Discussions on language and learning have revolved around the nature of their interactions and the extent to which one is dependent on the other. That one or more interactions exist is not disputed. One lasting debate has involved the extent to which language development is dependent on general cognitive development, or cognitive development is shaped by the language we speak. Delving into this discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, from a theoretical perspective, I will refer to Piaget and Vygotsky. An earlier chapter has elaborated on their influential learning theories. Here we will focus on the role that both assign to language in its interaction with cognitive development and the processes involved in learning. I will be expanding on Vygotsky’s learning theory in order to further explore the central part that language plays.

In the second part of this chapter I will then refer to seminal research that has demonstrated the crucial nature of language-based interactions in both home and school environments, followed by an exposition of recent efforts to enhance the role of language in the schooling system in the UK.

Finally, I will consider the case of children with language difficulties by looking at children with specific language impairment (SLI) as well as children with general delay (GD). By looking at outcomes for children with relatively selective language deficits (i.e. without other learning difficulties) as well as children who have both language and non-verbal difficulties, it may be possible to reach some conclusions on the extent to which learning within the school setting is dependent on language skills.

Piaget and Vygotsky’s views on language and learning

Piagetian (Piaget and Inhelder, 2004) theories of development and learning pitched the process as primarily involving an interaction between the child and the environment where the developing child built cognitive structures, ‘maps’, or schemes for understanding and responding to physical experiences within his or her environment. During all development stages, the child experiences the environment using whatever mental maps he or she has constructed so far. If the experience is a repeated one, it is assimilated into the child’s cognitive structure so that he or she maintains mental ‘equilibrium’. If the experience is different or new, the child loses equilibrium, and alters his or her cognitive structure to accommodate the new conditions, in other words to learn. Progressively, the child develops more and more adequate cognitive structures. Piaget appreciated the importance of language in a child’s process of learning about the world around him. With regards to the relationship between thought and language, Piaget and Inhelder stated:
The semiotic function detaches thought from action and is the source of representation. Language plays a particularly important role in this formative process. Unlike images and other semiotic instruments, which are created by the individual as the need arises, language has already been elaborated socially and contains a notation for the entire system of cognitive instruments (relationships, classifications, etc.) for use in the service of thought. The individual learns this system and then proceeds to enrich it.

(Piaget and Inhelder, 2004: 60)

From a Piagetian perspective, language constitutes a convenient and ready-made system for representing the cognitive schemes that children learn through interaction with their environment. In spite of its insightful contribution to the nature of children’s developmental process, Piagetian theory ignored certain crucial aspects, namely the role of human mediators and the relevance of sociocultural aspects (Kozulin and Presseisen, 1995).

Vygotsky’s theories marked a radical shift from the dominant Piagetian ones in their approach to the nature of learning and development. Like Piaget, Vygotsky saw development as consisting of periods of relative stability interspersed with ‘crises’. However, for Vygotsky, these crises are prompted by the interaction of maturation and sociocultural forces, rather than maturational and experiential factors (Kozulin, 2002). Vygotsky’s work emphasised the crucial role played by parents, carers and peers in defining and shaping the child’s interaction with his/her environment and consequently in shaping his/her cognitive development.

A crucial difference between Vygotsky and Piaget lies in the nature of the interaction of language and thought. The role assigned to ‘egocentric speech’ is typical of this. For Piaget, egocentric speech reflected the child’s underlying egocentrism. For Vygotsky, egocentric speech was derived from its communicative origin, while representing the first steps towards inner speech in its cognitive function (Kozulin, 1999). As Kozulin (1999) comments, ‘Vygotsky demonstrated how thought and language, without coinciding with each other, are involved in a dynamic process of transmutation’ (p. 81).

**Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory: the link between language and learning**

Wertsch identified three basic themes that run through Vygotsky’s work, and that are closely intertwined (Wertsch, 1991, 1985). The first theme is an emphasis on ‘genetic’ or ‘developmental’ analysis (Wertsch, 1991, 1985). For Vygotsky, the understanding of mental functioning required an appreciation of where these functions originated and how they changed and developed over time. In Vygotsky’s words:

> To encompass in research the process of a given thing’s development in all its phases and changes – from birth to death – fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for ‘it is only in movement that a body shows what it is.’ Thus, the historical study of behaviour is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base.

