



**Success Indicator IN08:** To the greatest degree possible, the ELs' instructional program supports the maintenance and development of ELs' home languages. (5885)

**Overview:** When school community members encourage bilingual students to share and utilize their home languages in their classrooms, they not only communicate an appreciation for the diversity of their students, but also improve students' chances to meet or exceed academic expectations. The inclusion of multiple languages in the classroom allows the space and security students need to make full use of all their language resources as they work with complex content and build relationships. Furthermore, when home languages of students are overtly valued as contributing to new learning in classrooms, schools often become more invested in supporting families' efforts to further develop first language literacy skills and academic discourse at home.

**Questions:** Why encourage first language use in content classrooms? What does first language use (translanguaging) look like and how does it work? How can school leaders promote and support teachers in using translanguaging practices and in the maintenance and development of first languages?

#### **Why encourage first language use in content classrooms?**

Current research evidences benefits from capitalizing on students' strengths in their first languages (August, McCauley, & Shanahan, 2014; Durgunoğlu, 2002; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005; Wells, 1998). The comprehensive, longitudinal Review of ESL K-12 Program Implementation in Alberta, for example, concluded that proficiency in the first language is one of the biggest predictors of English Learners' (ELs) success (Alberta Education & Howard Research & Management Corporation, 2006). In a review of five separate studies, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, and Christian (2005) found that strong reading skills in the first language (L1) almost always transferred to the language being acquired (L2), and a literate background in the L1 could make up for deficiencies in other areas, such as low speaking proficiency in the L2. In a study conducted by Daniel and Pacheco (2016), one student explained, "if I cannot understand, I write it in Burmese and then I go back and read what I wrote, I can understand" (p. 4). ELs who share the same L1 can work together to plan tasks or projects, problem-solve, and check their comprehension (Ellis, 2014, p. 241). In a separate study, 62% of students said they thought about L1 grammar when learning English grammar (Jiang & Kuehn, 2001). Ellis (2014) also suggested that when ELs use their L1 to discuss L2 grammar, they are better able to focus on the form of the target grammar instead of the language needed to talk about grammatical concepts (p. 234).

Various theories about why first language development and use support learning a second language have emerged. In recent years, sociocultural theorists have argued that bilinguals have a linguistic repertoire made up of all the languages they know/are acquiring from which they draw to meet their communicative needs. Garcia (2009) introduced the term translanguaging to describe the linguistic act performed by multilingual individuals which allows them to



naturally use all language resources to make meaning of the task at hand. She explained that translanguaging is a common concept around the world, where languages are not in contention but are instead used to enhance the context of a situation. For instance, countries such as India with vast numbers of languages and soft language boundaries rely on translanguaging to accomplish everyday tasks, often using a combination of a local language, a common language like Hindi, and English (Garcia, 2009). Emerging multilingual students can call upon similar resources to complete classroom tasks; they might read instructions for a science project in their L1 and complete the associated group task in English with their English-speaking peers, developing their knowledge of content and academic language together. In this organic process, students use the language necessary for a desired outcome, practicing a multilingual approach when necessary – using all of their language resources at once, rather than switching between them (Otheguy, et al., 2015). Translanguaging is what allows students to make sense of the multilingual world in which they live, while also preventing the erasure of students' L1 identities (Garcia, 2011).

In the classroom, the concept of translanguaging is also associated with biliteracy, defined as “any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing” (Hornberger, 1990, p. 213). Just as students use all of their language resources to learn and accomplish content- and interaction-based tasks, teachers and administrators need to remember that they use those same resources to develop their reading and writing skills. Therefore, L1 literacy should not be neglected in favor of L2 literacy, particularly in a digital society where it is increasingly difficult to separate audio, visual, and written content (Marshall & Moore, 2013; Schwinge, 2003). Biliteracy, and Hornberger's continua of biliteracy in particular (discussed below), is generally used by educators and researchers as a tool to evaluate curricula and assessments; it is another means by which translanguaging can be acknowledged, encouraged, and used to benefit all students (Hornberger, 1990; Schwinge, 2003; Skilton-Sylvester, 1997).

