

Assessing EAL: purpose & methods



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Preamble

- The Bell Foundation has funded an eighteen-month EAL assessment project, to produce a research-based and practice-informed assessment framework:
 - Separate scales for primary and secondary,
 - Guidance for teachers and schools,
 - Practitioner advice will be important in developing the assessment and evaluation framework.
 - The framework is to recognise the wide range of pupil background educational experiences and proficiencies in language(s) in an increasing mobile and diverse school population.



Profiles

- EAL learners are a heterogeneous group. The profile of an EAL learner's knowledge and skills is shaped by:
 - Age;
 - First language educational history
 - First language literacy
 - English language proficiency
 - English-medium schooling experience
 - Academic track record
 - Family and community circumstances.



Purposes

- An EAL assessment framework has several functions:
- **Profile on entry:** through interview, evaluation, formal measures
- **Inform expectations:** identify strengths as well as areas of need. Over time observe trajectories of EAL pupils with particular profiles; understand potential, set appropriate targets.
- **Orientation:** where did I start, where am I now and where am I going?
- **Feedback into learning:** distinguish language issues from conceptual /content issues, and indicate where individuals might best focus attention.
- **Feedback for management:** aggregated for use by management and policy makers (as well as pupils and teachers): global indicators of learning progress and outcomes of EAL pupils.
- All forms of assessment share the same functions: to evaluate and provide evidence that **promotes learning.**



