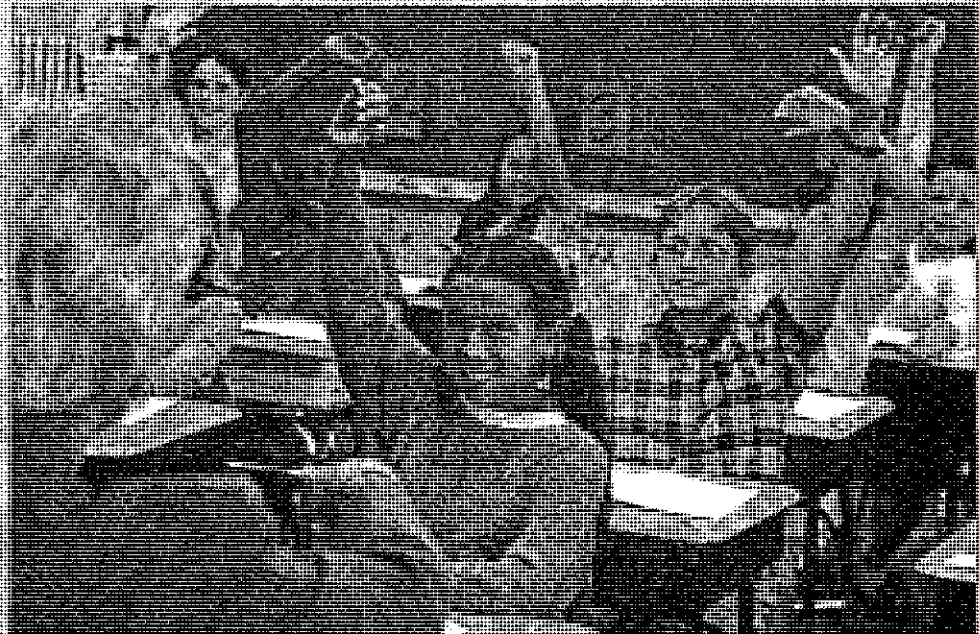


2

Language Acquisition: Dimensions of Proficiency



The following text is extremely faint and illegible due to the low resolution and high contrast of the scan. It appears to be a paragraph of text located below the photograph.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- 1. What are the main components of the...?
- 2. How does the... process work?
- 3. What are the... results of the...?
- 4. How can the... be improved?
- 5. What are the... implications of the...?

Research has shown that... the... process... the... results... the... implications...

...the... process... the... results... the... implications... the... process... the... results... the... implications...

ACCESSING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE: ACQUIRING A SECOND LANGUAGE

Complete the anticipation guide in Figure 2.1 to access your prior knowledge about this topic.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

There are many similarities between first- and second-language learning. How do infants acquire their first language? They receive immense amounts of input from the people around them. They hear the same language over and over again, all day, and over months and years. They see many clues around them to help connect the words to actions, things, and ideas. No one minds if they make mistakes as they learn to speak. Parents often model the correct way to express a thought simply by restating it. Babies are rewarded with praise and encouragement for their efforts. They use language to communicate with others about the world around them all day long. And there is always a real-life purpose for the communication.

Figure 2.1 Second Language Acquisition Anticipation Guide

Read each statement. Mark "A" if you agree or "D" if you disagree. Tell why.

A	D	Statement	Justification
		Young children learn a second language more easily than older children or adults.	
		A student who sounds fluent in English no longer needs English language development.	
		Proficiency in the primary (first) language helps second-language acquisition.	
		The more English you are exposed to, the more quickly you will learn English.	
		Instruction in content areas (math, science, etc.) should not begin until the student has reached proficiency in English.	
		Math, science, and social studies teachers are also language teachers.	
		Students should be encouraged to use their primary language in a sheltered classroom.	

Learning a second language is not so very different. It also requires:

- *Comprehensible input*—English language learners need to hear comprehensible language all day long.
- *Contextualized instruction*—Part of what makes language comprehensible is the context or the clues provided.
- *Low-anxiety environment*—Students need to feel safe enough to make mistakes and take risks.
- *Meaningful engagement*—Students need to use language with others for authentic purposes.

The differences come into play when the second-language learning takes place in school, where individual attention is infrequent, and grade-level content must be learned at the same time as language. Then it becomes essential that we provide explicit, focused language instruction, along with scaffolds (support) to make content learning accessible to students who are still learning language. Within the school environment, we also expect students to be able to use academic language to talk and write about academic concepts. This level of language requires more than comprehensible input, contextualized instruction, a safe environment, and meaningful engagement. It requires explicit instruction in the forms and functions of academic language (e.g., see Dutro & Moran, 2003). We will discuss this further in chapter 6.

WHAT IS LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY?

Before we examine the ways in which these four principles of language acquisition support language and content learning, let's examine the end goal. What does it mean to be proficient in another language?

BICS and CALP

Jim Cummins (1979) defined two levels of language proficiency: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

BICS refers to the ability to communicate about everyday subjects and needs, the language used to talk with friends, shop, eat at a restaurant, or even tell a teacher why a homework assignment isn't done. It is language learned and used in highly contextualized situations where there are many clues to aid in comprehension. The speaker or listener need not rely solely on language to construct meaning. Familiarity with the situation (background knowledge) and clues such as facial expressions, pictures, and real objects all provide a context that supports understanding.

CALP, on the other hand, refers to academic language, the type of language used in the classroom for lectures, discussions, reading, lab reports, oral presentations, and so forth. These academic tasks provide little in the way of context or clues and generally involve abstract concepts. Students must rely on language to make meaning.

