

LAYERS OF LANGUAGE (AND CONTENT) ACQUISITION

(adapted and expanded, but based on work by S. Hudelson)

Language and content learning develops in ever more complex layers . The top, most visible (audible) layer is the easiest to note as it is based in the concrete and experiential - what you can see, hear, do in the here and now. The next layer begins to build on the background and memories learners have. As the learning becomes less context-embedded, the difficulty increases. Adding layers to a learner's capacity, therefore, requires careful scaffolding of the previous layers . The following provides a brief description of each layer and some typical platforms for learning.

LAYER ONE (From emerging to developing)

- ❖ *Student uses language to describe what the learner can see, hear, touch directly, etc. as in the classroom situation*

<i>Acquisition stage</i>	<i>Characteristics (listed in order)</i>	<i>Activities to support learning</i>
emerging to beginning to developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - silent period - minimal comprehension - one or two word responses - simple sentences - comprehends if information is highly contextualized - communicates simple ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constructions: dioramas, something in wood, metal, etc. - Cook - Experiments in science, math, art - Field Trips - Jazz Chants and other repetitious language - Oral language activities - lots of listening opportunities - Paint, make jewelry, build clay pots, etc. - PE games and sports - Role play common tasks – shopping, using the phone - Show and tell - Talk through a task e.g. computation problem - TPR (Total Physical Response) - Work on the computer

KEY: Students are capable of cognitive work appropriate for their age but cannot yet communicate this level of thought in spoken or written English. Therefore, lots of exposure to the language is the key.

LAYER TWO (developing to expanding)

- ❖ *Language centers on what the learner knows from her own experiences in daily life, what she has heard and seen directly but cannot see or hear at the moment. This is the language of the home and the neighbourhood. Build and expand vocabulary through a combination of classroom talk and hands-on experiences.*

Acquisition stage	Characteristics	Activities to support learning
<p>developing</p> <p>to</p> <p>expanding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good comprehension of information in context - communicates well orally with some use of approximations - can interact with native speakers with some confidence - NB: reading and writing may range widely – from emergent to expanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compare daily life in two different countries - Compare/contrast schools in Canada and the home country - Describe a movie, a meal, etc. - Describe family members, childhood memories, etc. - Describe the topography of the home country - Develop study skills: make predictions, inferences, etc. - Label and illustrate a family tree - Recall a recipe - Recall events, recipes, movies, experiences - immigration, first day at school, etc. - Remember holiday events - Remember special customs - Report about a pet - Teach a game or sport

KEY: Ongoing and expanding vocabulary work should continue and more emphasis can now be placed on how and why questions. Particular emphasis on reading and writing skills development is needed at this stage.

LAYER THREE (expanding to consolidating)

- ❖ *The learner is now able to describe what she has not yet experienced directly but can imagine, usually with the help of pictures, dramatizations, charts, and so on.*

Acquisition stage	Characteristics	Activities to support learning
<p>expanding</p> <p>to</p> <p>consolidating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good comprehension of information particularly when given both orally and in writing - fairly proficient communication orally and in writing - adequate level of vocabulary to achieve academically - can summarize, draw comparisons, justify views, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compare statistics/ data for different countries - Compare/ contrast a polar bear to a brown bear - Describe Ancient Greek dress, the prairies, photosynthesis, etc. - Explain simple machines; how a volcano erupts; the circulatory system, etc. - Guide use of reference materials - Read a variety of genres - Read about a topic and summarize the main ideas and details - Talk about ghosts - Watch a play or video and summarize the plot - Write coherent paragraphs and narratives

KEY: Reading and writing proficiency may still range from late emergent to nearly fluent. At this stage, generally, explicit grammar instruction, in context, is helpful.

LAYER FOUR (consolidating to exit)

❖ The learner is able to discuss what is brought to mind through the spoken, written or printed word, with minimal help from visuals. At this stage of development students are pretty well ready to make the transition to unassisted grade level work.

Acquisition stage	Characteristics	Activities to support learning
<p>consolidating</p> <p>to</p> <p>“exit”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - very good comprehension of information and instructions - heightened proficiency to communicate well - expanded vocabulary to achieve academically - near native speech fluency - can initiate discussion in both social and academic settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct an experiment from a written description - Conduct independent library research - Cook from printed directions - Lead group discussions - Listen to a story without pictures - Make presentations - Outline a text chapter - Put together a model using print directions - Read a story and describe the hero/ine - Read a textbook - Recall a fairy tale or fable - Recite a poem - Study for a test from notes - Synthesize, analyze and evaluate information - Take notes from a lecture - Write a letter - Write a report - Write a summary of a chapter or book

KEY: Since reading and writing proficiency may still be highly variable, consistent and explicit teaching of reading and writing should be emphasized.