

Second Language Learning Theories and How They Support Classroom Practice



EAL Conference

Monday 15th May 2017

Sian Reading

Aims

- To develop an understanding of some of the theories about language for bilingual learners
- To consider how these theories can support classroom practice

What is 'bilingualism'?

- A bilingual or additional learner is a term used to describe a learner who has come to school learning English as their additional (or second) language



The importance of learning about bilingual theories

- Utilising our own beliefs in our practice as teachers
- A better understanding of the language learning process will ensure we are more effective in our teaching
- The need to include the social, cognitive and linguistic aspects of additional language development

Activity

- **Discuss your thoughts about these statements?**

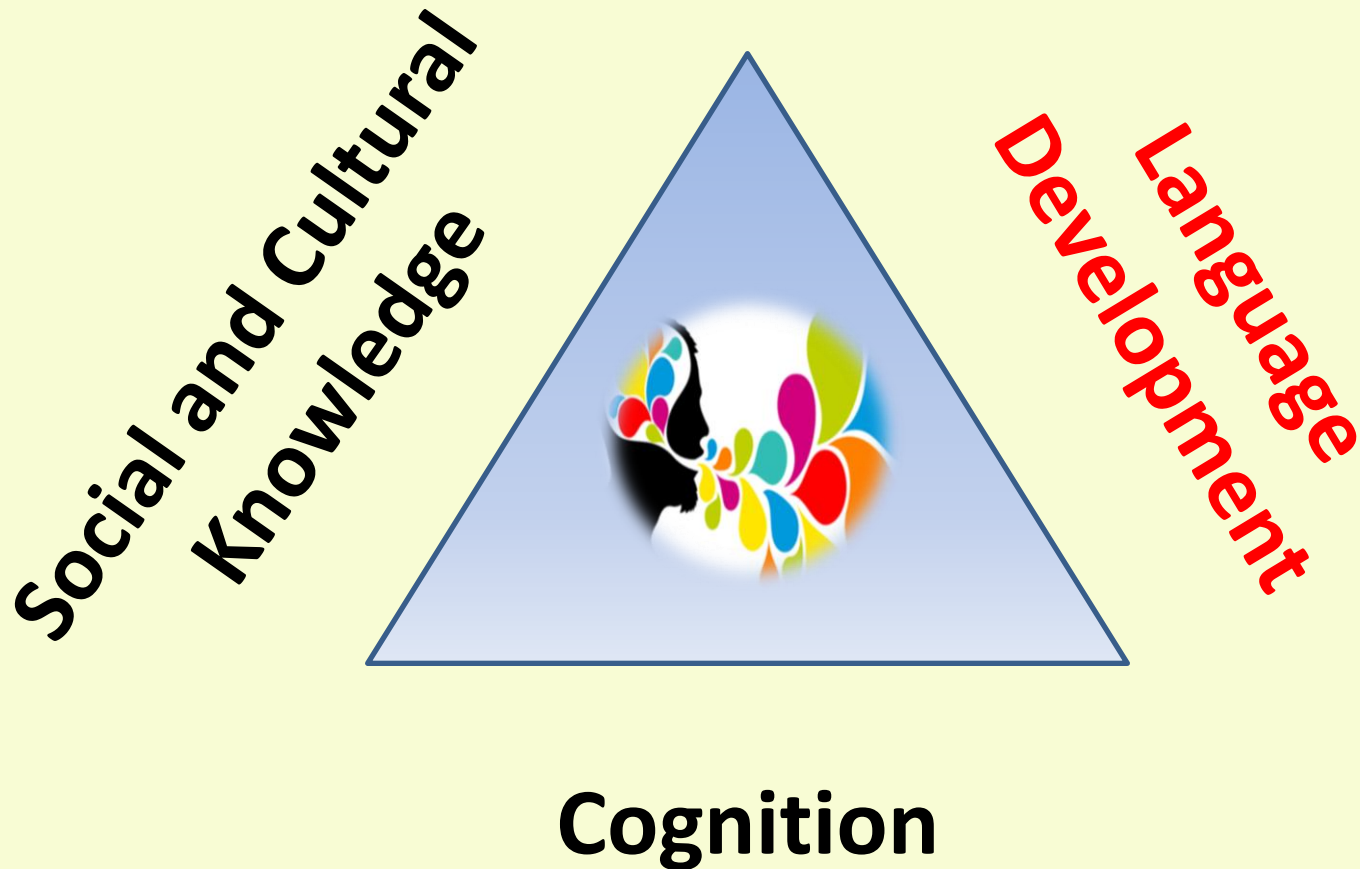


Language Development

- Pre 2002 there was belief held that children learn language by mimicking the adults around them through repetition and practice (Bloomfield 1933)
- 2002 Noam Chomsky argued we are born with innate language principles
- Chomsky's theory also challenged and questions around language, society and culture raised

