



# The importance of ideas in assessment

An illustration using the Cambridge English approach

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# Philosophical underpinnings

- The Who?
- The Why?
  
- The What?
- The How?
  
- The How well?
- The How successfully?



# The Who and Why

## The Cambridge English stance

Part of the University of Cambridge and Cambridge Assessment

- Originating within UCLES 1913
- An educational mission with a focus on achieving positive impact in specific contexts
- A contribution to the common good

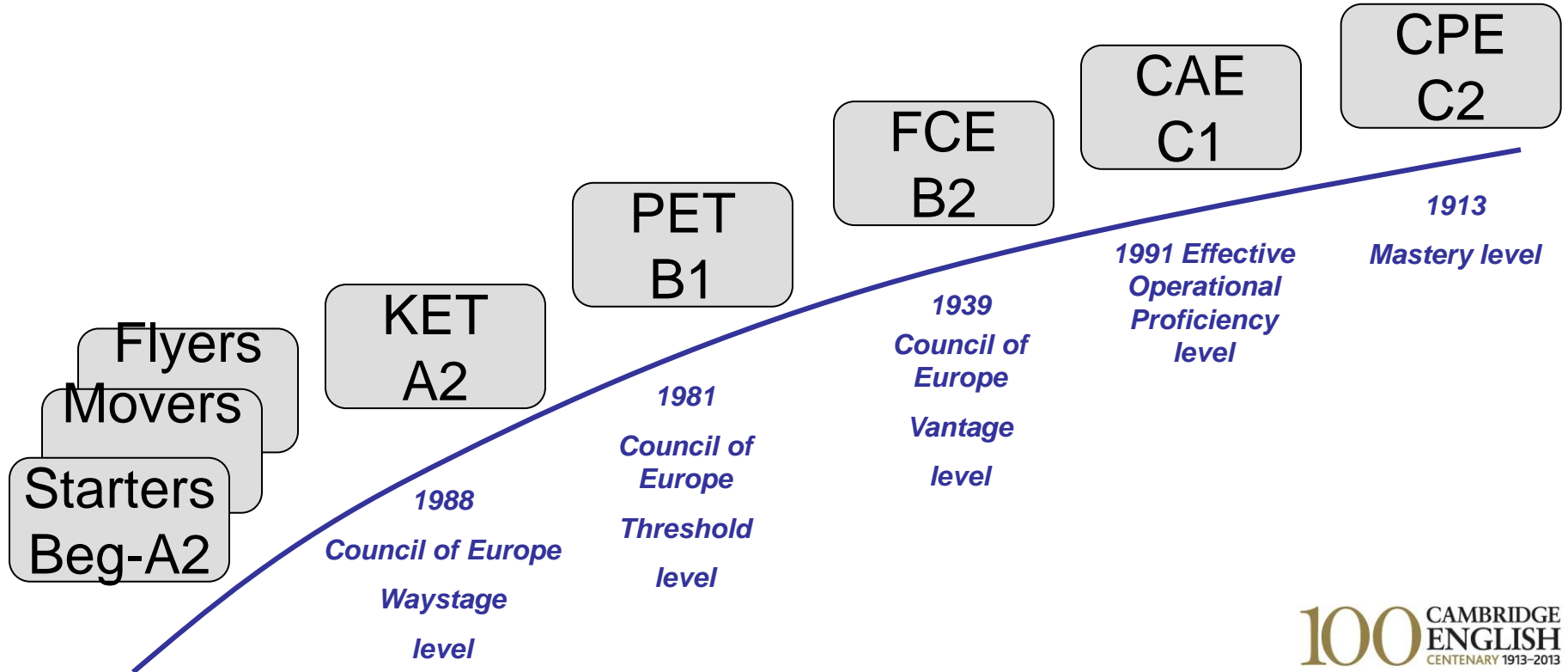
The leading international provider of English language examinations

Provision at national and institutional levels worldwide (multiple contexts)

Approx. 4.5m candidates a year



# The Cambridge English “learning ladder”



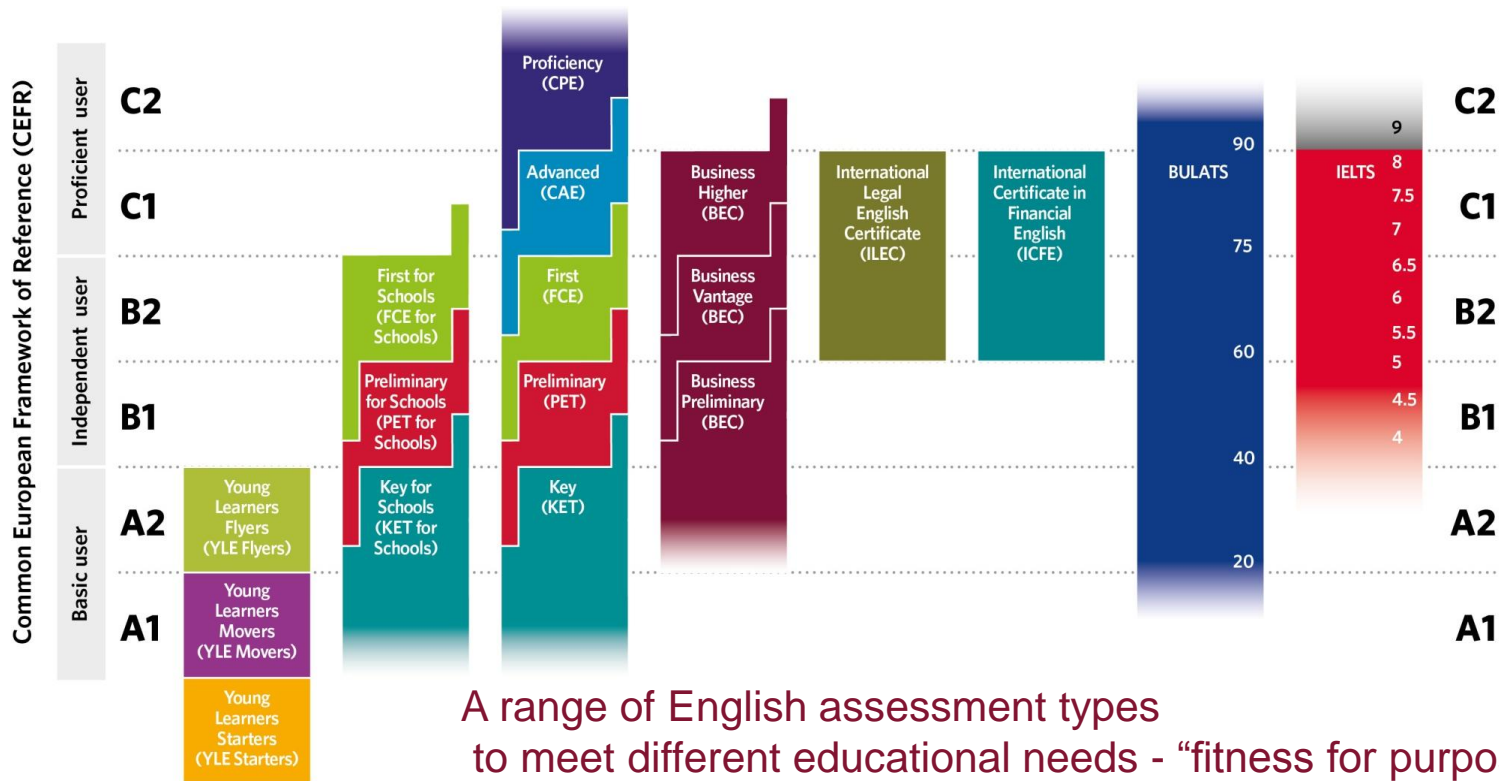


# The What and How

- A **socio-cognitive model** of language and learning
- Measurement model to support learning and **meaningful interpretation** of outcomes
- One size doesn't fit all



# The What – a structure for organising learning



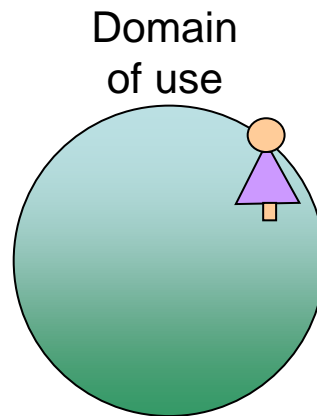


# The What - English language ability

- Language as **communication**
  - Can do approach
    - NB theories of communication
- Explicit **constructs** of language abilities
  - NB theories of knowledge, cognition and skills
- Progress across proficiency **levels** over time
  - Outcomes which are assessed must align with learning objectives
    - NB theories of teaching and learning/acquisition, and theories of measurement



