

EAL Tips

What is the difference between BICS (social) and CALP (academic English)?



BICS – Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills is also called Social English. It is the language of everyday communication. It includes things like talking with our friends, reading grocery lists or answering the telephone. To achieve functional proficiency in BICS, it may take a newly arrived English Language Learner (ELL) 2-3 years.



CALP- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency is also called Academic English. It is the language of school and studies. It is related to the content areas of Math, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts, etc. It may take an ELL from 5-7 years to achieve proficiency in CALP.

Teachers may find an inconsistency between the language used by EAL students in their daily interactions and their ability to use and understand language in the content areas. By being aware of the distinctions between these two types of language proficiencies and the time differences required for each type of language learning, teachers can better help students further their language skills. More information on this topic can be found at the websites listed below:

Credit:

Jim Cummins (1979)

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/what-difference-between-social-and-academic-english>

<https://sites.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/Best%20of%20Bilash/bics%20calp.html>

If you need help finding materials, or are looking for ideas, reach out to the EAL mentor at your school, or one of the EAL Leads:

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