Balancing the needs of the bilingual learner

The bilingual learner:



How we acquire language

Children proceed through a similar process of language development in their first language across the world:

- Learn the sound
- Distinguish between vowels and consonants
- One word utterances by the 2nd year
- Two and three word utterances by the end of the 2nd year



Language and meaning

Language and meaning

dog

**The way the
word is written**

**The way the
word is
pronounced**



An animate being

Cultural knowledge:

- **Dogs are pets**
- **Dogs are scavengers**

A countable noun

Language and meaning

- Think about a time you may have asked a bilingual learner to do something new. Did they have difficulties because they had no previous experience or knowledge?
- How can we make the classroom more explicit for new bilingual learners?



Language Development

If only language needs are met (provision outside the mainstream classroom) children will be:

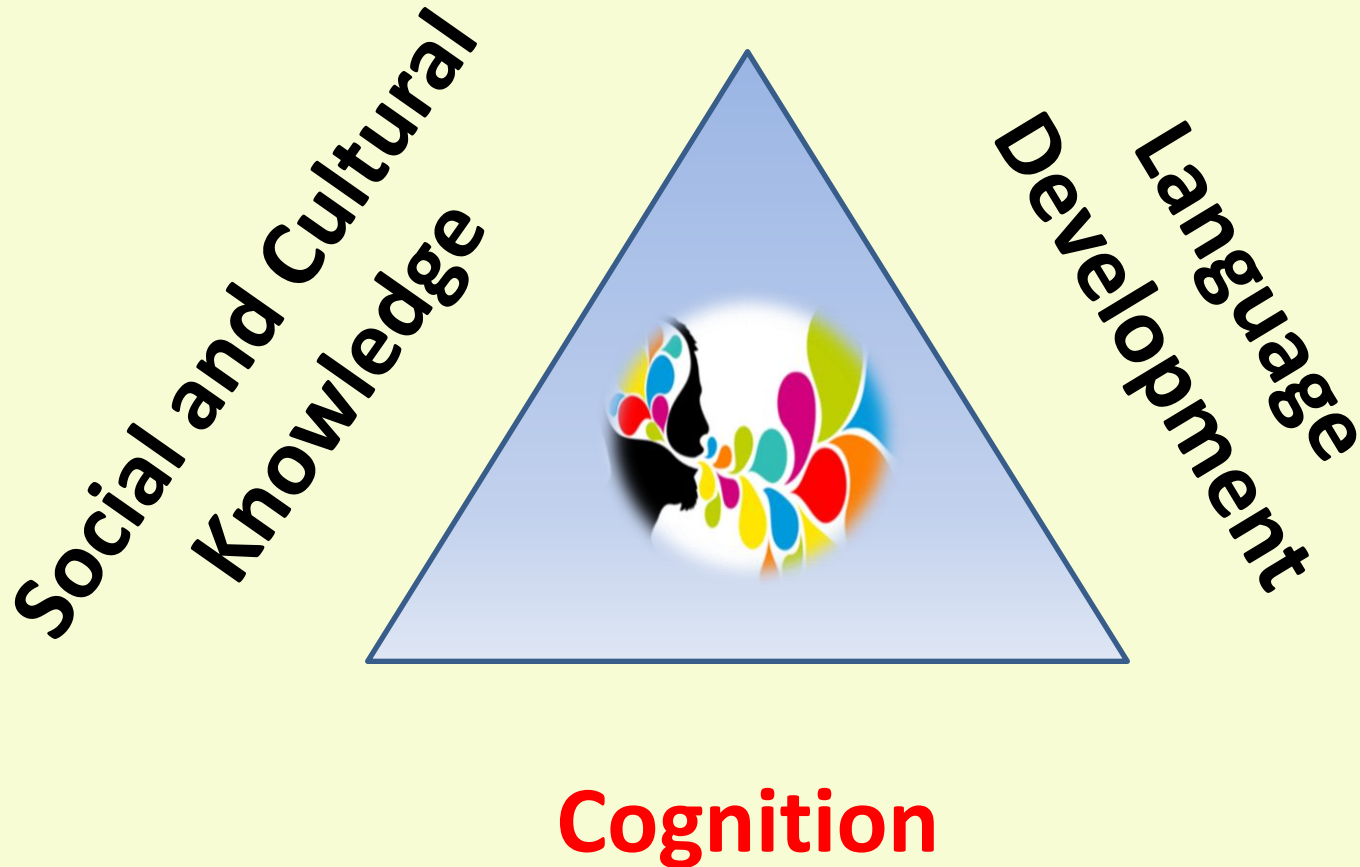
- technically proficient
- socially isolated
- dependent on adults
- unable to apply language across the curriculum
- prevented from making progress

