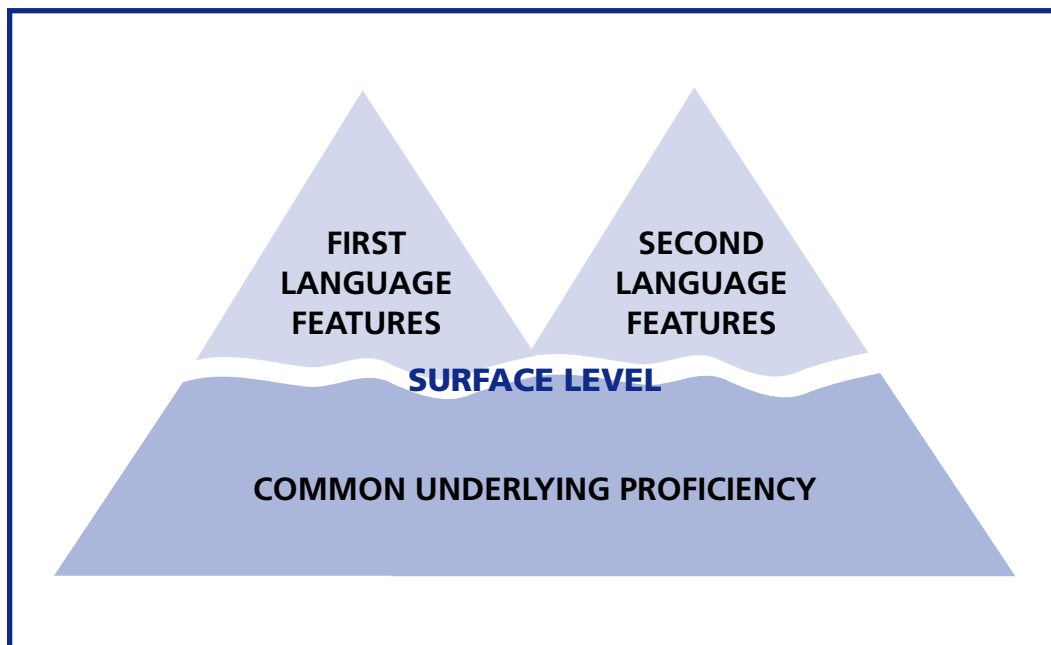
While theories of second language acquisition were being hypothesized and investigated, other scholars were investigating the relationship between first and second languages and expanding theories of cognition and bilingualism. One scholar whose work has continued to influence our understanding of bilingualism, language proficiency, and first and second language transfer is Jim Cummins. In the course of his work in those areas, Cummins posited three major principles related to second language acquisition theory. These are: the linguistic interdependence principle, the distinction between conversational fluency and academic language proficiency, and the additive bilingual principle.

Cummins theorized that there was a common operating system that existed across an individual's two (or more) language systems (1980). That is, on the surface, an individual may appear to have two distinct languages. Below the surface, however, there is an operating system that is shared by both languages. Cummins' theory challenged the myth that separate underlying proficiencies (SUPs) are responsible for the functioning of language in a bilingual's brain. The existence of SUPs would suggest that each language takes up a certain amount of space in an individual's brain, leaving little room for the adequate development of more than one language.

In contrast, the common underlying proficiency (CUP) suggests that there is one operating system responsible for language processing and cognition. The CUP theory holds that reading, writing, speaking, and listening are derived from the same central location and that these four functions may be developed and enhanced through either the first or second language. The common underlying proficiency is represented pictorially in **Figure 1** as an iceberg with above- and below-surface level features. The figure shows that individual languages may appear distinct at the surface level. However, below the surface, both languages share a common operating system.

## FIGURE 1

Common Underlying Proficiency (Cummins, 1980)

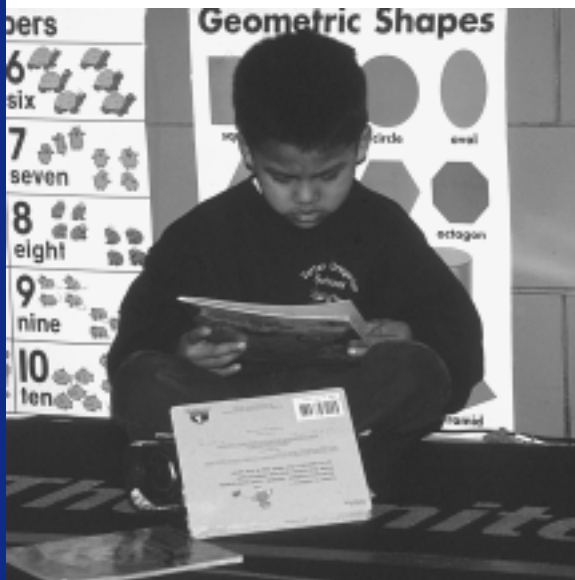


The interdependence hypothesis proposed by Cummins maintains that second language acquisition is influenced greatly by the degree to which the first language is developed. He states this as “to the extent that instruction through a minority language is effective in developing academic proficiency in the minority language, transfer of this proficiency to the majority language will occur given adequate exposure and motivation to learn the language” (Cummins, 1986, p. 20). That is, when the first language is supported and developed, acquisition of the second language is enhanced. The interdependence hypothesis has important implications for educators and policymakers: providing students with continued first language support (as in well-implemented bilingual education programs) will foster English language learning.

In the Threshold Theory, Cummins explored the relationship between cognition and bilingualism. This theory suggests that the degree to which bilingualism is developed will have consequences, either positive or negative, for a child. The Threshold Theory has been depicted pictorially as a house with three floors, separated by two thresholds or levels. At the first floor, children who have low levels of competence in two languages are likely to experience negative cognitive effects of bilingualism. At the second floor, children who have acquired age-level competence in one language but not the second may experience positive and negative consequences of bilingualism. Finally, at the top floor, bilingual children who have age-level competence in both languages are likely to experience positive cognitive advantages. Cummins proposed the Threshold Theory to help explain why some children were not experiencing the positive benefits of bilingualism (enhanced cognitive, linguistic, and

academic growth). The theory has been criticized for not being able to define the level of bilingualism required at each of the thresholds to avoid the negative effects and gain the positive benefits of bilingualism. From the Threshold Theory, Cummins proposed the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that the level of competence attained in the first language will impact the level of competence in the second language.

Perhaps his most well-cited contribution to the field of bilingual education, Cummins developed a theory that differentiated between two different types of language:



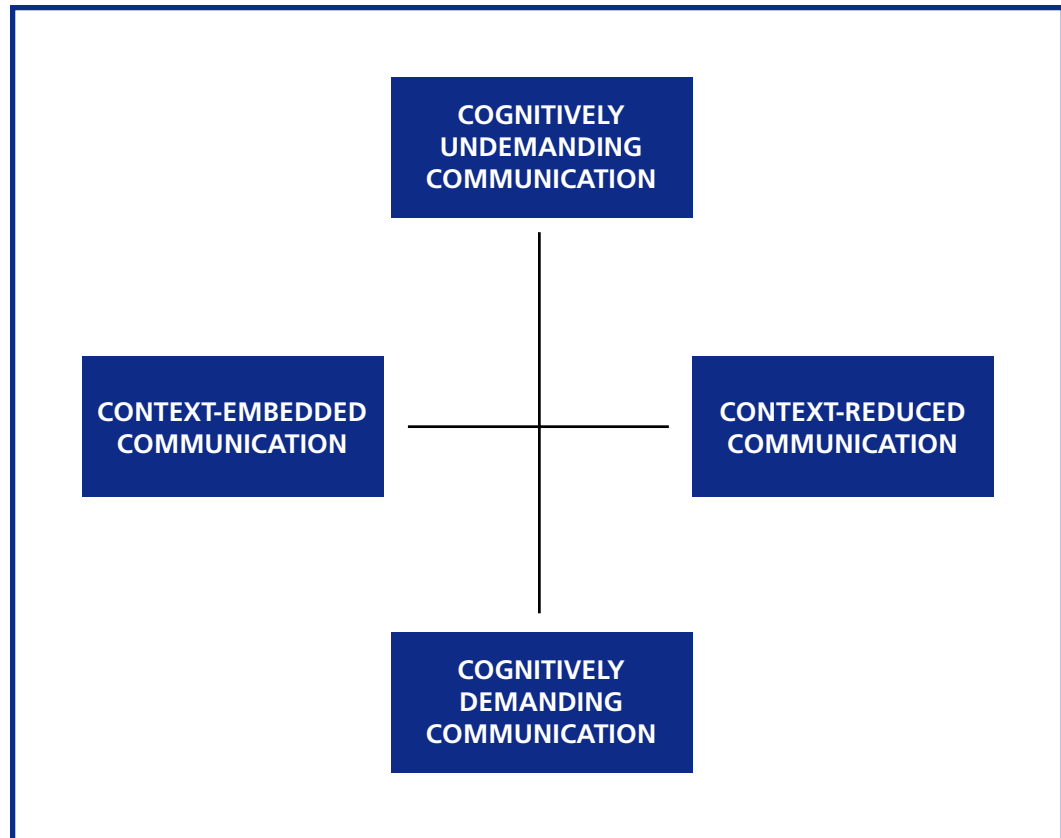
basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) or conversational language skills, and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which is required for bilingual children to participate and succeed academically. Cummins observed that a child's ability to communicate with conversational fluency could actually mask the child's inability to participate in a cognitively demanding academic environment. This distinction had a great number of implications for children who were diagnosed as learning disabled and overrepresented in special education programs because of their limited academic language. Conversely, children who demonstrated conversational fluency but not academic language proficiency were being exited too quickly from programs that provided first language support (as in transitional bilingual education programs) while the second language was being developed (see Cummins, 2001b).

The BICS/CALP distinction was criticized for being dichotic and static (Harley et al., 1990) and also for its inability to operationalize the terms in research studies (see Baker, 1997; Wiley, 1996). The criticism was perhaps valid for investigating the cognitive dimension of CALP because the relationship between (academic) language and cognition is not simple or easily unraveled. In response to some of those critiques, Cummins has recently refined the terms used to differentiate these different language uses to conversational fluency and academic language proficiency (see Cummins, 2001a).

The theory underlying the conversational fluency-academic language distinction was later advanced to further address the type of communication and the cognitive demands placed on second language learners. These two dimensions—context-embedded versus context-reduced communication, and cognitively undemanding versus cognitively demanding communication—are depicted on page 39 in **Figure 2**.

**FIGURE 2**

Cognitively Un/Demanding Communication and  
Context Embedded/Reduced Communication  
(Cummins, 1981)



As the theory suggests, context-embedded communication occurs when communicative supports (such as objects, gestures, or intonations) are available for a student. These help the student discern the meaning of the communication. Context-reduced communication occurs when there are few, if any, communicative cues or clues to support the interaction. The second dimension includes the degree to which cognitively demanding communication is required. Cognitively demanding communication occurs frequently in a classroom setting where students are required to analyze and synthesize information quickly. In contrast, cognitively undemanding communication may occur on a playground or at a local shop.

Cummins' two dimensions of context-embedded/-reduced communication and cognitively un/demanding communication have implications for schooling of second language learners. For example, some scholars (Robson, 1995) have shown how instructional strategies and assessments can be coordinated using the theory as a framework to guide instruction that exposes second language learners to increasingly cognitively demanding and context-reduced forms of communication. The distinction between the two dimensions proposed by Cummins is further insight for practitioners and policymakers to understand the difference between conversational fluency and academic language and subsequently assess the academic achievement of students using the appropriate measures.

Research shows that it takes approximately two years for second language learners to approach a native speaker's level in conversational fluency and from 5 to 7 years for them to approach a native speaker's level in academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1981). A recent review of research conducted by Hakuta, Butler, & Witt (2000) further reveals that it may take from 3 to 5 years for English language learners to acquire oral proficiency and from 4 to 7 years to acquire academic English proficiency.

