

# Learning in a second language

Student teachers will need to become familiar with models of [bilingualism and second language acquisition](#) and how they relate to practice in the classroom. This section examines some aspects of the complex interaction between first and second languages in schooling situations.

Making a clear distinction between "the language of the playground", and "the language of the classroom". Gibbons (1993) argues that bilingual pupils are at a disadvantage as they are not only learning a new language, but they are learning in that language as well. They must begin to use English to develop new and abstract concepts as well as literacy skills. As Gibbons points out, the language of the playground does not offer children opportunities to use such language as "if we increase the angle by 5 degrees, we could cut the circumference into equal parts." (p.3); therefore, children learning EAL would benefit from classroom teaching based on the integration of language and content (see [Met](#), and [Snow, Met & Genessee](#)). Gibbons presents a range of practical teaching activities for reading, speaking, listening and writing and offers ideas for planning and assessment through identification of language functions in different curriculum contexts (see [summary](#)).

Gibbons argues that without support to maintain and develop their first or home languages, pupils learning EAL do not automatically become bilingual. Rather, "their mother tongue is gradually replaced by English. Instead of adding on a language, they lose one". She argues that development of children's home or first languages is crucial for cognitive development in English: "if there is a gap in a learner's language resources, then the thinking processes that are dependent on them will also be restricted".

Taking as a starting point that "reading is a cultural matter", Gregory (1996) examines the reading practices of bilingual children and their families in London, Northampton and France. She highlights how important it is for mainstream teachers as well as teachers with responsibility for pupils learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) to find out about the reading experiences, practices and expectations which EAL pupils and their families bring to school (see [summary](#)).

## Author

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