# A socio-cognitive model of language and learning



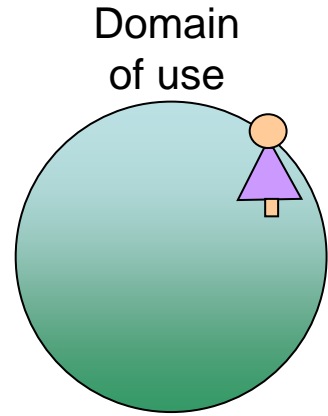
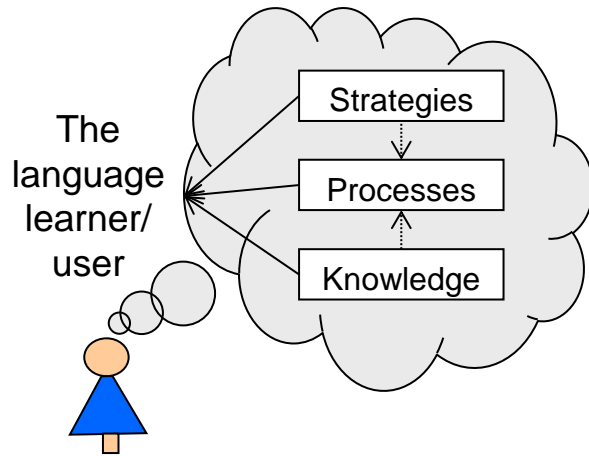
CEFR, 2001 p9

Slides by Dr Neil Jones





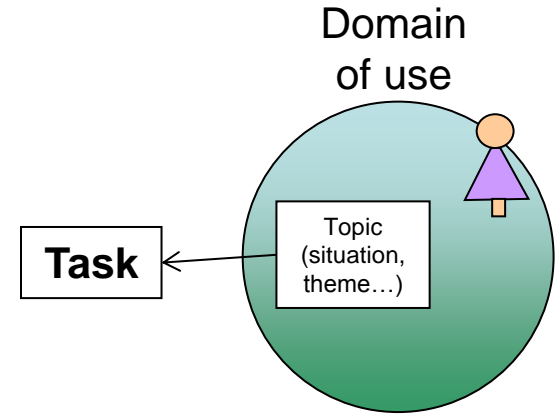
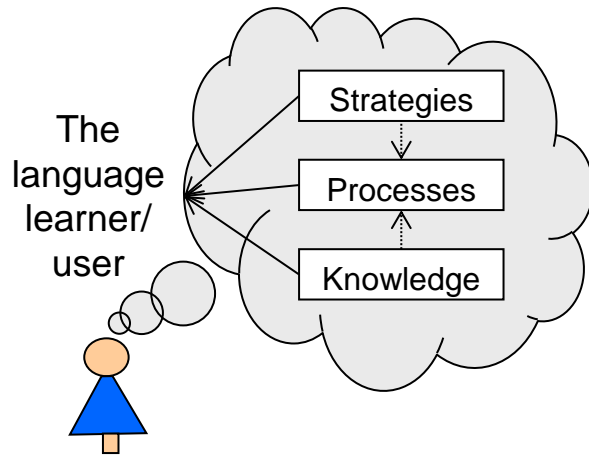
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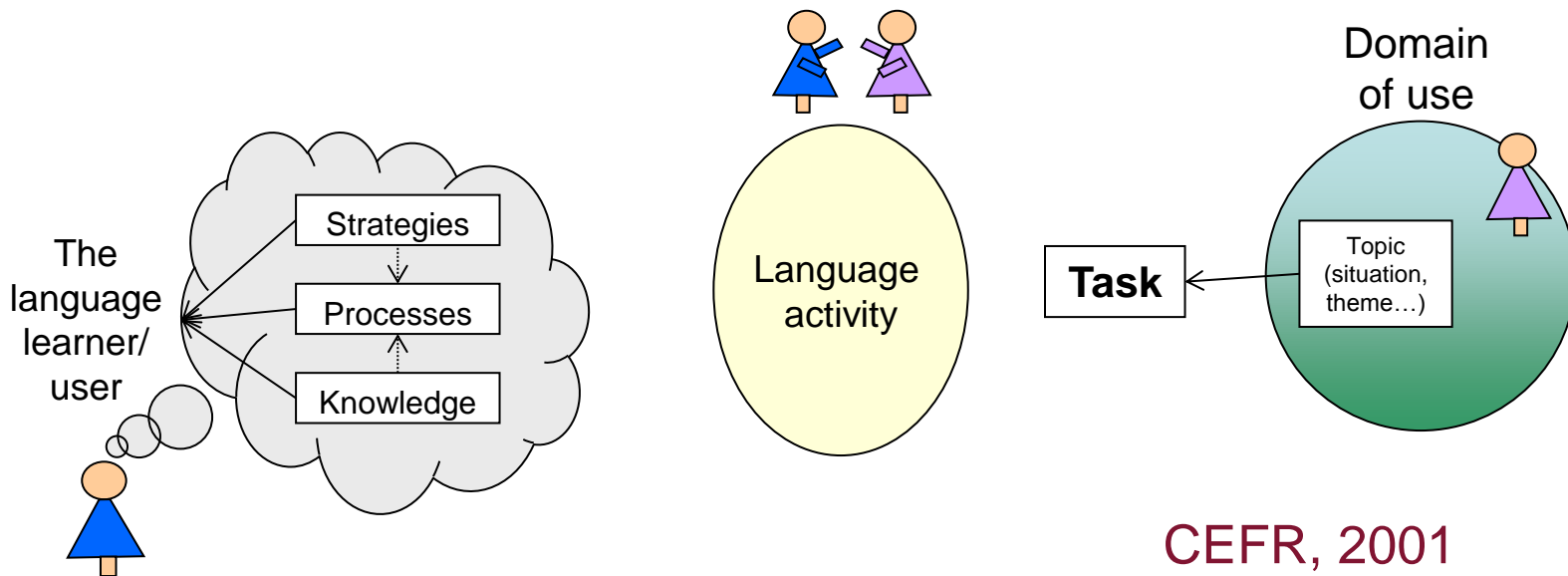
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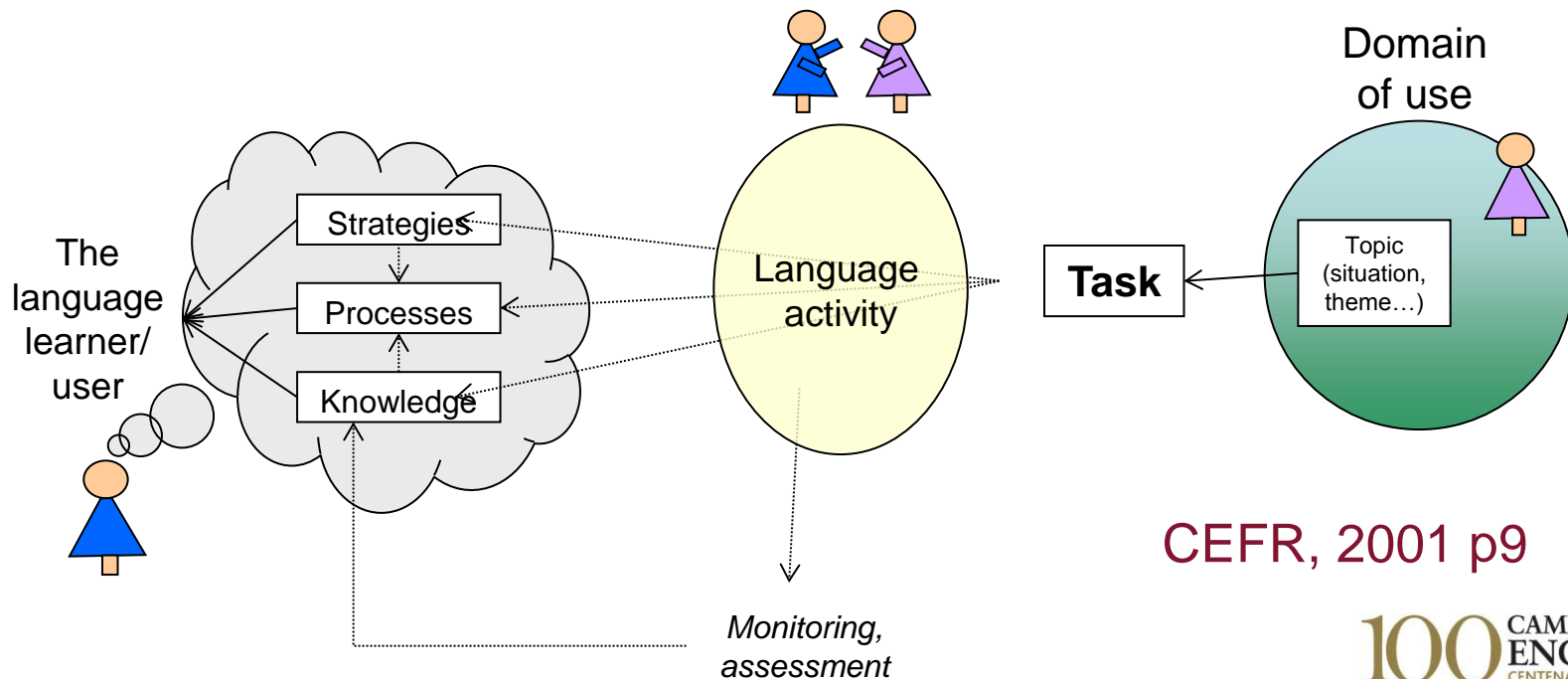