Four principles of language acquisition

What makes second-language learning different from first language learning?

Who are your ELLs who speak English fluently yet do not do well on writing assignments or on state standardized tests? What are the differences and similarities between their conversational language and their writing?

lge

do
om
lay,
the
ney
ply
ef-
und
on.

Research in Focus: Dimensions of Language Proficiency



During the 1970s and 1980s, a Canadian linguist, James Cummins, did extensive research on how people acquire language. The majority of his studies were done in Quebec centering around the French-English immersion programs. One of the first observations made by Cummins was that there are two dimensions of language: conversational and academic. The terms used to describe these dimensions are BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency).

When children first begin to speak and eventually enter school, they arrive with BICS in their primary language. This is the language used at home, on the playground, knowledge of basic survival communication. When we chat with our friends about the events of the weekend, we are using BICS. When your child tells you about the soccer game, that is also BICS. It is expected that children entering school at the kindergarten level come with a fully developed BICS, basically, a receptive and expressive vocabulary of about 2500 words.

With that dimension at a functioning level, the school can proceed to expand and build upon that knowledge to develop CALP, the academic dimension of language that is necessary for school success. CALP is used to explain cell structure, to summarize a reading selection, write a research paper on habitats, to take any academic test.

Therefore, if a student has BICS in one language, learns to read in that language, and then uses that language in thinking and analyzing, the student develops relatively clear relationships between speech and print and between language and thought.

Thus, for a student to be both socially and academically successful in a language, these two dimensions need to be developed. In short, the degree of success that a student will experience in school is positively associated with the extent of the development of both BICS and CALP.

BICS + CALP = academic success

Source: The American School in Japan, <http://www.asij.ac.jp/elementary/parent/mosaic/Research.htm>.
Used with permission.

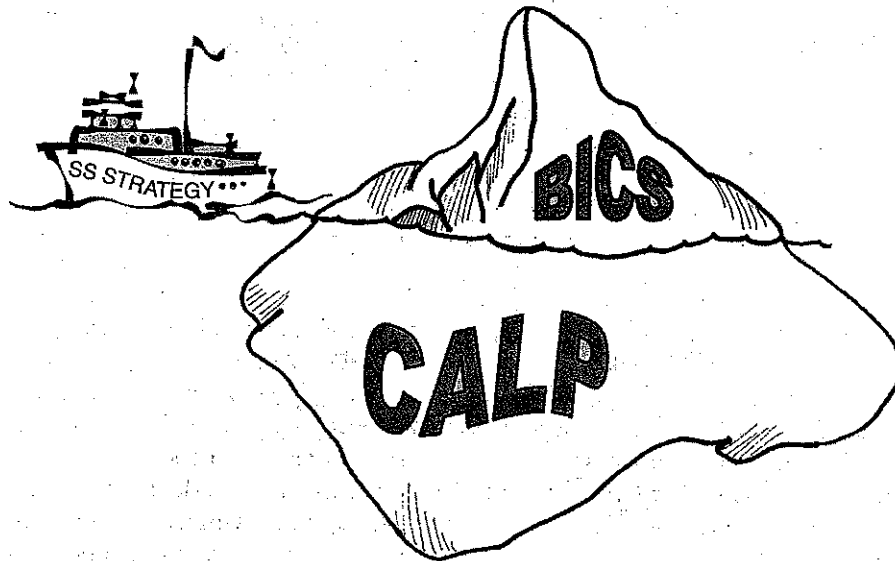
Understanding the difference between BICS and CALP is critical to knowing our students. We hear some of our students talk at lunch or on the playground, and they sound very nearly fluent. They talk in class easily, yet they have difficulty reading. And when we look closely at their writing, we can see many errors that sound like someone who is still learning English. Particularly in secondary schools where we have many English language learners who have attended school in this country for several years, we see many students who sound very fluent. Often, however, they are lacking the academic language required to be successful in school. As educators, we must be aware of our students' skills

in all four domains of language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—in order to ensure that we continue to provide instruction aimed at developing full proficiency in English. (We will take an in-depth look at developing academic language in chapters 6 and 7. In this chapter our focus is on developing an understanding of how language is acquired.)

Cummins has since reframed our understanding of language proficiency and added a third dimension—discrete language skills (Cummins, 2003). These discrete skills include phonological, literacy, and grammatical knowledge. They are developed alongside conversational fluency (BICS) and academic language proficiency (CALP), through direct instruction and formal and informal practice in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Recent methods of second-language instruction have often neglected this third dimension of language proficiency in the belief that students would acquire these skills over time as they used language. Remember the letter from Van in chapter 1? Clearly she was able to express her wishes about a relatively academic topic related to her education and learning. We can make the assumption that she can also communicate about more social topics. When we read her writing, what we find missing is accuracy—plurals, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, word forms—along with the sociolinguistic and strategic competence needed to express ideas appropriately for the audience.

The concept of BICS and CALP has traditionally been explained through the analogy of an iceberg (see Figure 2.2). The tip of the iceberg, the part that we can see, is BICS, that conversational fluency that we often mistakenly assume equates to the ability to understand and participate in grade-level academic work. The far greater portion of the iceberg lying beneath the water where we cannot see it is CALP, the academic language needed for successful participation in that

Figure 2.2 BICS and CALP



grade-level academic work. Building on this analogy, we have added a ship, representing the third dimension of language proficiency, those discrete language skills and strategies necessary to navigate the waters of both conversational and academic contexts. It is our contention that direct instruction of such skills as letter/sound relationships, decoding, and conventions of language, along with opportunities to practice them in authentic contexts, will accelerate the development of language proficiency. We caution that this does not mean a return to a grammar-based approach to language instruction, but rather a balanced approach that addresses conversational fluency, academic language, and the specific skills required to comprehend and produce language accurately.

