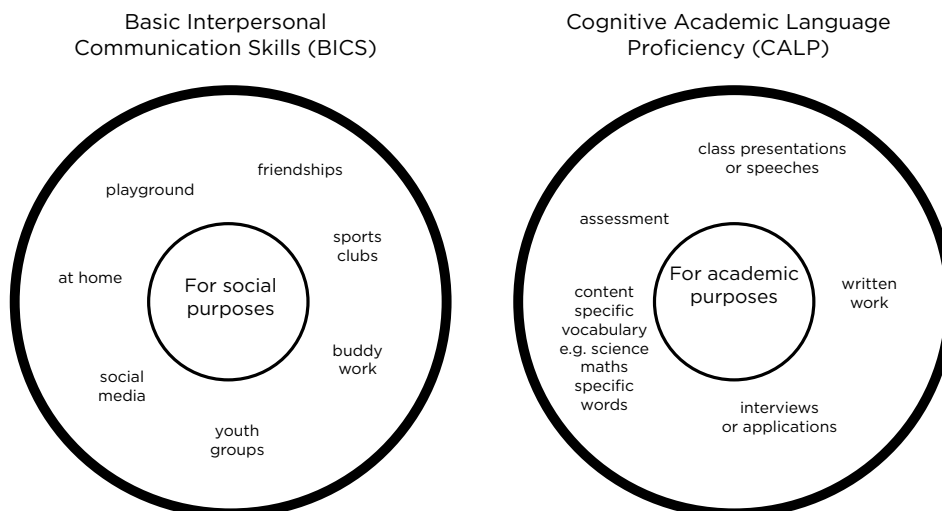# Introduction

Welcome to Module 3 of Working with English Language Learners: A handbook for learning assistants (WELLs).

The field of second language acquisition (or learning a new language) outlines key factors that can encourage and promote successful language learning. Emergent Bilinguals in schools are often in the process of learning English as an additional language, while at the same time using it to understand and produce curriculum content. As Pauline Gibbons stated, these learners are "learning to learn in a second language" (1991). Factors that can influence additional language learning include the following:

- **Language learning takes time:** Learning the language of social communication can take between six months to two years. Learning the academic language of the curriculum can take between five and seven years (Cummins, 1979, 1981). Social language, referred to by Cummins as 'Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills' (BICS) is mainly used in social or informal contexts e.g. playground language. Academic language, referred to by Cummins as 'Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency' (CALP) is the academic, technical language of the curriculum e.g., scientific words and language. Effective teachers will teach academic language and curriculum content. A learner's BICS (social language) is a springboard to support their use of CALP (academic language).

- **The significance of heritage language/s:** It is very important to support and encourage the use of learners' heritage/first language/s when they are learning an additional language. When developing CALP (academic language) in the additional language, learners who continue to maintain their heritage/first language will generally achieve better results. Using a learner's prior knowledge and concepts they already understand in their heritage/first language will help them to access curriculum content in the new language. Encouraging learners to think and discuss new learning in their heritage/first language can provide a strong foundation to build knowledge in the new language.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)

playground · friendships · sports clubs · at home · For social purposes · buddy work · social media · youth groups

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

class presentations or speeches · assessment · content specific vocabulary e.g. science maths specific words · For academic purposes · written work · interviews or applications

- **Early stages of learning an additional language:** Three phases have been identified in the table below:

First Phase	Second Phase	Third Phase
There may be a **'silent period'**, typically only a few weeks at most, in which learners listen to the new language and assign meanings to the words they hear. Learners may not choose to speak any new words from the additional language during this phase.	Learners may produce **'meaningful chunks of language'** such as 'How are you?' understood as a way to greet people, or chunks based on learned sentence patterns, e.g. "My mother's name is …, My father's name is…., My brother's name is……"	Learners may begin to feel confident to take risks and try **'original chunks'** of the additional language to express themselves, e.g., "I am feeling happy today because… I am feeling excited today because… I am feeling angry/sad today because…"

- **Later stages of additional language learning:** Over time, learners will develop a bank of vocabulary and understanding of the sentence structure or grammar of the language, and rely less on using learned patterns and models. As time goes on, learning assistants can support learners' growing knowledge of language patterns and vocabulary for different subject areas.

- **Translanguaging:** Emergent Bilinguals are able to draw from all of their language resources to make connections, to communicate, and to make meaning. Learners who have bilingual support and who are encouraged to think about their ideas using all of their language resources, are more likely to make faster progress in the new language. Learners can receive **input** in one language (through listening, reading, or viewing), and generate **output** in another language (through speaking, writing, or presenting).

- **Metacognition:** Learners bring different concepts, knowledges, experiences and learning strategies to their language learning. It is important to create opportunities for learners to develop an understanding of how they think and learn. Metacognitive strategies (thinking about how you think and learn) can help learners become independent in their academic learning journeys.

