SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING FACTS and STRATEGIES

**Facts about second language learning**

**Intercultural Understandings**

* Not all languages are written, many indigenous languages are oral and some are sign based (e.g Auslan).
* Not all languages are alphabetic or read left to right.
* Language reflects the culture in which it exists. This means that often-direct translation is not possible.
* Texts are constructed differently in different languages. Texts and the information and the order in which information is presented need to be explicitly taught.
* Intercultural understandings such as who to say it to, how to say it, when to say it, why to say it and with which props and gestures must be explicitly taught. This is the same for writing.
* Non-verbal features of a language, such as expected eye contact, hand signs and facial expressions must be explicitly taught.

**Second language acquisition**

* It takes 5-10 years to learn a language when immersed in that language. On average students will take 1-2 years for conversational language but academic language usually takes 7 years if it is achieved. (Cummins 2008).
* There are two sorts of language students must learn: one for conversational purposes and one for academic purposes.

(see Cummins 2008 BICS and CALP; Imperical and theoretical status of the distinction).

* We attach new languages and dialects to our home languages (L1) and dialects therefore it is important that the L1 be maintained.
* Bilingual students may appear to underperform until approximately 8 years of age at which they will start to outperform their monolingual peers.
* There is a developmental sequence for learning every language. This sequence is influenced by the first language (s)/dialect(s) one already has. For English Language Learners in Western Australia refer to the ESL/ESD progress map Department of Education, 2010.
* This sequence should be respected for successful language acquisition. Students will therefore be unable to learn a new grammatical concept if they are not ready for it no matter how well the teacher teaches it.
* Children will need to listen first. Teachers should understand that learning is happening even though speaking is not apparent.
* Grammatical features differ across languages and may not exist in other languages. The concept of this language feature will need to be taught alongside the language.
* Students cannot focus on meaning and accuracy simultaneously.
* Students will learn languages at a different rate depending on their prior experience, home language and the new environments in which they are learning it.

**Oral Language**

* We learn spoken language through listening first and then oral repetition. Listening and speaking are therefore of the utmost importance.
* Pronunciation difficulties are usually caused by unfamiliarity with placement of the mouth and tongue. Unless there is evidence of receptive or expressive difficulties in the student’s L1 they do not need to see a speech therapist.
* Pronunciation in any language varies according to many factors such as class or region. Pronunciation should not be the primary focus of learning a language providing meaning is comprehensible.
* Teachers should be aware that students may find some new sounds and tones difficult. Each spoken language has its own set of sounds and tones. Students may find it difficult to hear and reproduce different sounds and tones with which they are unfamiliar.

**STRATEGIES TO USE**

* Accurately model the target language/dialect at all times and don’t code switch (note that some languages use signs rather than sounds or tones.). Students must have opportunities to listen to and/or view rich authentic text.
* Listening and viewing should be honoured. Language learning is taking place although the child can be silent.
* For spoken languages, teach oral language first before reading and writing.
* Teach meaningful chunks of text first, (MCTS) and echoic phrases not single words in isolation.
* Use oral repetition and ask students to ‘chorus’ words and or phrases, to allow practice in a safe environment.
* Provide opportunities to practice learned chunks of language orally every day.
* Language learning takes place best little and often rather than in longer chunks, especially for beginning learners.
* Support students to focus either on meaning or accuracy. Decide which tasks focus on meaning making and which tasks focus on accuracy and be clear about your requirements.
* Create a rich print and non-print language environment to support the learners.
* Use realia (authentic target language materials) where possible.
* Parts of language can be rote learned and others cannot be rote learned. The alphabet, graphophonic awareness and spelling patterns can be rote learned.
* Grammar emerges out of form and meaning making. This is especially important for beginning learners.
* Grammar should be taught explicitly and in context, as children develop their language skills.
* Use anchor charts. These are generated records of the classroom experiences, and can be generated by the students or teacher. They could consist of words, pictures, simple definitions and concepts and are posted in the classroom for reference or for building cumulative lessons.
* Use information gap tasks to encourage communication between students.
* Explicitly teach register, including field, tenor and mode. See ACARA EAL/D Teacher Resource Glossary 2012.
* Know and model the cultural gestures, tone, register that accompany that language. Identify the props explicitly for students.
* Allow students to use their L1 in the classroom and the wider school environment to clarify their understandings of new language and concepts.
* Give students opportunities to think about learning in their L1.
* Give students opportunities to compare and contrast their L1 and the new language(s)/dialect(s).
* Language learning strategies (how to learn the new language) must be taught.
* Time is required to allow students to translate, process and retranslate responses to communication. This means teachers should allow appropriate ‘wait time’ when questioning students.
* Language learning requires students to make errors so that they may learn from these ‘errors’.
* Language learners should be encouraged to take risks.
* Encourage parental and community engagement to create reciprocal relationships.
* Know the current abilities and language levels of your students and plan and teach accordingly. Use documents such as the WA ESL/ESD Progress Maps or the ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression to assess/plot students individually, establish needs and relevant strategies and monitor progress.

**Suggested Further Reading**

1. *NARIS Capability Framework for Teachers of ATSI EAL/D Learners*
2. *ACARA EAL/D Teacher Resources 2012* <http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/student_diversity/eald_teacher_resource.html>
3. Department of Education and Training Western Australia, 2010, *English as a Second Language/English as a Second Dialect Progress Map*
4. Cummins, J. 2008, ‘BICS and CALP: Empirical and Theoretical Status of the Distinction’, in Street, B. & Hornberger, N. H. (eds) Encyclopedia of Language and Education, 2nd edn, Volume 2: Literacy, pp. 71–83, Springer Science + Business Media LLC, New York

[http://www.wisd.us/campus/whs/social\_studies/edd/Fall09/8344/Articles/CumminsBICSCAL PSpringer2007.pdf](http://www.wisd.us/campus/whs/social_studies/edd/Fall09/8344/Articles/CumminsBICSCAL%20PSpringer2007.pdf)

1. Angela Scarino and Anthony J Liddicoat. 2009 *Teaching and Learning Languages A Guide*
2. *Linking Languages and Literacy- Information for parents and teachers*

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1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child <http://www.unicef.org/index.php>