Communicative competence

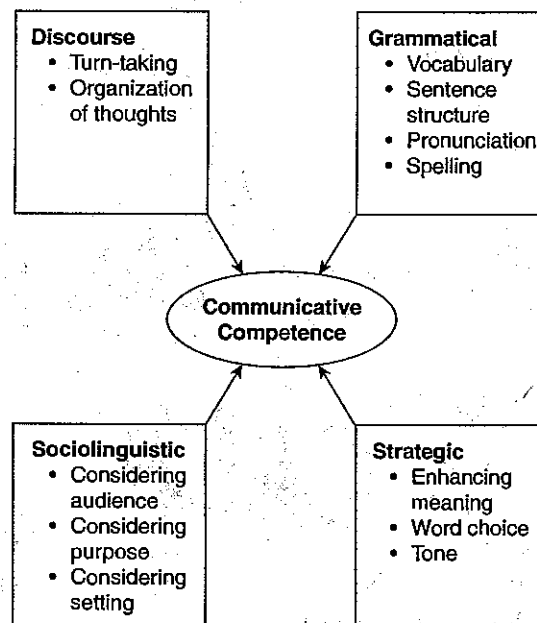
What does it mean to be "communicatively competent"?

Another way of thinking about what it means to be fully proficient in a language was suggested by Hymes (1972), who coined the term "communicative competence." Communicative competence refers to the ability to know when, where, and how to use language in a variety of contexts or situations (see Figure 2.3 for a visual representation of this information). The ability to communicate effectively is a complex skill that is comprised of different aspects—grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic (Canale, 1983).

How might you help students develop each type of competence?

Grammatical Competence. This is the aspect of competence that we often think of first when we think of what it means to be proficient. It refers to accuracy, the ability to use the language code correctly—vocabulary, sentence structure,

Figure 2.3 Communicative Competence



pronunciation, or spelling. For many years, language instruction, whether in English or other languages, was grammar-based, focusing primarily on this one of four aspects of competence. Of the four aspects, grammatical is perhaps the least bound by cultural norms.

Sociolinguistic Competence. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to vary language according to the situation. It entails using language appropriately in different settings, understanding how language expression changes depending on the social status of participants (e.g., teacher vs. peer), the purpose of the communication (e.g., making a request), or the situation itself (e.g., classroom vs. playground).

Discourse Competence. Discourse competence refers to the way in which we organize our thoughts to communicate. It relates to the logical organization of an essay as well as to the logical progression and give and take of a conversation. This logical organization of thought varies from culture to culture as well as from discipline to discipline.

Strategic Competence. Strategic competence is the ability to manipulate language to achieve a goal. Both verbal and nonverbal communication may be involved. Strategic competence is generally used to either clarify or enhance meaning. When a speaker forgets a word or doesn't have the specific vocabulary to express an idea, gestures or paraphrasing can help to make meaning clear. Word choice, tone, or volume of voice may enhance the message and help the speaker (or writer) achieve the desired outcome. Persuasive speech or writing is an example of when strategic competence is likely to be useful.

Reaching this level of competence in English requires focused, explicit instruction as well as many opportunities to practice language in authentic situations. Just as infants engage in language learning all day long, so our students need language development to be a focus all day long. We cannot expect them to reach high levels of language proficiency when the only attention paid to learning language takes place during a 20-minute pull-out session, an hour-long English as a Second Language (ESL) class, or even embedded within a three-hour literacy block. Language development must occur throughout the entire day, integrated into the content. Instructional activities must be planned so that they integrate language learning with content learning. Language instruction must also be a subject area in and of itself, a time when we teach students how to use language and give them multiple opportunities to practice using language in ways that require them to think critically. Compare the following two tasks. Which one requires a higher level of thinking? Which one requires a higher level of linguistic competence?

Task 1: Tell your partner five things you did this morning before coming to school. Write them in sentences.

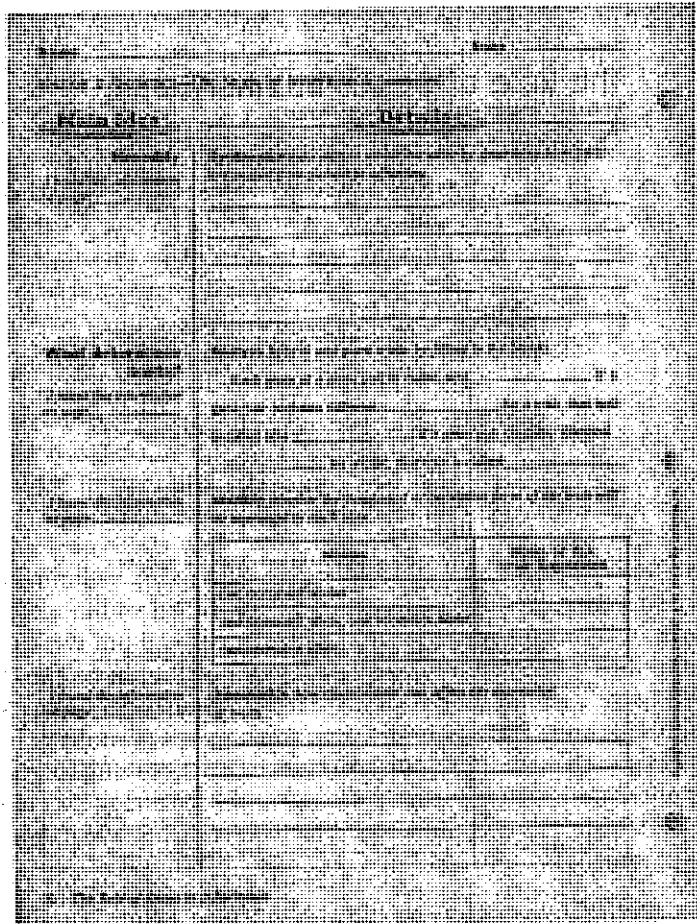
Task 2: Rewrite each sentence in the past tense: Sheryl talks to Elizabeth. Aida walks to school. Jorge rides his bike.