(Vygotsky, 1978: 64, 65)

Vygotsky applied his genetic approach to various human domains, including phylogensis, sociocultural history and what Wertsch (1985) refers to as ‘microgenesis’. However, Vygotsky’s main focus was ontogenesis – the development of the individual, and in particular the development of the child. One particular defining feature pertaining to ontogenesis, as defined by Vygotsky, was the simultaneous and inter-related existence of different levels of development.

Vygotsky (1993) identified two levels of development – ‘natural development’ and ‘cultural development’ – which ‘coincide and merge one into the other’ (p. 42). Natural development involves the process of maturation and organic development, whereby ‘sociopsychological apparatuses’ develop ‘in the presence
of innate human intellect, organs and function’ (p. 42). Cultural development takes place through socialization and interaction between the child and the adult or more capable other (Vygotsky, 1993). The fundamental importance of the latter is particularly emphasized and Vygotsky (1993) argued that a lack of cultural development may lead to ‘primitivism’ or ‘primitiveness’. He defined primitivism as the ‘polar opposite of cultural development’, which could easily be mistaken for ‘mental retardation’ since the ‘two phenomena are often extremely similar’ (Vygotsky, 1993: 43). Vygotsky emphasized the importance of distinguishing between these two phenomena, which may co-occur, but are not one and the same.

Vygotsky, on the one hand, saw language as a good example of the fusion of ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ development and stated that, as a result of socialization and ‘if his [the child’s] brain and speech apparatus develop normally, he masters language’ (Vygotsky, 1993: 42). On the other hand, he also construed a lack of command of language as leading to a deficit in cultural development and therefore to ‘primitivism’. He referred to a bilingual girl for whom ‘the entire complex of symptoms, implying illness, stemmed in fact from primitivism, which, in turn, was conditioned by the lack of command of either language’ (Vygotsky, 1993: 44).

The second basic theme that Wertsch (1985, 1991) identified in Vygotsky’s work was that higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social relations and interactions. This theme is clearly related to the first in that it deals with the genesis of cultural development. As Wertsch (1985) points out, Vygotsky reflected Marx’s ideas about the social origins of human consciousness and elaborated it into his much quoted and discussed ‘general genetic law of cultural development’:

Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition … internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships.

(Vygotsky, as cited in Wertsch, 1985: 26)

According to this view, an examination of the interpsychological or ‘intermental’ functioning as well as its product, intrapsychological or ‘intramental’ functioning, is required in order to obtain a complete understanding of the individual’s development. There are strong ‘genetic’ ties between interpsychological and intrapsychological functioning, such that variations at the interpsychological level may lead to different intrapsychological outcomes (Vygotsky, 1981). As Wertsch (1981) points out, the notion of ‘internalization’ does not merely suggest that the child develops cognitive skills such as problem-solving, memory or language through interaction with others. Rather, the very means that are used in social interactions, with speech and language being the primary examples, are internalized. Within Vygotsky’s theory, speech and language hold a special place because they are themselves a key cognitive skill that is internalized, but that also constitutes a primary tool through which the child develops other skills and knowledge.

A central concept of Vygotsky’s theories is the notion of the ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky 1978). He defined it as ‘the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development determined through problem solving under either adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). This separate notion clearly finds its foundations in the more general claim about the social origins of higher mental functioning in the individual. The zone of proximal development is the zone within which the teaching–learning interaction between adult and child takes place. This concept has been central to the view that the process of assessing a child’s learning should involve a ‘dynamic assessment’ of the child’s ability to respond to the adults’ mediations, rather than merely ‘statically’ assessing the child’s knowledge (as happens in standardized
assessments). Dynamic assessment has been developed in the field of cognitive assessment (Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2002; Sternberg et al., 2002; Brown and Ferrara, 1985; Budoff, 1987; Haywood and Lidz, 2007; Lidz and Elliott, 2000) and, more recently, has also been adopted in the assessment of children’s language (Bain and Olswang, 1995; Olswang and Bain, 1996; Peña et al., 2006; Peña, Resendiz and Gillam, 2007; Camilleri and Law, 2007).

