Translanguaging

What is translanguaging?
Translanguaging is a term used to describe practices that allow and encourage EAL learners to use their full linguistic repertoire in order to empower them and help them to realise their full potential. This means encouraging them to speak, write and/or translate to and from their first language or any language they speak and English, to support their learning.

Encouraging translanguaging involves fostering positive attitudes towards multilingualism and encouraging EAL learners to be proud of all their language skills. Allowing learners to choose which language to use at any time is a key feature of translanguaging.

Examples of activities
Translanguaging can be used with EAL learners at all stages of English language proficiency, at any age and across the curriculum. Here are a few examples:

1. **Bilingual and multilingual glossaries**: These are useful to help EAL learners to build on their prior knowledge. For example in *Organs and systems* there is a multilingual word bank giving the names of organs, which many EAL learners may know in their first language. Other resources on EAL Nexus recommend encouraging learners to compile their own bilingual glossary of key terms.

2. **Drafting written work in first language**: When being asked for an extended piece of writing, such as a newspaper article in English, EAL learners with good literacy skills in their first language often produce a more sophisticated result if they are encouraged to draft it in their first language before writing it in English, particularly if they are at the *New to English or Early acquisition stages*. This is because they can concentrate on the content first without being constrained by thinking about how to express it in English. They can then try and translate it with the help of a bilingual dictionary or translation software.
3. Online research: If learners are asked to conduct their own research on a topic this can often be done entirely or partially in their first language. For example in *Life and works of Charles Dickens* learners are asked to find out information such as which books some of his most famous characters appear in, or matching the name of a character with a short description, and some of this research could be carried out in the EAL learners’ first language.

4. Group discussion: Many of the group and pair discussions in EAL Nexus resources provide good opportunities for translanguaging. For example in *Checking out me history* where the learners are asked to talk about their own experiences as well as the meaning of the poems, it is suggested that particular attention should be paid to grouping to facilitate both English and first language communication.

**How translanguaging works**

- As well as the examples above, translanguaging includes any activity that empowers learners to choose which language they use, for example:
  - Note making (e.g. making their own notes from a text, graphic organiser or during practical work), in first language, English or a mixture
  - Note taking (e.g. noting down information while someone is talking or while watching a video), in any language(s)
  - Use of subject specific books in their first language
  - Any collaborative group or pair activity with peers who share a language, where the discussion can be in their language(s) of choice
- Encourage and support EAL learners to take GCSE exams in their first language (if available)
- Make EAL learners feel proud of their first language, and make positive references to their bilingualism in class
- Encourage development of first languages by providing texts in a range of languages, e.g. fiction and non-fiction books, magazines and newspapers

**Top tip:** Make sure that EAL learners and other in the class are clear that they are encouraged to use their first language in lessons (unless asked to English for a specific task) and that this will help them to develop both/all their languages.
Why is translanguaging a Great Idea for EAL learners?

All EAL learners have useful language skills in their first language, and many also have literacy skills, which they can build on to acquire academic English. Learners may sometimes find it easier to engage with new concepts in their first language and transfer that knowledge and understanding to English. The principle of building on the learner’s prior knowledge is a key aspect of EAL pedagogy (NALDIC 1999).

Research such as the work of Cummins (dual iceberg and threshold theories), and Collier and Thomas (2002) recommends a socioculturally supportive school environment for EAL learners that allows natural language, academic, and cognitive development to flourish in their first and second languages. Welsh research into bilingual education (Baker and Wright 2017) points to the advantages of bilingualism and bilingual education, and there is also research that suggests the cognitive benefits continue into later life (e.g. Bialystock et al. 2012).

Researchers into translanguaging, such as Garcia and Li, argue that giving EAL learners the opportunity to use their full language repertoire empowers them and enables them to reach their full potential. The importance of a positive attitude to multilingualism has been suggested by various researchers and activist for a long time. For example Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) coined the term ‘linguistic human rights’ and challenged what she saw as ‘linguicism’. Levy et al (2014) suggested that learners whose first language is seen as low status in schools feel less included. Conteh (2015) reinforces the idea that valuing multilingualism in schools promotes success for EAL learners.

References


Thomas, W.P. and Collier, V.P., 2002, A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement. Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

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