Spotlight on Instruction

Structured Note-Taking

As Mr. Bonine begins his science instruction, he reads aloud a book related to the content that his students will be exploring. He knows that this short Read Aloud will provide his students with vocabulary in context and will help to build his students' background knowledge.

Mr. Bonine also provides his students with a structured note-taking guide to help them record their observations during the lab. This tool provides a level of support for his students in completing the tasks. It also provides students with some of the academic language he expects them to know and use in their lab reports.



A sample note-taking guide
Science Noteables, Douglas Fisher, 2007, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill

Both tasks provide practice in the past tense form of language. The first task also requires students to use other vocabulary to describe events in their own lives and to think about what makes a complete sentence.

THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION APPLIED

The four principles of language acquisition are the foundation of instruction for English language learners. They are reflected in all instruction throughout the day. Through providing a safe environment with ample support for making meaning and daily opportunities for students to be actively involved in learning, we can help our students develop language proficiency and facilitate learning of grade-level content in language arts, math, social studies, science, or other subjects. These principles also provide a structure for thinking about differentiating instruction—students at different levels of proficiency in English require different supports to make input comprehensible, provide context for new concepts, lower their anxiety level, and make activities meaningful.

Principle 1: Comprehensible input

The first step in developing language proficiency is to provide comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). If students don't understand what they are hearing or reading, we cannot expect them to then produce comprehensible language at progressively more complex levels. Comprehensible input is exactly what the term sounds like—ensuring that students understand (comprehend) what they are listening to and reading (input). It is required for virtually everything that goes on in a classroom: discussions, lectures, readings, and assignments.

Providing comprehensible input requires teachers to think about how they:

- Make their speech comprehensible
- Make new information comprehensible
- Make text comprehensible
- Make directions for assignments comprehensible

Making Speech Comprehensible. Have you noticed that when you hear a language that is unfamiliar to you, it is often difficult to distinguish one word from another? Each phrase or sentence can sound like one long word. When Carol was just beginning to learn Spanish, one of the first things she learned to say was "*más despacio, por favor*" (more slowly, please). She noted that even as her language proficiency progressed, she would still sometimes find herself translating each Spanish phrase into English before it made sense. Unfortunately, by the time she finished translating the first thing that was said, the speaker would be a few sentences farther along. If there was any one part she didn't understand, she would frequently find it difficult to understand what followed because she missed vital pieces of information. A slower rate, pauses now and then, and some repetition of ideas would have helped Carol to keep up, especially as she was learning this new language.

As you read about these principles, think about students at different levels of language proficiency—beginning, intermediate, and advanced. How will you apply these principles differently for students at these different levels?

Listen to your language in the classroom. Do you speak rapidly? Do you pause between thoughts? Is your language academic, yet with enough explanation for ELLs to understand? How do you know if they understand? Tape-record yourself and listen for ways in which your language supports understanding.

Differentiating instruction: What strategies might you use for students at each level of proficiency to make your speech comprehensible?

List the techniques detailed here that make speech comprehensible. Put a check by the ones that you do.

We will discuss background knowledge in greater depth in chapter 7 as it is a key factor in making content comprehensible to ELL.

Repetition can be an effective way of providing multiple opportunities to make meaning. Carol's friend Renee is one of those people who make the same statement several different times in a conversation. Perhaps it's her way of stressing importance, perhaps it's her way of thinking aloud. Regardless of her intent, she's exactly the type of person a new language learner wants to listen to in the new language. Renee's redundancy provides the listener additional opportunities to catch her meaning. If the listener doesn't understand a word or phrase stated in one manner, he or she may be able to get it in the reiteration. These repetitions also provide time to process the language and catch up.

Doug's friend Adam speaks very slowly when he wants to make a point. Although he has his own reasons for this, the way that Adam varies the speed of his speech provides the listener time to think and respond.

So what can classroom teachers do to give students the time they need to process the language itself and make the content of the language comprehensible?