Progression

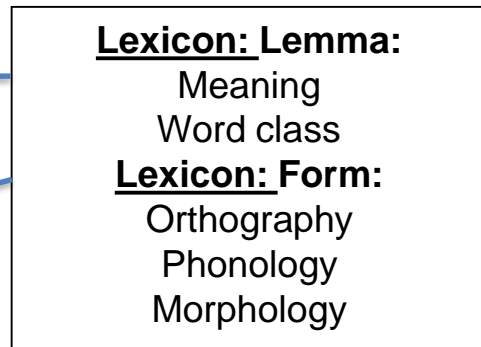
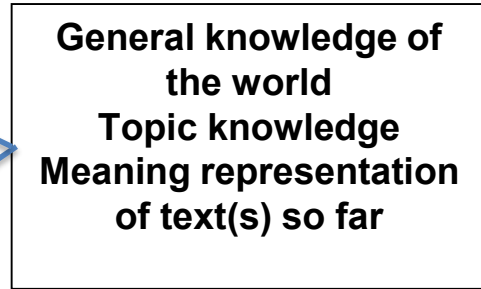
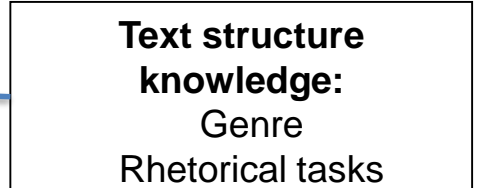
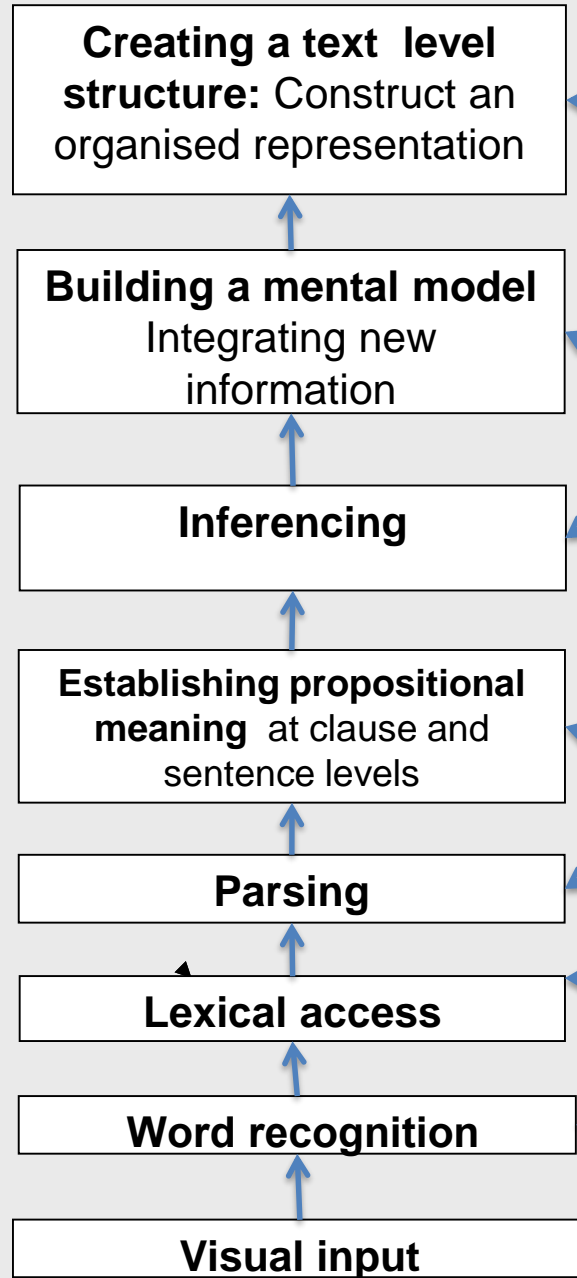
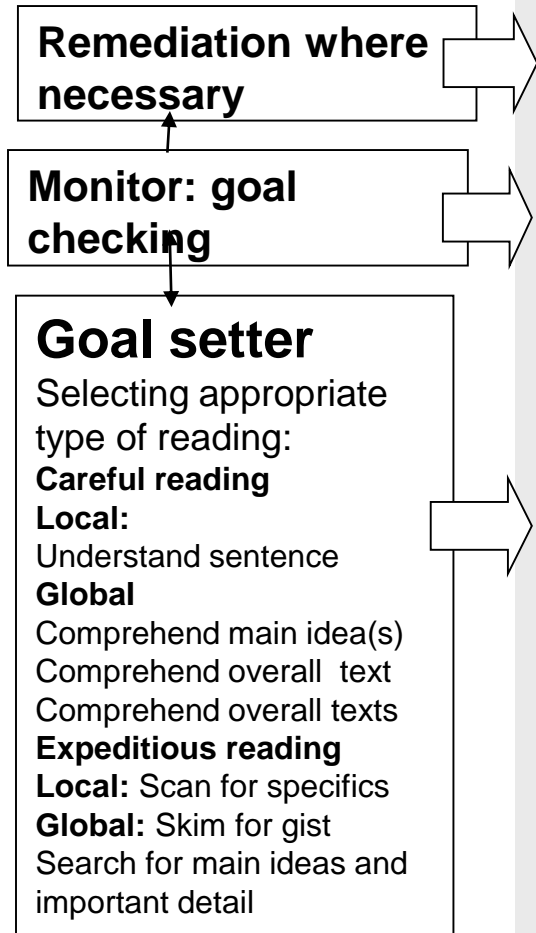
- The notion of progression is fundamental to learning, whether we use terms such as ‘standards’, ‘levels’, ‘phases’ or ‘stages’.
- We require a global scale against which all unique learner profiles can be evaluated.
- This enables a common understanding among practitioners, valuable for teaching and administrative purposes.
- Our framework must also measure or evaluate a range of aspects of language proficiency, relevant to the needs of EAL pupils.
- The framework should illustrate pupil achievement through performance exemplars that characterise levels in particular knowledge and skills.
- Regarding measurement and evaluation, the complementary roles of classroom assessment and psychometric tests should be considered.



Constructs

- Thus there are several different aspects of language competence that we must evaluate.
- We attempt to describe these explicitly by defining *constructs* – a model of progression in a particular skill or domain.
- An example for the construct of *Reading*:

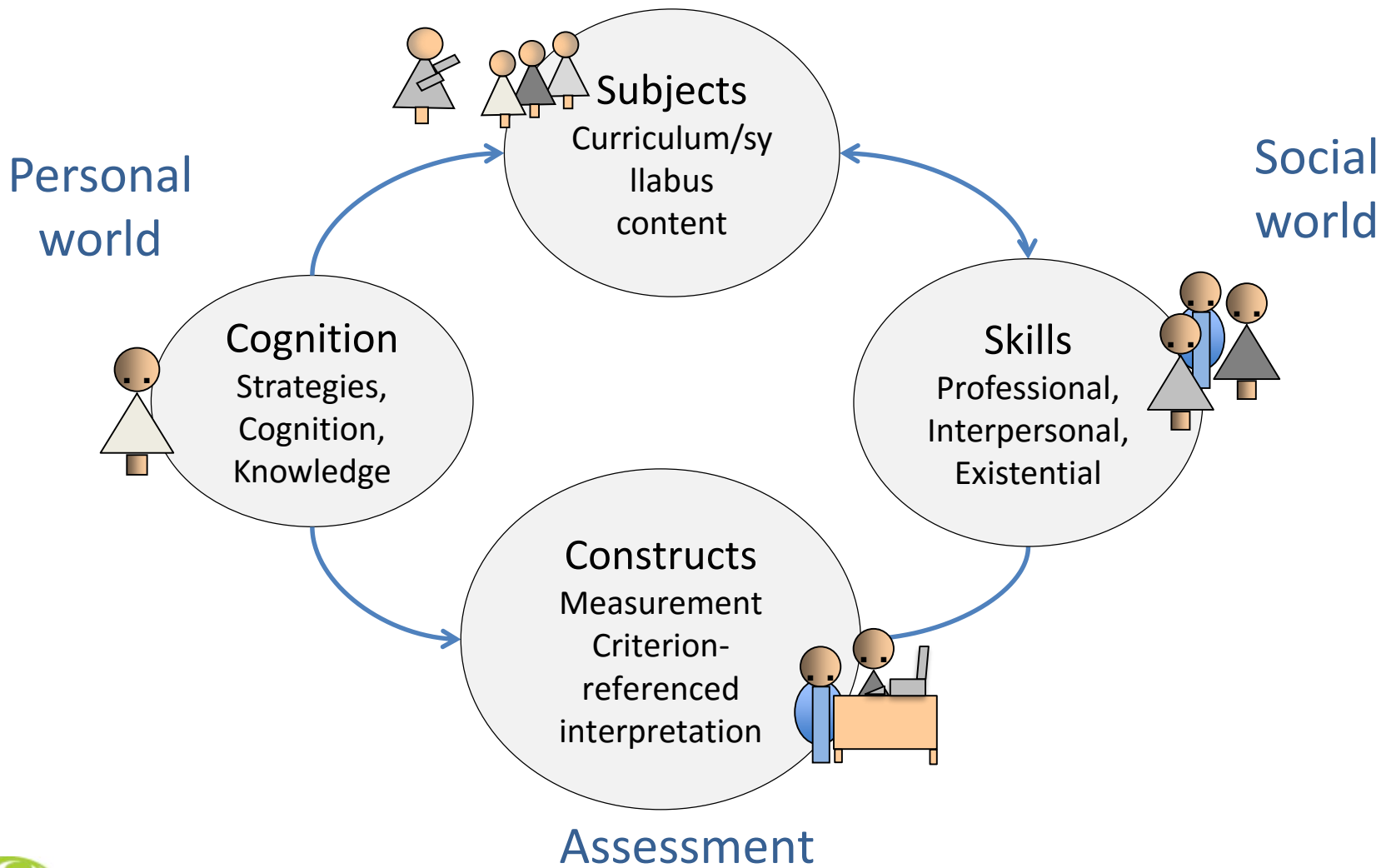
A Reading construct (after Weir and Khalifa 2009)