CEFR, 2001

p9



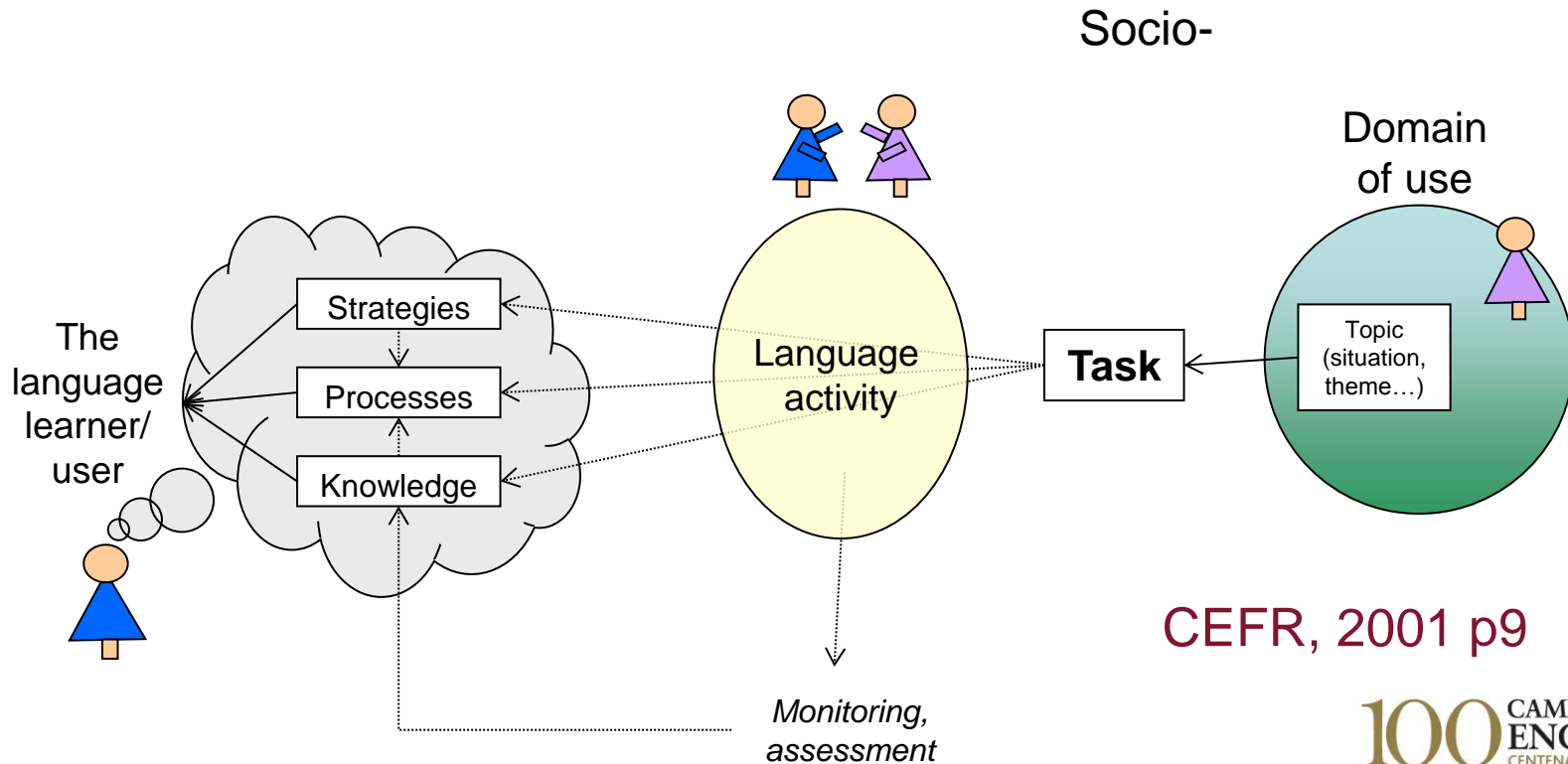
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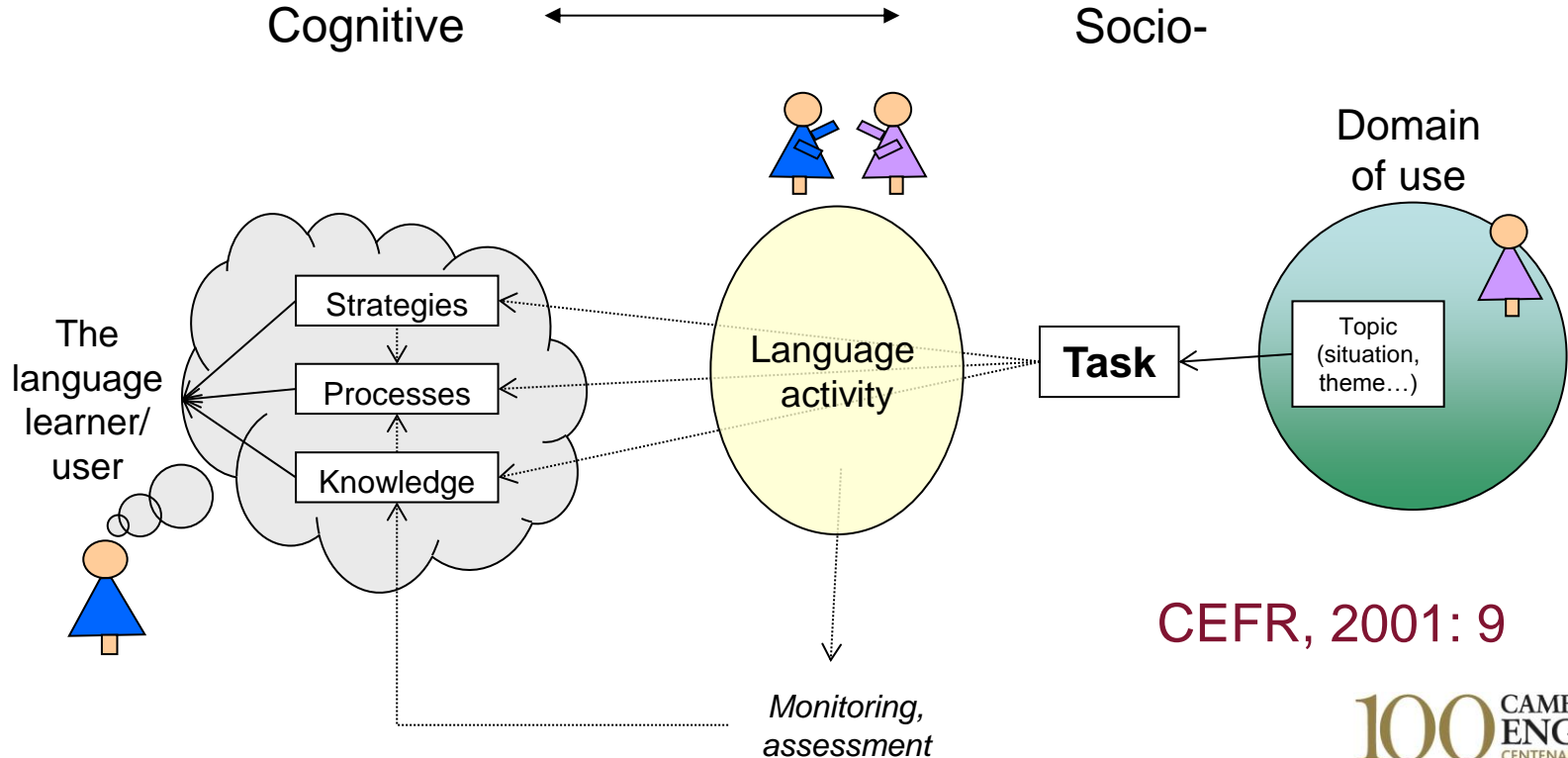


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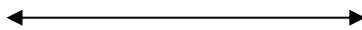
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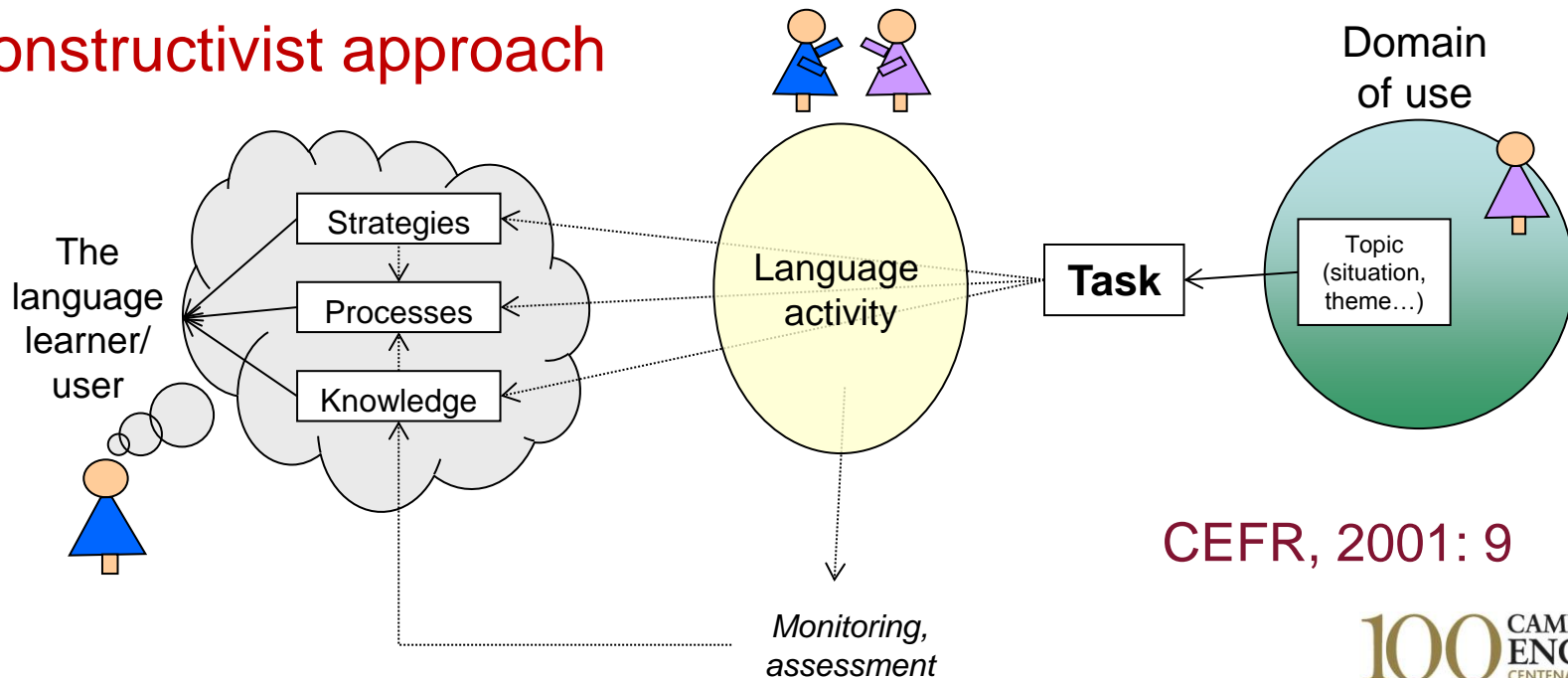
# A socio-cognitive model of language and learning