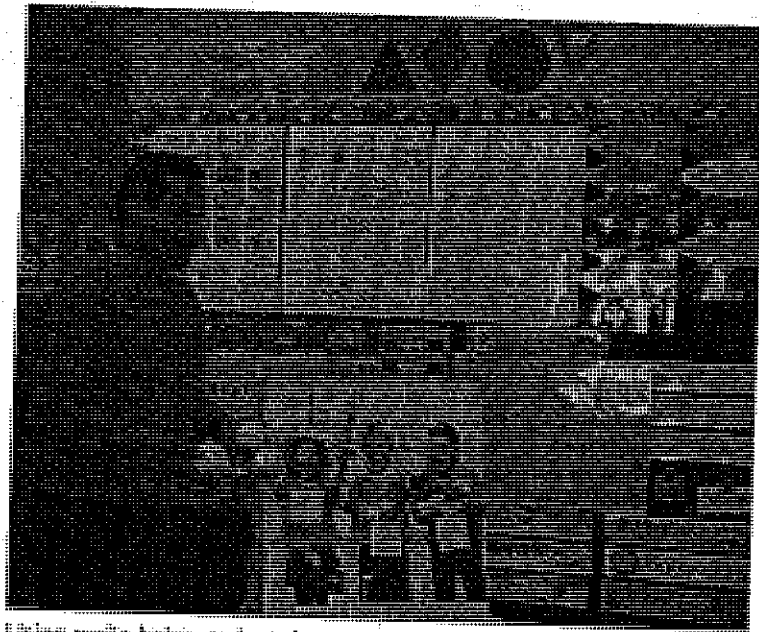
Slowing down the rate of speech slightly and **pausing** between thoughts gives learners time to process what they've heard and catch up. Using **gestures** helps to reduce the reliance on language alone. If you've ever traveled in a country where you were learning the language, you probably remember communicating many ideas through gestures—pointing to the item you wanted to purchase, listening to directions to the train station, and watching the speaker point to the right. **Avoid idioms** and slang or directly teach them. Simple expressions like “let the cat out of the bag” can cause an English language learner to lose the flow of the discussion. One of the most important ways in which we can give students the opportunity to understand is to amplify our language, as opposed to merely simplifying it. When we restate ideas in many different ways, we can facilitate comprehension for those who didn't understand the first time we said something. We can include additional supporting information or simply explain the concept in another way. We provide **redundancy** of both language and ideas, allowing students to hear the language and vocabulary over and over again (multiple exposures), at the same time as clarifying the ideas through further explanation. Often, when working with ELLs, we tend to simplify our language, using simple vocabulary and simple language structures. In effect, we are watering down our speech and, in the process, our content as well. Simplifying ideas and language can be like reading the Cliffs Notes to a Steinbeck novel instead of reading the novel itself. It's virtually impossible to get the flavor of Steinbeck by reading those Cliffs Notes. All of our students need to get that flavor—it's a matter of presenting it in ways that make it comprehensible.

Making New Information Comprehensible. Connecting new ideas to prior experiences and learning helps students make sense out of the new material. When Carol was learning Spanish, she would listen to the Tijuana radio stations as she drove to work every day. As long as they were reporting on events that had taken place in San Diego, were of national concern in the United States, or were events that had been covered in the newspaper that morning, she could follow along fairly well. As soon as they began to report the news from Mexico City, however, she was lost and found herself changing the station

to listen to jazz. Her background knowledge regarding the news helped her to understand the formal, complex language of a news report. The same level of language was rendered incomprehensible when she had no prior knowledge of the subject, and her response, not so dissimilar to that of many of our students, was to tune out.

Making Text Comprehensible. Much of the material we expect our students to read is dense, academic text above their reading level. Even the literature can contain unfamiliar language or make reference to unfamiliar places, experiences, or customs. In order to make the text comprehensible for students who are learning English, we must first analyze the text to determine what challenges it might present, and then plan supports that will help students make meaning as they read. Using visuals, realia (real objects), graphic organizers, and discussions before, during, and after reading are examples of ways in which we can alleviate the complex language demands of text. A picture of a covered wagon allows students to see the living conditions of the westward movement. They can connect their own understanding to the picture and thereby to the reading or discussion. A graphic organizer describing the life cycle of a frog can assist students in seeing how each phase connects to the others, and they can use this knowledge as they read or listen to the explanation. In chapter 7, we will discuss these supports and others in greater depth as part of developing academic language and helping English language learners reach grade-level standards.

Differentiating instruction: What strategies might you use for students at each level of proficiency to make text comprehensible?



Using realia helps students learn content and vocabulary
Doug Fisher

Spotlight on Instruction

Making Directions for Assignments Comprehensible

Ms. Schwartz, a tenth-grade history teacher, writes her daily agenda on the board and explains the tasks for the day. She then asks one of her students, "What are we going to do first?"

Marco replies, "Review the steps of Reciprocal Teaching," reading from the board. "What did Marco say we are going to do?" Angie asks Yolanda.

Ms. Schwartz repeats this process rapidly with each of the parts of the daily agenda. Her students have now taken on the responsibility of knowing what they are to do, and she no longer has to answer that age-old question, "What are we supposed to do?"

Think of a task you recently assigned your students. What were your instructions to them? Did they all know what to do? How did you know?

Differentiating instruction: What strategies might you use for students at each level of proficiency to make directions comprehensible?

Making Directions for Assignments Comprehensible. Often what prevents ELL students from participating is simply that they did not understand the directions for the task. Understanding and following directions can be a stumbling block for anyone who is not proficient in the language, as those of us who have ever asked for directions in a foreign country can attest to. Words and phrases such as "circle," "underline," or "find the one that does not fit," though simple enough words, carry a great deal of the meaning. If you miss one of the words, you miss the entire idea. It is critical that we make our directions clear and explicit, and that we check for comprehension by having students explain in their own words what they are expected to do.

Giving directions visually as well as orally, demonstrating the task, using clear language, and checking to be certain students understand are crucial to assure that students can participate fully in classroom activities. Consider the advice of Rosa, a fifth-grade ELL student. When asked what would help her in



Using visuals can help students understand the directions
Diana Yemha

school, she replied, "if teachers explain more and give more examples." English language learners may require more explanation and more modeling or demonstrations than students who can understand the language easily.