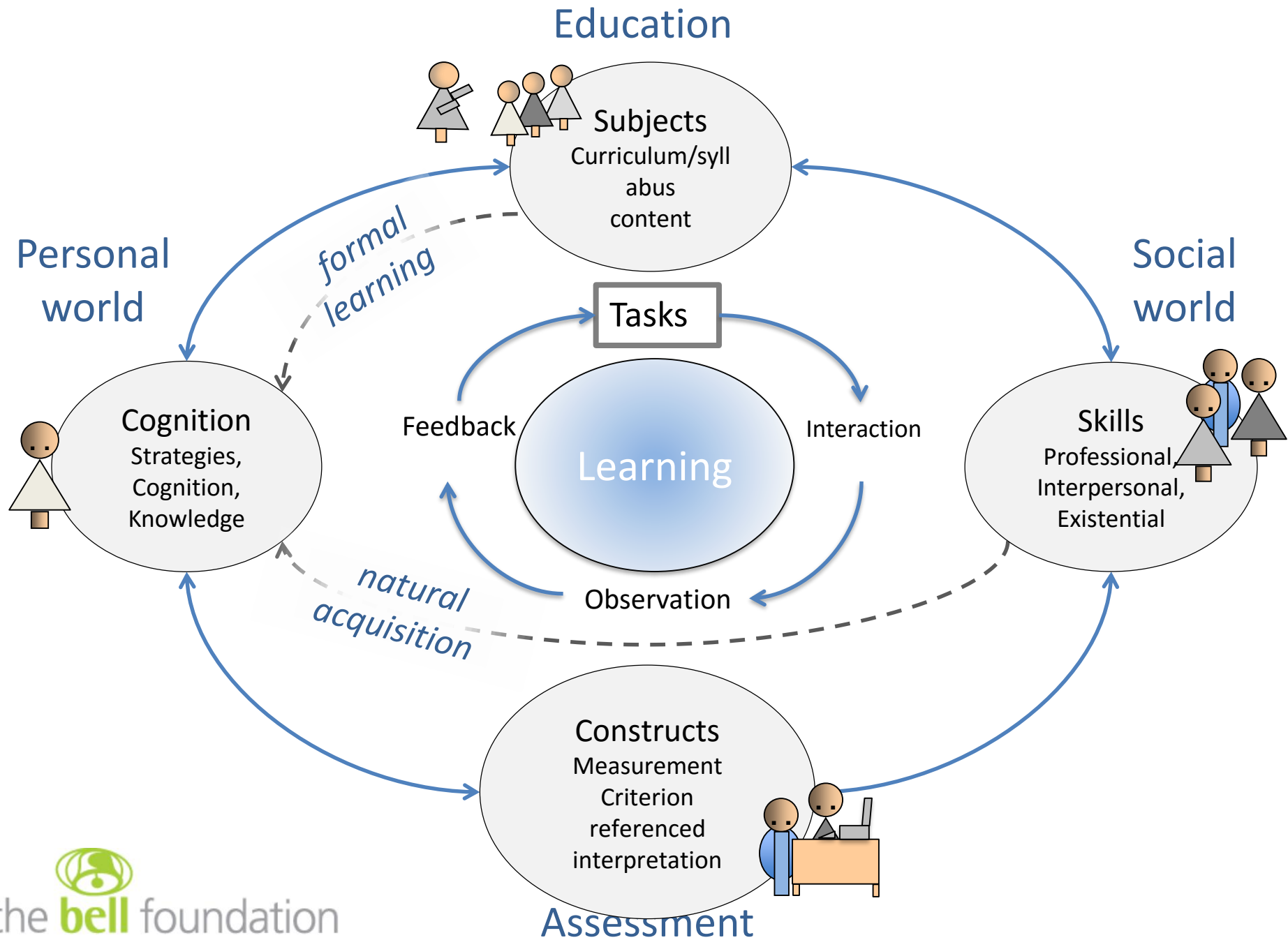


Central processing core

Knowledge

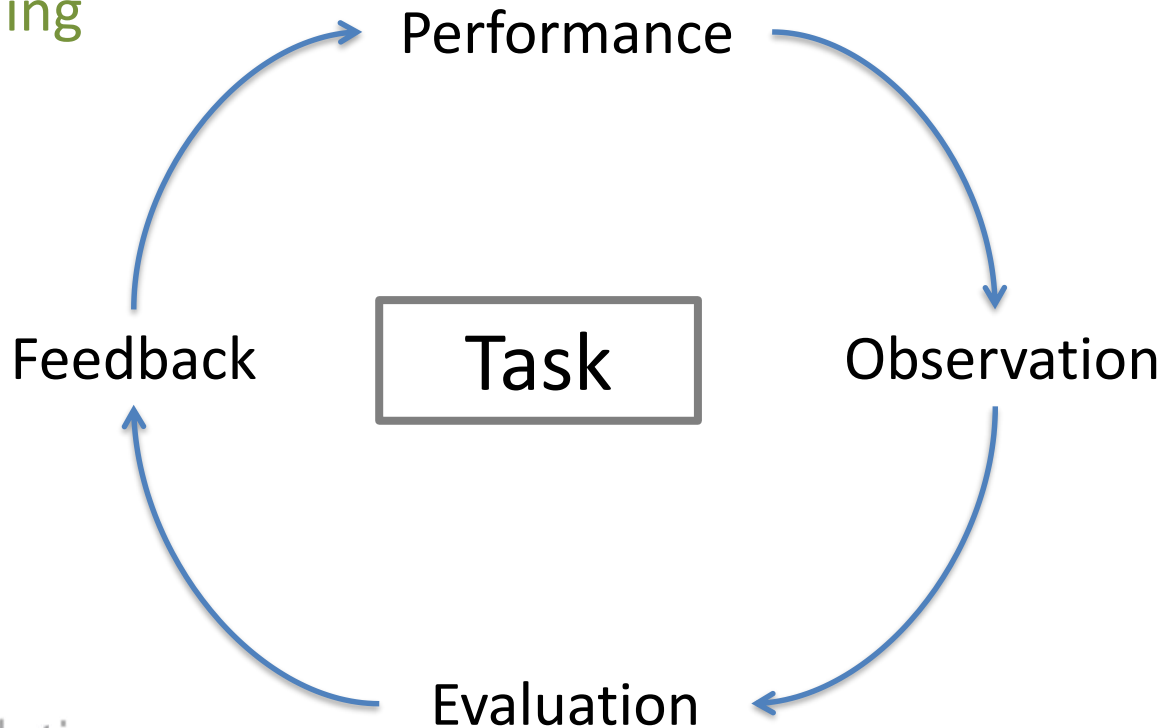
Education





Performance

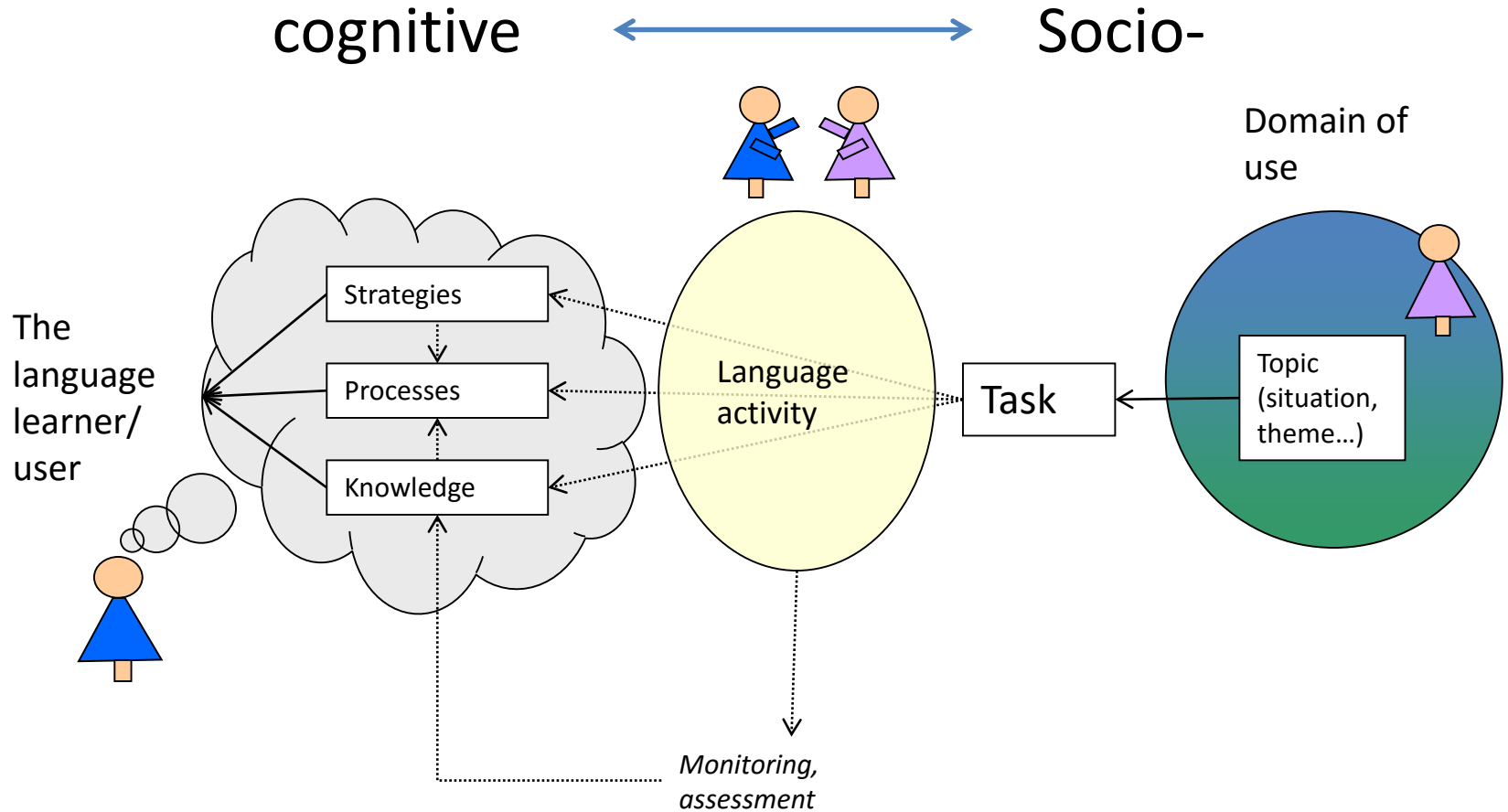
- The assessment cycle is identical to the learning cycle. At its centre is performance on a task.
- The formative/summative distinction is problematic: all forms of assessment can and should promote learning



The Common European Framework (CEFR)

- An influential document published by the Council of Europe, which offers:
 - a descriptive (can-do) framework of levels of language proficiency, offering all languages and contexts of learning a common understanding of what it means to master a language at a given level;
 - an extensive discussion of how languages are learned and might be taught in school.
- The former is more familiar than the latter.
- We find the CEFR's 'action-oriented' model of learning particularly relevant to EAL:

The CEFR's action-oriented model of language use and learning