The work of these scholars has influenced both education policy and practice regarding English language learners. For example, we know that educational environments that support the ongoing development of students' first language while they are acquiring English are among the most effective. But this knowledge lies in stark contrast to recent mandates prohibiting use of the first language in the classroom, as with recent legislation in California (Proposition 227) and Arizona (Proposition 203). Programs that build upon students' first language while they acquire English, with the goal of bilingualism and biliteracy, are considered "additive," a term first coined in the early 1970s. Additive bilingualism refers to the acquisition of a second language without detriment or loss to the first. In contrast, subtractive bilingualism occurs when the acquisition of a second language occurs at the expense or loss of the first language.

*Additive bilingualism refers to the acquisition of a second language without detriment or loss to the first. In contrast, subtractive bilingualism occurs when the acquisition of a second language occurs at the expense or loss of the first language.*

More recent research on second language acquisition has reflected a shift among researchers to include qualitative data. In fact, scholars from a variety of disciplines, including sociologists and anthropologists, have described processes of second language acquisition and explored the impact of its social, cultural, and political contexts. For example, in their work with second language learners, Wong Fillmore et al. (1991) documented the rate of first language loss among young immigrant children in the U.S. The authors' study revealed that language loss holds negative consequences for intergenerational relationships within a given family structure. Their conclusions are stark:

What is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children—when parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences... When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings. (p. 27)

Sociopolitical context and power relations between groups impinge upon the learning environment of the students. When students' linguistic repertoires are valued and considered a resource, collaborative relationships are formed that challenge unequal patterns of power among groups. This occurs in properly implemented bilingual education programs as well as in programs that view students' linguistic repertoires as a resource rather than as a problem (Ruiz, 1984). We return to this idea at the conclusion of this chapter. In the following section we outline the developmental sequence of second language learning.

## Developmental Stages of Sequence of Language Acquisition

### VIGNETTE: Silent Period: Marta and Esteban

Marta and Esteban are recent immigrants to the United States, and both are in Mrs. Grover's third-grade classroom at Barton Elementary School. Since their arrival at the beginning of the school year, both children have been receiving English as a second language (ESL) pullout instruction from a trained ESL teacher. However, they spend the majority of their time in Mrs. Grover's classroom with their peers. Mrs. Grover wants to ensure that the students are on target in acquiring English and progressing academically while learning English, but she has recently noticed that Marta is able to communicate with her peers, while Esteban rarely communicates at all; when he does, his utterances are limited to two-word strings.

In the teachers' room, Mrs. Grover expresses her observations and her concern to the children's ESL teacher. The ESL teacher, Miss Simmons, explains to Mrs. Grover that second language learners often experience a period of time during which they are not producing language but are still listening and processing what's going on around them. This period has been called the "silent period." Miss Simmons reassures Mrs. Grover that this is entirely within the scope of the second language learning process and that it can last up to 6 months. She suggests that Mrs. Grover explore activities that Esteban can participate in without using oral language (such as picture drawing and pointing) until he appears ready to produce English. Mrs. Grover and Miss Simmons agree to work together to brainstorm ways to actively engage Esteban in all classroom activities during the silent period. They also agree to communicate regularly on his progress.

The vignette on page 42 illustrates that the process of second language acquisition is complex. Unraveling the sociocultural and political influences on the second language learner is no small task. In addition, there is tremendous variation in the contexts within which both individuals and groups acquire a second language. Educators face the challenge of understanding those contexts, what motivates individuals, the relationship between first and second languages, and the academic environment (including the different demands placed on the second language learner in a classroom setting). But what can we say about the process and general stages of language acquisition for second language learners? In the following section, we present an overview of those stages. We believe that teachers' understanding of the second language acquisition process will help to dispel some of the myths surrounding what second language learners can and cannot do. It can also guide teachers' instructional strategies toward ways to accommodate second language learners in their various developmental sequences.

While there is a certain amount of difference between first and second language acquisition, researchers generally agree that learning the rules and structure of a second language is very similar to learning the first language. So, while the two processes are not precisely the same, they do parallel one another. We know, for example, that second language learners make similar errors as those made by native, monolingual speakers. As with young children acquiring their native language,

second language learners may listen to and process language before actually producing it. The difference is that second language learners, by definition, already have access to a first language. Therefore, they are more sophisticated learners; they understand how language works and can use that first language knowledge as a bridge to acquisition of the second language. Cummins' linguistic transfer theory (discussed above) postulates how this occurs. As a result, for each individual the degree to which the first language has been developed directly influences the acquisition of the second language.

Selinker (1972) described a learner's knowledge of a second language at a given point as interlanguage. Interlanguage refers to a language system produced by a second language learner that is not equivalent to either the first or the second language. Interlanguage may be viewed best as a continuum between the first and second

*Interlanguage refers to a language system produced by a second language learner that is not equivalent to either the first or the second language.*

languages. At any given time, a language learner's knowledge of the second language is situated at a point along the interlanguage continuum. Selinker also identified the phenomenon of fossilization. Fossilization occurs when a language learner's acquisition of the second language wanes or even halts along the interlanguage continuum. This may occur when a language learner has acquired enough of the rules of the second language to adequately communicate.

Scholars of second language acquisition have identified a common developmental sequence that second language learners pass through while learning a second language, even though they may refer to these stages differently. Here we will outline the developmental stages of second language acquisition. It is important to keep in mind that there is great individual variability in second language acquisition, in particular with the rate at which learners pass through the various stages and the influence of the first language on the second. It is also important to remember that learners who appear to have made progress learning the target language by demonstrating correct performance may still demonstrate incorrect performance at a later stage. This happens because as learners begin to unravel the grammatical rules of the target language and test out new rules, errors often reappear. In fact, the errors are indicative of progress as the second language learner gains deeper understanding of how the second language works.

In the first stage of the developmental sequence, child second language learners may continue to use the home language in second language situations. In this stage the child may assume that others understand his or her first language; it may take several months for the child to discontinue use of the first language. Savielle-Troike (1987) has referred to this type of child discourse as "dilingual discourse."

Scholars refer to the next stage as the preproduction stage. This stage is characterized by the "silent period" (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). In this stage, the learner absorbs the sounds and rhythms of the new language and processes language input through listening and comprehension skills. As mentioned in the vignette above, communication may include using nonverbal means such as pointing or picture drawing. During this period, access to context-embedded communication is very important and likely to help the student move efficiently through the preproduction

*Fossilization occurs when a language learner's acquisition of the second language wanes or even halts along the interlanguage continuum.*

period. Clues picked up in the immediate environment, such as gestures and realia (real objects), will facilitate language understanding during this stage. Context-embedded communication, then, is highly desirable, and a teacher can create this type of environment through instructional strategies that use gestures and realia to make input comprehensible. While second language learners may stop talking, this does not mean they will stop communicating.

Scholars refer to the next stage of the sequence of second language acquisition as the early production stage. During this stage, researchers have observed two types of speech: telegraphic speech and formulaic speech. Telegraphic speech refers to the use of a few content words that generally omit grammatical morphemes. In our section on language and literacy, we explore morphemes more fully. Briefly, grammatical

morphemes are small words or markers that carry meaning, such as the definite article *the* or the plural marker *-s*. Telegraphic speech commonly consists of a second language learner's reference to nouns or objects. An example of telegraphic speech may be "Tommy ball," which omits a verb and definite article ("Tommy has the ball"). In contrast, formulaic speech refers to the use of specific, unanalyzed utterances that language learners have observed around them. An example of this might include greetings such as "How ya' doin'?"

*Telegraphic speech refers to the use of a few content words that generally omit grammatical morphemes.*

*Formulaic speech refers to the use of specific, unanalyzed utterances that language learners have observed around them.*

As second language learners progress in language acquisition, they pass through a stage scholars refer to as the extending production stage. In this stage, utterances become longer and more complex. Students begin to recognize and correct some of their own errors, and they become more comfortable initiating and sustaining conversations. At this stage, the second language learner speaks in short sentences. Learners also begin to expand on simple sentences, displaying knowledge of additional grammatical elements of sentences. The student learner may begin to master conversational language skills but is not likely to have developed extensive proficiency in academic language.

A teacher may assist the student by modeling a complete utterance and asking the specific, clarifying questions.

Simple descriptions and comparisons, as well as sequencing events, may help in the classroom. Graphic organizers that illustrate relationships among ideas, for example, may be useful for scaffolding language during this stage. The Language Experience Approach (LEA) is an instructional strategy teachers often use to assist students at this stage of their second language learning. Students at this stage may begin to read and write, producing simple written sentences. Using the LEA strategy, students dictate to the teacher short narratives or dialogues based on their personal experiences. The teacher records those experiences, then reads the piece back or asks the students to read them back. In this approach, meaningful vocabulary is acquired through dialogue with the teacher and among the students (if LEA is conducted as a group activity).



## **ACTIVITY:** Language Experience Approach

**Identify a topic of interest to a second language learner or have her choose one. For example, the student may excel at soccer and be knowledgeable about the equipment and rules of the game. Using the Language Experience Approach described above, ask the student to talk about her experience playing soccer. The student can do this by telling a story or recounting an event that took place. Record what the student said using the board, chart paper, overhead, or computer. Read back what the student has said (repeating the sentences correctly). Point to the words. As a follow up activity, you might ask the student to read the piece aloud. Alternatively, you might make certain word cards based on the meaningful words the student used. The student may take the story and word cards home.**

At the stage of intermediate language proficiency, second language learners begin to engage in verbal conversations with a higher level of comprehension. Second language learners are typically able to produce narratives and to interact more extensively with other speakers. Students make fewer speech errors, have a good command of conversational fluency, and begin to acquire academic language. As a result of this development, instructional strategies used in the classroom should focus on both language development and subject matter content.

Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), also known as sheltered instruction, is a technique that a teacher may use once the student has attained intermediate-level fluency in English. SDAIE classrooms teach grade-level content material through modified grammar and vocabulary. Teachers also use some of the visual supports and realia found in the classroom. SDAIE is a strategy that counters the common complaint that second language learners are handed a “watered-down” curriculum. Rather, SDAIE aims to make input comprehensible so that second language learners can acquire academic language—all while providing a supportive, effective learning environment.

The instructional strategies used by teachers are designed to make input comprehensible in a meaningful context. To do this, teachers must understand the language proficiency of the students and the content and vocabulary of the lesson they’re teaching. Teachers become conscious of the language used in the lesson by scanning and reviewing the language of the text. They seek to make new vocabulary and academic language comprehensible to the students by using visual clues (gestures, body language, pictures, etc.). Vocabulary development is essential to academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2001a).

In the advanced stage of language development, second language learners approach native speakers’ ability to use multiple “registers” of language, progressing in their development and knowledge of academic language. “Register” refers to a specialized type of talk or writing that is used either to conduct a particular activity or to communicate with a particular group when engaged in that activity (one example is legalese—a register used among law professionals and others knowledgeable of law). Even students who were previously enrolled in bilingual education programs that gave them first and/or second language support are likely to continue to need support at this advanced stage. Teachers working with second language learners are faced with the dual task of enhancing students’ second language while providing content area instruction.

Certain instructional strategies can be used to support the academic language proficiency of students. Ideally, language use and curricular content material should be integrated rather than taught as isolated subjects. Scholars suggest that active and meaningful learning occurs when the learning process goes beyond memorizing discrete facts and rules. Language is more readily acquired when it is used to transmit messages in natural forms of communication rather than when it is explicitly taught.

At this advanced stage of language development, students' exposure to increasingly complex texts appears to be critical to their acquisition of academic language. Cummins (2001a) has suggested that at higher levels the constructs of vocabulary acquisition (namely students' lexicon or dictionary) and academic language proficiency are virtually indistinguishable. Therefore, teachers should focus on using texts that expose students to increasingly complex academic language. For certain groups of second language learners, the first language may act as a bridge to English through the use of cognates. "Cognates" refers to the relationships among languages that are historically derived from the same source. For example, a certain word in French will resemble the same word in Spanish, as with the words for book: *livre* and *libro*. Similarly, cognates exist for languages such as English and Spanish, as with the Spanish word for civilization: *civilización*. Raising students' awareness of the relationships among words—especially through exposure to text and classroom discussion about language—will help them draw on their own linguistic repertoires and will facilitate their acquisition of academic language.

