DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION learners first

English as an Additional Language - Teaching and Learning Expectations

Acquiring a new language has some similarities to the stages children go through as they learn their first language. To make progress and to achieve the same level of educational success as other students whose first language is English, EAL students must develop literacy in English by:

- learning to communicate in English though speaking and writing English or through the use of devices using the English language if a disability requires the use of assistive technologies
- learning to read English
- learning to comprehend when listening to spoken English
- continuing their learning in all learning areas using English, at the same time as they are learning through English and communicating with English
- learning about the Australian school system
- developing new cultural understandings and social registers, in both the educational context and in the wider community.

There are two broad categories that teachers are mindful of, support, and plan for in their expectation of increased language proficiency in their EAL students. Language development in these categories will of course depend on a number of factors, some of which are mentioned here.

Gibbons (1991) refers to playground language and classroom language. Playground language enables children to make and communicate with friends, join in and play games and take part in a number of day-to-day activities that help develop and maintain social interactions. This proficiency develops through face-to-face communication and engagement with their physical environment and the use of the senses to read the environment and the body language of others. Classroom language on the other hand is the language of concepts, ideas and abstractions used in the classroom to access and learn the curriculum. The development of classroom language is crucial if a student is to succeed academically in further and tertiary education. Cummins (2008) uses the terms BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) for playground language and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) for classroom language. Both these capabilities develop at different rates and over a period of time. It is thought that for many EAL students, BICS takes about two years to develop and CALP between five to ten years. A student who has experienced trauma or disrupted schooling may take up to twelve years to master the language required for success in the school context.

Many students entering school in Australia in the later primary school years and up are faced by a rapidly growing gap in their level of proficiency when compared to native speakers. They have to learn subject content through English while learning English, and need to learn at a much faster rate than their peers in order to close the gap. This highlights the importance of intensive English language support in the first two or three years followed by

ongoing support. Progress through the Beginning and Emerging phases is often rapid, but slows down in the Developing and Consolidating phases. Students often "plateau" and require targeted intervention to move on.

It is important to recognise that a child's proficiency in playground language or BICS is not an indication of their proficiency in classroom language or CALP.

References:

Cummins, J. (2008). 'BICS and CALP: Empirical and theoretical status of the distinction', in B Street & NH Hornberger (eds), *Encyclopedia of language and education, Volume 2: Literacy,* 2nd edn, Springer Science + Business Media LLC, New York,

Gibbons, P. (1991). *Learning to Learn in a Second Language*. Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teachers Association.