

Why do children from language background other than English sit the NAPLAN?

It takes a child two years to develop the ability to communicate in a second language in the playground, but it takes 5-7 years to develop age appropriate academic language (Cummins, 1994). Why then is a new arrival in mid grade 1 expected to sit the NAPLAN in grade 3? This child is at best developing basic playground language.

Children can speak and socialise way before they can use language for academic purposes. BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) are acquired first. This is social language such as the language needed to interact in the playground and in the classroom. It usually takes students 1-3 years to completely develop this social language. The children will develop CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) skills. This is the language needed to undertake tasks in the mainstream classroom. It includes content-specific vocabulary. It usually takes from 3-7 years or longer to develop CALP.

Culture can affect how long it takes children to learn English. Do your students come from a modern industrialised country or a rural agricultural society? Do your students come from language backgrounds using a different writing and reading system (right to left)? These factors will affect how long it takes them to learn English.

The question that needs to be asked and a answer given is

Why was the exemption for students who have been learning English in Australia for less than two years pre-2006 (AIM) changed to exemption only for one year post 2006 (NAPLAN)?

It doesn't make sense!

Recommendation

Exemption of students who have been learning English in Australia for less than two years in sitting the NAPLAN.