*"Cognates" refers to the relationships among languages that are historically derived from the same source.*

## Models of Bilingual Education

We wish to round out this chapter on Learning a Second Language by discussing various models of bilingual education. Now that you have an understanding of the major theories underlying second language acquisition and the general stages that learners pass through while acquiring a second language, we wish to present an overview of the most widely followed models of bilingual education. It is important to bear in mind that none of these types of programs are prototypical—that is, there is tremendous variation in the scope and implementation of actual programs for second language learners. Issues that affect a program's scope and implementation include funding, access to trained teachers, support (both community and administrative) for the programs, and the first language background of students (as with dual-language immersion programs). We also believe that while certain guidelines may be useful in implementing a quality program, the program itself should not be so prescriptive that its implementation lacks imagination, creativity, and adaptability to individual learners.

Quality bilingual education programs generally share a number of characteristics: highly trained bilingual, bicultural teachers; quality curriculum; community and parental support; and high expectations for students (Brisk, 1998). We believe, however, that regardless of program type, all quality educational programs share the principle that students bring valuable resources (including linguistic repertoire) to the classroom. The interaction that occurs between student and teacher should tap into

these resources in collaborative and powerfully affirming ways. We expand upon this theme in the concluding section of this chapter.

In the United States there is a wide array of programs and instructional strategies in which English language learners participate. Scholars in the field of bilingual education, however, have yet to agree on uniform terminology for such programs (compare, for example, Brisk, 1998 and Baker, 1997), rendering quite tenuous any conclusions drawn from research on program evaluation and program effectiveness (August and Hakuta, 1997). Further, the actual language



environment (including how language is used) of a particular program may diverge from a program's stated type (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991). For example, Escamilla's (1994) case study of the sociolinguistic environment of an elementary school in California revealed that the school favored English language use in a variety of contexts (such as in the parent handbook) despite its stated policy of bilingualism. Similarly, Coady (2001) found that English was used as an instructional strategy and was largely present in written forms in the classrooms of two all-Irish schools in the Republic of Ireland. Thus, the stated program model differed from what was actually implemented in practice.

Finally, program names can be deceptive. For example, the use of the term "immersion" in the United States, as with Structured English immersion, has been misleadingly equated with immersion programs in Europe and Canada, as in French immersion programs in Canada or all-Irish schools known as *Gaelscoileanna* in Ireland (see Johnson & Swain, 1997). The former programs are directed toward language minority students in the United States and have as their goal English monolingualism; the latter programs target language majority students with the goal of bilingualism and biliteracy. Thus, it is clear that not only is the target population different, but the program objectives and outcome goals diverge as well.

It is important, nevertheless, to highlight some of the more common program types that are currently implemented in the United States. **Table 1** on page 51, adapted from Baker (1997), reveals some of the differences and similarities among program structures and program types.

**TABLE 1**

Selected Models of Bilingual Education Adapted from Baker (1997)

TYPE OF PROGRAM	TYPICAL TYPE OF CHILD	LANGUAGE OF THE CLASSROOM	SOCIETAL AND EDUCATIONAL AIMS	AIM IN LANGUAGE OUTCOME
Submersion	Language minority	Majority language	Assimilation	Mono-lingualism
Submersion (withdrawal classes)	Language minority	Majority language with "pullout" second language lessons	Assimilation	Mono-lingualism
Transitional	Language minority	From minority language to majority language	Assimilation	Relative mono-lingualism
Immersion	Language majority	Bilingual (emphasis on second language)	Pluralism and enrichment	Bilingualism and biliteracy
Two-way/ dual language immersion	Language majority and language minority (often 50-50)	Minority and majority	Maintenance for minority students, pluralism, and enrichment	Bilingualism and biliteracy

Based on Baker's classification, immersion programs for language minority students in the United States would be more accurately classified as submersion programs or submersion programs with English language withdrawal/support classes.

Regardless of what a particular program or model of bilingual education is dubbed, it is important to consider both the societal and educational aims of the program and the language outcomes. Nevertheless, the name and type of program should not be misrepresented. For example, a submersion program in Baker's typology has assimilation and monolingualism as its aims and outcomes. These aims and outcomes would hold true for most English immersion programs in the United States, a theoretical model advanced by opponents of bilingual education programs. In Baker's typology, however, immersion programs for language minority children would aim for pluralism, enrichment, and bilingualism/biliteracy. So, we need to look beyond a particular program model to the actual characteristics that describe language development and outcome objectives.

Effective bilingual education programs empower students through maintaining and developing their first language (and identity) while engaging them fully with a broader, English-speaking society. Through critical examination of language, students are able to address social realities and challenge uneven social relationships. Ultimately, the critical examination of language (analyzing forms and uses of language) serves to heighten students' and teachers' awareness of the social realities and complex sociopolitical structures that perpetuate uneven power relationships. Language and knowledge about language are empowering in that they equip students with the tools they need to challenge existing social realities.

This chapter of *The Diversity Kit* has focused on various aspects of learning a second language, including the theories underlying second language acquisition, developmental stages and instructional strategies, and models of bilingual education. At the beginning of the chapter we urged you to become an educational linguist in your own classroom or community. We encourage you to continue your exploration into the ways in which languages are learned and used and how knowledge of language can empower students.

# LANGUAGE and LITERACY

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ? *How are oral language, literacy, and culture related?*
  - ? *How does literacy instruction need to be adapted for culturally and linguistically diverse students?*
  - ? *How does knowledge of language, including morphology and syntax, assist second language learners?*
-

The term “literacy” in the strictest sense refers to the ability to make meaning from written code. Over the course of recent decades, however, views of reading have shifted from a focus on the mechanical aspects, or coding and decoding, of language to a broader interpretation of reading as “a strategic process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text” (Braunger & Lewis, 1998, p. 6). Here we also take literacy to include the sociocultural context in which this construction of meaning occurs. Thus, in this section of *The Diversity Kit*, we define literacy as not only a multifaceted act of reading, writing, and thinking, but also as constructing meaning from printed text in a particular sociocultural context.

Some scholars have used the term “critical literacy” to refer to the ability to use language in all of its forms (including oral language use) as a tool for thinking, communicating, and challenging unequal power relationships among groups of people (Calfee & Nelson-Barber, 1991). The emphasis of both definitions is on using language to communicate and to make sense of the world, but the broader definition is more consistent with the notion of empowering students to participate in a democratic society and challenge the unequal power relationships within it (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Of course, in the Information Age, the range of print and media has expanded to include Internet communications and new types of graphics that require particular interpretive skills (Rafferty, 1999). Current definitions of the word literacy more frequently include proficiency with these new forms of media.

In this section of *The Diversity Kit*, we focus on learning to read and write and how that process is related to oral language proficiency. We also acknowledge that there are connections between high-level uses of written and oral language. Learning the discourse of the classroom entails acquiring what might be called “literate” or “formal” uses of oral language, which have much in common with the type of language that students will eventually encounter in print. Also, we cannot overlook the fact that literacy does not exist outside of a social context. That is, literacy refers to the ability to think and reason according to the norms of a particular society. Societal expectations for literacy determine (or at the least, influence) who becomes literate, how an individual becomes literate, and for what purposes literacy is used.

## Cultural Approaches to Literacy

There is a cultural foundation for learning to read and write. Literacy, which is highly valued in U.S. dominant culture, is not uniformly meaningful across cultural groups. For example, certain American Indian and Alaskan Native groups prefer to keep their

ancestral languages oral because of the social costs of having a written language (Kwachka, 1994). Among these costs are the erosion of traditional roles of elders (i.e., an individual can obtain information in a book rather than ask an elder) and the loss of oral traditions. These groups or “speech communities” typically have highly sophisticated oral strategies for organizing lengthy narratives, as well as social strategies that ensure transmission of cultural traditions and history. Particular individuals are responsible for understanding and remembering certain knowledge and passing it on to other appropriate individuals. When written forms of the language are introduced, they can disturb (and, in fact, permanently change) the culture of the group. Moreover, special oral skills that develop memory (use of rhyme and special storytelling strategies) may be lost when a speech community transitions to using written language.

Indigenous tribes of the Americas and elsewhere have been faced with a paradox: on the one hand, despite what they regard as the negative implications of written literacy, they know that certain languages may have a better chance of surviving if they are reduced from oral to written form in a process known as graphization (Cooper, 1989). On the other hand, graphization necessarily alters the patterns of language use traditionally used by the group. Further, groups that have chosen to record their oral language in writing will have distinctive patterns of literacy use, depending on the group’s needs. If the group is bilingual, people may choose to use certain forms of communication in one language and other forms of communication in the other language; this is a linguistic phenomenon known as diglossia. For example, in the Marshall Islands

of Micronesia, personal letters are most often written in the vernacular language, Marshallese. However, beyond elementary school grades, academic writing is conducted in English. Further, Micronesia also uses literacy in rich ways one might not consider in an American context. Examples include carved story boards illustrating legends or historical events (used to retell the story without actual text), tattoos that have explicit “textual” meaning, and petroglyphs, or drawings in stone that transmit ancient cultural history and content.

Teachers who want to draw upon students’ prior experiences and make connections to classroom literacy will want to explore



the culture-based literacy norms of their students. The vignette on page 56 illustrates how one teacher makes connections to her students' cultures. These immigrant Latino students come from Mexico and Central America, and their cultures are very collectivistic. In their homes, children learn to focus on shared success rather than individual success; cooperating to accomplish almost any kind of task is the norm.

## VIGNETTE: Class Books

Mrs. Amada Pérez, a Ventura, California third-grade teacher, had children create posters about themselves on 11"x17" paper as a homework assignment. She explained, "When they brought them back, I interviewed each child. They learned about each other. The collectivistic part is putting them together as a class book." She laminated the pages so that they would stand up to ongoing use by more than 20 students who took great pride in their joint product. On another occasion, she paired her third graders with first graders (they have a buddy arrangement) to collaborate on a single book based on a story they had heard called "If". Mrs. Pérez described what happened: "They drew on paper and cut out their drawings. They wrote a sentence on the computer—some in English, some in Spanish. Some of their pages illustrated things like 'If people could smell wind...,' 'If tables could have faces...,' 'If grass could be eyebrows...,' 'If my heart were a butterfly...,' 'If a whale could run in the park...,' 'If apples could eat trees...'. Reading the whole finished product as a group, they were in awe of each other's work."

(Adapted from Trumbull, Diaz-Meza, and Hasan, 2000.)

When Mrs. Pérez has her students make individual books and create an author's page about themselves, they inevitably portray themselves in the context of their whole family. Often, it is impossible to tell which person in the illustration is the child author. In their text, children tell about all of the members of their family. Should Mrs. Pérez instruct the children to focus only on themselves? If she did not understand the cultural origin of her students' behavior, Mrs. Pérez might think that the students had simply misunderstood her directions. This short, nonfictitious vignette illustrates how cultural values can permeate literacy in the classroom. The class books are symbolic of two values: collaboration and shared property. These values are not prevalent in mainstream American society; thus, there is a potential for conflict and misunderstandings, especially in a culturally mixed classroom where the teacher is not aware of these different orientations. In addition, the value of family is also reflected in the children's preference to draw their whole family on the author's page.

*Successful reading in any language depends on seeing print, hearing speech, and associating these with stored experiences (i.e., making meaning). Language development, therefore, is essential for proficient reading.*

### ***Oral Language as the Basis for Written Language***

Well-developed oral language proficiency provides the foundation for written language (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In fact, reading involves responses to visual symbols based on auditory language. Successful reading in any language depends on seeing print, hearing speech, and associating these with stored experiences (i.e., making meaning). Language development, therefore, is essential for proficient reading. As reading researcher Marilyn Adams (1990) has observed, "Children ... understand spoken language, and we depend on that. It is from speech and through speech that they must come to understand written language as well" (p. 221).

Whether in the first or second language variety, language provides labels for thoughts that can then be used to transmit and receive ideas, either through oral or written modes. This relationship between language and reading is well-documented. According to Snow et al. (1998), "Between 40 and 75% of preschoolers with early language impairment develop reading difficulties later.... [Even] those with mild-to-moderate language delays, who appear to overcome their spoken-language

difficulties by the end of the preschool period, remain at greater risk than other youngsters...” (p. 105). Thus, the importance of early language development cannot be underestimated.