Support in the classroom: Language Development

- As teachers needs to have a good understanding of pupils' language experience
- Also need to understand the linguistic background of your learner and their experience of language outside of school
- Provide opportunities for language exploration
- Don't neglect the pupil's first language

Balancing the needs of the bilingual learner

The bilingual learner:



Cognition

Language expert Jim Cummins distinguishes between two types of language:

1. **Conversational language**

- **BICS** (basic interpersonal communication skills)
- The skills to understand and take part in conversations and activities

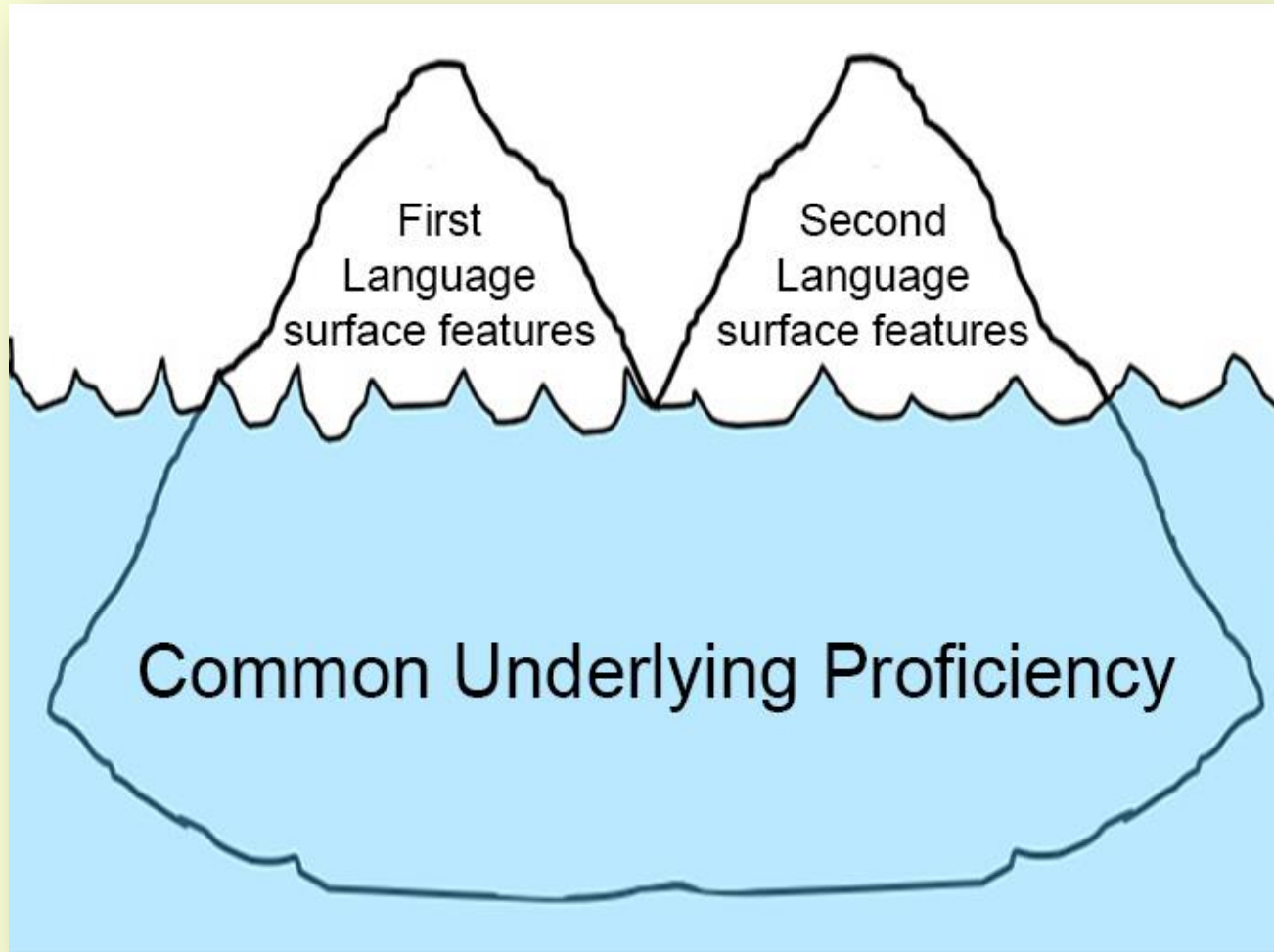
Cognition

Language expert Jim Cummins distinguishes between two types of language:

2. Academic language

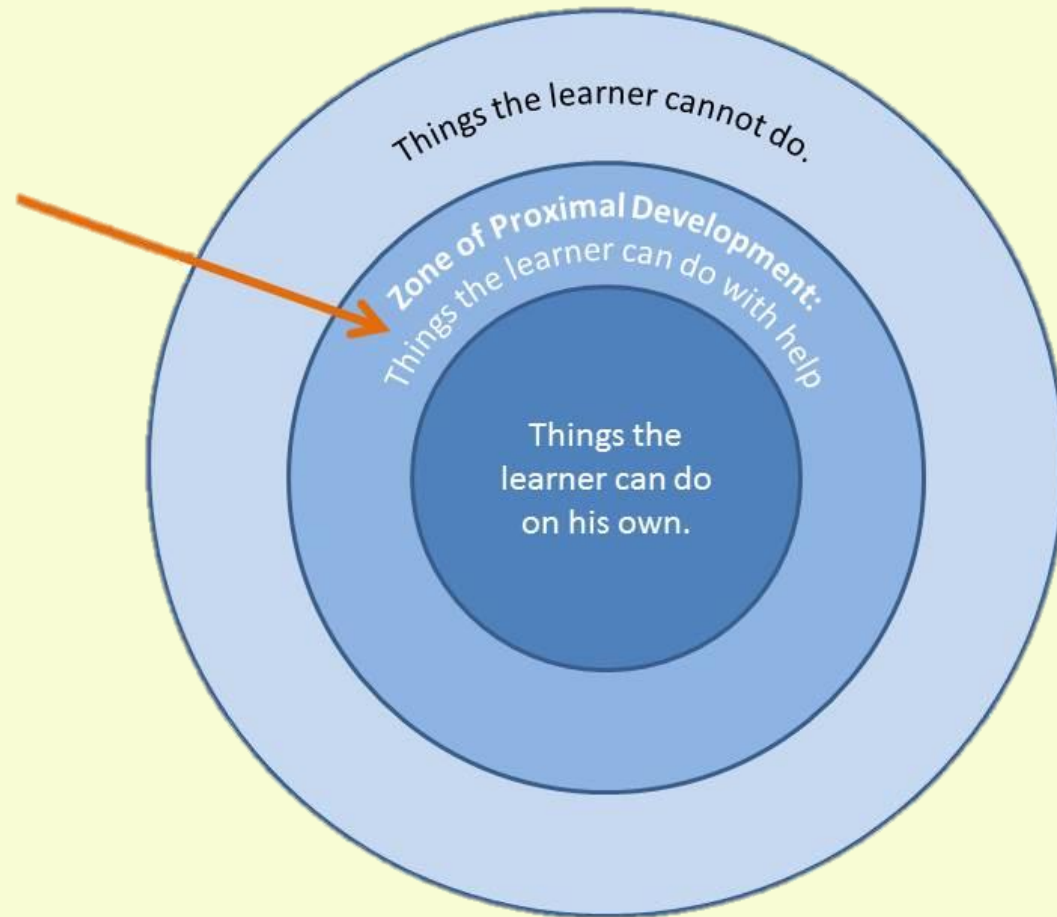
- **CALP** (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency)
- The more formal language that is essential for pupils to demonstrate what they have learned or achieved