Cognitive



Socio-

## A constructivist approach

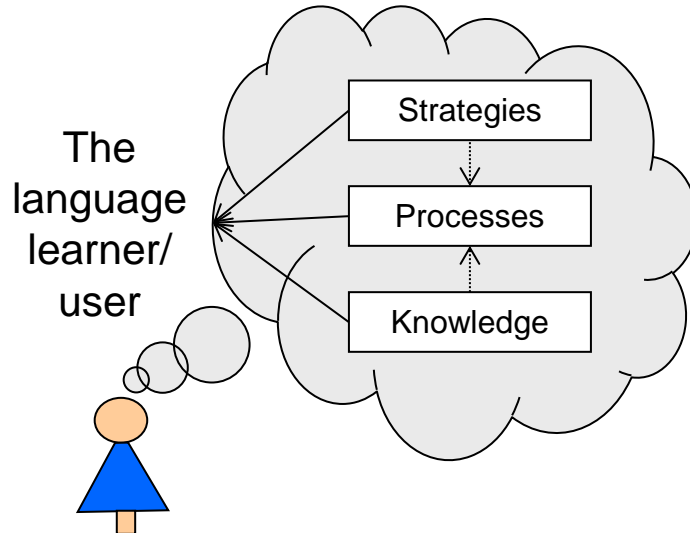


CEFR, 2001: 9

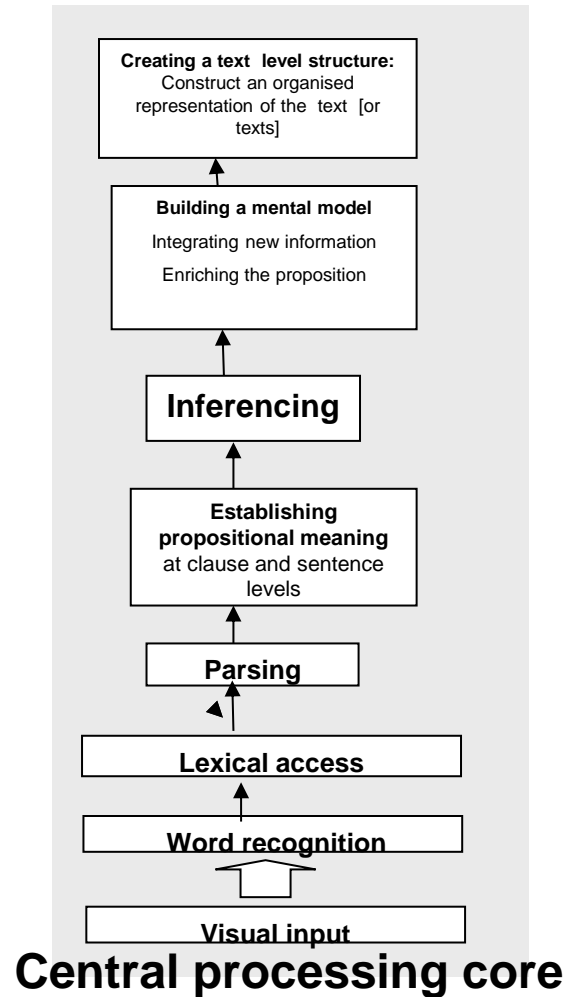


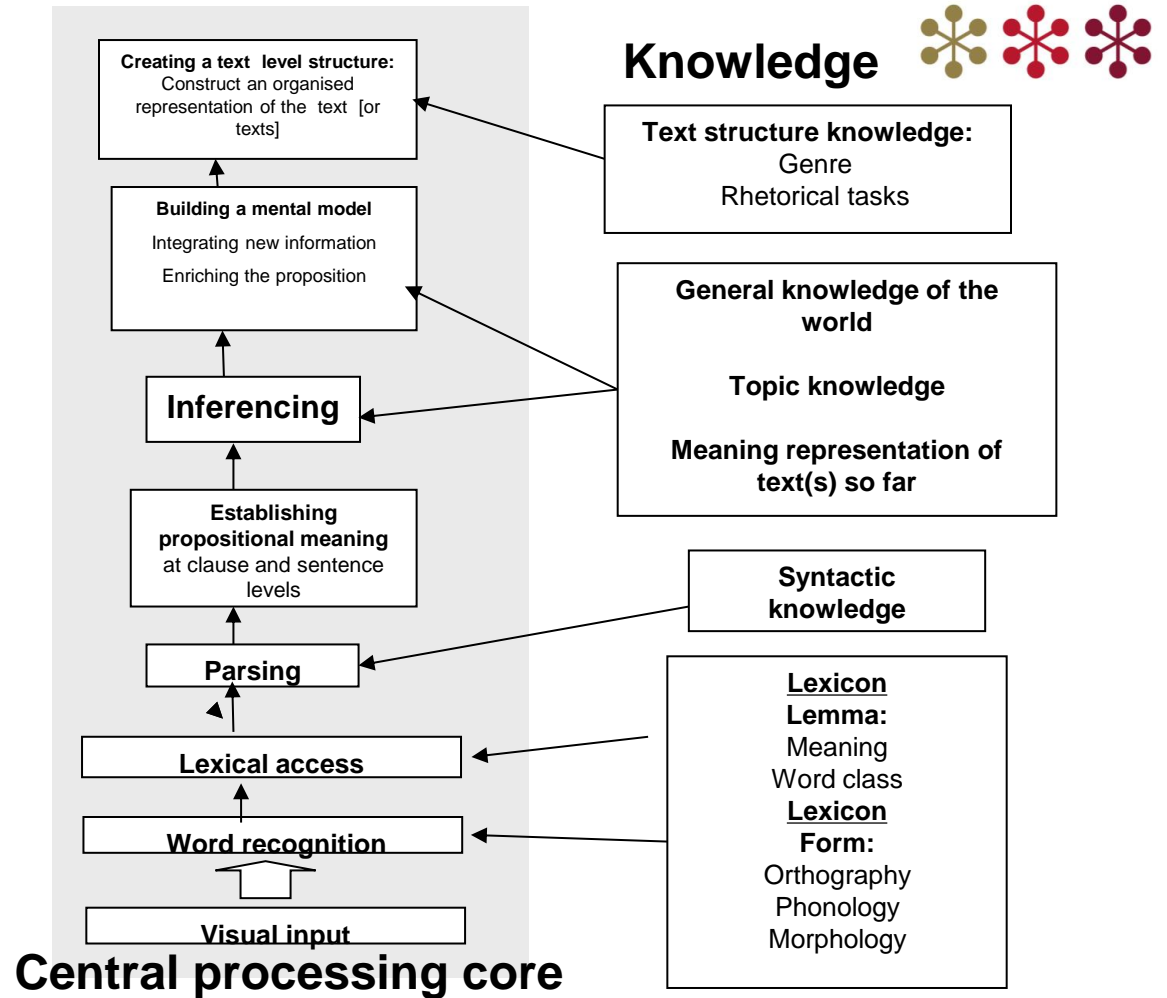
# A model of reading ability

(see Weir 2005)