### ***Elements of Literacy Proficiency***

The major elements of literacy proficiency are phonological awareness, vocabulary and prior knowledge, knowledge of discourse structures, knowledge of literary styles, and awareness of purposes for reading. Although these elements are not the only building blocks of literacy, we believe they are among the most important. In addition, teachers’ understanding of morphology and the syntax of a language can facilitate second language learners’ acquisition of English. The goal of this section is to provide an introduction from which teachers can proceed to identify areas they want to pursue in greater depth.

### **Phonological Awareness**

To read successfully in any alphabetic language, students must be able to distinguish among the sounds of the words they are reading and to hear the smaller units of the sounds that compose words. This has been referred to as phonemic awareness, a skill that is actually a component of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is “the ability to attend explicitly to the phonological structure of spoken words, rather than just to their meanings and syntactic roles” (Snow et al. 1998, p. 111). To be phonologically aware is (at a simple level) to be able to detect patterns like rhymes or (at a more abstract level) to learn to hear the individual sounds (phonemes) in words. For example, a young reader must learn to hear “fog” as “f-o-g.”

At a more advanced level, reading successfully requires that the reader understand the relationship between words such as intervene/intervention or among words such as integrate/integral/integrity. At this level, linguists speak of morphophonological awareness. As unpronounceable as this word might seem at first, it is an illustration of an important concept: words are often composed of meaningful chunks (think of “beauti-ful” or “dis-connect”). The task for the developing reader is not only to hear words as composed of sounds but to perceive their underlying structure—their morphophonological structure. “Morpho” refers to “morphemes,” which can be words (beauty, connect) or the small pieces added to words (-ful, dis-) to make a particular meaning. So, to be morphophonologically aware (which is very important to being a good reader), children have to understand the sound-letter correspondence, how morphemes may be combined, and the relationship between the pronunciation and spelling of multimorphemic words.

For instance, a student who hears the word “protects” as “pratex” and writes it that way has a basic ability to analyze words phonetically, but he or she is missing a deeper morphophonological knowledge that goes beneath the surface of the word. “Protects” is composed of two morphemes that can be combined with other morphemes in many ways: pro-, and -tects (*provide, detect, etc.*). Moreover, a more developed reader-writer would know intuitively that “protects” is a verb, and verbs don’t usually end in -x. In the past, portions of reading texts and workbooks were devoted to structural analysis, which addressed many aspects of morphophonological awareness, including combining prefixes and suffixes with root words to change the grammatical category of a word (*work/working*). So, although there is a current emphasis on phonemic awareness in the reading literature, it should be understood as one piece of a larger set of skills.

Phonemic awareness is one of the most important predictors of student success in reading (Adams, 1990; Snow et al., 1998). In fact, the vast majority of students who have difficulty learning to read have problems at the level of phonemic awareness (Snow et al., 1998). Such students may not readily hear all three sounds in “fog” but hear it only as an unanalyzed syllable. This skill—being able to figure out that spoken language is composed of phonemes, hearing the sounds in a word, and distinguishing between words based on the different sounds—helps children learn the letter-sound (grapheme-phoneme) correspondence needed to read and spell words. More important, phonemic awareness is essential to knowing how to use knowledge of letter-sound correspondence to identify new words. These skills are learned, and because they do

not develop naturally they should be explicitly taught. **Table 1**, on page 60, shows a series of phonemic awareness tasks that can be used to assess a student’s level of proficiency with this skill. They are listed roughly in order of difficulty. If a student cannot do any one of these tasks with relative success, he or she probably needs some specific intervention to improve phonemic awareness.

Preceding any of these tasks, a teacher should assess a student’s ability to recognize and produce rhyming words. Ability to detect and produce rhymes is a phonological skill that develops before grapheme-phoneme correspondence, and lack of



awareness of rhymes suggests that instruction needs to begin with earlier developing skills (rhyming, detection of numbers of syllables in a word). Many children can hear the beginning sound in a word (and perhaps associate it with a letter) but cannot break the word down into component sounds. Note that all of the tasks in **Table 1** are oral tasks that do not require knowledge of the alphabet. The letters within slashes (/s/p/a/, etc.) stand for sounds, not letter names.

**TABLE 1**

## Examples of Phonemic Awareness Tasks

TASK	EXAMPLE
<i>Word-to-word matching</i>	<i>Do pen and pipe begin with the same sound?</i>
<i>Sound isolation</i>	<i>What is the first sound in rose?</i>
<i>Odd word out</i>	<i>Which word starts with a different sound— bag, nine, beach, bike?</i>
<i>Sound-to-word matching</i>	<i>Is there a /k/ in bike? In bone?</i>
<i>Phoneme deletion</i>	<i>What word would be left if the /k/ sound were taken away from cat? What sound do you hear in meat that is missing in eat?</i>
<i>Phoneme counting</i>	<i>How many sounds do you hear in the word cake?</i>
<i>Blending</i>	<i>What word would we have if you put these sounds together: /s/ /a/ /t/ ?</i>

(Adapted from Stanovich, 1994)

## Print-Based Skills

Other related important predictors of reading success in English are knowledge of the alphabet and awareness of how print works—for example, that letters can be used to represent speech (Snow et al., 1998) and that words in English are written from left to right (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). However, a child may know the alphabet, the sounds that each letter represents, and that words are read from left to right but still get stuck trying to distinguish among individual phonemes in words.

## Vocabulary and Prior Knowledge

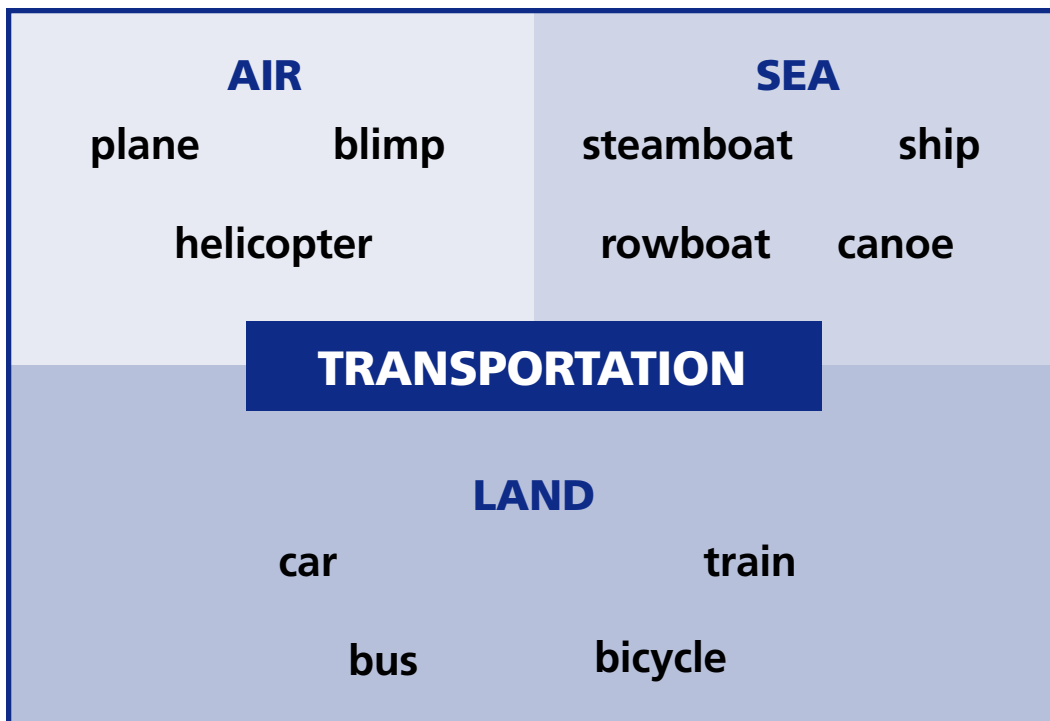
A second important component of literacy proficiency has to do with the skills required to understand ideas or concepts of language in order to gain meaning from reading. This is the area of prior knowledge and vocabulary development. These two areas are deeply intertwined: words represent concepts, and students' vocabularies are greatly dependent on their daily life experiences, reading, and instruction. For instance, a word like “butterfly” may evoke an image of an insect with large wings. Greater experience with butterflies (or more exposure in school) will likely lead to a more elaborated sense of the word's meaning (stages of development of the butterfly, habitats, geographical distribution, types of butterflies, etc.).

This combined factor, vocabulary and prior knowledge, is also a major predictor of success in reading and a primary determinant of reading comprehension for students learning to read English as a second language (August & Hakuta, 1997). “Reading comprehension is a process that involves the orchestration of the reader's prior experience and knowledge about the world and about language” (Bartoli & Botel, 1988, p. 186). Teachers should strive to help students build the background knowledge and vocabulary necessary to comprehend the reading. This can be accomplished through informal instruction, such as reading aloud to students; it can also be accomplished through direct, step-by-step instructional strategies for teaching key concepts and vocabulary in both pre- and postreading activities (e.g., semantic mapping). Semantic mapping is a simple technique that asks students to show (and learn from each other) relationships among words. An example of semantic mapping is presented on page 62.

*“Reading comprehension is a process that involves the orchestration of the reader's prior experience and knowledge about the world and about language.”*

## ACTIVITY: Semantic Mapping

With students, create a map of modes of transportation. Cluster together words related to types of land transportation, air transportation, and sea transportation. Can you expand the modes of transportation beyond the example presented below?



### DISCUSSION:

- Ask students how transportation may differ based on a region's geography. How do cultural norms and cultural considerations influence modes of transportation available? Uncommon modes of transportation, such as rickshaws, may be examples of this.

## Knowledge of Discourse Structures

A third component of literacy considers students' knowledge of different kinds of oral and written discourse structures. "Discourse" refers to any unit of oral or written speech that is longer than a sentence. As sentences get strung together, there is an expectation that the resulting discourse will be structured in a certain way, depending on its purpose. Reading and writing entail producing and comprehending extended stretches of oral and written discourse (often referred to as "text") that are organized in different ways. Readers who understand the structure of a text and are able to comprehend the text beyond each individual sentence tend to be more successful at reading (Meyer, 1977; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979). In the Culture section of *The Diversity Kit*, we discuss the organization of stories or narratives and how culture influences not only narratives but also expository discourse such as argumentation and persuasion, description, and explanation (see Kaplan, 1988; Kochman, 1989).

Discourse structures most commonly used in the U.S. are not superior to other discourse structures; they simply differ from those that are more commonly used in other cultures. For example, an argument in which facts are presented first and a conclusion is then drawn is neither superior nor inferior to an argument in which an allegation is made and facts offered to support it. Students who have been exposed to different expectations for how text should be structured may not recognize the patterns of the stories or descriptions that are used in the classroom (or are expected in their writing). When students have difficulties reading English texts or writing according to accepted standards, teachers may wrongly judge that they are deficient in language skills or reading ability. The problem for teachers in assessing the writing of such students is that it is difficult to recognize patterns that are not familiar to the teacher. Teachers may see only the lack of something they expect to see, rather than understanding the pattern or structure produced by the student. Although teachers' familiarity with students' writing patterns tends to be overlooked in the literature on balanced literacy instruction, it is very important, particularly for English language learners who may come from different cultural backgrounds.

## Knowledge of Appropriate Literary Styles

A related area has to do with literary styles students may use in their own writing or recognize in the texts they read (Kaplan, 1988). A couple of brief examples will illustrate this issue. Vietnamese narrative style apparently emphasizes the importance of a story's setting. A Vietnamese American student who has been exposed to this

tradition may expend what a teacher considers a disproportionate amount of time describing the setting of a narrative—time the teacher feels should be used to develop the story’s plot or characters. Students from an Arabic writing tradition may appear to digress when they use elaborate description. In both cases, students and teachers may find themselves focusing on different elements of the text. These cases may result in inaccurate assessment of a student’s literacy skills, but they also provide an opportunity for student-teacher discussion about how literacy styles can differ and about what is expected of students in an academic setting.