The third general theme that Wertsch (1991) identified in Vygotsky’s work was that human action, on both the social and individual planes, is mediated by tools and signs. Vygotsky’s concern was to identify how tools and sign systems, the foremost of which being language, were involved in intermental and intramental functioning. Rather than focusing primarily on their structure, he approached language (and other sign systems and tools) on the basis of how they are a part of and mediate human action (Wertsch, 1991).

In summary, Vygotsky’s view was that, in order to understand how a child learns, it was necessary to observe this learning as it took place, in interaction with adults and/or more capable peers. This learning is primarily mediated through language, first between the adult and the child and then within the child, as he/she internalizes the new cognitive skills. By documenting the child’s language-based interactions with adults it should be possible to identify features of the interactions that were conducive to the child’s learning – of language and of a whole range of other skills. Such observation of language-based interactions between adults and children was at the essence of the project undertaken by Wells and his colleagues in Bristol, in the 1980s.

**Early language-based adult–child interactions and learning**

In his seminal and influential project, which followed children over a decade, Wells (1985) explored the impact of adults’ language in their interactions with children. He felt that, in addition to learning new skills and knowledge, children ‘internalized images of themselves as learners, and of their abilities to recognize and solve problems for themselves’ (Wells, 1985: 152). Without referring extensively to Vygotsky’s ideas at the time, this view is compatible with them. As Wells himself pointed out, he has since incorporated Vygotsky’s theoretical framework in much of his more recent work (Wells, 2009).

In the Bristol project, Wells obtained recorded data from 128 children, sampling their interactions in their home environments, and subsequently in school settings, from the age of 15 months. As Wells (1985) pointed out, in spite of the lack of any curriculum or direct teaching as such, children were observed to make great progress in learning language itself, but also in learning about the world around them through their language-based interactions. He found that interactions were negotiated by the child and the adult involved, not imposed by the adult. A crucial component of children’s learning at home was that much of it took place through meaningful and purposeful activities, much of which involved joint engagement with the parent/carer. While the words, skills and knowledge that children acquired tended to be ones that were relevant within the home environment, the learning was particularly effective because it served the purpose of meeting the child’s goals within that context. Language and learning were fully integrated in pursuit of the common goal of making sense of those meaningful activities.

By comparison, when Wells (1985) explored the interactions which took place between teachers and five-year-old children in the school setting, he found that children, first of all, tended to talk much less. Additionally, the percentage of conversational sequences actually initiated by the child was only 16%, compared to 73% at home. The child was also far less likely to ask the adult questions in the school setting. Only 3% of the child’s utterances at school, compared to 12% at home, were questions to adults. While adults were not dissimilar in the school and home settings in terms of the proportion of their utterances that were questions to the child, there were important qualitative differences in the type of questions used. A much higher proportion of the questions asked by adults in school settings were ‘display’ questions – asking the child to display skill or knowledge, rather than provide information unknown to the adult. Most
importantly, perhaps, adults in the home setting were far more likely to produce utterances that extended the child’s chosen topic. Conversely, in the school setting, the adult was far more likely to produce utterances which pursued a topic previously introduced by the adult. Wells (1985) described how teachers, compared with parents, appeared ‘more concerned to pursue their own topics – to follow their own agenda – than to accept and extend the topics offered by the child’ (p. 160). The tendency for teachers to do this was partly driven by the fact that a large proportion of sustained interactions between child/ren and teacher took place within group or whole-class discussions. As Wells (1985) points out, such teacher-led discussions may not be the best way to develop children’s ability to use language to think and to learn, in spite of the teachers’ best intentions. Another crucial influence is the pressure on teachers to ensure that the curriculum is covered systematically. Wells (1985) pointed out how a great degree of effort had gone into breaking learning tasks into graded steps that could be arranged in a linear fashion for the purpose of teaching. Wells (1985) argued that, while this may be helpful for promoting some types of learning, it is certainly not the case that children learn best when all the tasks they are engaged in form part of a rigidly set curriculum with predetermined sequences. Relying on a structured and graded curriculum is certainly not the best way for ‘learning the language with which to learn’ (Wells, 1985: 170).