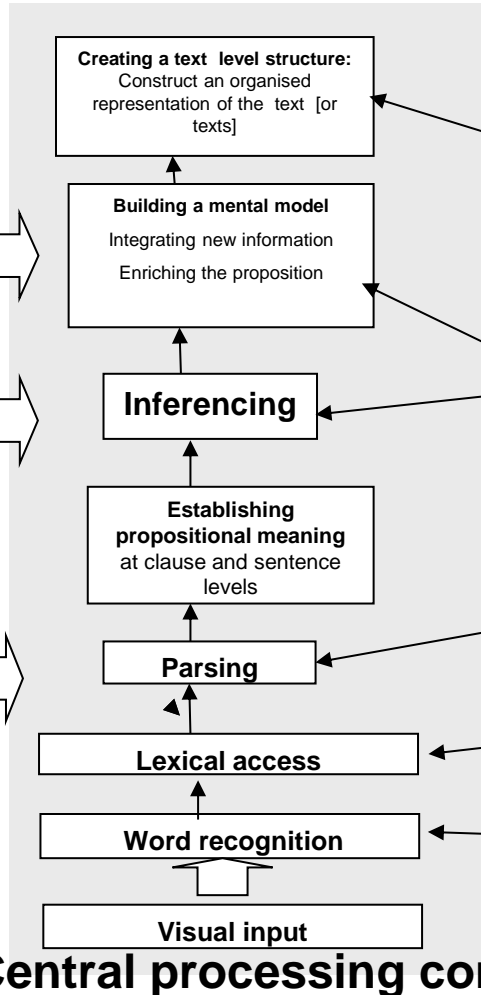
# Knowledge

**Text structure knowledge:**  
Genre  
Rhetorical tasks

**General knowledge of the world**  
  
Topic knowledge  
  
Meaning representation of text(s) so far

**Syntactic knowledge**

**Lexicon**  
**Lemma:**  
Meaning  
Word class  
**Lexicon**  
**Form:**  
Orthography  
Phonology  
Morphology



# Central processing core

**Remediation where necessary**

**Monitor: goal checking**

**Goal setter**  
Selecting appropriate type of reading:

**Careful reading**  
**Local:** Understand sentence  
**Global:** Comprehend main idea(s), Comprehend overall text, Comprehend overall texts

**Expeditious reading**  
**Local:** Scan for specifics  
**Global:** Skim for gist, Search for main ideas and important detail

# Metacognitive mechanisms/ Strategies



# Studies in Language Testing

Examining English – the complete set



*Vol 30 Examining Speaking*

- Edited by Lynda Taylor (2011)

*Vol 29 Examining Reading*

- Khalifa and Weir (2009)

*Vol 26 Examining Writing*

- Shaw and Weir (2009)

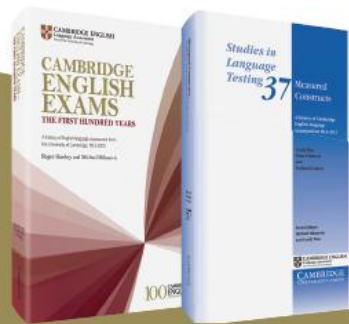
*Vol 35 Examining Listening*

- Geranpayeh & Taylor (eds) (2013)

1913 – 2013  
100 years of Cambridge  
English Exams

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full list of publications:

[www.cambridge.org/elt/silt](http://www.cambridge.org/elt/silt)  
[www.cambridgeenglish.org/silt](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/silt)





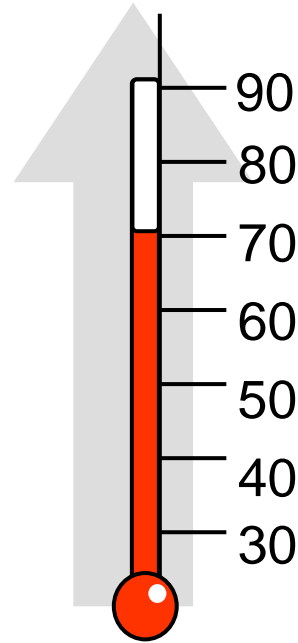
# Measurement model: Item response theory, item-banking

Measurement  
scale



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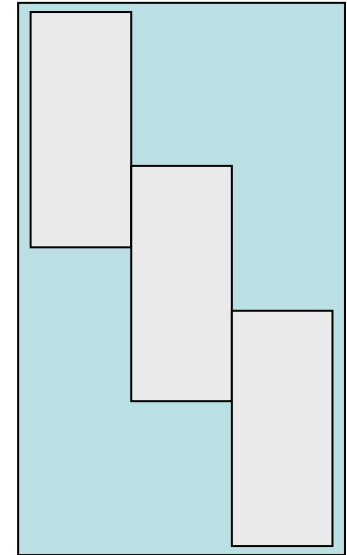
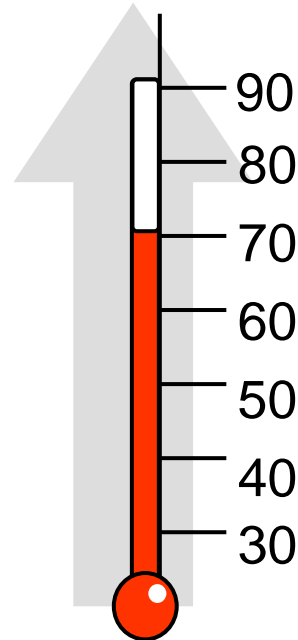
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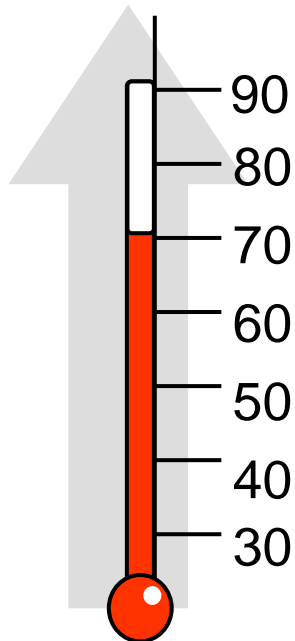
Item bank links  
all levels



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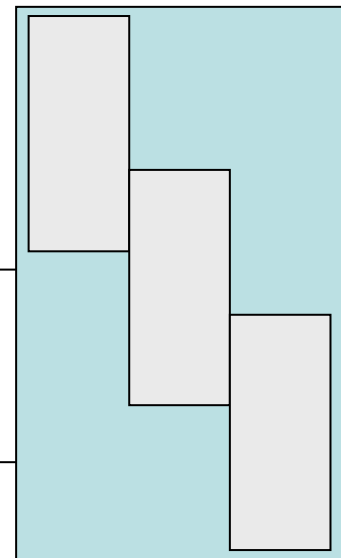