It is not just immigrant students who may encounter conflicts between their own styles and the styles expected of them in school. According to Kochman’s research (1989), African Americans are more likely to follow the classical Greek pattern of arguing in a way that is logical but also employs an appeal to the emotions, revealing personal feelings about a topic. Dominant culture individuals tend to regard the emotional appeal as undermining the logic of the argument (which, of course, it need not), while their African American peers regard the elimination of emotion as insincerity. Because of these differences, the writing of students from different backgrounds may look quite different. In addition, literate oral discourse (giving a speech, for instance) could take very different forms but still be effective, depending on the audience.

### Purposes for Reading

Although we may not think of purpose as a reading skill, it affects a reader’s approach to any given text. Purposes for reading or writing may vary from person to person and from culture to culture. Students’ experiences within their families will have provided them with certain ideas about the purposes of reading. In some homes, reading may primarily serve religious purposes (reading the *Bible*

*African Americans are more likely to*

*follow the classical Greek pattern of*

*arguing in a way*

*that is logical but*

*also employs an*

*appeal to the emo-*

*tions, revealing*

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*about a topic.*

*Dominant culture*

*individuals tend to*

*regard the emotional*

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*of the argument*

*(which, of course,*

*it need not), while*

*their African*

*American peers*

*regard the elimina-*

*tion of emotion*

*as insincerity.*

or *Koran*, for example). Other purposes of literacy may be to keep up with the news, to make lists for shopping or planning, to seek out information, to keep and review records, to gain pleasure or escape. In addition, literacy may be valued in order to communicate with distant relatives or to complete tasks for one's job. Home exposure to specific genres of literacy may impact students' expectations for literacy use in school. However, it is dangerous to assume that a student's limited exposure to certain forms of literacy in the home means she will not be a proficient reader. All students can expand their reading repertoires through instruction and through exposure to and interaction with a variety of texts.

Uses of literacy and motivation are intertwined. Braunger & Lewis (1998) suggest that in order to sustain their engagement with text "children must be motivated to want to read for authentic purposes connected to their own lives in meaningful ways" (p. 33). Studies have shown that students aren't personally engaged in literacy activities when they are unable to make a connection between the text and their own lives. In these cases, students do not develop into mature readers (see Greenleaf, 1997). It should come as no surprise that students who are engaged, purposeful readers are more likely to succeed in school than those who are not (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1990). If they are to be successfully engaged, students' cultural backgrounds and personal interests must be allowed to influence their choices for what to read and write.

### ***Second Language Issues in Acquiring Literacy***

Learning to read in English is likely more of a challenge for English language learners than for those who already speak Standard English as a native language. When learners from non-Standard English backgrounds encounter English print, link it to the sound patterns of their native speech, and seek meaningful references drawn from their cultural heritage, they may be unable to make adequate connections. At best, their reading skills may stop at the decoding level, and the written material may not make sense to them. To avoid these disconnects, teachers must build a broad basis of oral English, a foundation firm enough to support acquisition of the English writing system. However, this does not mean that writing instruction needs to wait until the student is fully proficient in oral English. Snow et al. (1998) suggest that "print materials may be used to support the development of English phonology, vocabulary, and syntax." However, they encourage postponement of formal reading "until an adequate level of oral proficiency in English has been achieved" (p. 325). In short, the richer the experiences students have in English, the more abundant will be the resources for thinking through English and extending that knowledge to reading in English (Thonis, 1981).

For students who have been using another language or dialect in the home, coming to school and learning to read using somewhat different phonemic patterns can be an exceedingly difficult and frustrating task. Such students would benefit from explicit instruction that helps them distinguish between meaningful sounds in one language or dialect and another. For example, the /sh/ sound is not present in the Spanish language, and first language Spanish speakers may confuse it with /ch/. The /r/ sound may be confused with English /d/ because of where the tongue is placed to make both sounds. English /th/, as in “they,” may also be confused with Spanish /d/. The Spanish /h/ sound is represented by “j” or “g,” and the letter “h” is actually silent; these differences will need to be addressed with students who have learned to read in Spanish.

Students who have mastered a language variety not spoken in school may not readily hear the differences between their own set of phonemes and those of the school dialect because these differences often do not interfere with face-to-face communication. Students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE, also referred to as Black Language or Ebonics), for example, tend to use /v/ for the /th/ sound in “mother” and /f/ for the /th/ sound in “with.” A teacher can point out these differences, which primarily affect spelling and not reading.

If students do not have the background knowledge to support comprehension of texts in English, teachers will have to help build that knowledge and the associated vocabulary. They may also need expanded experiences to develop their background knowledge. Thus, the development of both prior knowledge and vocabulary is also critical. Even when students do have the expected experiences and knowledge (and relevant vocabulary in their first language), they may not have the actual English vocabulary to express their knowledge. In this case, the task for the teacher (and peers) is to help the student match new vocabulary to prior knowledge.

Research shows that students who are literate in their first language can become proficient readers in the second language without learning to read from scratch in the second language (Cummins, 1981; Droop & Verhoeven, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1995; Krashen, 1996). Because most reading skills transfer, once oral language skills in the second language have been acquired, the task of learning to read again is unnecessary. However, these students need instruction in the specific, nontransferable skills: hearing the sounds of English, linking them to the symbols (letters) that represent them, learning English spelling patterns (which go beyond the sound-letter level), and understanding the different English terms for concepts they have already developed in the first language.

## VIGNETTE: Disproportionate Representation of English Language Learners

*Ms. Altcheck teaches fourth grade. She observes that because many English language learners are mainstreamed into English-only instruction in fourth grade, there are suddenly many referrals for special education evaluations of these students. She recognizes that most teachers believe that phonemic awareness skills in Spanish will transfer readily to English. And while the general principle may transfer, the majority of students will likely need explicit instruction in English orthography (spelling conventions) and word analysis. In addition, English language learners' English vocabularies are not going to be equivalent to those of native English speakers. If they have not had prior experience with a concept (for example, ice fishing, hula dancing, keyboarding), they may also need to learn the ideas behind the new vocabulary.*

### DISCUSSION:

- **What can Ms. Altcheck do to investigate her observation that English language learners are being overreferred to special education?**
- **How can she inform her colleagues of the information she finds?**
- **What can Ms. Altcheck do to inform her colleagues of the relationship between oral language development and literacy for English language learners?**
- **How can she connect this with students' prior knowledge?**

## Knowledge of Morphology

Morphology refers to the study of the forms of words, including the structure of words themselves. Morphemes are the smallest functioning unit in the composition of words. That is, words are composed of one or more morphemes. Morphemes are considered to be either “free” when they can occur as separate words or “bound” when they must be attached to other words. For example, the word “cats” consists of two morphemes: the free morpheme “cat” and the bound morpheme “-s” that acts as a marker of plurality. Sometimes altering a free morpheme by adding or removing a bound morpheme results in a shift in the class or meaning of a word. For example, adding the bound morpheme “-ish” to the noun “sheep” results in an adjective. These morphemes are considered derivational because the new word is derived from a base word.

Knowing how language works and how words are comprised can facilitate the language acquisition process. Krashen’s (1982) Monitor Hypothesis, which was presented in the Learning a Second Language section of *The Diversity Kit*, is part of one broad theory of second language acquisition. This hypothesis suggests that knowledge of the rules of language helps second language learners to check or monitor the language they produce or their linguistic output. This can occur with both oral and written output. As with other aspects of language teaching and learning, a general understanding of the composition of words lends itself to the second language acquisition process. It is important that teachers understand how language works linguistically as well as functionally.

## Knowledge of Syntax

As with morphology, a general understanding of syntax on the part of both second language students and teachers is important in the process of language acquisition. Syntax refers to the rules that govern how sentences are formed in a language. This includes both the grammar and structure of a language. Syntactically, English follows a sentence construction that consists of subject + verb + object. An example of this structure is the sentence, “The children went to school.” In this sentence, “children”

*Morphology refers to the study of the forms of words, including the structure of words themselves. Morphemes are the smallest functioning unit in the composition of words.*

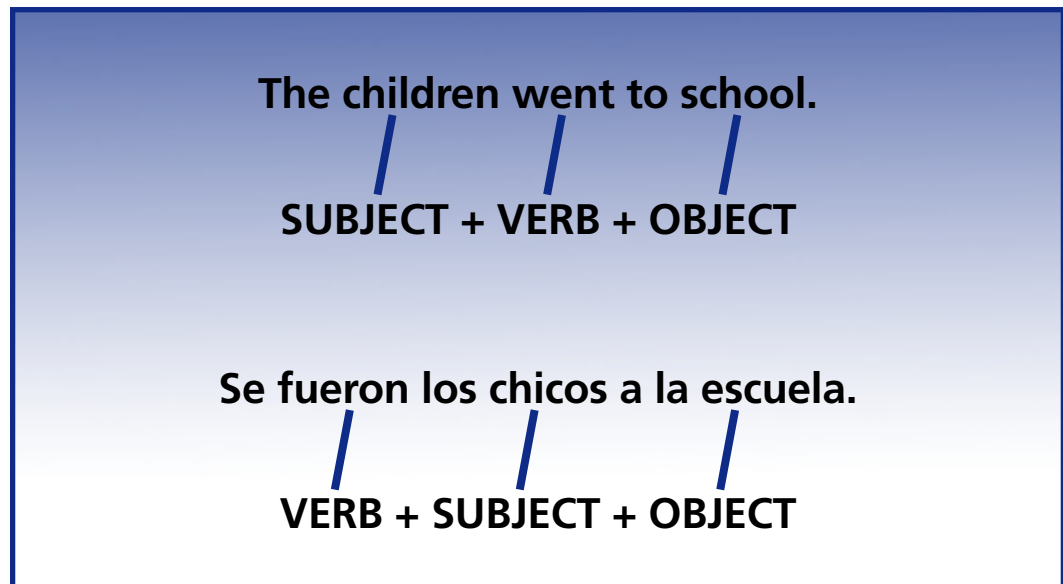
Syntax refers to the rules that govern how sentences are formed in a language. This includes both the grammar and structure of a language.

is the subject, “went” is the verb, and “school” is the object.

The sentence structure of another language may differ from that of English. In Spanish, for example, sentence structure typically follows a verb + subject + object construction. Thus, a translation of the sentence above into Spanish would reveal a sentence structure that is different from that of English. The sentence would be “*Se fueron los chicos a la escuela,*” or literally “Went the children to school.” The difference in these two constructions is depicted in the sentence tree in **Figure 1**. Note also that the Spanish construction uses a reflexive verb (went/*se fueron*) in addition to a definite article (the/*la*) before the word school (*escuela*).

## FIGURE 1

### Sentence Tree



To take another example, adjectives in English generally precede the nouns they describe, as in the construction “the white cat.” However, in Spanish, as in other Romance languages, the construction is reversed, and adjectives generally follow the nouns they describe. Thus, the Spanish construction for the noun phrase above is “*el gato blanco*.” This translates directly to “the cat white.”

When an English language learner is acquiring English, he or she may refer back to the knowledge of syntax gained in the first language; until the rules and structure of English are acquired, students may apply the syntactic rules of their first language to the second language. It is important that teachers are aware of this in the process of second language acquisition. Teachers can explicitly teach their English language learners about the syntax of English while pointing out the syntactic differences among the languages of their students.

Knowing how languages function and how words may be used is perhaps the most creative aspect of language learning and teaching. Language is dynamic; new words are generated continually, and existing words are constantly deriving new meaning. It is important for teachers to recognize that language acquisition is more than just learning words.

In summary, learning a language consists of knowing the uses and meanings of that language, in addition to knowing how that language functions. Cummins (2001a) has proposed a framework consisting of three foci of language acquisition:

- Focus on meaning. This refers to making input comprehensible to second language learners.
- Focus on language. This refers to learners’ knowledge and awareness of the specific forms and uses of language, including a critical look at those forms and uses.
- Focus on use. This suggests that language can be used to generate new knowledge, address social realities and inequities, and create new literature and art.

Cummins suggests that these three dimensions of language can help guide pedagogy, which will enhance the cognitive and linguistic development of second language learners. He suggests further that these dimensions can lead to the growth of critical literacy skills. To understand the different dimensions of language, including its forms, meaning, and use, try the following activity.



