



Current research-informed understandings of second language learning & associated teaching and learning practices

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Today I would like to respectfully acknowledge the Jagera and Turrubul peoples and their custodianship of the lands on which Milpera State High School is situated.

I pay my respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. I recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

Linguistic Diversity is the norm!

Living in Australia now:

- 150 Australian Indigenous languages spoken today by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (260+ before European arrival).
- Over **300 languages** in total identified in 2016 census (ABS 2017)
- 21% speak a language other than English at home (ABS 2017)
- The Australian Early Childhood Census (2015) reports that 21.5% of children aged 5-6yrs have a language background other than English. 3% (8,252) use a language other than English when they enter school.

Coming into Australia (2017-18):

- **160,000** through the migration program (family and skilled)
- **16,250** through the offshore humanitarian program (refugees)
- **1,425** through onshore humanitarian program (refugees)
- **799,371** International students (across all sectors)
- **Approx 1.5 million** temporary visas

Bilingual students are not unusual in our school system. Every classroom in Australia will have students who are either bilingual or **emerging bilingual**.

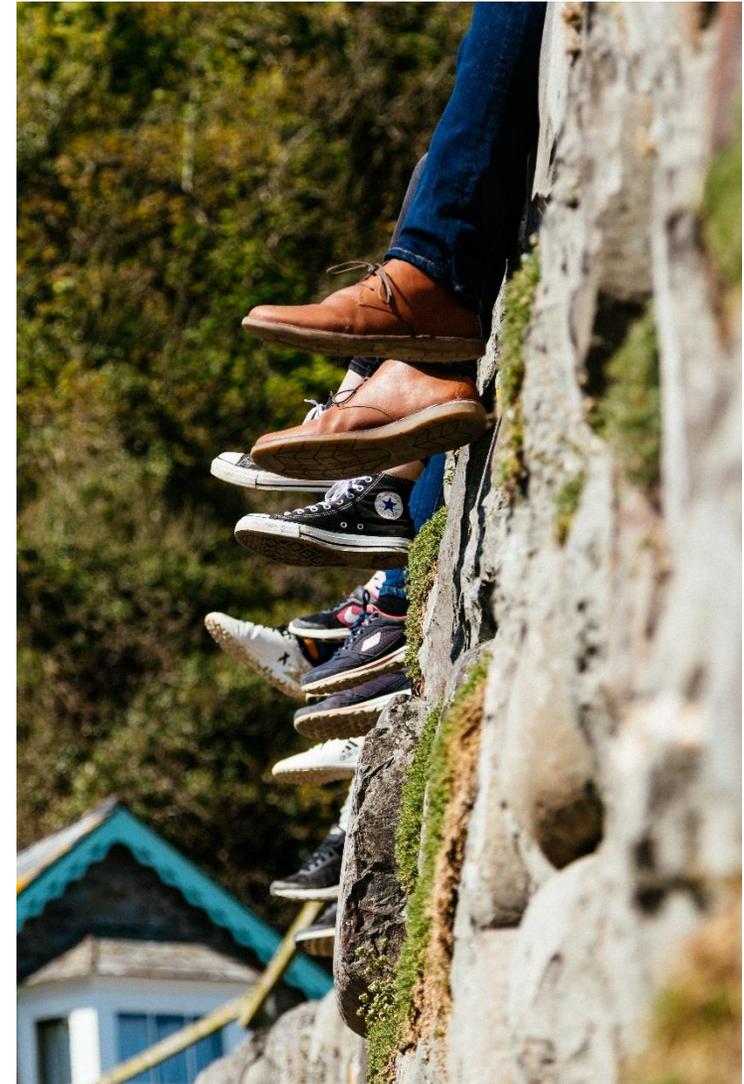
Bilingualism has enormous benefits:

A source of neuroplasticity – repeated language selection creates new brain pathways and supports attention and other cognitive benefits.

A source of social connections – through family, travel, intercultural understanding.

A source of economic benefits – bilingual skills can be helpful when looking for jobs

A source of cultural benefits – through recognition of the Indigenous and migrant communities who enrich all our lives.



Take a moment to reflect on your own language story and your experiences of bilingualism, personally and/or professionally. Consider some of the ways in which you nurture your own and/or other's bilingualism.

Our interest today is with the students we teach.

So, who are the emerging bilingual students in our education system and how do we nurture their language capacity?