Test 1

Test 2

Test 3

Tests at  
appropriate  
level

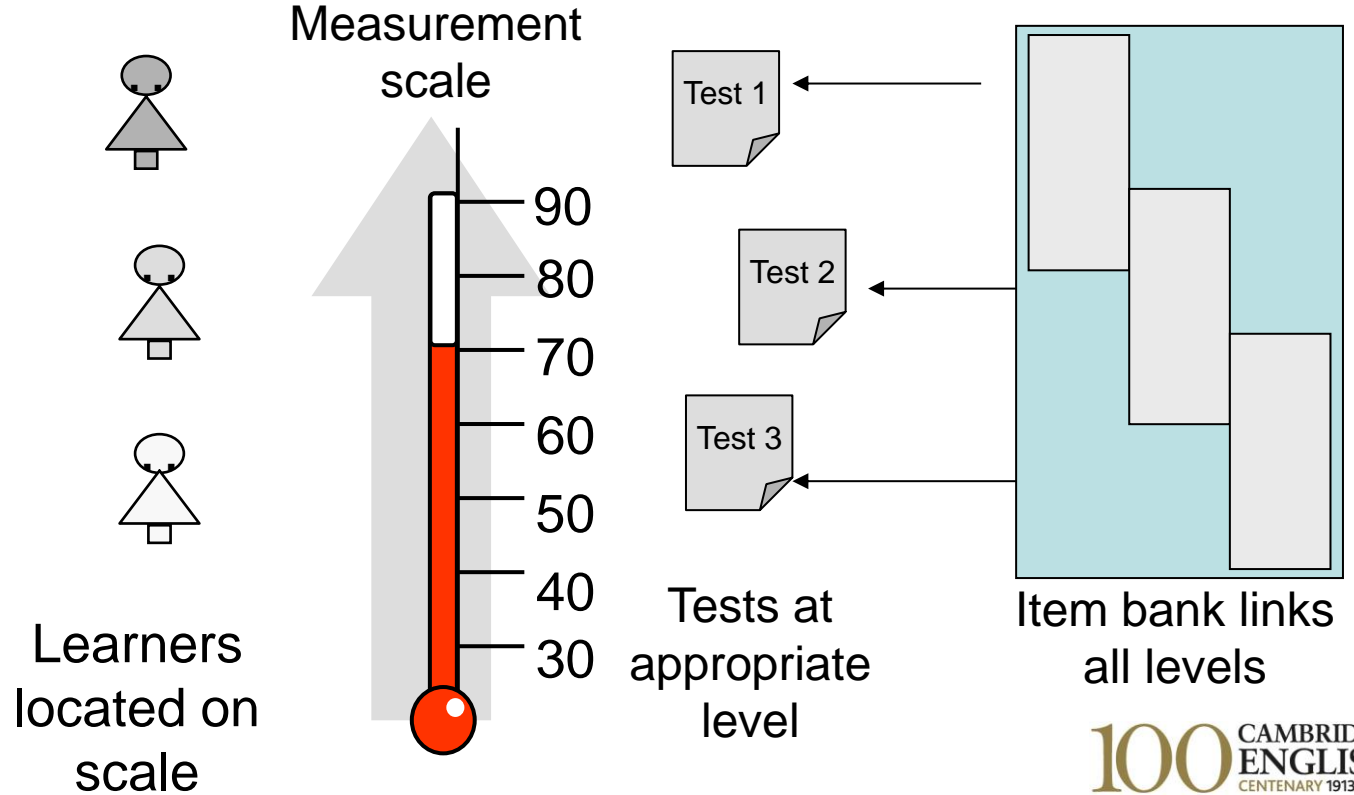


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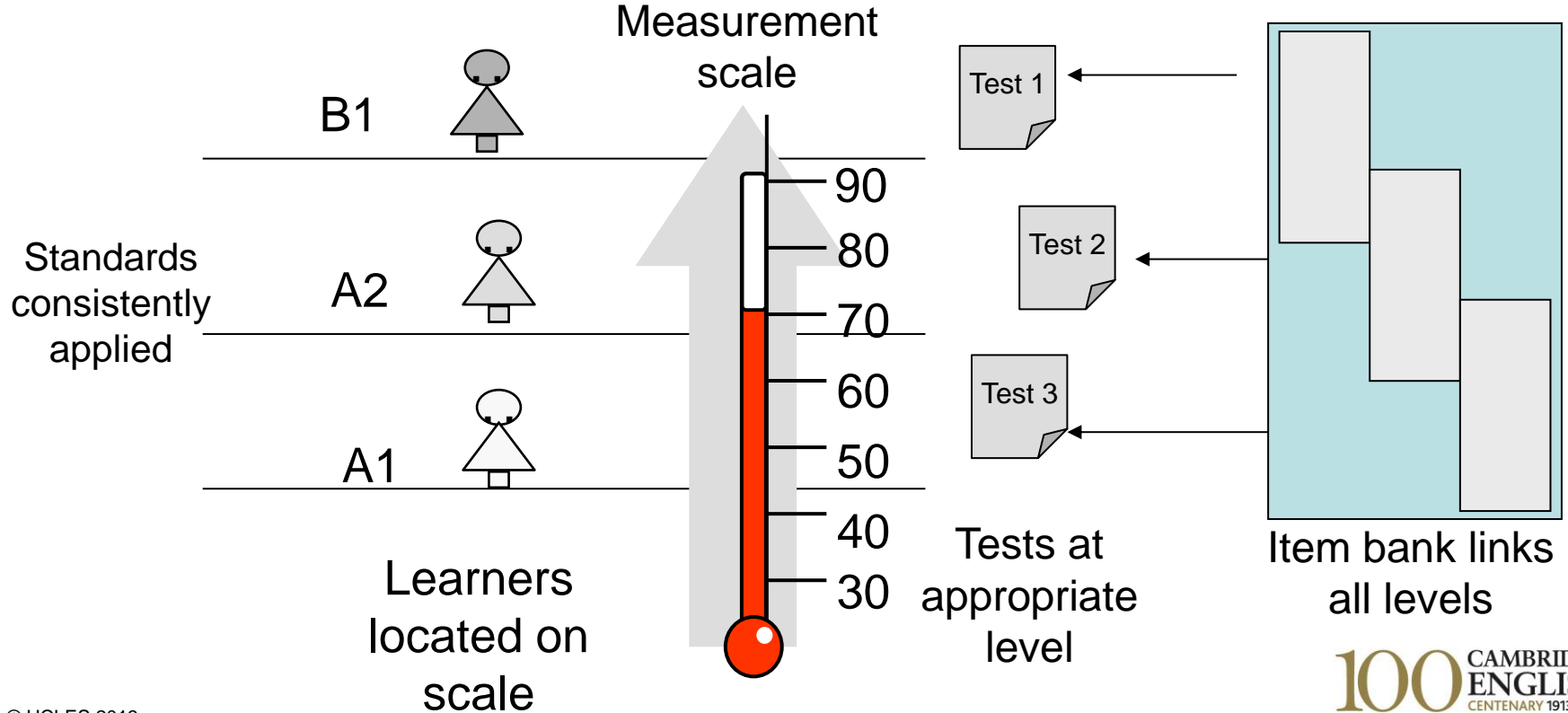


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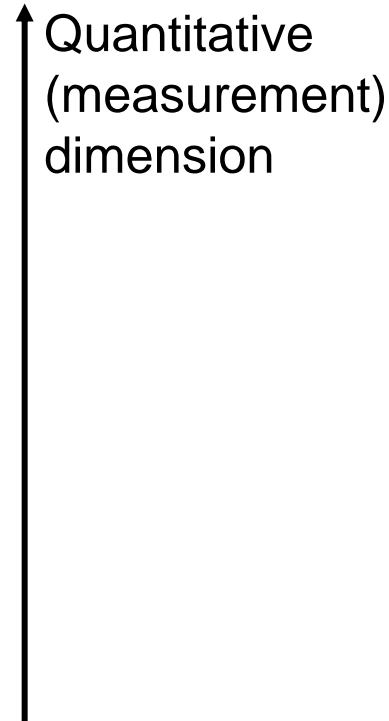




# A complementary relationship with teaching:

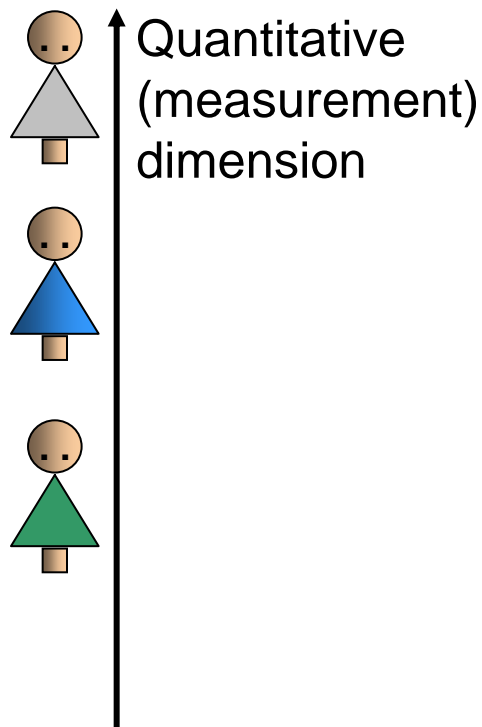


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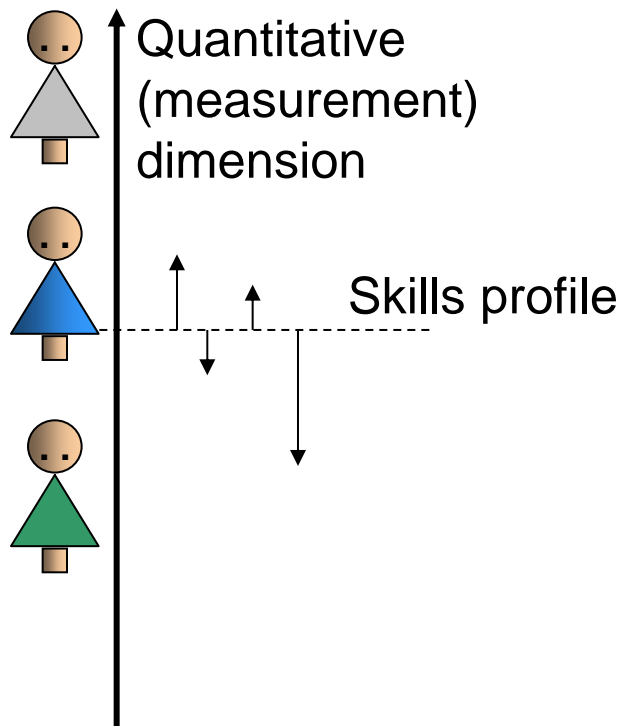


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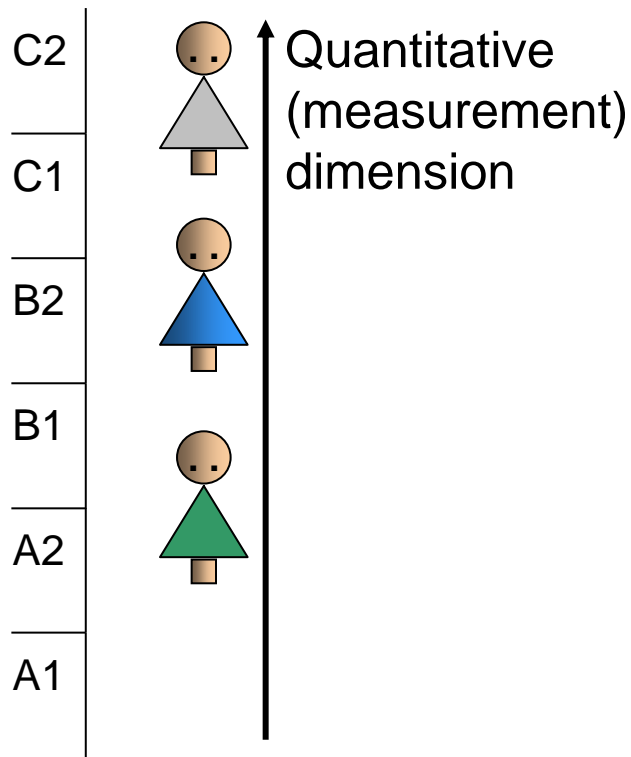