Principle 2: Contextualized instruction

Read the following sentence. Before reading on, visualize the situation in which this scene might have taken place and note what you think this statement is referring to.

"Oh Bill, I missed you!" she cried.

Stop. Really think about this and visualize the scene. Once you have this in mind, continue reading.

Then she aimed and fired again. (Pritchard, 2004).

If you responded as we did when we first read these statements, you might have thought that *she* had not seen Bill in a while and was happy to see him (though an English language learner might read the word *cried* and, not recognizing the multiple meanings, think that she was unhappy). The first statement, however, takes on a completely different meaning when provided with the context of the second sentence.

As teachers, we have a great deal of knowledge about our content. We read and write at high levels. We understand the math, science, or social studies concepts that we teach. As good readers, with background knowledge about a subject, we are able to understand what we read. We usually can place new learning or information into a context that helps us create meaning. When we don't know the context, though, as we saw with *Bill* it is not only more difficult to make meaning, but we may actually develop misunderstandings. Many of our ELLs bring neither the reading skills nor the background knowledge required to understand the complex grade-level concepts with which they are presented. One way we can compensate for this lack of background skills or knowledge is by providing context for new information.

Cummins (1981) identified two intersecting continua (four quadrants) of support for comprehension and level of cognitive difficulty. These continua highlight how language is used in situations that range from context-embedded (many clues to meaning) to context-reduced (few clues), as well as in situations that are cognitively undemanding (easy) to those that are quite demanding cognitively (hard). We can use Cummins's four quadrants to think about the level of support or context provided for various academic tasks (see Figure 2.4). The tasks on the top half of the quadrant in Figure 2.4 are easy. Those on the bottom would be considered difficult. The tasks on the left-hand side of the quadrant provide lots of clues, whereas those on the right provide only language as a clue to meaning.

- **Quadrant A**—Quadrant A contains tasks that are relatively easy and offer support through visuals, demonstrations, and so on. When playing a game, for example, you can participate by watching others and doing what they do—an easy task, made accessible by watching a demonstration.
- **Quadrant C**—In quadrant C, the tasks are also easy, but provide little support other than through language. Talking on the telephone to set a lunch date does not tax the brain, but, as those among us who have ever

Think of a time when not understanding the context of a situation caused you to misunderstand what you were seeing, hearing, or reading.

Differentiating instruction: Think of a task you might ask students to complete. How can you vary the level of context you provide for students at different levels of proficiency?

Figure 2.4 Comparing Context and Cognitive Demands

		Cognitively Undemanding	
Context-embedded	A		C
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in an art class • Playing a game in PE • Playing with friends at recess • Following directions after watching them modeled 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a list • Talking on the telephone • Copying from the board • Filling in a worksheet
	B		D
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to a lecture with a graphic organizer • Reading a textbook with graphics—pictures, charts, maps • Writing an essay after discussion, reading, organizing information on a graphic organizer • Participating in a lab experiment • Working with manipulatives in math 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to a lecture • Reading a text book • Writing a persuasive essay • Writing a lab report • Solving a word problem in math • Taking standardized tests
		Cognitively Demanding	

Think of the most recent activity or assignment you used with your students. Which quadrant did it reflect? What context, clues, or supports did you provide?

What is a Quadrant D type of task that you might ask your students to do? What context or clues could you provide that would support them as they complete the task?

talked on the phone in a language we were still learning can attest to, this task is made far more difficult by virtue of the fact that the only way to make meaning is through words. There are no facial expressions or gestures to look to for support.

- *Quadrant B*—In Quadrant B, we find those tasks that require higher-order thinking skills, but also include many supports for making meaning. Students usually watch a demonstration of a lab experiment before they are asked to perform one on their own. They are usually working with a partner, with real-life objects, and have others in the class whom they can watch and mimic.
- *Quadrant D*—Quadrant D includes tasks that require students to use higher-order thinking skills where they must rely solely on language in order to understand and communicate. These are tasks required on standardized tests and in most classes at the university level.

Obviously, all of our students must be able to perform the type of tasks in Quadrant D. For our English language learners, however, reliance on language alone can often be a challenge, leaving them unable to participate successfully. So what does this mean for our instruction? How do we prepare students for cognitively demanding, context-reduced tasks?

The answer lies in Quadrant B. This is what sheltered instruction is—cognitively demanding academic content with lots of supports. The activities

in which we engage our students must require them to analyze, hypothesize, synthesize, evaluate, and use all the other thinking skills we find on Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, Mesia, & Krathwohl, 1964). At the same time, when students are not fully proficient in English, we must contextualize learning in order to help them make meaning. Many of the techniques presented in our earlier discussion of comprehensible input—visuals, demonstrations, hands-on activities—can help to provide that context for students.

Our goal is for our students to participate successfully in grade-level academic tasks, to be able to listen, speak, read, and write independently. We can get them there through providing contextual supports and gradually removing the supports as they become more proficient in English, more able to rely on language alone. We can get them there through the type of instruction (SDAIE) described in Quadrant B.

Principle 3: Low-anxiety environment

Language acquisition is enhanced when students are engaged in meaningful activities and their anxiety level is low. Students must feel comfortable enough to risk producing imperfect language. This is especially critical for older students. When learning a new language, it is virtually impossible to express yourself in a manner commensurate with your age. Even adults will make numerous mistakes and be relegated to using simple language with incorrect grammatical structures. Add to this the importance of peer approval for adolescents, and it is easy to understand why some of our students are reluctant to speak up in class. As teachers, we must take responsibility for creating an environment in which students know that all their attempts to participate will be encouraged, accepted, and celebrated.

