

# MISUSAGE AND MISINTERPRETATION OF BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION (BICS) AND COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY (CALP) IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELLS) IN FIRST AND SECOND GRADES.

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## ABSTRACT

*In this article, the author discusses the importance of integrating Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency skills in teaching first and second grade English language learners (ELLS). He also differentiates Basic Interpersonal Communication Skill (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and draws a conclusion about the misuse of both theories of second language acquisition in teaching English language learners (ELLS). Based on linguistic research and Krashen's theories of first and second language acquisition and learning, the author shows that first and second grade students who are classified as English language learners can learn the target language, English, in the mainstream classroom by implementing CALP in subject areas.*

**Keywords:** *Elementary Education, Second Language Acquisition, English as a Second Language (ESL), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Second Language Learning, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students, English Language Learners (ELLS), Second Language Pedagogy, Language Acquisition, Language Learning, Second Language Teaching Methods.*

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has been a sub-field of Linguistics for a long period of time. After the victory of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al against State Board of Education, United States Court of the Southern District in 1990, teaching English and other subject areas to English language learners (ELLS) not only requires teachers to develop intercultural competence, but to also acquire knowledge in different theories and methods in second language acquisition and second language learning so that they can be better prepared pedagogically to engage their students in the learning process. Many school districts and educators in North America feel the need to implement or develop different ESOL programs due to the influx of immigrant children from diverse backgrounds. Many states require teachers to be ESOL endorsed or certified. However, before the Court Case League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al against State Board of Education, United States Court of the Southern District, 1990, various second language theories were developed and implemented in the foreign language classroom. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are among the most adopted second language theories by teachers of English language learners (ELLS).

## BACKGROUNDS OF BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION (BICS) AND ACADEMIC COGNITIVE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY (CALP)

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are considered as two distant second language skills that play a tremendous role in teaching and learning a second language. Both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) were introduced by Cummins in 1979 and 1981. To have a better understanding of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), we have to differentiate one from the other.

CALP Basic Interpersonal Communication (BICS) are language skills needed in social situations. It is the day-to-day language needed to interact socially with other people (Haynes, 2007). BICS does not require English language learners (ELLS) to use academic language or Standard English; it simply places emphasis on verbal communication skills to interact with native or non-native speakers of English. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) refers to formal academic learning. This includes listening, speaking, reading and writing about subject area content material. This level of language learning is essential for students to succeed in school. Students need time and support to become proficient in academic areas (Haynes, 2007).

## DISCUSSION

The differentiation between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) can help us understand how these two second language theories are misused by teachers of English language learners. English language learners; especially children, can easily develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). These basic linguistic skills can be acquired through social interaction with native speakers of the language. Elementary school children that are classified as English language learners (ELLs) can acquire the basic skills in the target language while eating in the school cafeteria, playing at school or watching television at home. The acquisition of basic skills in the target language can lead us to the social interactionist concept. Ariza (2007) argues that social interactionists believe that human language emerged from the social role that language plays in human interaction. Like the behaviorists, they believe that environment plays a key role ... in the child's linguistic environment. The social interactionists view learners as participants who are actively negotiating meaning with those with whom they interact. Referring to social interactionist, Vygotsky (1978) reveals that learners bring two levels of development to their learning: an actual developmental level and a potential developmental level. These two levels are referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (Ariza, 2007).

Basic Interpersonal Communication (BICS) can be viewed as one of the first language acquisition theories for the following reasons. One of the reasons is that children who were born with no language disorders or Specific Language Impairments (SLI) can acquire as many languages that they are exposed to. Since Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) places emphasis on social language in terms of being exposed to the target language socially, we can conclude that English language learners can acquire the target language while playing to the native speakers of English. I do not think it is necessary to place elementary children in ESOL program ranging from first to fifth grade. ESOL Teachers who service children that are classified as English language learners can simply develop language skills that address communication skills. Cummins (1981) addresses psychological and cognitive factors that influence the second language acquisition process. He hypothesized a developmental interdependence influenced by the importance of cognitive skills in the language process. Cummins (1981) also reveals that first language acquisition plays a key role in second language acquisition in terms of transferring the cognitive skills used in the first language. Based on Cummins' second language theories and models, it is not necessary to place elementary children in an ESOL program. All major states (California, Texas, Florida & New York) with the highest percentage of English language learners' enrollment require elementary school teachers to be ESOL endorsed or certified. ESOL certification and endorsement lead teachers of English language learners to become highly competent. Teachers who are highly competent, ESOL certified and endorsed can teach language skills through content areas. The integration of language skills through content areas can effectively increase the fluency levels of English language learners in the target language, English.