### **What does first language use (translanguaging) look like and how does it work?**

As suggested above, translanguaging is not a skill to be taught, but a communicative method used by students who are bilingual or multilingual. They draw on their

knowledge base, in their home language(s), in order to make meaning of instruction. The teacher is there to support the use of both languages where appropriate, scaffolding lessons accordingly. As stated earlier, in translanguaging learning contexts, students are encouraged to draw on their full range of language resources to understand and communicate their ideas with others (Garcia, 2011). Translanguaging works with many classroom dynamics. Using different grouping styles to teach students is one of our most common practices in the modern classroom. Teachers do not have to speak the language of their students in order to facilitate its use. Students can work in groups with same L1 or in mixed language groups, using their own language skills as well as notes, bilingual dictionaries, and collaboration with other students to complete discussions and tasks (Cummins, 2007; Garcia & Sylvan, 2011; Webster & Valeo, 2011). Students will look for positive reinforcement when they are attempting to make meaning using their home language. For educators, the job is to provide students with a positive and trusting environment to exercise forms of learning that employ more than English.

In support of this, educators can allow students to use translators when giving new content area vocabulary words, which are readily available through websites and computer applications. Although some researchers discourage translation as a distraction that can encourage students to rely on their L1, Cummins (2014) and Garcia and Sylvan (2011) suggest translation can encourage biliteracy and offer stronger students the opportunity to use their skills to aid their peers. New vocabulary could be accompanied by visual aids with the word in English and the L1. Students could use this method to create personal vocabulary dictionaries using their first language and English. Once students understand that use of their home language is accepted in the classroom, they can decide with the teacher when to use it and when only English would be a better choice. This decision will be dependent upon many variables, such as the student's EL level, the amount time spent in a new country and in the school/class, the assignment, the objective, and the grouping dynamic.

For example, during a science class, a concept such as gravitational pull could be explained in the first language using a bilingual translator, translation technology, a high-proficiency student, or by translating a few key vocabulary words. English development could also be a



specific focus through relevant language objectives that ask the student to explain the concept verbally or in writing, such as a lab journal. There should be supports in place around the classroom as well, such as a multi-lingual vocabulary wall where keywords are displayed in both languages alongside other visuals. The objective may also be written in the student's first language, and students could be encouraged to make use of their first language when taking notes. Other strategies include:

- previewing content in primary language
- using cognates
- visuals and role play in either L1 or L2
- devising a group writing assignment in the L1 where students write about new experiences, later translating to L2
- telling stories, then translating them to English
- pairing students of the same language, where one student is stronger in L2
- encouraging students to discuss school work in their native language with family members
- providing books written in L1
- creating spaces for promotion of L1
- including L1 in school and classroom displays
- encouraging the development of L1 in homes and communities

(Goldberg & Coleman 2011; Cummins, 2007; Del Carmen Salzar, 2008).

As Garcia argues, these are not intended to replace English acquisition, but to enhance it. Students' home languages should be one of the resources used in activities that are not English specific to develop skills that allow them to achieve success, enhance teamwork, build self-esteem and motivation, and support positive relationships with classmates and teachers (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996). Students can see their home language as a way to succeed academically while the development of bicultural identity is fostered.

### **How can school leaders promote and support teachers in using translanguaging practices and in the maintenance and development of first languages?**

Education systems that incorporate the use of more than one language support students academically, socially, and emotionally, as they acculturate and form bicultural identities. It is important that ELs are not "othered," or made to feel as if their first language should not be

used, as these identities are being formed (Khatib & Taie, 2016). Creating a whole school environment where students feel comfortable having exchanges in their first language is one example of being sure students do not feel "othered." The following are a few ways leaders could create this supportive environment.

### **Classroom Instructional Support**

The support teachers receive will enhance the quality of inclusion within instruction. When observing and supporting instruction, school leaders should be mindful of the first languages of the students and how language use supports content/language objectives. Leaders should look for displays that mirror the students and especially their language, such as the vocabulary wall or other visual supports discussed above (Cummins, 2007; Garcia, 2011). When observing classes, leaders should be sure that no student is isolated socially or academically for language reasons (Webster & Valeo, 2011). Some grouping plans should be included in lesson plans, along with a rationale. For example, teachers may have homogeneous language groups for some activities, allowing same language students to support one another (Webster & Valeo, 2011). Lesson planning may also mention cross-cultural opportunities such as culturally responsive pedagogy and places where the use of multiple languages would be appropriate.

During any discussions that follow teacher observations and evaluations, leaders should bring up topics about how instruction could be enhanced with translanguaging approaches. Some questions for observation and post-observation discussions include:

- What exchanges, instruction, and activities may be supported with use of first languages? How could the first languages be brought in for the purpose of the objective?
- What baseline assessment was used for the objective and was the learner's home language supported in the assessment?
- Is the culture being supported and celebrated through the environment and choice of resources?