## ACTIVITY: Critical Literacy

- 1. *Read through the local newspaper and find any article concerning culturally or linguistically diverse populations.*
- 2. *Identify words that appear to impact the message or tone of the article. For example, the phrase “influx of immigrants” contains the message that a community is faced with large numbers of immigrants. Based on historical demographic data, this may or may not be true. On a more subtle level, this message implies that the social and economic costs associated with immigrants are a burden to the community—a burden thrust on them against their will.*
- 3. *Use the article in your classroom or at a local community group to generate a list of loaded words from the articles brought in. Do members of the group understand the words and their associated meaning(s)? How do these words generate or reinforce existing stereotypes about members of the community?*
- 4. *Words can be analyzed for their various linguistic functions (semantic, phonemic, morphologic, and syntactic). What substitute words could be used in place of the loaded words to portray a more accurate description of the social reality?*
- 5. *Generate a new list of words that could act as substitutes. Rewrite the article using the newly generated words from the group.*
- 6. *Submit the group’s article to the local newspaper.*

When teachers have a strong understanding of morphology in addition to syntax, phonology, and semantics, second language learners will become more proficient in their ability to use and understand language.



## **ACTIVITY:** Exploring Literacy for English Language Learners

**Teachers can enhance learning opportunities for English language learners by using a variety of strategies that call for the use of language and literacy. Reflect on and discuss these points:**

- *Discuss views of literacy with a group of your colleagues.*
- *In their view and yours, what constitutes a good beginning literacy program for English language learners?*

## Different Orthographies

For students whose first language writing system is alphabetic and who have learned to read in that language, moving to English orthography (spelling conventions) may not be a huge leap. However, for those who have learned to read in a syllabic writing system (like that of Japanese, where a syllable like *ka* or *mi* is represented by a single graphic element), the leap is greater. Japanese, for example, uses a combination system, with some words written in symbols that stand for syllables (*hiragana* or *katakana*) and some written in *kanji* that represent whole words. *Kanji*, which are Chinese in origin, can be very complex, with many pen or brush strokes composing a single one. Such a system places an extremely high demand on memory but less demand on phonological and phonemic skills.

Even when a student's first language is written in an alphabetic system, we cannot expect students to make the transition to English reading without considerable explicit instruction (Escamilla, 1999). Perhaps the biggest sticking point for speakers and readers of languages that have fewer vowels is the complex vowel representation system in English: five letters represent 11 vowel sounds individually or in combination. The letter a alone stands for at least four sounds. Confusion can arise over differences in the sounds represented by the same letter; as mentioned, in Spanish the letter h is silent, unless it is combined as ch, and j is pronounced roughly like the

English h in many dialects (as is g before i or e). The vowels may present even more problems: the letter e in Spanish stands for a sound roughly equivalent to a long a (as in *bake*) in English, while the letter i stands for the long e sound (*keep*) in English.



In this chapter we have explored various aspects of language and literacy, including the relationship between oral language development and literacy. We have also considered the importance of vocabulary enrichment and connecting students' home knowledge and literacies to the academic environment. Finally, we have looked at how knowledge of language, including morphology and syntax, can assist U.S. second language learners in their acquisition of English.

By way of highlighting some of the issues we have introduced in this chapter, **Figure 2** shows the major components of reading proficiency and some literacy questions one might pose related to language and culture. Addressing the following questions should aid in planning instruction and interpreting student performance.

## FIGURE 2

### Key Questions About Literacy

COMPONENTS OF LITERACY PROFICIENCY	SAMPLE QUESTIONS RELATED TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
<i>Phonological awareness</i>	<p><i>How much overlap is there between the phonemes of the student's first language and those of English?</i></p> <p><i>What are the possible ways for words to be structured (use of root words with suffixes, prefixes, or compounding)?</i></p> <p><i>Are children encouraged to "play" with language, to engage in rhyming games, etc., which would increase phonological awareness?</i></p> <p><i>What is the orthography (spelling system) of the student's first language like?</i></p>
<i>Vocabulary knowledge</i>	<p><i>What kind of vocabulary does the student have in his or her first language? in English? With regard to key words in an instructional unit or topic, does the student grasp the concepts represented by the words?</i></p> <p><i>How elaborate is the student's understanding of important words?</i></p>
<i>Prior knowledge</i>	<p><i>What experience has the student had with classroom topics?</i></p> <p><i>Is the topic at hand one he or she may have learned about at home or in another school?</i></p> <p><i>What personal experiences could be used as bridges to classroom topics?</i></p>

COMPONENTS OF LITERACY PROFICIENCY	SAMPLE QUESTIONS RELATED TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
<i>Knowledge of oral and written discourse structures and strategies</i>	<p><i>What are the text structures of the student's home culture (i.e., narrative, exposition, formal, oral language)?</i></p> <p><i>How are they similar to or different from what is expected in the classroom?</i></p>
<i>Knowledge of literary styles</i>	<i>What are the written styles of the student's home language or culture? Is the student's writing influenced by those styles?</i>
<i>Purposes for using literacy</i>	<i>How is literacy used in the student's home or culture? How are those uses similar to or different from the purposes for reading in school?</i>
<i>Knowledge of morphology and syntax</i>	<p><i>How can students' prior knowledge about language, both oral and written, be tapped to facilitate second language learning?</i></p> <p><i>What areas and skills of first language seem to transfer to the second language?</i></p> <p><i>In what ways (e.g., word games, explicit teaching) can teachers expand students' knowledge of the functions and meanings of language?</i></p>

Ultimately, teachers who maintain high expectations for students, who value the knowledge and literacies that students bring to the classroom, and who link students' home languages to the English that is required in an academic context will be most successful in fostering an equitable and high-quality educational experience for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In the following chapter on Language and Assessment, we explore different types of assessments, including authentic assessments, which may be used with culturally and linguistically diverse students. We encourage you to explore issues of language, culture, and human development in education by using *The Diversity Kit* in its entirety.



# LANGUAGE and ASSESSMENT

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ? *In what ways is language both a tool and a target of assessment?*
  - ? *In what ways should assessment of English language learners be modified to reflect linguistic and cultural considerations?*
  - ? *How is assessment (mis)used to distinguish between language deficiency and language difficulty in English language learners?*
-

Language is both a target and a tool of assessment. In the case of children acquiring English as a second language, teachers use two types of assessment: they evaluate language in terms that correspond to educational standards in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and they also assess mastery of content area material, a process that often takes place through language but is also largely an assessment of an individual's language proficiency. Language specialists using formal assessments evaluate students' attainment of different aspects of language, including syntax (grammar), vocabulary, pronunciation, ability to use language appropriately in different circumstances (pragmatics), and sometimes writing skills. Both types of assessment are necessary to understanding students' language proficiency.

## Assessing Language Proficiency

Understanding a student's language proficiency requires evaluating the student in several settings and evaluating multiple ways of using language. Formal tests administered by specialists may be used for placement purposes or to assess progress in language development in English; however, other sources, such as parent interviews and teacher observations, can help give a full picture of a student's language use. This full picture cannot be developed by a single test. Below, we pose sets of questions pertaining to three important aspects of language proficiency: communication outside the classroom, language in school, and relative proficiency with English and the home language.

### Communication outside the classroom

- How successful is the student in communicating with peers in a social setting (like the playground)?
- Is he or she able to use English to accomplish intentions (such as sharing equipment, getting someone to work or play with him or her, getting an answer to a question)?
- How well does he or she communicate at home, according to family members?
- What language does the student prefer to use in these situations?
- Does he or she use both the first language and English successfully?
- Is the student able to communicate his or her needs to both children and adults?

## Language use in school

- How well-developed is the student’s “academic” vocabulary (related to school subjects)?
- Does the student successfully use English to learn academic subjects?
- What kinds of support does the student need in order to engage in an academic discussion (bearing in mind culture-based discourse preferences)?
- How proficient is the student at academic writing tasks?
- Is there a gap between oral proficiency and reading or writing proficiency?

## Relative proficiency in English and the home language

- How does the student’s academic vocabulary in his or her first language compare to that in English?
- What is known about the student’s literacy (reading and writing) in his or her first language?
- How does the student’s grammatical proficiency in English compare with that of his or her native, English-speaking peers?
- Does the student have particular kinds of problems (e.g., with verb tenses, plurals, possessives)?
- Is the student comfortable using both the first language and English and is he or she able to select appropriate times for both (e.g., using first language in small-group discussions where others speak it and using English in the larger group or on assignments and assessments)?

As these questions suggest, a classroom teacher is in an excellent position to observe a great deal more about a student’s language proficiency and use than a specialist who may see the student only for testing. Teachers need to be aware of a student’s level of academic language proficiency and, in particular, the student’s vocabulary development in academic subjects—something that can affect comprehension of both oral instructions and texts. Ideally, a classroom teacher with students who are still acquiring English will have the support of bilingual or ESL staff, whose observations can be pooled with his or her own to arrive at a valid assessment of students’ language proficiency. It is always advisable to assess the student in both her first language and in English, particularly when the student’s first language development is still being supported or when a child is just entering school. **Figure 1** on page 80 is a checklist that a teacher can use as an aid in assessing students’ language proficiency in English.

**FIGURE 1**

## Interpersonal and Academic Language Skills Checklist

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	
<i>Directions: Please check skills that have been observed at an appropriate level in either English or the non-English language.</i>		
	ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE
<b>Contextualized/Noncognitively demanding:</b>		
1. Answers basic questions appropriately.		
2. Exchanges common greetings.		
3. Follows general classroom directions.		
4. Participates in routine school activities.		
5. Describes classroom objects or people.		
6. Gives classroom commands to peers.		
7. Participates in sharing time.		
8. Retells a familiar story.		
9. Initiates and maintains a conversation.		
10. Follows along during oral reading.		
<b>Decontextualized/Noncognitively demanding:</b>		
11. Decodes fluently.		
12. Reads noncognitively demanding information (e.g., notes, signs, directions, simple sentences, etc.).		
13. Writes words and simple sentences.		
14. Generates simple sentences.		
15. Writes from dictation.		

	ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE
<b>Contextualized/Cognitively demanding:</b>		
16. Follows specific directions for academic tasks.		
17. Uses terms for temporal and spatial concepts (e.g., first, last; top, bottom; left, right; etc.).		
18. Asks/answers questions regarding academic topics.		
19. Understands contextualized academic content.		
20. Reads stories for literal comprehension.		
<b>Decontextualized/Cognitively demanding:</b>		
21. Distinguishes main ideas from details (oral).		
22. Predicts conclusions after listening to story.		
23. Understands lectures on academic content.		
24. Uses language to reason, analyze, synthesize.		
25. Participates in academic discussions.		
26. Reads content area information for comprehension.		
27. Uses glossary, index, appendices, etc.		
28. Writes meaningful short paragraphs.		
29. Uses correct language mechanics.		
30. Writes coherent stories or reports.		

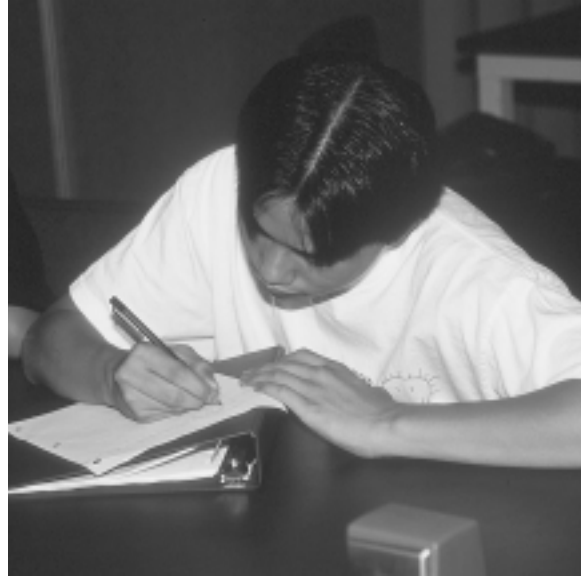
(Adapted from O'Malley, 1997)

## Language Factors, Content Mastery, and Assessment

Accurate assessment of children's language proficiency is critical in order to make valid interpretations about their academic progress. This is important because learning and demonstrating content mastery are frequently dependent upon language proficiency. Even so-called nonverbal tests often require that a test taker employ mental language to conceptualize the problem or hold certain ideas in memory (Oller, 1992; Roth, 1978). A student may have met requirements for English-only instruction but still takes longer to process ideas in English than in her first language. For this reason, timed tests or time-limited assessments of any kind may penalize an English language learner (Ascher, 1990). Sometimes the directions on a test are ambiguous or require close parsing of complex syntax. This is troublesome because if a student does not frame a problem correctly from the outset, his or her solution is likely to be flawed (Duran, 1985).