The importance of first language development



Scaffolding

The zone of proximal development



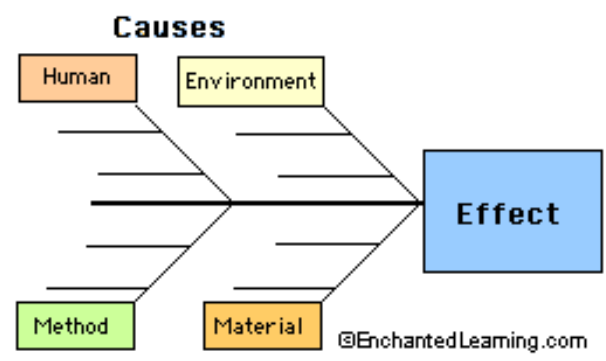
Cognition: Bilingualism

- Working memory
- Problem solving
- Languages are linked in the brain by a central processing unit- any language acquisition helps the whole cognitive system to develop; the brain has the ability to transfer across languages
- Opportunities to talk

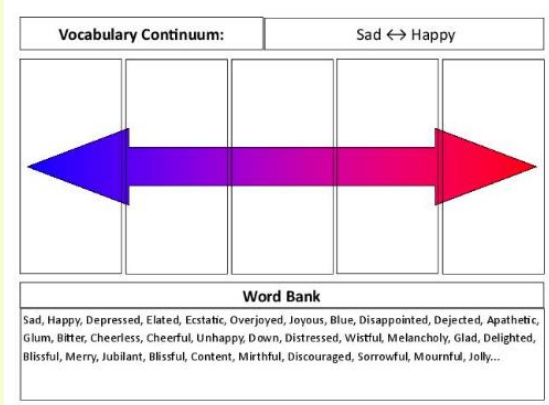
Support in the classroom: Cognition

- ‘Scaffold’ learning e.g. Visuals- graphic organisers / writing frames / Pre and post tutoring of new vocabulary
- Concepts- opportunities for pupils to discuss their thinking in their first language
- Carefully structured interventions to bridge the gap between what a child can do unaided and what they can do with the support of others
- Development of thinking; not from individual to social but from social to individual
- Find ways to move the social language into the curriculum language