(West-Olatunji, Goodman, & Shure, 2011; Genesee et al., 2005).

Leaders can also use the continua of biliteracy, proposed by Hornberger (1989) and updated by Skilton-Sylvester (1997), which includes 12 continua separated into four



areas of focus: contexts, development, media (outdated, omitted below), and content.

- Contexts (Hornberger, 1989)
- Micro–Macro, or text features focused on individual learner needs – the expectations of academia/society
- Oral–Literate, or spoken – written texts
- Monolingual–Bilingual [multilingual]
- Development (Hornberger, 1989)
- Reception–Production, or texts that are received (such as reading/listening) – those that are produced (writing/speaking)
- Oral Language–Written Language
- L1–L2 Transfer, or monolingual norms (e.g. language used at home with friends v. language used at school) – multilingual norms (e.g. Spanish used at home with friends v. English or Spanish used at school)
- Content (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997)
- Minority–Majority, or local community knowledge (e.g. texts from minority perspectives written by minorities) – knowledge required by schools or at the national level
- Vernacular–Literary, or common texts such as recipes – standard literary texts
- Contextualized–Decontextualized, or texts that include clear examples or references to previous experiences (e.g. a story) – texts that explain a concept without an example (e.g. an encyclopedia) (Schwinge, 2003)

It is important to note that these are continua, not dichotomies – in other words, the two sides should not be competing against one another, but used in tandem. Schwinge (2003) offered the example of students reading a story about swimming in the ocean (contextualized), then reading a scientific article in their L1 that explained why oceans are salty (decontextualized). Leaders can use the continua to evaluate how well learning tasks and assessments make use of/develop all of students' linguistic resources, including their L1s, and make resources, such as minority texts, available and accepted/encouraged components of curricula.

### **Promotion of First Language Outside Classrooms**

When all school faculty and staff are engaged in promoting the use of first languages, they encourage the development of students' language resources and help prevent the segregation, or othering, of ELs – which can,

in turn, increase students' confidence in their learning ability (Auerbach, 1993; Khatib & Taie, 2016; U.S. Dept. of Ed.). To this end, welcome and direction signs throughout the school should be written in students' L1s and in English. Labels for important rooms, such as bathrooms or the nurse's office, and all school informational handouts should follow the same multilingual protocol. This use of home languages can also help parents feel more comfortable interacting with school officials and participating in their children's learning (Auerbach, 1993; U.S. Dept. of Ed.). Faculty and staff can also encourage translanguaging and foster respect for students' L1s by using greetings in different languages, or by using their own L1s with visitors, students, and other staff (U.S. Dept. of Ed.). When possible, staff members should share their knowledge about students' languages and cultures, such as dress and dietary restrictions, with other faculty members.

To convey an appreciation for language diversity, leaders should know the names of the languages and understand how to contact necessary translators for all of them. Schools are required to provide translation and/or interpretation services of all pertinent information to parents with limited English (US Dept of Justice). There should be language translators on hand for every scheduled meeting and a number to call for a translator if an emergency should arise. Any flyer sent home should be in the home languages of the parents. Phone calls home should be made with translators or through translating services. All staff and faculty should be trained on how to use available translating services. Schools are required to use professional translation/interpretation services, and cannot ask students or untrained bilingual staff members to serve as interpreters (US Dept of Justice). Making use of L1s is very important and should be handled with care and respect for all involved.

### **Promotion of Home Language Literacy and Academic Discourse**

As L1 literacy is correlated with English literacy and overall academic success, it is important to provide students and families with the resources to promote L1 academic literacy (Alberta Education & Howard Research & Management Corporation, 2006; Durgunoğlu, 2002; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). Schools can provide after school opportunities in students' L1s or share information about heritage language programs, which promote the maintenance of students' L1s and



teach very young or second-generation immigrants the language of their parents. The U.S. Department of Education emphasized the importance of encouraging student autonomy, so schools should provide information on home language literacy strategies that can be introduced in class and practiced at home, such as drawing comparisons between formal language features in English and in their L1, or reading appropriately challenging books in their L1 (Durgunoğlu, 2002; Genessee, 2012; U.S. Dept of Ed). As parent involvement increases student success, parent classes on topics such as home literacy and L1 academic discourse should be considered alongside programs aimed at students (Durgunoğlu, 2002; Dept of Ed).

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