Wells’s suggestion is that children should be encouraged to take an active role in choosing the activities to carry out in the classroom (Wells, 2009, 1985). This would allow children to be intrinsically interested in learning skills in order to achieve goals that they have, at least to some extent, set themselves. In this context, rather than directing every activity in the classroom,

the teacher is freed for the more important tasks of sharing interests and enthusiasms and helping them to think and to talk about what they are doing … to articulate their aims and to formulate appropriate plans of action; to recognize problems and to consider alternative means of resolving them; to use available resources to the best effect, e.g. books, equipment and material; to evaluate the outcomes of their activities, both functionally and aesthetically.

(Wells, 1985: 157)

The child has time and space to talk, and the adult listens to the child without immediately imposing the adult point of view. Listening to what the child has to say can be followed by questions or other contributions from the adult, which allow the child to explore and express his or her thinking process. This experience would match more closely the child’s earlier learning context at home, where parents used the child’s interests as a means of exploring a variety of new learning opportunities. From a Vygotskyan perspective, this would constitute the ‘intermental’ construction of new skills, which the child can subsequently internalize.

As Wells (2009) has recently pointed out, many things have changed since the Bristol project. One such change, both in the UK and in North America, has been the increasing emphasis on accountability and outcome measurement. This has led to greater centralization of curriculum planning and, inevitably, to a greater emphasis on achieving set targets than on fostering students’ individual interests and talents (Wells, 2009).

Since the Bristol project, the appreciation of the importance of language within the learning process has increased. On the other hand, the pressures that may negatively impact on the development of language for learning have also increased.

Language in the early years and primary school curriculum in the UK

The importance of speech and language as a foundation skill for learning as well as an important area of skill in its own right was highlighted in the Independent Review of Teaching of Early Reading (Rose, 2006). While the main recommendations arising from Rose’s report relate to the adoption of ‘synthetic phonics’ for the development of literacy, a key underlying message was that:
Far more attention needs to be given, right from the start, to promoting speaking and listening skills to make sure that children build a good stock of words, learn to listen attentively and speak clearly and confidently. Speaking and listening, together with reading and writing, are prime communication skills that are central to children’s intellectual, social and emotional development.

(\textit{Rose, 2006: 3})

Over 20 years after Wells’s (1985) research, the crucial importance of language in the classroom was formally recognized in the UK through the inclusion of Communication, Language and Literacy as one of the six areas within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) of education,\(^1\) which was implemented through the passing of the Childcare Act in 2006, shortly after the Rose Report. It is therefore one of the areas of learning and development ‘that all early years providers must by law deliver, regardless of type, size or funding of the setting’ (Anonymous).

Communication, Language and Literacy is further elaborated into areas including Language for Communication, Language for Thinking, Linking Sounds and Letters, Reading, and Writing. By the end of the EYFS, when children enter primary school (aged four to five), they are expected to achieve a number of early learning goals that relate to these areas. Children should be able to interact with others and negotiate plans and activities by taking turns to listen and to speak, to listen attentively to spoken language and to respond appropriately both verbally and through their actions, and to speak clearly with an awareness of the listener’s perspective. Children are also expected to enter primary school with an ability to use language ‘to imagine and recreate roles and experiences’ and to ‘use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events’ (Anonymous). The latter goals explicitly highlight the relevance of language as a tool for thinking and learning. In relation to the link between spoken language and early literacy skills, children are expected (among others) to develop their phonological skills to the point where they can ‘hear and say sounds in words in the order in which they occur’ as well as ‘link sound to letters, naming and sounding the letters’ (Anonymous). Children are also expected to be able to retell narratives with an awareness of the key elements of stories and to answer questions about ‘where’, ‘who’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ in the stories (Anonymous). Early years practitioners and carers are supported in their work to help children achieve these (and other) goals related to communication, language and literacy through initiatives such as the project, Every Child A Talker (Anonymous). This provides resources and activities for early years practitioners and carers, designed to ‘encourage early language development right from the outset, extending children’s vocabulary and helping them build sentences so that before they start school, children are confident and skilled communicators’ (Anonymous).

While these state-led initiatives understandably highlight the fact that all children should achieve the language-related targets, there is little or no mention of the needs of children for whom language and learning remain problematic, for one reason or another. It is estimated that approximately 7% of children starting school at age five have a significant primary speech and/or language difficulty and a further proportion of children have language difficulties associated with other conditions such as autism, cerebral palsy and general learning difficulties (Bercow, 2008). It is to these children with language difficulties that I will be turning now.