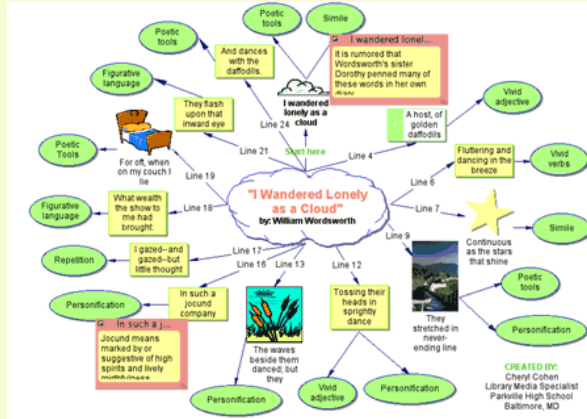
Visual- Graphic Organisers



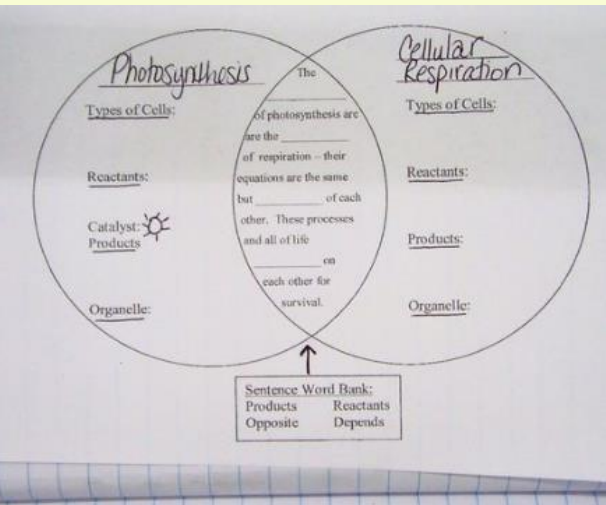
Fishbone



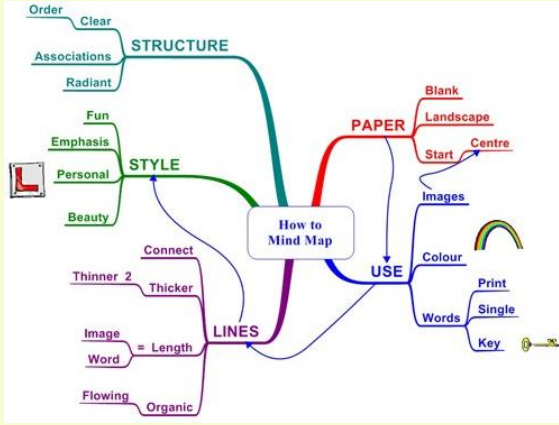
Continuum



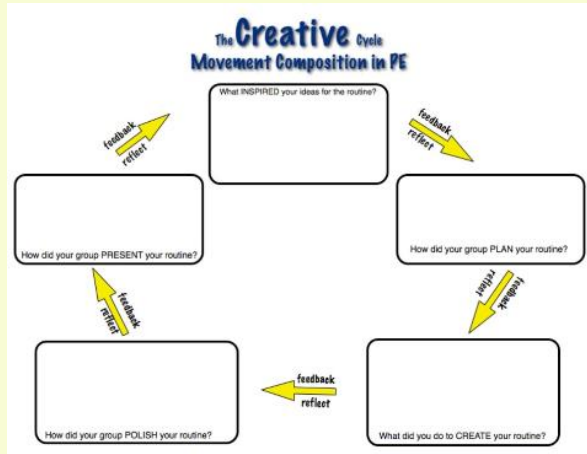
Cluster



Venn Diagram



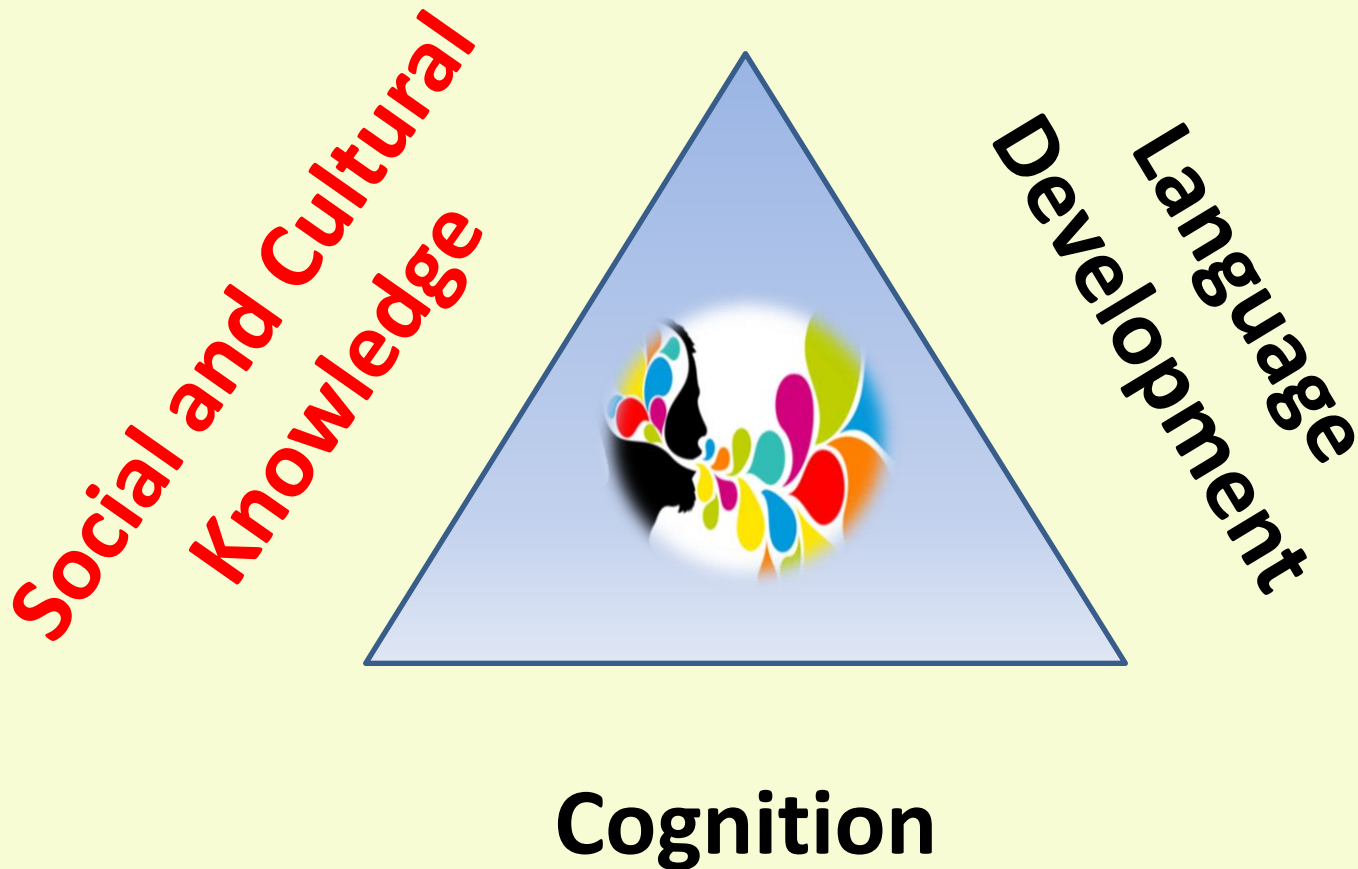
Spider / Mind Map



Cycle

Balancing the needs of the bilingual learner

The bilingual learner:



Social and cultural knowledge

- An understanding of language is essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life
- Language underpins participation in society each child's language learning is unique and is shaped by the values and behaviours of the culture into which the has been socialised
- The differences between cultures and individuals within cultures needs to be acknowledged



Social and cultural knowledge

Code switching (or translanguaging)

- **Stockwell** (2002) defines code switching as the juxtaposition between the same speech but belonging to two different grammatical structures within the same utterance



Social and cultural knowledge

Think about the pupils you teach:

- Do they use two languages?
- Do they use English and words from their first language?
- Do they speak in their first language and include English words?



Social and cultural knowledge

Think about any bilingual pupils or adults that you work with.

- Can you think of a time when communication failed?
- Was it due to language or cultural misunderstanding?