CEFR “General competences”

- *Knowledge (savoir)*, i.e. declarative knowledge
- *Skills and know-how (savoir-faire)*: the ability to do things
- *Existential competence (savoir-être)*: the individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes which concern self-image, one’s view of others and willingness to engage with other people in social interaction.
- *Ability to learn (savoir apprendre)*: mobilises all the other competences. It implies ‘being disposed to discover “otherness”’.
- The notion of ability to learn is of general application, but is particularly relevant to language learning.
- An important issue is whether ability to learn is a transferable skill.



Community

- If we accept the CEFR model then learning a school subject and personal development are closely linked –learning is not just accretion of knowledge.
- A classroom is a community of practice, and so is each school subject:
- to learn maths is to learn the concepts, the associated lexis and grammar, but also the modes of discourse used within the community of mathematicians.



The Product

- What we are intending to produce is a range of materials of use to EAL teachers, helping them to identify the stage of each EAL learner with respect to key constructs, so as to provide appropriate support for each learner.
- Constructs we are hoping to develop:
 - General classroom interaction; social and management functions
 - General language competence to engage in academic subjects; fundamental literacy issues
 - If possible: age- and language-appropriate treatments of specific academic subjects
 - If possible: indicators of general learning skills or dispositions
- Additionally, questionnaires for evaluating new students, etc.



Why so uncertain?

- This study is primarily an empirical one, based on the collection of data.
- Thus we cannot be certain what exactly will emerge – which makes things interesting.
- The empirical study is the subject of our workshop session – please join us then!