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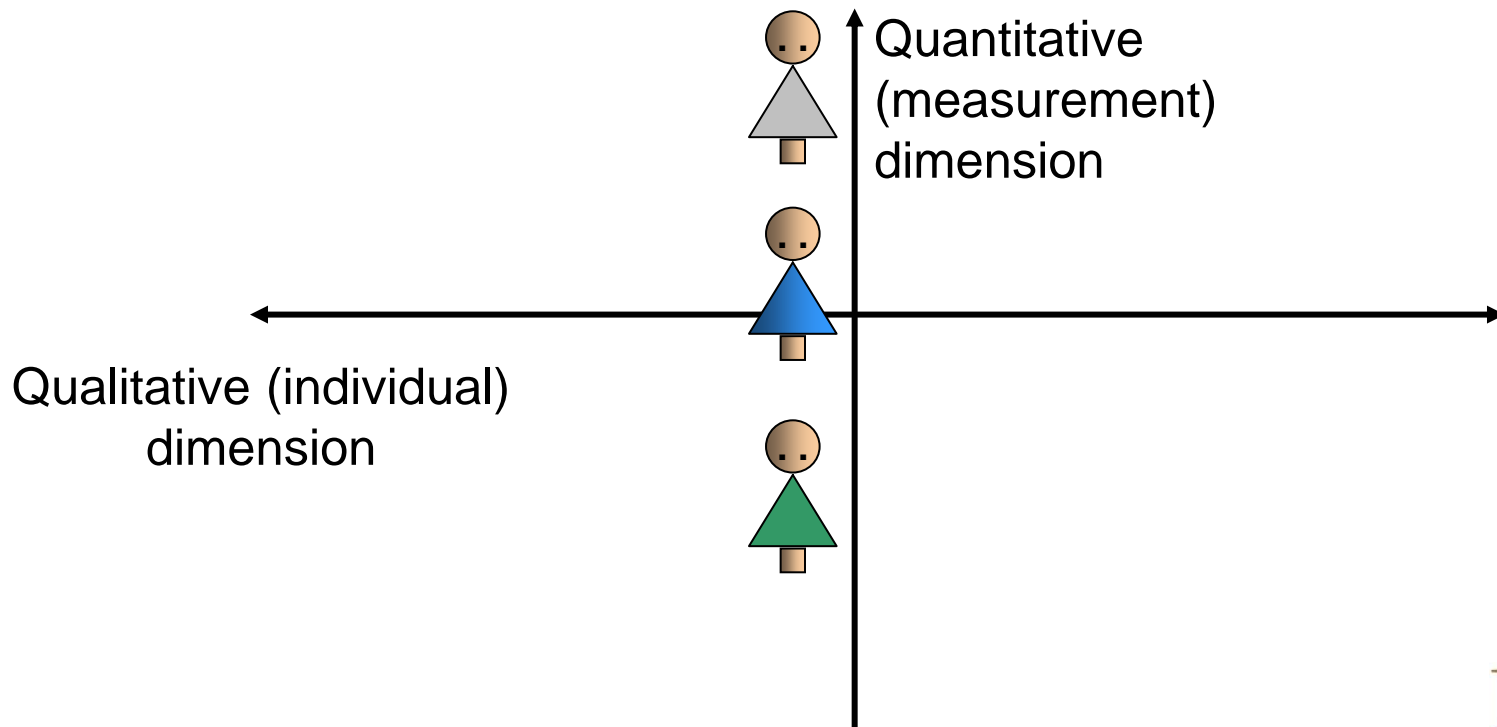


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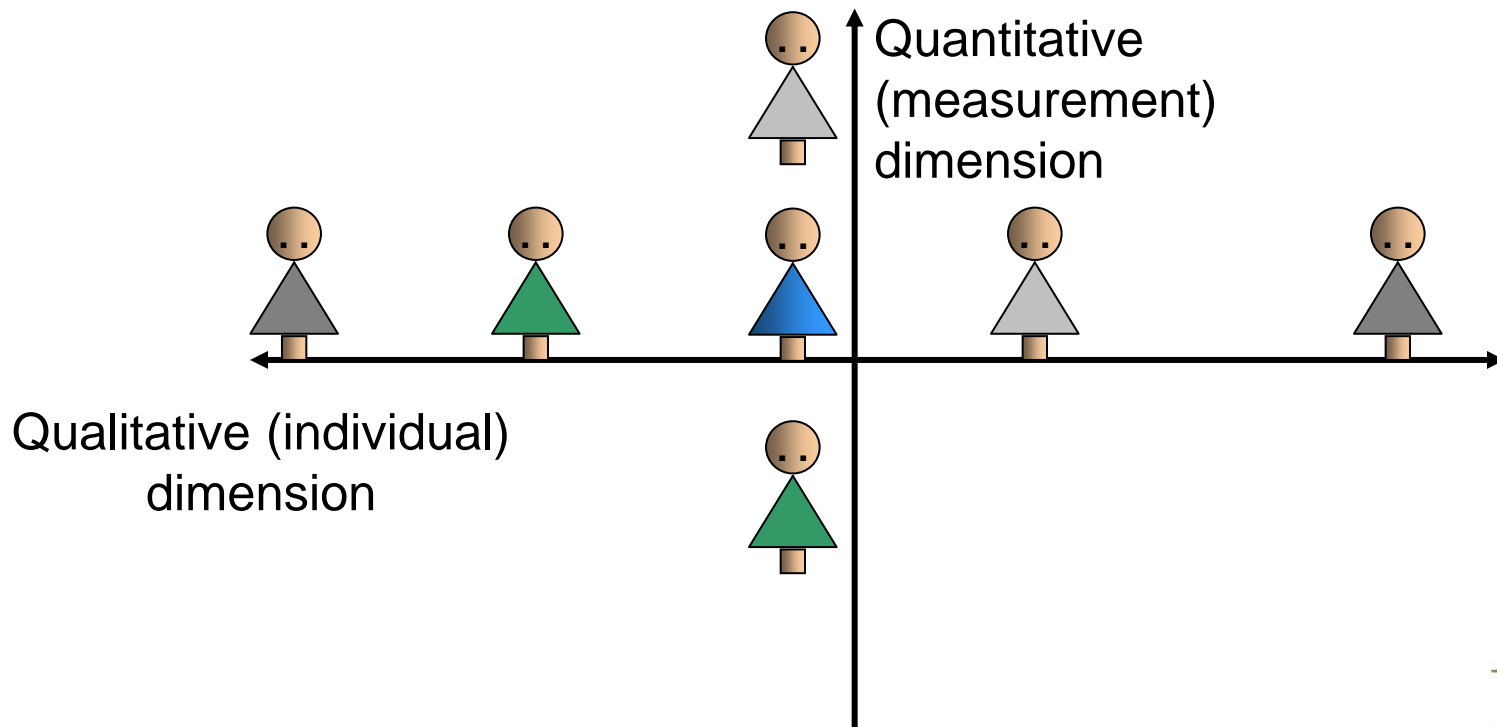
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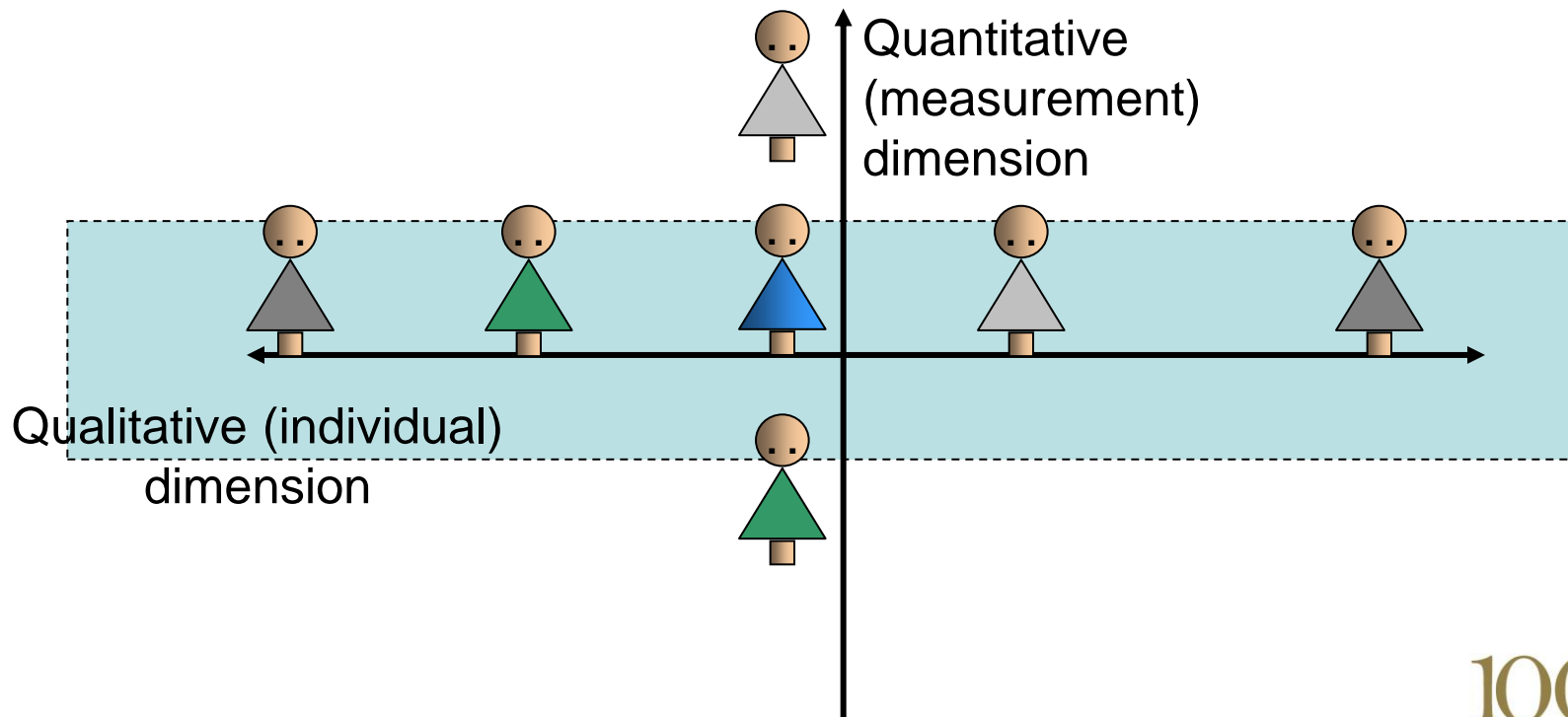