Social and cultural knowledge

Case study

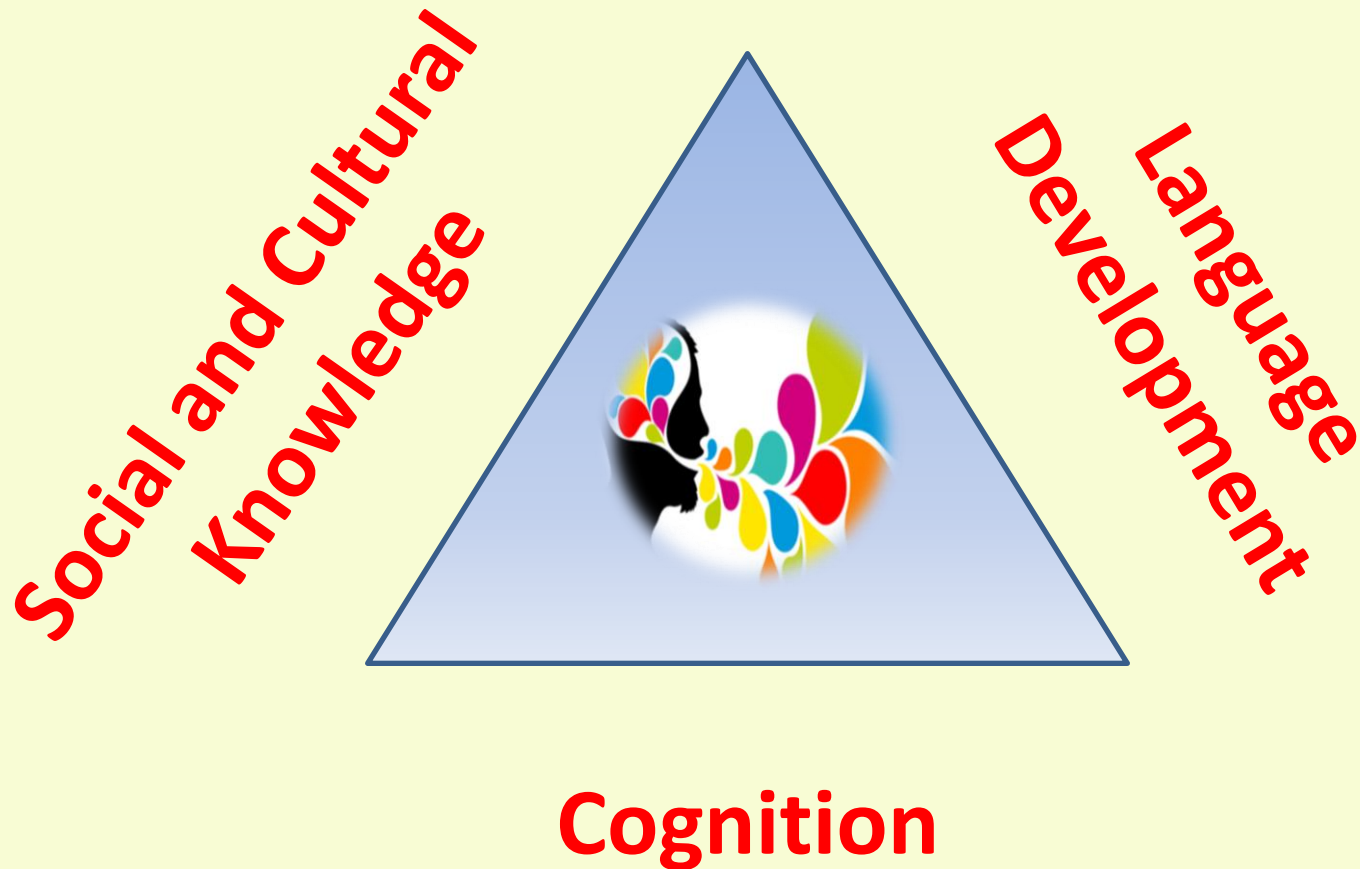
Stephen is 5 years old and currently in Reception. He is a Cantonese speaker whose parents run the local take-away Chinese restaurant. They are the only Chinese family in the area. They speak very little English. Stephen is progressing in his oral English; he is eager and quick wanting very much to be part of a group. He makes errors when speaking but the other children seem to understand him. He is reading above his age in English, however his comprehension ability varies. He was unable to identify an illustration of a family 'teatime' and showed curiosity about what they were doing in the picture. His teacher feels he is doing well but his language support teacher is concerned.

Support in the classroom: Social/Cultural Knowledge

- Background information
- Code switching- find out from the pupils themselves when they are more likely to do this
- Opportunities to use first language whilst at school
- Recognition of pupil's own culture and first language
- Parent Ambassadors

Balancing the needs of the bilingual learner

The bilingual learner:

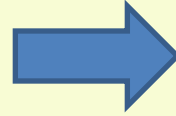




Myth v Facts

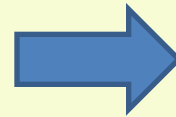


Speaking 2 or more languages to a child will confuse them



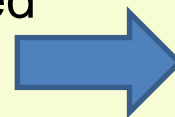
All children are capable of learning multiple languages

It is better for families to only speak the language the child will speak at school



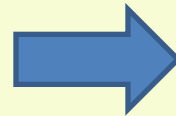
Families should speak the language they are most comfortable speaking

Young bilingual children are delayed in learning language compared to their peers who only speak 1



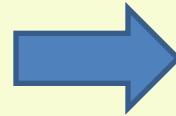
Bilingualism actually improves a child's ability to learn new words, identify sounds and problem solve

Bilingual children should not mix parts of the languages they speak



'Code-switching' or 'translanguaging' fosters culture and metalinguistic awareness

Children become bilingual just by listening to those around them speak the second language



Children require opportunities to practice communicating in context. They need to listen and respond.



Sian.Reading@birmingham.gov.uk