In addition, we know from research that the vocabulary of students still acquiring English is likely to be less elaborate than that of a native speaker. Such a student may know that "buckle" means "a metal belt fastener" but not that it can mean "to cave in" (either figuratively or literally— as "to buckle at the knees"). And, of course, grasping common idioms such as "at a low ebb," "music to my ears," or "out of step" may take a long time for second language learners, making them appear to lag behind. When a student performs poorly on an academic assessment, we often simply do not know the degree to which the performance is due to poor learning versus inadequate mastery of language (Garcia & Pearson, 1994; Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

Performance assessments, or those that demand an extended response, often call upon multiple, high-level language skills. **Figure 2** on page 83 demonstrates this fact.



**FIGURE 2**

## Language Factors in Assessment

<b>SAMPLE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY*</b>	<b>LANGUAGE DEMANDS</b>
<p><i>Write a report to a friend who was sick today, explaining to her the science experiment you did and how you did it. (Elementary writing task following a classroom science assessment)</i></p>	<p><i>Recount a multistep past event, sequencing and reinterpreting information; assume role of the teacher to a nonpresent audience. Requires considering what recipient already knows, level of detail he or she needs to comprehend.</i></p>
<p><i>Tell us anything else about your understanding of this story—what it means to you, what it makes you think about in your own life, or anything that relates to your reading of it. (Segment of an elementary reading assessment)</i></p>	<p><i>Give account of own experience(s), linking experience(s) to text, elaborating story comprehension.</i></p>
<p><i>Imagine that you are a staff writer for a small magazine. One day you are given your “big chance.” You are asked to write a final scene of an incomplete story. (Taken from a high school writing task)</i></p>	<p><i>Complete an account (a story) following prescribed format; comprehend and analyze the story so that the new segment makes sense; take on the voice of another author, maintaining style.</i></p>

\* Tasks are adapted from examples provided by the California Department of Education (Estrin, 1993).

**Teachers can evaluate the difficulty and appropriateness of assessment (and instruction) by asking some questions:**

- What components of language arts are involved in the activity, and how competent is the student with each one?
- How complex are the directions for undertaking the task? (Consider sentence structures and length, specialized vocabulary, length and complexity of text, dependence on small relational words such as “before,” “after,” “if...then,” “because,” etc.)
- How flexible is the task in terms of its requirements for language use? Are there alternative ways of expressing understanding or representing information given in language (drawings vs. essays, for example)?
- Even though the task appears to be nonverbal, what kinds of hidden language demands does it have (for example, for problem representation)?
- How can the task be facilitated or mediated? Can additional explanation be offered? Is the student allowed to use a dictionary or other tool?
- How much decontextualized language is being used, or how much will the student have to produce (demands of reading, writing especially)? Does the topic provide any bridges to student experience?
- How many different language functions must the student “pull together” to perform a complex, integrated task—and where might the process break down for a student who is still learning English or who has limited mastery of language functions?
- How cognitively demanding does the task appear to be, judging from what is known about a student’s language proficiency and previous educational experience?
- To what degree does a language use or an associated genre match the student’s cultural experience with that use or genre?

(Adapted from Farr & Trumbull, 1997)

Because language factors may cloud the picture of academic achievement, we must develop assessments that minimize this confusion; we must develop a way to mediate the administration of assessments so that they elicit performances that reveal the true learning of students in subject areas. In terms of evaluating student performance, teachers also need to determine which kinds of student errors indicate learning problems and which simply indicate normal developmental stages along the way to language mastery. Much assessment is done through writing, and while it is natural to notice student errors in writing (whether writing is the object of assessment or the vehicle for assessing learning in another subject area), not all errors merit the attention they get in scoring (Leki, 1992; Valdés, 1991).

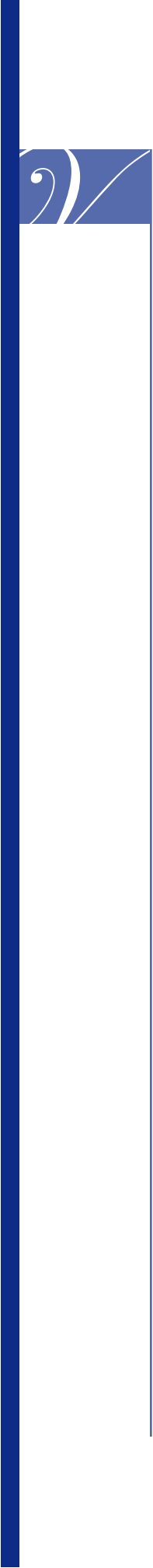
Criteria need to be established for what should count as a serious error. For instance, even though omission of articles (as in “My family had picnic this weekend”) may grate on the ears of many English teachers, this particular error is relatively trivial. In addition, when teachers are familiar with students’ first languages, they can look at student work with an understanding of first language transfer rather than focusing unduly on errors (Sweedler-Brown, 1993). Many Asian languages do not use articles at all, and even advanced English speakers and writers may continue to struggle with similar language issues.

## Assessment as a Cultural Event

As with other areas of education, assessment is embedded in cultural context (Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995). There are accepted ways of evaluating student progress or child development in every culture, but these ways differ from one culture to the next. Immigrant students, in particular, may take some time to understand the norms of assessment in U.S. classrooms; the same may be true for American Indian students growing up in traditional communities (Deyhle, 1987). For this reason, it is important to use a variety of assessment techniques and formats—including informal observation as well as a range of more formal measures—with nonmainstream students. The following vignette illustrates some problems with informal assessment and the complexities of understanding the performance of a student from a culture different from dominant U.S. school culture.

## VIGNETTE: Hermana May Understand, but I Can't Tell

Hermana came from Palau, an island republic in the Pacific about 700 miles east of the Philippines, to a first-grade classroom in Honolulu earlier this year. She's staying with an older sister and brother-in-law. Earlier today I read the class a story that has always captured their imagination, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. As I read, Hermana sat quietly, eyes down. I remember thinking, "Is she interested? Has she put herself into the story?" It was easy to tell with the others. I could almost feel Sam's interest as he wiggled, frowned, and smiled along with the story. I've been trying to get a sense of Hermana's understanding while I read. I decided to try this book because it's never failed me before. When I called on Hermana and asked her how she liked the story, she barely spoke. "Good." She said it so quietly that no one else heard. When I asked how she'd feel if she were the boy in the story, she looked confused. The more questions I asked about the story, the less she responded. I'm frustrated and worried. I have no idea what she really understands.



This teacher probably needs to know more about the child's home culture. Perhaps she could talk with a parent or with a community member (a paraprofessional, if there is one in the school system) who may be able to shed light on Hermana's behavior. She can also try different, more private ways of finding out about Hermana's story comprehension. Retelling the story through drawings may be one nonthreatening and even culturally appropriate way to do so. Some questions that will need to be answered are:

- What is the role of stories in the child's home culture?
- What kinds of stories are told to children or read by them?
- How are children expected to participate in storytelling?
- Do parents or elders typically ask questions about the child's response to a story?
- Is it considered appropriate to offer an opinion or to put oneself in the place of a character?

Answering these questions will perhaps point to some cultural explanations for Hermana's behavior. Of course, the teacher must bear in mind that Hermana is also an individual whose personal experiences, interests, and abilities will influence her orientation to literacy.

Below we attempt to capture some of the dilemmas teachers may face in trying to make assessment appropriate for children from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This list is not exhaustive, but it illustrates a range of concerns and possibilities.

**FIGURE 3**

ASSESSMENT DILEMMA	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p><i>Students' culture does not encourage competitive responses in a group.</i></p>	<p><i>Allow for small-group or pair interaction with informal teacher observation.</i></p> <p><i>Do not confront student in large group but encourage volunteering answers.</i></p> <p><i>Allow for choral response.</i></p>
<p><i>Students are used to cooperating and helping each other at home. They find the competitive frame of assessment strange, and they don't understand why they can't help each other more. (In some cases, students may come from countries where individual testing is rarely, if ever, done.)</i></p>	<p><i>Allow students to help each other (using their cultural strengths) whenever possible. Their group orientation can facilitate learning greatly.</i></p> <p><i>Explain that for certain assessments students will need to work independently, and make explicit the rules about when and where not to cooperate.</i></p> <p><i>There is no reason that even practice tests for standardized achievement tests can't be done in pairs or small groups.</i></p>
<p><i>Students do not understand purpose and consequences of assessment.</i></p>	<p><i>Explain that assessments can help show what a student has learned and needs to work on.</i></p> <p><i>Let students know that it is important to "do your best."</i></p>

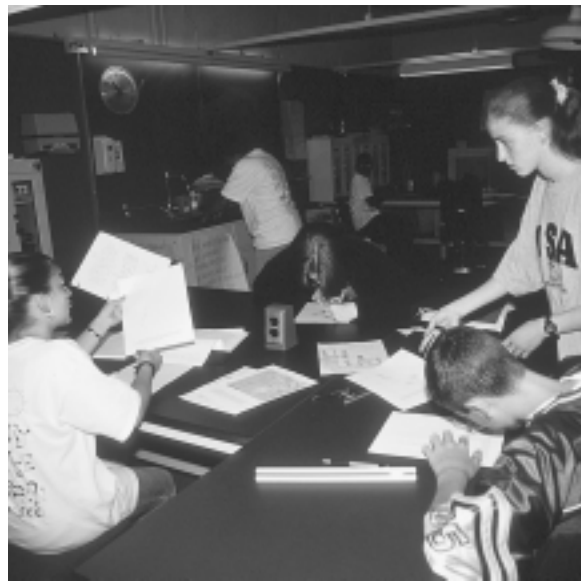
ASSESSMENT DILEMMA	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p><i>You want to use performance assessments based on students' research projects more, believing you can see students' progress better in a meaningful context where skills have to be integrated—but extended writing in English is difficult for your English language learners.</i></p>	<p><i>Allow students adequate time for writing. They may need more than native English speakers.</i></p> <p><i>If students are collaborating, let them use their first language (if they share a first language) to plan their project and discuss what they are learning. Consider demonstrations, dramatizations, visual models, and illustrations as alternatives to at least some of the writing.</i></p>
<p><i>On writing assessments, some students intermix text patterns and conventions that they have learned in school and ones that come from their language or dialect. For example, a student may introduce dialogue where it doesn't seem appropriate according to school norms. Or he or she may not use a "conventional" ordering of events.</i></p>	<p><i>Help students become aware of the patterns and conventions they are using so that they can make choices about when to use which ones.</i></p> <p><i>If students meet agreed-upon standards, they should not be graded down on the basis of different text patterns. If a high-stakes assessment requires adherence to school norms of writing, be sure students know that.</i></p>
<p><i>An assessment has been developed for native English speakers; some of your students are still learning English, but all of your students are required to take it.</i></p>	<p><i>Explain to students that the assessment is really for native English speakers and that they should do as well as they can but not feel bad if they don't understand something. Rephrase instructions as needed, so that at least they understand the overall task at hand.</i></p> <p><i>Use results judiciously; recognize that such tests are not valid indices of the overall knowledge, skill, or ability of students who are learning English.</i></p>

The more teachers understand how culture and language affect learning— influencing how students participate in class and what they produce—the more informed they will be about both instruction and assessment. They will understand serious flaws in conventional assessment practices and will find themselves modifying assessments, developing new ones, or even discovering new assessment methods. They will also be more informed critics of the value of assessments for students for whom the assessments were not necessarily designed.