\textbf{Language impairment and learning: the case of specific language impairment}

One way of exploring the relationship between language and learning is to look at the impact that a language difficulty has on an individual’s educational outcomes and beyond. Children and young people with specific language impairments are particularly relevant to this discussion, because they consist of a group of individuals for whom, by definition, language is the primary difficulty. A child is diagnosed as having SLI if they have significant difficulties understanding and/or expressing themselves using language in the absence of any primary cause for the difficulty. They have no hearing or other sensory difficulty. There is no
identifiable anatomic or physiological cause of the language difficulty (e.g. cleft palate, neurological difficulties) and their non-verbal IQ is similar to that of their peers. So, by definition, SLI constitutes an apparently isolated deficit in the area of language in the absence of a broader learning difficulty or of other conditions that could affect learning.

Over the years, a number of studies have followed cohorts of children with SLI longitudinally (Stothard et al., 1998; Catts et al., 2002). Most recently, the Manchester Language Study followed a group of 242 children with SLI from the age of seven into their teenage years. Conti-Ramsden (2008) reported on outcomes in areas that would be expected to be associated with language difficulty, including literacy and academic achievement, which we will focus on here. As she points out, one would expect to find an association between the degree of language difficulty and the degree of difficulty in related areas of functioning. The literature has consistently reported that there is a strong relationship between SLI and subsequent literacy problems (Stothard et al., 1998; Catts et al., 2002). This is hardly surprising, given that literacy is built on a foundation of language skills. Phonological skills are particularly implicated in the decoding aspect of literacy, and difficulties with receptive and expressive oral language are associated with reading comprehension.

As many as three-quarters of their cohort of children with SLI were found to have significant difficulties with reading at the age of 16 (a score greater than one standard deviation below the mean on standardized tests) (Conti-Ramsden, 2008). The vast majority of these children had difficulties with reading comprehension and about two-thirds of them also had difficulties with reading accuracy. This supports previous findings that adolescents with SLI have greater problems with reading comprehension than with accuracy, although many have problems with both.

Interestingly, of the adolescents with reading abilities within the normal range, 63% were found to have age-appropriate language abilities concurrently with the reading assessments (i.e. at age 16). In the group as a whole, language comprehension and language expression abilities were both found to be concurrently predictive of reading abilities, accounting for 30% of the variance (using regression analysis).

Given the high incidence of literacy difficulties among adolescents with SLI and the importance of literacy to the educational process, it was to be expected that children with SLI would be found to have lower academic achievement than their peers. The timing of the outcome measurement allowed Conti-Ramsden (2008) to report on adolescents’ achievements in the national exams carried out at the age of 16. They found that 3% of their cohort of adolescents with SLI achieved no qualifications, while 19% achieved the lowest, entry-level qualification. By comparison, none of a control group of typically developing (TD) children (comparable to the adolescents with SLI in terms of household income and maternal education) left school with only entry-level qualification. A small proportion (11%) of these TD children gained Level 1 qualifications (the next step up). A considerably larger proportion (34%) of adolescents with SLI achieved qualification/s at this (low) level. Finally, twice as many TD adolescents (88%) obtained at least one qualification at the expected level of A* to C (National Qualifications Framework, as cited by Conti-Ramsden 2008) when compared to adolescents with SLI (44%). Yet again, it is worth pointing out that, among children with SLI, the majority of those who were achieving comparable academic targets to their TD peers were found to have age-appropriate receptive and expressive language skills concurrently. This raises the question as to whether those adolescents who were achieving comparable outcomes to their TD peers were still truly language impaired. What is clear is that individuals who experienced ongoing language difficulties that lasted into adolescence were the ones most likely to achieve lower outcomes compared to their peers.