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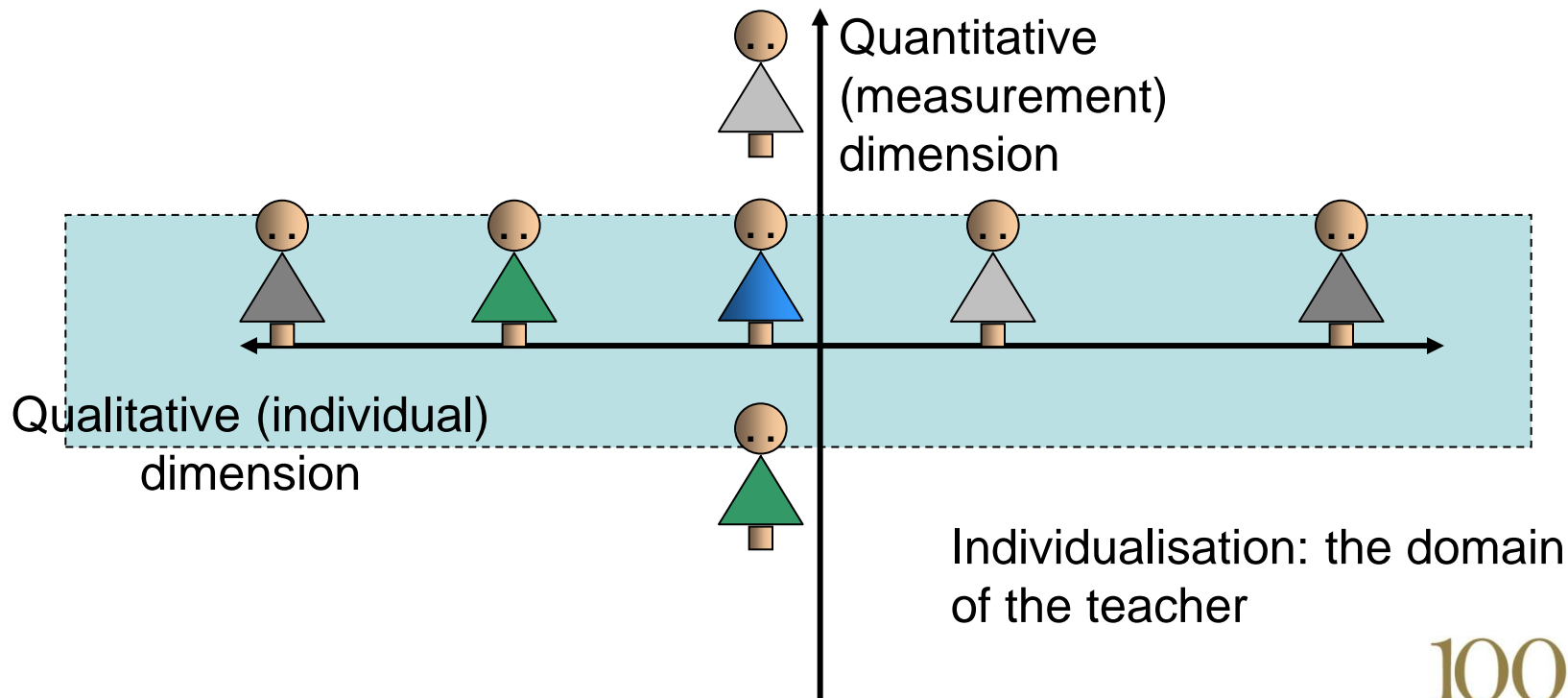


# A complementary relationship with teaching:





# A complementary relationship with teaching:





# The How well

## Key issues:

- The collection and interpretation of complex evidence
  - To understand how people behave and systems work
- Which philosophical influences? Which research methodology?
  - Critical realism
  - Mixed methods
  - Longitudinal designs
  - Proactive participatory approach



# The How well - investigating impact as validation

## Data collected routinely on:

- who is *taking* the examination  
(i.e. a profile of the candidates)
- who is *using* the examination results and for what purpose
- who is *teaching* towards the examination and under what circumstances
- what kinds of *courses and materials* are being designed and used to prepare candidates
- what effect the examination has on *public perceptions* generally  
(e.g. regarding educational standards)
- how the examination is viewed by those directly involved in *educational processes*  
(e.g. by students, examination takers, teachers, parents, etc.)
- how the examination is viewed by *members of society* outside education  
(e.g. by politicians, business people, etc.)



# The How well - investigating impact as validation

Consistent with Messick (1996):

*“In essence ..... test validation is empirical evaluation of meaning and consequences of measurement, taking into account extraneous factors in the applied setting that might erode or promote validity of local score interpretation and use.”*



# The How successfully

## "Impact by design"

A more **comprehensive model** which locates the study of impact as a research and development tool within an iterative approach to on-going test validation and revisions

- An essential component in establishing the overall usefulness of an assessment system in terms of its fitness for specific purposes and contexts of use
- A **Theory of Action** - the basis for doing things better

# Summary: a model for investigating impact

## Stance

Perspective of UK examinations board  
Influenced by critical realism, contemporary pragmatism

## Reconceptualising impact taking account of:

- theories of knowledge
- socio-cognitive theory
- constructivism
- theories of change

## Impact by Design

Procedural basis for knowing about effects and consequences

Theory of Action

Impacts (positive and negative) anticipated in design phase

Impact research methodology used to find out what happens

Remedial action taken when needed on the basis of impact evidence

## Key considerations

Centrality of language construct, theories of language learning

- a socio-cognitive model
- learning understood as change
- effective communication

Impact research incorporated into routine validation processes  
Mixed method designs used with impact “toolkit” to collect quantitative and qualitative data

Importance of the timeline with iterative cycles of review and revisions implemented over time

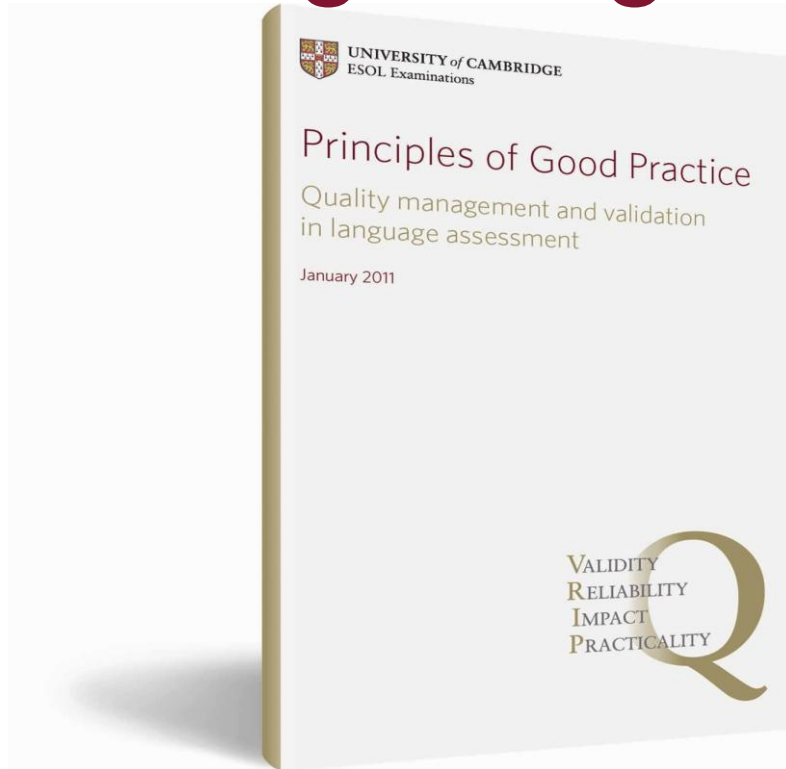
## Emergent aspects of validity

Improved understanding of the meaning of language assessment in context and of the effects and consequences on systems and people





# Cambridge English stance



See also:  
Saville, 2012  
Research Notes, 50



# Thank you







# The What - English language ability

Assessment has a powerful positive or negative impact on education and society

Objectives should focus on what matters - communicative language ability

Alignment of classroom and assessment activities (tasks) ensures coherence throughout the system.