Factors that Influence Language Learning

The language learning journey for each learner may be influenced by the following factors:

- oral language and literacy experiences in heritage/first language/s.
- the age of the learner.
- the learner's previous formal education and language learning experiences.
- the cultural differences between home and school.
- the cultural differences between familiar and new teaching and learning practices.
- the similarities and differences between English and their heritage/first language/s.
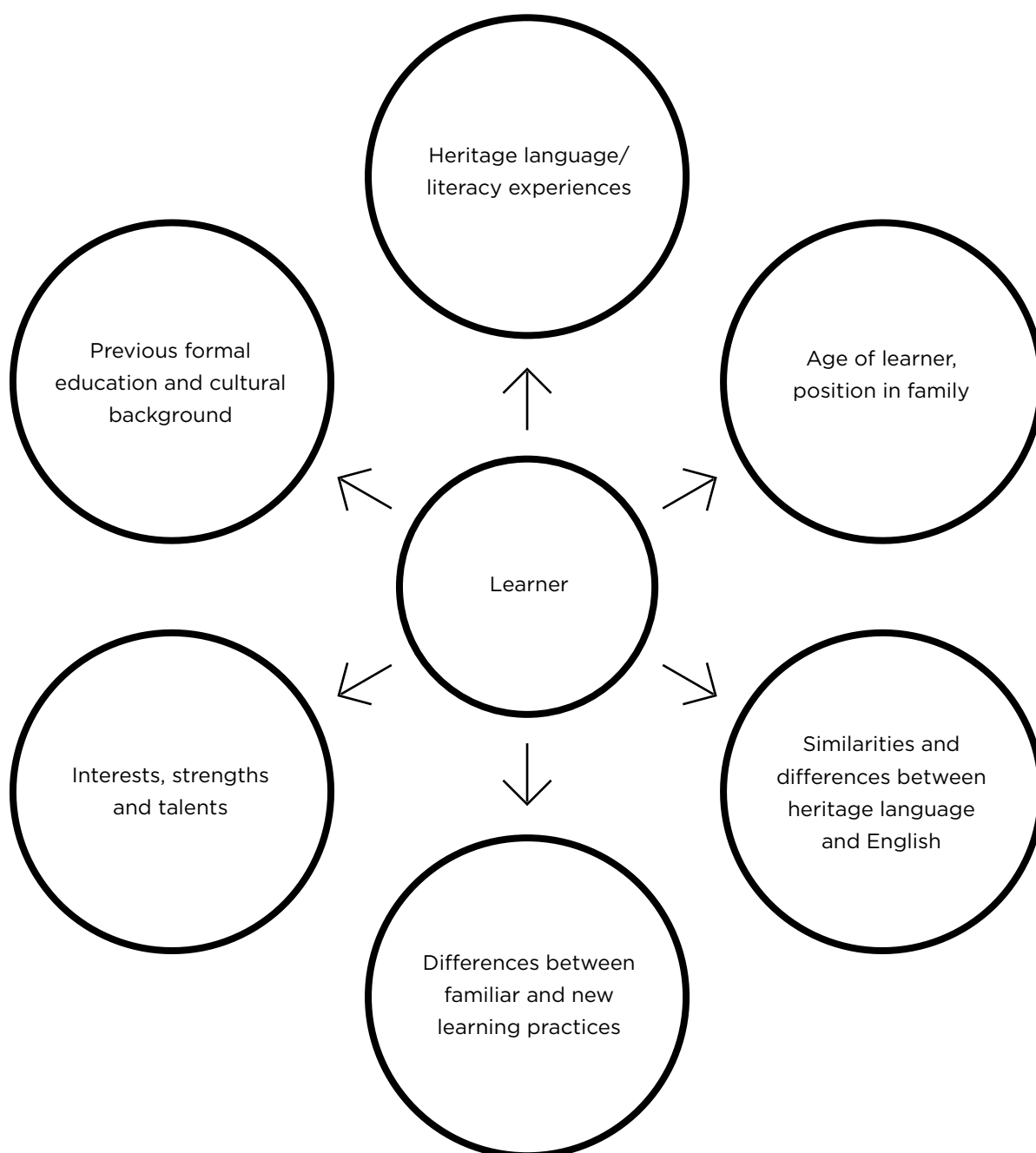- the learner's prior experiences with hearing and using English.

Seeing and Valuing Learners' Strengths

Learning assistants can support learners' language learning by:

- recognising and valuing the gifts and talents of learners.
- working in small groups and getting to know learners as people.
- developing teaching and learning relationships that build on learner strengths.
- sharing with classroom teachers effective ways to build on learner strengths.
- creating meaningful and affirming pathways as learners move from what they know to what is new.

Module 3: Task 1: Describing the factors influencing the learning journey of an Emergent Bilingual

Use this graphic organiser to guide a conversation with a learner that you support.

Heritage language/ literacy experiences

Previous formal education and cultural background

Age of learner, position in family

Learner

Interests, strengths and talents

Similarities and differences between heritage language and English

Differences between familiar and new learning practices

Recapping Key Vocabulary: Module 3

Term	Definition
Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)	Language of social communication
Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)	Academic, technical language of the curriculum
Translanguaging	Input in one language and output in another; provides opportunities for bilinguals to draw on all their language resources to support learning in English medium education
Metacognition	Thinking about how you think and learn, and using strategies to monitor and take ownership of your own learning
Input	Listening, reading, and viewing
Output	Speaking, writing, and presenting

Coming up: Module 4

Module 4 is about effective teaching practice.

Preparation: Discuss the term 'Scaffolding' with your classroom teacher. What does it mean? How does your classroom teacher plan for this? What are some ways you scaffold learning before, during, or after a lesson?

Resources

Cummins, J. (1979). 'Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters', *Working Papers on Bilingualism* 19, 121–129.

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Gibbons, P. (1991). *Learning to learn in a second language.* Primary English Teaching Association.

Ministry of Education, (2008). *The English language learning progressions: introduction booklet,* pp. 4 – 8.