These students may be:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Students with Maori and Pacific island backgrounds
- Students of Australian South Sea Islander background
- Immigrants and temporary visa holders from non-English speaking countries
- Students with a refugee background
- Children born in Australia of migrant heritage where English is not spoken at home
- Children returning from living abroad
- Children of deaf adults who use Auslan as first language
- International students from non-English speaking countries

These students are classified as **English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) if they are learning **Standard Australian English (SAE)**, while simultaneously learning the curriculum through SAE.**

Concept 1: Multi-competence (Cook,2016)

...There is no intrinsic reason why learning a second language should be the same as learning a first. Learning a first language is, in Michael Halliday's memorable phrase, 'learning how to mean' (Halliday 1975) – discovering that language is used for relating to other people and for communicating ideas... People learning a second language already know how to mean and know that other people have minds of their own. (Cook, 2016)

L2 (Language 2) learners cannot become *monolingual* native speakers by definition – they already have a first language present in their minds.

Cook (2016) suggests that the capacity of language learners to combine first language (L1) and the developing L2 is '**multi-competence**'.

Implications of Multi-competence

- The language that emerging bilinguals produce reflects their developing language systems of multi-competence.
- Their second language development is not happening independently of L1.
- Language output needs to be evaluated against where they are in their language learning journey.
- They should not be judged against the standards of a 'native' speaker.
- In the context of school, this requires the use of appropriate assessment tools to track English as *an additional language* development (aka Bandscales).
- It also requires language pedagogy – more of this, later...

Video 1: School in China “To school time”

Reflect on the multi-competence of this student as he draws on his developing knowledge of English systems (lexis, grammar) and communication strategies (in listening, in speaking) to tell me about his prior schooling.

Note a few examples of what the student knows and is drawing on to communicate. (Not what they lack!)

Take a moment to share with the person next to you.

Concept 2: Conversational/Academic Language Proficiency distinction (Cummins, 2000).

An important question for education systems, school leaders and teachers to consider is:
What is the '**extent and nature**' of support required to enable EAL/D students to succeed academically?

Our definition again:

Students are classified as English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) if they are learning Standard Australian English (SAE), while simultaneously learning the curriculum through SAE.

How much proficiency in a language is required to follow instruction in that language?

What is the nature of 'proficiency' in the context of school?

BICS vs CALP (Cummins, 2000)

A fundamental distinction is made between conversational and academic aspects of language proficiency.

- Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS): conversational, context-embedded, cognitively undemanding
- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) : academic, context-reduced, cognitively demanding

Why?

Research dating from the 1970s showed that even when English language students could converse easily, they frequently performed poorly on English academic tasks.

The point of the research-informed distinction was to **warn against the premature removal of students, based on surface level fluency, from programs of language support.**

In other words:

BICS might suggest the presence of CALP. However, achievement of CALP can take a number of years. This is based on research comparing the performance of EAL/D students against English speaking peers on standardised school tests.

Video: Developing CALP

What evidence can you see in this video of developing CALP? Share your examples with your neighbour.

So how long does it take to achieve *academic* proficiency?

Researchers compared the performance of English language students with their English speaking peers on standardized academic tests (to get at CALP).

They found:

- 8-11 years on arrival: within 2 years
- 5-7 years on arrival: 5-7 years
- 12-15 years on arrival: substantially below peers after 4 years

What factors are at play here, that might cause this variation?

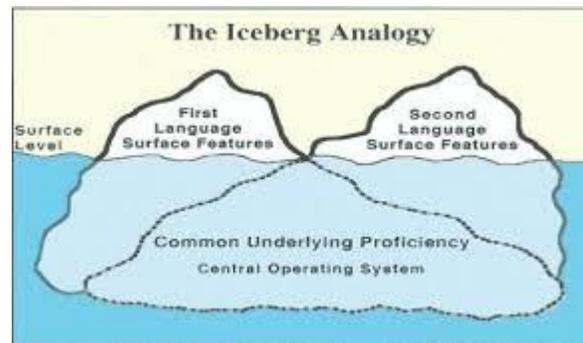


Concept 3: Interdependence hypothesis

Cummins (2000) uses the term 'Common Underlying Proficiency' to refer to the interdependence of L1-L2 academic proficiencies.

He refers to this as a central processing system consisting of:

- Cognitive and linguistic abilities
- Specific knowledge gained from experience and learning



Academic language proficiency transfers across languages such that students who have developed literacy in their L1 will tend to make stronger progress in acquiring literacy in L2. (Cummins 2000, p. 173)



Implications of Interdependence Hypothesis

For younger (aged 5-7 years) English language students:

- Limited or no exposure to learning at school, and literacy is not developed in L1
- These students might need the whole of primary school to reach academic proficiency in English and will need *appropriate language pedagogy for that time*.