Every human language consists of academic and non-academic skills. Academic and non-academic skills can give us a better understanding of the difference between language learning and language acquisition. Non-native speakers of a language can apply both the second language acquisition and second language learning. Many individuals who are not literate in their first language apply the process of the second language acquisition rather than second language learning. Second language learning places emphasis on academic language. Krashen (1991) views second language acquisition as a language acquired at the subconscious level which relates to how children acquire language. Later, Krashen (2007) reveals that "acquisition is the product of a subconscious process similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language -natural communication- in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communication act" (p2). The second language acquisition theory presented by Krashen is also focused on children, not adults. The cognitive process of the acquisition of children's first language reflects also on Krashen's second language acquisition theory. Both Krashen's second language acquisition theory and the cognitive process of the acquisition of children's first language can prove that English language learners (ELLs) at the elementary grade levels need not to be placed in an ESOL program. Teachers who develop intercultural competence can develop effective teaching strategies that embrace listening, speaking, reading and writing skills to respond to the academic needs and achievements of their target population of English language learners at the elementary level. We can consider that BICS reflects survival and social skills that children can acquire in the same way they have acquired their first language (s).

Second language learning is developed as a formal knowledge of a language. Krashen (2007) defined second language learning as the "learned system which is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge about language, for example knowledge of grammar rules" (P2). Further, Krashen (1987) argue that "the learned system or "learning is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge about the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules" (p2). Following Krashen's second language theories can lead us to the differentiation between second language acquisition and second language learning. The integration of second language learning theory can be merged with Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in

subject areas to teach English to first and second grade elementary English language learners (ELLs) for the following reasons:

The first is that the field of linguistics reveals that any child with no language disorder who is under fourteen years old can acquire or speak a second language like a native speaker. The application of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in teaching English language learners (ELLs) at the elementary levels can be a great asset for them to acquire both academic and social language. Language skills in English can be integrated in every subject. Classroom teachers can incorporate vocabulary development skills before introducing the concept or objectives of each lesson. English language learners need to have a clear understanding about the semantic aspect of the key vocabulary words that relate to the concept of the lesson. This can give them a better opportunity to clearly understand the lesson.

The second reason is the integration of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in the content areas for elementary children. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) must also address both literacy and reading skills. Literacy is the ability to read and write. Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols for the intention of deriving meaning (semantics). It is a means of language acquisition. Literacy and reading skills can be implemented in other subject areas such as social studies, science, and Math. First and second grade pupils are in the process of developing effective reading skills. Learning the target language, English effectively, can be a great asset for them becoming proficient readers in the second language. Tarey (2000) states that "content-based ESL is a method that integrates English-as-a second language instruction with subject matter instruction. The technique focuses not only on learning a second language, but using that language as a medium to learn mathematics, science, social studies, or other academic subjects" (p1). Further, Reilly (2000) argues that "although this approach has been used for many years in adult, professional, and university education programs at the elementary and secondary school levels are just emerging. One of the reasons for the increasing interest among educators in developing content-based language instruction is the theory that language acquisition is based on input that is meaningful and understandable to the learner (Krashen, 1981, 1982)" (p1).

## **THE INTEGRATION OF CALP IN TEACHING MATHEMATICS, SCIENCE, AND SOCIAL STUDIES TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL**

Teachers of all elementary children must understand the cognitive process in pedagogy. Many educational theorists have argued about cognitive in teaching and learning when dealing with children at the elementary level. English language learners (ELLs) at the elementary level are not exempt from the cognitive process even though they are learning or being exposed to a foreign in the learning process. Hollins (2011) as stated by National Research Council in 2005 reveals that perhaps the most important aspect of teaching and learning is how well the teacher knows the learner. Teachers need to know learners as individuals, as members of social and cultural groups, as learners with particular characteristics, and as learners at a particular point in their academic, emotional, psychological, and social development.

Teachers of English language learners (ELLs) need to have a clear understanding of their students' backgrounds. They must be aware that academic knowledge of human cognitive development helps teachers make sense of what children know and can do at particular points in their development, informs observations of children's understanding and perception in different situations, and increases the teacher's ability to employ developmentally appropriate learning experiences to build upon and extend what children already know and can do (Hollins, 2011; Kohlberg, 1986; Parke & Gauvin, 2009; Piaget, 1953; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1985). Since cognitive development relates to all children, we can conclude that Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) can be integrated in teaching Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies for English Language Learners (ELLs) at the elementary level.