## Authentic Assessment and Second Language Learners

In his book *Educative Assessment* (1998), Grant Wiggins states, “the aim of assessment is primarily to educate and improve student performance, not merely to audit it.” Wiggins is an advocate of authentic tasks for students, ones that allow students to conduct real-world, engaging work and draw on higher order cognitive skills. In conjunction with authentic tasks, Wiggins points out the significance of ongoing neutral feedback, which will lead to student self-adjustment (alteration of performance) and improvement. Feedback can be communicated through detailed rubrics, performance checklists, written narratives, and conferences; student work can be organized into ongoing (works-in-progress) and performance portfolios (in which students are asked to select work as part of a critique process for advancement). It is important to understand that feedback is not solely derived from the teacher. Peer feedback, parent feedback, and self-assessment are crucial components along the road to self-adjustment. Students’ products may include essays, research projects, scientific experiments, oral exhibitions, and visual and performing arts pieces, to name a few (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995).

If we revisit some of the key strategies for instruction of second language learners, we notice that they bear a striking similarity to the kinds of authentic work Wiggins proposes. For instance, the TESOL Standards



and the CREDE Standards emphasize the need to provide environments where English language learners can interact in meaningful ways with their peers. In a classroom where students are asked to perform authentic tasks, peer interaction becomes the norm, just as it is the norm to converse and exchange ideas with one's peers outside the classroom. Darling-Hammond et al. (1995) describe collaboration among students in the *Motion* program at International High School in New York. International High School serves students who have been in the U.S. for 4 years or less.

The use of assessment to drive collaborative learning turns out to produce one of the most powerful experiences *Motion* students have. Students work in groups to design experiments and solve problems in mathematics and physics, to interpret literature and write to and with one another about books and ideas, and to conquer physical challenges at Project Adventure. Throughout these activities, they must surmount language barriers to communicate with each other—thus being forced to learn and use English for complex, content-rich tasks—and they must surmount the challenges of different styles, approaches to work, and prior levels of knowledge.

(p. 134)

Ultimately, students in classrooms that provide the opportunity for authentic tasks and assessment are more invested in their work and more likely to self-adjust or alter their performance. At International High School, for example, new students engage in an ongoing process of writing their autobiographies. Through small-group collaboration and feedback, the writers produce works that will eventually be part of their final portfolios. One teacher is quoted as saying that “no student has ever lost his or her autobiography” (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995, p. 166).

Utilizing authentic tasks and assessment requires careful planning and implementation. Wiggins has developed a checklist for teachers to apply to tasks they have designed.

## **TABLE 1**

### Assessment Design Self-Assessment Checklist

- It is clear which desired achievements are being measured.**
- Criteria and indicators are the right ones for this task and for the achievement being assessed.**
- Content standards are addressed explicitly in the design; successful task performance requires mastery of the content standard.**
- Genre(s) or performance/production are important and appropriate for the achievements being assessed.**
- Standards have been established that go beyond the local norms of the school to credible outside standards or have been established by internal or external oversight.**
- Students will have ample and appropriate guidelines for understanding their performance obligations.**
- Task will provide students and teachers with ample feedback for self-assessment and self-adjustment both during and after its completion.**

(Wiggins, 1998)

These criteria can help teachers plan their assessment of English language learners thoughtfully. The first criteria, “It is clear which desired achievements are being measured,” invites us to consider whether our goal is to teach and assess language proficiency or content mastery. If we have designed the task to teach and assess content, then we must not confuse lack of language proficiency with lack of content mastery in our assessment of student work.



## **ACTIVITY:** Assessment Design Self-Assessment Checklist

**Analyze the other six criteria from the Assessment Design Self-Assessment Checklist. How can each of these help improve instructional design and assessment for English language learners and students from nondominant cultures whose ways of learning and communicating may differ from those of the dominant culture?**

## A Note on Grading

When it comes to considering the implications of language and culture, grading presents the teacher with the same dilemmas as assessment. In the case of grading, the teacher needs to carefully determine what standards must be met and which student products and performances she should count in determining a grade. In addition, the teacher needs to decide how to weight the different pieces of assessment (such as how much each will count toward the final grade). In fact, these considerations apply to all students, but language and culture complicate the picture. For instance, a teacher may value classroom participation, but some students avoid full participation in whole-group discussion because of their cultural backgrounds. Should they be given lower grades? Students who are still acquiring English may work more slowly on a test. If they don't finish, should they be graded on the same basis as other students? If so, should such a grade be factored into their final grade in the same way as for other students? If students' essays are scored according to several traits (for example, ideas, conventions, cohesion, voice, etc.), should equal weight be given to traits that rely heavily on high-level grammatical mastery?

### **ACTIVITY:** Grading the Work of English Language Learners

**Many teachers find themselves with the question of how to grade the written reports of the language minority student who has insufficient proficiency in English. The student has turned in a paper with very good content, but many grammatical errors. They know the student worked harder on his composition than any of their other students.**

**Discuss what criteria you would use for grading the student's work.**

There are no simple answers to the dilemmas posed above. Teachers will have to make decisions based on policies in their own schools and—as much as possible—on their students’ particular profiles and needs. However, because grades affect students personally (in terms of motivation and self-judgment) and have consequences for students’ school careers (such as retention and placement), they must be taken very seriously. In many cases, a district undertakes assessment reform without simultaneously addressing grading practices, thus jeopardizing the validity, fairness, and equity of its accountability system.

## Language Differences, Language Deficits, and Learning Problems

Because individuals have such a deep-seated sense of what language ought to sound like, on the basis of their own language socialization, the hardest task in distinguishing between difference and deficit is coming to accept a greater range of expression as normal. Very few students have actual language disorders, and virtually none are simply making random errors or speaking in slang (or other “nonstandard” language varieties). For example, a suburban school district collaborated with an inner-city school district to racially integrate the students. As soon as African American students arrived, they were being referred for speech therapy. The teachers reported that they made numerous grammatical errors and couldn’t pronounce many words (e.g., saying “muvver” for “mother” and “birfday” for “birthday”). It was only through a series of professional development workshops with the new African-American speech and language therapist and reading specialist that teachers came to understand that these “errors” were simply systematic differences between standard and nonstandard forms of language. Yet, a public perception persists that nonstandard languages are codes filled with errors and spoken by ignorant people.

In working with English language learners, distinguishing between normal developmental differences and actual deficits takes the assistance of professionals who have been trained in language acquisition—whether bilingual teachers or bilingual speech and language therapists. Normal patterns of development will look different depending on a learner’s first language, the age at which English was acquired, the methods by which English was taught, and even the child’s “linguistic personality.” Some children are naturally more talkative and sociable, and they tend to take more risks quickly with a new language (Saville-Troike, 1984). English language learners should be evaluated by a professional at least once a year, and sooner if a teacher observes

that a student is not making academic progress. Of course, understanding culture-based differences in language use will help a teacher put much of a student's linguistic behavior in proper perspective. A taciturn student may have been socialized to be quiet and respectful. Teachers who have had some experience with students from a particular language or cultural group will have a sense of whether a student is progressing normally. (See "Assessing Language Proficiency" for ideas on how teachers can check student progress.) The greatest risk is underestimating a child's capabilities because his or her language sounds different, but there is also a risk that a child who could benefit from special services may have a real deficit overlooked.

Assessment of a student's language proficiency and academic progress in multiple areas requires the use of multiple measures. With regard to language assessment, it is critical to evaluate how the student uses language in different situations and for specific purposes (for example, for social versus academic purposes). As we have said, assessment is itself a cultural phenomenon. In some countries, such as Mexico, very little formal assessment is done. In some cultures within the United States, the ways assessment is conducted in our schools would be considered either rude or inane. For these reasons, we need to identify a range of ways to assess and hope that we can match them appropriately to our students. At the same time, we need to help students become comfortable performing in ways that schools expect. So language-dependent are our assessments that it will always be difficult to determine, with English language learners, whether an assessment is testing a language ability or academic progress.

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## RESOURCES and FURTHER READING

Baker, C. (1997). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

This book is a remarkable source for gaining a broad understanding of second language acquisition, bilingualism, and bilingual education. As its name implies, each section provides a solid foundation of information on which readers can build and explore topics of interest in further detail. Baker not only synthesizes theory and research but also contributes his own work in the areas of language attitudes and the Welsh context of bilingual education. The book provides a much-needed international perspective on issues of bilingualism and bilingual education.

Corson, D. (2001). *Language Diversity and Education*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

This recent volume, intended primarily for graduate students, draws upon a variety of disciplines including sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, anthropological linguistics, and education. The work explores the range of language varieties that currently exist in many schools, including standard and nonstandard varieties, bilingual and ESL education, and gendered and culturally different discourse norms. The framework is embedded in language, power, and social justice. The chapter on Research Methods draws upon several studies that have used non-traditional or combinations of methods to investigate issues of language and power in educational settings.

Corson, D. (1999). *Language Policy in Schools*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

The focus of this book is to provide a working tool or handbook for educators investigating language policy and language practice in their schools. The book provides a framework of critical policymaking and language planning for social justice and provides educators with the tools necessary to investigate language policy and language use in schools. Each chapter ends with "Discussion Starters"—questions that are meant to prompt readers to reflect on the chapter and relate the information to their personal experiences. The final chapter is devoted to summarizing the questions that can guide educators' investigation of school language policy and examining issues of critical policymaking.

Hurley, S.R. & Tinajero, J.V. (Eds.). (2000). *Literacy Assessment of Second Language Learners*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

In this volume, contributors address the concerns of practitioners and scholars regarding the dearth of literacy assessments for English language learners. Many of the contributors provide case studies and vignettes to illustrate issues with and applications of literacy assessments. The editors explore the connection between first and second language literacy, and the connection between oral language and literacy. Other authors contribute holistic writing rubrics that show how assessments conducted in both first and second languages are essential in order to gain a more accurate and overall view of a student's work. Each chapter ends with questions for discussion. Overall, the book combines theory with rubrics, graphics, and other tools intended to facilitate literacy assessment in the classroom.

Perry, T. and Delpit, L. (Eds.). (1998). *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language and the Education of African American Children*. Boston: Beacon Press.

The 1996 Oakland, Calif. school board's decision requiring all schools in the district to participate in a Standard English proficiency program was followed by tumultuous debate surrounding the position and use of Ebonics in schools. As a result of the debate, the editors of this volume chose to compile a rich and vast array of work from educators, linguists, practitioners, and students. Each piece provides a distinct viewpoint and clear voice in the Ebonics debate. In addition, the volume adds depth and insight into any conversation of language, power, and identity.

Samway, K.D. and McKeon, D. (1999). *Myths and Realities: Best Practices for Language Minority Students*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This small volume provides readers with accessible information regarding best practices for educating language minority students. The book is organized into nine broad topic areas, arranged to counter the myths surrounding the education of language minority students. Some of the topics include demographics, enrollment, first and second language instruction, and assessment. Myths are listed under each of the nine topics and are followed by a concise reality statement, which is based on recent and relevant research. In total, the authors dispel over 40 myths. Practitioners will find this handy, especially in the current context of meeting the needs of English language learners.

## WEB SITES and ONLINE RESOURCES

### <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/>

This Web site is devoted to the teaching and learning of language for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The scope of the site is broad, ranging from excerpts of Dr. Cummins' own work, including papers recently presented, to resources for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The links provide practitioners with an enormous array of additional resources, including governmental and private education sites and teaching tools for educators.

### <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/>

This Web site is Jim Crawford's Language Policy Emporium. The site, which includes current event topics of national concern such as bilingual education and English Only, is meant to stimulate discussion surrounding the sociopolitical context of educating culturally and linguistically diverse students. Crawford's most recent work is also accessible directly from this site. This site is one of the top sites in the U.S. devoted to issues of language policy.



# VIDEOS

## **Student Voices: English Language Learners. (2000). The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, Providence, RI.**

This 30-minute video is designed to highlight the educational experiences of nine English language learners in secondary public schools. The video is organized around three themes: isolation and barriers, teachers and guidance, and strength and resilience. The students offer compelling suggestions for how educational reformers can and why they should work toward inclusion and equity in education.

## **Where the Spirit Lives. (1989). Studio Entertainment, New York.**

Based on language policy toward Native Indian groups, this 97-minute video captures the lives of two Native Indian children who were taken by the government and institutionalized with other children. The video reveals how children were forced to cut ties to their families, language, culture, and identity. This is an engaging and useful video for educators interested in understanding how national language policies were implemented and their impact on the lives of children and Native Indian families.





## The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory

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*a program of The Education Alliance at Brown University*

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