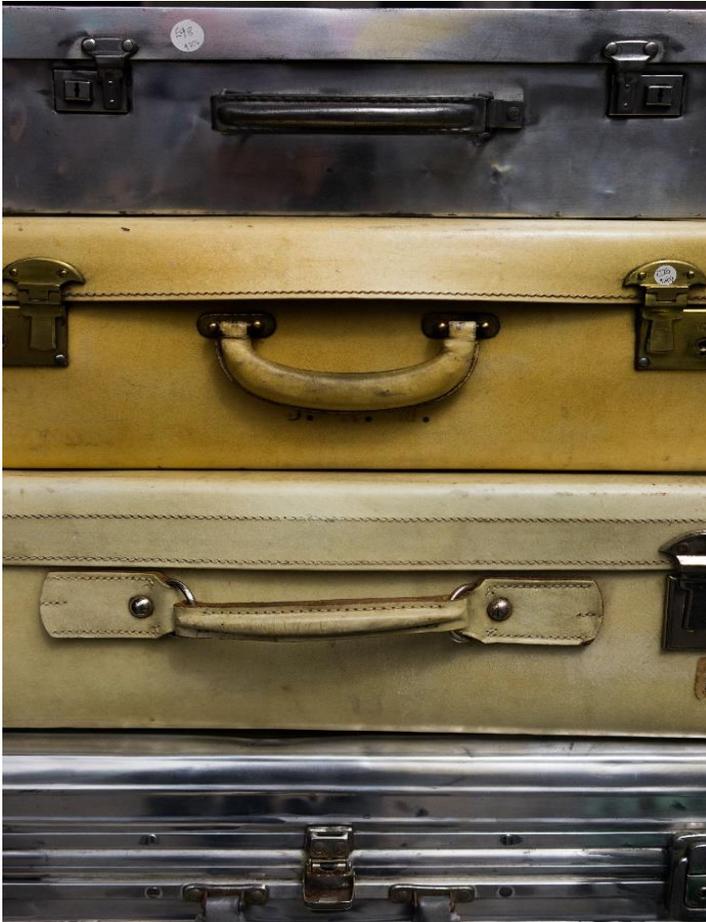
For upper primary aged English language students:

- If they have had access to comparable schooling and thus have developed L1 literacy and age-appropriate school knowledge, they will progress more quickly, *given appropriate language pedagogy*.

For secondary aged English language students:

- If they have had access to comparable schooling and thus have developed L1 literacy and age-appropriate school knowledge, they have a solid foundation for their learning. However, the older they get, the more the linguistic demands of the curriculum, and so *continued language pedagogy is essential*.

Refugee schooling experiences



- The refugee journey may involve long periods of transit in refugee camps or urban centres (e.g. Pakistan, Bangkok) – not safe, hostile locals, indefinite waiting.
- School may be not available, or the situation is too dangerous to allow children to attend
- Demand outstrips supply, many children do not have access; conditions are dire: lack of shoes/clothing, harassment when travelling to school, lack of toilets, children needing to work, lack of information about schooling, overcrowded classrooms, discrimination and corporal punishment
- These factors result in significantly disrupted schooling and this may impact rate of learning.

Implications for pedagogy

In planning for language pedagogy, we must consider both **the language proficiency of the student** and the **cognitive and linguistic demands of the learning task**.

Let's consider the learning task through two continua.

Context embedded:
meaning is actively
negotiated, language
is supported in situ



Context reduced:
relies on linguistic
cues, therefore
requires knowledge of
language

Applying a social view of language, teachers can use classroom talk (dialogic talk) to scaffold and guide the use of academic language, in learning activities. In reporting back activities, teachers can scaffold for EAL/D learners by 'clarifying, questioning, providing models' so that together, the learner and the teacher collaboratively build the response. (Gibbons 2015)

Implications for pedagogy

Tasks also need to be cognitively demanding. Again, let's consider a continuum.