Classroom environments must provide a balance between safety and comfort, and enough stress to push performance. If you are in an interview situation, talking about your experience and your philosophy of education, you may find it difficult to remember everything you wanted to say. Having the same conversation over coffee with your friends at school, you might easily talk for hours about the same topic. However, in the discussion with your friends, you will probably use a far more casual register of language, avoiding higher-level academic language even though talking about an academic topic. Students who are in the process of learning English must be able to speak within the comfort and safety of friends, and yet participate in activities that require them to use more explicit, formal language.

Principle 4: Meaningful engagement

The purpose of language is communication. Learning a language simply for the sake of learning a language may be interesting for linguists and others whose linguistic intelligence is their strong suit (as in Gardner's [1985] theory of multiple intelligences), but for most of us, it is no more than a tool for communication. It follows, then, that as a tool, it is best learned in the process of other learning. If you have ever tried to learn another language on your own, with no

Differentiating instruction: Think of a task you might ask students to complete. What might you do differently for students at different levels of proficiency to help them feel comfortable as they complete this assignment?

Differentiating instruction: How might meaningful activities look different for students at different levels of language proficiency?

one to use it with, you may have found that you easily forgot most of what you had studied. When learners are engaged with language in meaningful ways, they have built-in motivation to use a language through the need to communicate, opportunity to practice, and immediate feedback they receive regarding the comprehensibility of their communication.

This means that instructional activities must include daily opportunities for authentic use of language, perhaps best accomplished through student-to-student interaction where students must listen and speak in order to accomplish a task. They may be exchanging information, expressing an opinion, or solving a problem. The tasks provide meaningful application of the concepts and skills just taught, and ideally, they are of interest or personal relevance to the student.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE LANGUAGE LEARNING

The four principles of language acquisition we described are meant to be used as a guide to planning instruction. They are the aspects of language learning over which the teacher has control. There are other factors that also influence language acquisition over which the teacher has no control, personal factors that vary from individual to individual. Awareness of these factors can assist teachers in better understanding their students, recognizing the natural developmental progress, and adjusting their instruction based on that knowledge about their students.

Primary language

Perhaps one of the most important factors is the level of proficiency the student has in the primary language. Concepts and skills that children have already learned in their primary language form the foundation for learning in a new language. If they have already learned to read and write in their home language, they can readily attach new vocabulary, language structures, and organizational patterns in order to learn to read and write in another language. They have already gained the deeper understandings of making meaning from text and can focus on the surface aspects that differentiate one language from another.

When we listen to ELL students speak, or when we read their writing, we often see evidence of other ways in which their primary language influences their use of English. Recall the letter from Van. As you analyzed her writing, you might have noted errors such as "I get A in English," an error that we would not be likely to find in the writing of a native English speaker, even one with poor writing skills. This is an example of a structure that Van has brought with her from Vietnamese to English. Some languages, Chinese, Hmong, and Vietnamese; for example, have no indefinite articles. They may either leave out the article, as Van did with "[an] A," or they may substitute another word as in *I bought one car* as opposed to *I bought a car*. Even though we may not speak the student's language, when we see repeated errors such as these, we can recognize that the student may be transferring his or her own language structures,

Find a student in your class who is proficient in their primary language and one who is not. What differences do you see in their English proficiency?

and we can call attention to them so that the errors do not fossilize and become more difficult to correct.

Just as we see students transfer structures from their primary language that are incorrect in English (negative transfer), we also see elements of the primary language that affect second-language learning in a positive manner (positive transfer). In Spanish, for instance, there are many words that are very similar to English words. Called *cognates*, words such as *independence* (*independencia*), *circle* (*círculo*), and *mathematics* (*matemáticas*) are easily recognized and can facilitate comprehension, particularly when teachers are aware of them and ask students to notice them as well. Many of them tend to be academic words, which can make learning some of the more difficult vocabulary that much easier (see Teacher Tools at the end of the book for a list of common cognates between Spanish and English).

Another way in which we can take advantage of a student's knowledge of the primary language in order to assist in learning English is by providing opportunities to compare and contrast similarities and differences between the two languages. Obviously, this strategy is most useful when the teacher has some knowledge of the student's primary language, but even without that, it can be beneficial to ask students to think about how something is said in their own language. They can then compare how it is said differently in English.

Age

Infants are born with the capacity to hear the sounds of all languages. As they grow, however, and are exposed to the sounds of only one, perhaps two languages, they begin to lose that capacity. The younger the child, the more ability remains, allowing them to hear sounds of a new language. Hearing the sounds, of course, leads to the ability to pronounce them more accurately. So young children learning English can sound like native speakers of English. Young children are not expected to use a high level of language in order to sound like native speakers their age. The language they must learn is generally simple, concrete, and full of context.

Older students, on the other hand, must be able to make themselves understood at much higher levels of language and in relation to much more complex ideas. They may take the same amount of time as a 5-year-old to sound like a 5-year-old. The problem is that after that amount of time, the 5-year-old will sound like others his own age, but the 13-year-old will still sound like a 5-year-old. One advantage that older students have, however, is their greater experience with language and their greater ability to use cognitive strategies such as comparing/contrasting, memory devices, questioning, or accessing prior knowledge. Their knowledge of the world as well as their knowledge of language can accelerate their learning of a new language. Although they may continue to have more difficulty with pronunciation than young students, there is a body of research that shows adolescents and adults achieve higher levels of proficiency more rapidly than young children (Snow & Hoefnagel-Hoehle, 1978).

