

Key Concepts from Theory on Second Language Acquisition

Cross-Language Transfer

- The skills, background knowledge, and cognitive strategies that children transfer between the first and second language.
- Most common transition for English learners is from speaking one language at home to acquiring English as a second language at school.
- Examples of specific knowledge transferred include: sensitivity to rhyme, letter knowledge (for alphabetic languages), and cognates.

Source: August, D., & Hakuta, K. (Eds.). (1997). *Improving schooling for language-minority children: A research agenda*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Interdependence Hypothesis

- As children develop proficiency in one language, they develop underlying cognitive skills and meta-linguistic awareness—awareness about content and meaning of language, rather than its external structure or sound.
- This universal understanding from acquiring one language facilitates learning a second language.

Threshold Hypothesis

- English learners must achieve minimum threshold levels of proficiency in **both** their home language and English before the benefits of bilingualism can be achieved.
- Studies indicate that bilingual students, who are proficient in their first language, do better in academic achievement in English.
- Teachers need to support the continued development of the child's first language as much as possible while also supporting English language acquisition. It gives the child a foundation to move upwards on the ladder. Then, she can move steadily up the ladder towards the joyous ride on the slide of success in school. Not supporting the first language makes the climb that much harder for the preschool English learners, and makes the joyous ride on the slide of success that much harder to attain.

Source: Thomas, W. and Collier, V. (2003). *The multiple benefits of dual language*. Educational Leadership, 61, (2), 61-65. Yeung, A. S., Marsh, H. W., & Suliman, R. (2000). *Can two languages live in harmony?: Analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS88) longitudinal data on maintenance of home language*. American Educational Research Journal, 37, 1001-1026.