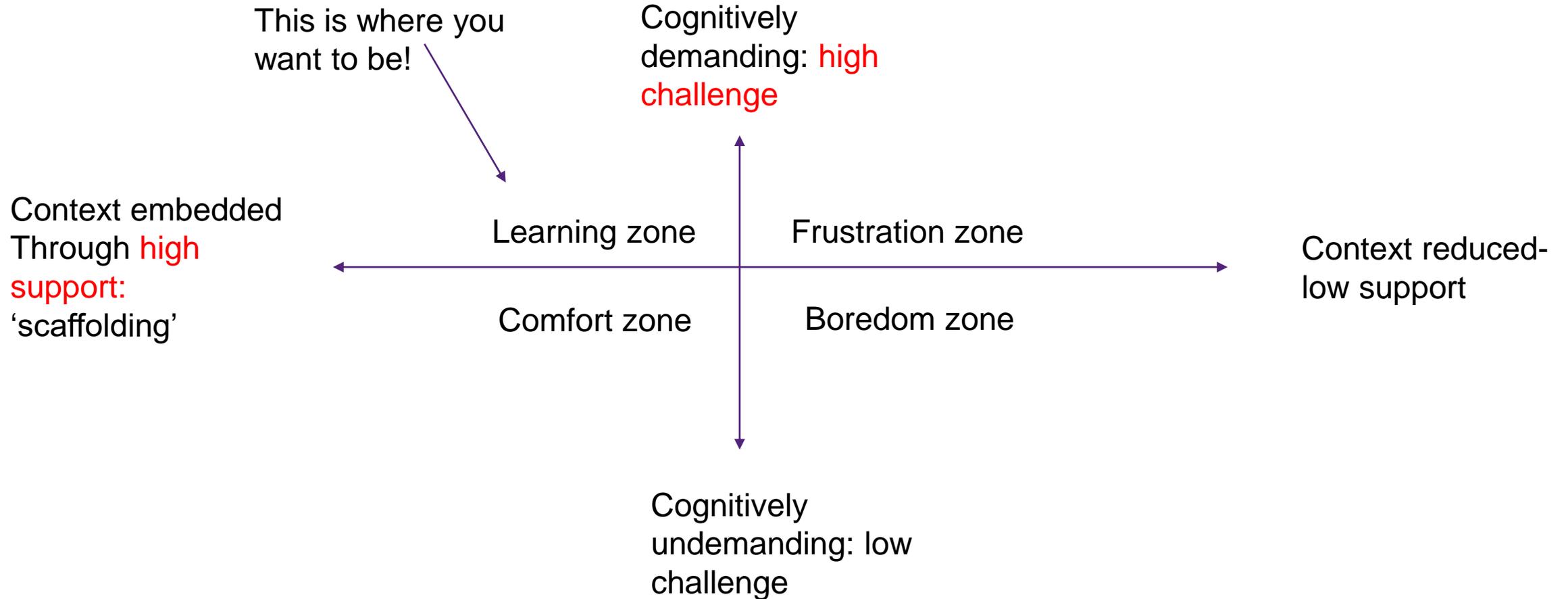
Cognitively undemanding: language required has become automatized and the task requires little cognitive involvement.



Cognitively demanding: Language required is still developing, and task requires cognitive involvement.

Drawing on Vygotsky's notion of 'zone of proximal development' we want students to move towards new concepts, new levels of understanding and new language.

Implications for pedagogy



Pedagogical practices

Equitable access for EAL students requires **high-challenge, high-support** programs.

In studies within mainstream classrooms, Hammond (2014) found that students **did not** have opportunity to provide information, arguments, reasoning – in other words, engage in deep discussion about curriculum concepts. **So they were exposed to the high-challenge but not to the levels of support which would enable them to understand and engage at a deep level.**

The emphasis should be on:

- Scaffolding: planning, selection and sequencing of whole-class, group and individual tasks to enable different levels of support
- Message abundancy: multiple opportunities for exposure to concepts, via different modes of meaning including hands-on activities, visual support, group discussion, working with multimodal texts, reading tasks, written charts. This allows time to engage with learning both the educational concepts and associated language
- Systematic and explicit teaching of language and literacy across the curriculum
- Consistent and explicit discussion of purposes and significance of learning
- Emphasis on ‘unpacking’ of assessment tasks. (Hammond, 2015)

Finally, to recap...

We have considered the following research-informed understandings and associated implications of second language learning:

<p>1. Students bring linguistic multi-competence to their language learning</p>	<p>Don't measure performance against monolingual English standards. Value their emerging bilingualism, encourage and support maintenance of L1 while learning English.</p>
<p>2. A distinction is made between conversational and academic language.</p>	<p>BICS implies proficiency in CALP. However, CALP takes longer and requires pedagogical support for development.</p>
<p>3. Extent of academic learning in L1, and stage of schooling, can impact time taken to acquire CALP.</p>	<p>Know your students, know their educational histories, provide appropriate support informed by student need and demand of task.</p>
<p>4. Language learning pedagogy should be high support and high demand.</p>	<p>Build academic language through dialogic talk, explicit teaching of language, and message abundancy.</p>

Questions?

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Thank you

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