

Silent Period

---Steps in the development of English for bilingual pupils

1. Processing: At first bilingual children need to understand their new language environment and become familiar with the sounds, rhythms, inflections, cadences and patterns of English. They do this by watching and listening and then internalising and processing what they have observed. This is sometimes called the 'silent period'. (Some children may make attempts to replicate sounds as a processing strategy.) During this period children may participate in classroom activities and communicate by non-verbal means. They may also use their first language with other speakers of the language. This processing may take up to six months.
2. Echoing: After this period of processing English, bilingual children will move on to start using the language. Their first attempts will be echoing words or phrases they hear around them. Some of these words or phrases may come from songs or repeated responses in activities. Increasingly there will be an understanding of their meaning.
3. Formula phrasing: Children will begin to use words, phrases or short sentences which will serve them in a variety of social and classroom situations.
4. Functional vocabulary development: Children will begin to extend their repertoire of names of things. They will also start to use these words to perform different language functions. For example "Book" may mean "Where is the book?" or "I have my book" - depending on the context.
5. Basic sentence construction: Children will begin to put together their own sentences of two or three words, usually involving a verb with a subject and/or object.
6. Extended sentence construction: Children will begin to build on and extend this basic sentence construction through word substitution or through addition of adjectives, prepositional phrases, pronouns and clauses. There will inevitably be surface errors in the use of plurals, tenses and pronouns, depending upon the structure of the first language.

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Sarah Brooks