If older students can acquire a new language more rapidly through use of metalinguistic skills, what does this imply for language instruction?

Personality

How can you encourage a shy ELL to participate in oral language tasks?

Personality traits such as shyness, risk taking, and self-confidence can influence the language acquisition process. Students who are shy likely will not participate in as many opportunities to practice language. They may rely on written language more than spoken language in order to learn. Students who are risk takers are not afraid to make mistakes, an unavoidable occurrence when learning a new language. They will therefore be more likely to speak up, practice language, and receive more feedback. Generally speaking, personality influences the rate at which students acquire language, not the level they will eventually achieve.

Motivation

Discuss with a partner: Is motivation a trait or state?

There usually is no debate over the idea that students who are motivated will achieve at higher levels than those who are not. The critical issue for teachers, though, pertains to how we perceive motivation. Do we believe that this discussion belongs in the previous section on personality, that it is a character trait? Or do we believe that it is a state that can change based on the situation, that it is a temporary condition that can be influenced by instructional methods and materials? If we believe the former, it absolves us of responsibility as teachers. If we believe the latter, it requires us to examine our instruction, designing activities that engage our students.

Another issue regarding motivation stems from students' perception of their need to learn English. Some of our immigrants arrive in this country with the expectation that they will soon return to their homeland. They may believe that they will be here only long enough to wait out a war and therefore won't need to become proficient in English. Other students may see their future here as limited due to their legal status. Without documentation they cannot see how they will be able to begin a career that requires proficiency in English or a high school diploma. These are not situations that we can change, but we do have a responsibility to prepare our students so that they will have options when they leave us. We must encourage them to take the most advantage of their education now, regardless of what they believe may happen in the future.

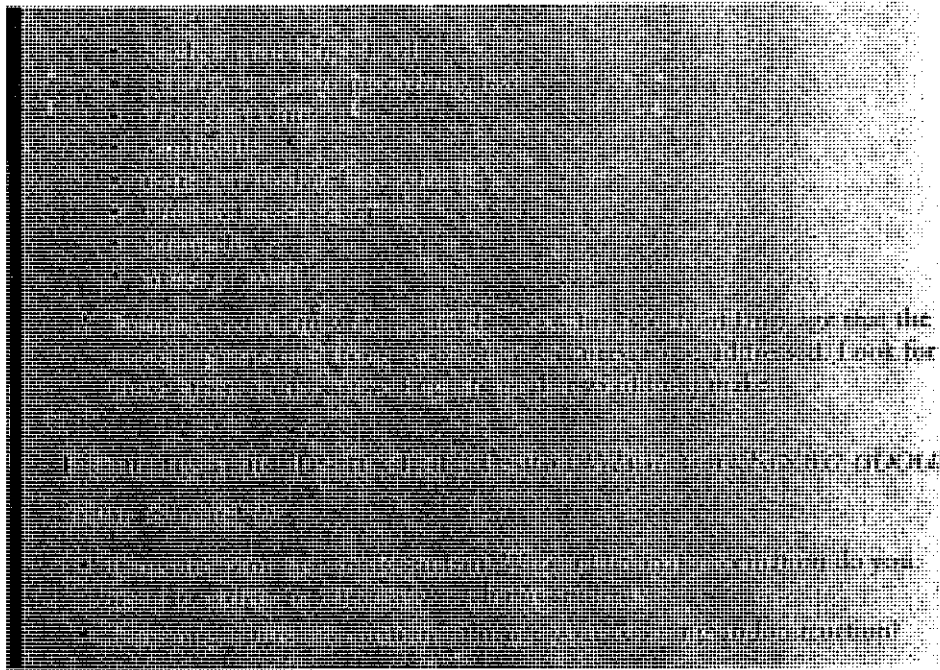
Application to Practice

Reflection

1. Select 3 of the ideas in this chapter that you think are most important and reflect on how you will incorporate them into your teaching.
2. Return to the Anticipation Guide on page 34. Have you changed any of your answers? Can you add anything to your justifications?

Case Study: Investigate Your Target Student

1. Begin to collect information on your target student. Look for such information as



References

- Bloom, B., Mesia, B., & Krathwohl, D. (1964). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The affective domain & the cognitive domain*. New York: David McKay.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-27). New York: Longman.
- Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, 19, 121-129.
- Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework*. Sacramento, CA: California State Department of Education.
- Cummins, J. (2003). Reading and the bilingual student: Fact and friction. In Garcia, G. (Ed.), *English learners: Reaching the highest level of English literacy* (pp. 2-33). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Dutro, S., & Moran, C. (2003). Rethinking English language instruction: An architectural approach. In G. Garcia (ed.), *English learners: Reaching the highest level of English literacy* (pp. 227-258). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- Gardner, H. (1985). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. New York: Longman.
- Pritchard, R. (2004). *Differentiating instruction to develop strategic readers and learners*. Presentation for San Diego State University Reading/Language Arts Conference. San Diego, CA.
- Ruiz-de-Velasco, J., Fix, M., & Clewell, B. (2000). *Overlooked and underserved: Immigrant students in U.S. secondary schools*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Snow, C., & Hoefnagel-Hoehle, M. (1978). The critical period for language acquisition: Evidence from second language learning. *Child Development*, 49, 1114–1118.
- Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook & B. Seidlerhofer (Eds.), *Principle and practice in applied linguistics: Studies in honour of H. G. Widdowson* (pp. 125–144). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Tan, A. (1989). *The joy luck club*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.