**Language impairment and learning: the case of SLI compared to general delay**

Although a discrepancy between language abilities and non-verbal cognitive abilities has been widely used as a key diagnostic criterion for SLI, the conceptual and clinical utility of the diagnosis has been questioned in
recent years (Cole, Dale and Mills, 1990; Plante, 1998). Through their epidemiological methodology, Tomblin and colleagues were able to longitudinally follow a large cohort of children from the age of five/six years throughout their childhood and into their teenage years. This cohort included children with SLI (whose non-verbal abilities were within the normal range) and children with general delay who had both poor language skills and low non-verbal skills, as well as typically developing children. Tomblin (2008) reported that, perhaps unsurprisingly, both of the groups of children with poor language skills presented with reading difficulties by the time they were in second grade (7–8 years) and that these difficulties persisted through the eighth grade (13–14 years) and into the tenth grade (15–16 years). One interesting finding was that the two groups of children with language difficulties did not differ significantly. From a functional perspective, Tomblin and colleagues defined ‘functional illiteracy’ as performing (at age 16) below the mean level for an 11 year old. Nineteen percent of children with SLI and 31% of children with GD were found to be functionally illiterate, compared with 5% of the typically developing children in the epidemiological study (Tomblin, 2008).

The significant conclusion reached by Tomblin (2008) was that spoken language abilities (as measured at the age when the children were assessed in second grade) had a long-lasting and major impact on children’s academic outcomes, while the impact of non-verbal IQ was actually quite small. The poorer outcomes for children with GD were actually explained by the fact that their language skills were also poorer than those of children with SLI, rather than by the fact that they had lower non-verbal abilities. Tomblin (2008) reported that, through stepwise regression analysis of the entire cohort of students (including SLI, GD and TD), oral language abilities were found to account for 43% of the variance of reading comprehension ability, whereas non-verbal IQ only accounted for an additional 3%. Tomblin’s findings only serve to reinforce the importance of language skills in achieving learning outcomes, irrespective of whether we are dealing with children with SLI or GD.

Conclusions

I started out this chapter by mentioning that the link between language and learning is often assumed, although the precise nature of the interaction is widely debated. If the evidence from children with language difficulties is to be taken at face value, one thing is clear. Language skills or the lack thereof is a crucial variable in determining the degree of success that an individual will achieve in their learning outcomes as measured using academic achievement criteria, which are so highly valued by society. The recent drive to emphasize the importance of language skills in the early years of education, both as an important skill in its own right and as a tool for learning in a range of other areas, can only be seen in a positive light. Ironically, this has led to new sets of targets being identified, accompanied by new sets of linear tasks towards achieving specific language skills. These are the sorts of curriculum-led pressures that Wells (1985) argued are not ideal for fostering individual children’s learning of ‘language for learning’.

Conti Ramsden’s and Tomblin’s findings also raise the question as to whether children who are identified as having language difficulties are being served by the current educational system. Bercow’s (2008) review on provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in fact found that there was great variability and a lack of continuity in the provision of universal, targeted and specialist services for these children. In spite of the central role assigned to language in the Childcare Act of 2006, Bercow reported that there was still ‘insufficient understanding of the centrality of speech, language and communication among policy makers and commissioners nationally and locally, professionals and service providers, and sometimes parents and families themselves’ (Bercow, 2008: 7).

A problem with language, it seems, is the tendency to take it for granted. The widely held view that language and learning must be associated should drive us to pay particular attention to language, both as a fundamental skill in its own right and as crucial to learning. However, in many instances, the opposite may
be true. Parents of children with SLCN in fact expressed the concern that their children’s ability to communicate, to speak and to understand was taken for granted in the school setting (Bercow, 2008).

Perhaps the widely held assumption that language and learning are related and the tendency for language to be taken for granted are in fact two sides of the same coin. Language appears to be such a natural endowment to human beings, and children typically appear to acquire it with such relative ease, that there is a lack of widespread understanding of the variability in language skills among children, or of the impact that different language-based interactions may have on children’s learning.

Recent changes in the economic and political scenario may well lead to changes in educational policy. In the UK, one such change is likely to be a shift, of some degree, away from centralized control of curricula and of teaching methods. In the coming years, the challenge will be to bring about changes that take into account and even foster children’s individuality while ensuring that key skills, language skills foremost among them, are catered for appropriately. Whether in improving language and learning in the school-age population generally, or in addressing the needs of children with language difficulties, the theoretical viewpoint of Vygotsky and the practical suggestions of Wells may well constitute useful reference points.

Note

1 At the time of writing, an independent review of the Early Years Foundation Stage had been initiated, following the election of a new government in the UK.

References


Web References