Learning English as a second language requires learners to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the target language. This means that teachers of English language learners must integrate the four skills in the teaching and learning process. Linguistically and educationally speaking, it seems that the integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing could not be a difficult task for elementary school teachers who serve English language learners. The integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing can be applied in integrating Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in subject areas such as Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science.

Troncale (2002) argues that more systematic planning is crucial not only for content area teachers to become involved in CALP instruction, but also for more ESL teachers to be convinced of the need to teach their students through more traditional methods (p 6). The integration of CALP in Mathematics, Social Studies and Science can be a great asset to develop language skills for English language learners (ELLs). According to Reilly (1988) the language of mathematics has its own special vocabulary, syntax (sentence structure), semantics properties (truth conditions), and discourse (text) features. Further, she

argues that the classroom environment in which ESL is taught through mathematics content should be carefully structured so that second language acquisition can occur. Instructional activities should promote second language development through a natural, subconscious process in which the focus is not on language, but on communicating per se the concepts, processes, and applications of mathematics.

Perez-Prado (2009) as stated by Peregoy and Boyle reveal that when learning both a language and content area at the same time, ELLs need constant support and assistance. This support can come in the form of scaffolded instruction. Scaffolding can be provided through activities that build on one another in a meaningful and consistent way. When students encounter a format that is predictable and prevalent in their materials, this can enhance their ability to understand the content. The repetition of certain format gives learners an idea of what to expect and thereby an opportunity to prepare themselves to receive instruction.

Reilly (1988) states that current approaches to science and second language education based on research and classroom practice indicate a set of central notions for relating science and ESL. Science inquiry facilitates the development of ESL by providing the following: a "sociocognitive conflict" that spurs development of a new language system; a source of meaningful and relevant language input, using hands-on materials and texts with extralinguistic devices (diagrams, charts, pictures) to clarify meaning ; positive affective conditions of high motivation and low anxiety; extensive opportunities for small group interactions in which students negotiate meanings and receive comprehensible language input. Further, Reilly (1988) reveals that science gives a rich context for genuine language use. From a language acquisition perspective, science can serve as a focal point around which oral language and literacy in ESL can develop. Specifically ,science offers interesting, relevant and challenging content, opportunities for students to negotiate meanings; an abundance of appropriate language input; conditions for keeping students involved; material for development of reading; activities for development of writing; and experiences with the forms and functions of English (p2-3). Since second language learning needs to address listening, speaking, reading and writing, teachers of English language learners in elementary must effectively apply these skills in teaching science to their target population of English language learners (ELLs) students. The integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing can be a great asset for English language learners to master science concepts and learn the target language, English, at the same time.

Social studies relate to the acquisition of knowledge of history, geography, and historical facts. Riley (1988) argues that teachers can use language classes as a means of expanding social studies content to enhance language development. Conventional instructional activities may be adapted by teachers not only to enhance LEP students' language development and knowledge of social studies, but to develop their cognitive skills as well (p3). There are many different pedagogic strategies relating to social studies concept that teachers of English language learners can integrate in the teaching process for the development language skills. These strategies can focus on the usage of manipulative and multimedia materials, language experiences and semantic webbing (Riley, 1998).

English language learners (ELLs) need to develop effective lexical skills in the target language, English. Teachers of target group of English language learners (ELLs) must teach whole language approach in terms of developing listening, speaking, reading and writing when teaching history, geography and historical facts. First, ESOL teachers can identify key words from the content and develop mini lexical lessons so that English language learners will identify the semantic aspect of each term or key words that relates to the lesson. Next, reading skills can also be implemented in the lesson for the development of fluency in English. Reading skills can be implemented in different ways such as individual, jumping, or choral. Upon the delivery of a lesson in social studies, ESOL teachers must develop comprehension questions so that English language learners can answer orally. The development of questions that must be answered orally by English language learners (ELLs) can serve as a great tool to increase their oral fluency in English.

Teaching linguistically and culturally diverse learners requires educational practitioners being knowledgeable of intercultural competence that can guide them in the teaching process, because many students may not be at grade levels and need to be exposed to didactic materials that can motivate them in the learning process. The integration of intercultural competence can be addressed in mathematics, science, social studies and reading with the implementation of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The implementation of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) along with the integration of intercultural competence cannot only increase their fluency levels in the target language, English, but also give them an insight into motivation that can contribute to their academic success in the learning process.

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