



TeachingEnglish

British Council: TeachingEnglish

A podcast series for teachers
of English



**Episode 8: How can I use
different languages in my
teaching?**

Show notes



Episode overview

Students' home languages should be seen as assets in the English language classroom – but all too often they are viewed as problematic and detrimental. In this episode, the writers of the British Council publication *Using multilingual approaches: moving from theory to practice* share activities you can use in your classroom that celebrate the languages your students speak. Following these practical suggestions, academic and researcher Tony Capstick shares his insights into the value and importance of a multilingual approach to learning.

In this episode

The languages students speak are a strength and potential aid, rather than a barrier to learning.

When students' languages are an active part of the classroom, they can be valuable resources for connecting with prior knowledge and learning new concepts.

Topics that are linguistically and culturally inclusive can be motivating and enjoyable for both teachers and students.

A key aspect of inclusive teaching is choosing topics that engage all your students, from all linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Classrooms ... are changing because of things like pandemics, technology ... how do we adapt these real-world events to the current situation that teachers face?

Even your monolingual learner has access to these different resources, but the world is far more multilingual than that.

Classroom application

Think about your own practice

- What language(s) do your students speak? Are they allowed or encouraged to use them in your classroom / institution?
- What are the advantages of a multilingual education?
- What is the official policy of your institution / system for language in the classroom? How strictly is this implemented?
- What are the views of other educational stakeholders about the appropriate language(s) to use in the classroom? What do parents think? What does the headteacher / principal think?
- Are there things which you could do in your classroom to support children who speak minority languages?

Classroom activity: Global Goal connections and Project Action Plan

Some short, multilingual activities which you could try with your students are presented below. They are taken from Chris Sowton's book *Teaching in Challenging Circumstances*.

ACTIVITY: Reconstructing a L2 text from L1 notes

- 1 Give students a reading or listening task in L2.
- 2 Students read or listen, and take notes about the main points in their L1.
- 3 Students work in pairs. They should reconstruct what they just read or heard together in L2, using their L1 notes.

ACTIVITY: Labelling images in multiple languages

- 1 Draw a picture on a poster or the board (e.g. your classroom; the human body; an urban scene).
- 2 Ask students to label the picture in as many languages as they can. There can be multiple labels for the same object. For example, in Lebanon, it might be labelled *eyes* (English); *عيون* (Arabic); *les yeux* (French).
- 3 Encourage students to ask questions to each other about any of the words they do not know.

ACTIVITY: Storytime

- 1 Tell the whole class that you are going to create a story. Ask students to come up with a title for the story. Alternatively, you could give a title (e.g. *The naughty monkey*, *Two sisters*, *The longest journey*).
- 2 Students (whose L1s are different) work in groups and brainstorm ideas for the story.
- 3 Take ideas from different groups, and together create the story in the dominant language of the class.
- 4 Students (whose L1s are the same) now write this story in their own L1.
- 5 Students read the story to the rest of the class in their L1.

Chris Sowton - *Teaching in Challenging Circumstances*. Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers

Classroom activity: This is one of the activities about ‘names’ found in the publication. The other activities discussed (and many more) follow the same approach.

Activity 2: Finding out about your name

Objectives

- Students think about different aspects of names and naming practices, for example who chose their name, how many names they were given, if they were named after someone.
- Students ask questions and provide answers in their home or local languages and English.
- Students communicate with family and community members to gather information about their names, using the family/community languages.

Time

30 minutes, plus some time at home

Materials

- Board and chalk/pens
- Pencil and paper for each student

Steps

1. Ask students to think of all the different questions they could ask about someone's name. Examples might include:
 - › What is your name? (all your names)
 - › What does your name mean?
 - › Who chose your name?
 - › Where does your name come from?
 - › What language does your name come from?
 - › How do you write your name in different scripts?
 - › Do people pronounce your name in different ways? How do you feel about this?
 - › What would you be called if you were the other sex?
 - › Are there any well-known people with the same name as you?
 - › Do you have any nicknames, and how do you use them?

Students may come up with many more interesting questions!

For each question, write an answer structure in their home or local language, where possible, and in English. For example:

My name is _____.
 My name means _____.
 _____ chose my name.

Depending on your students' English level, they could do this individually, in groups or following the teacher's instructions.

2. Write each question and answer structure on the board for students to see. Ask students to write these in their notebooks. Remember, you can choose the most appropriate language(s) to use, depending on your students' level.
3. Ask students to choose five to seven questions that are most interesting to them. Ask them to think of one or two people who can give them the answers. Ask students to think about which languages they should use when asking their family or community members these questions.
4. Students can work in groups to create translations of their questions and write these on the board for others in the class to use.
5. Ask the students to write out their chosen questions in their notebooks, using the appropriate language, and leaving space to write the answers.
6. Students will need to find the answers to their questions at home or in their communities. They may need one or two days to complete this task. Ask students to write down the answers as they find them out (where possible in the languages that the information is given).

Extra resources

Have a look at this video <https://tinyurl.com/y5cnzhxq> to see an interesting way of students using the board in the classroom.



TEACHER FEEDBACK

Shefall

The [activity relates] deeply with the lives of the learners and encourages them to explore. This activity also breaks the barrier of teacher hierarchy by letting the teacher share something personal about her life.

Social media

Please share your views about this episode, and the whole series on social media using the hashtag #TEBC. Let us know your thoughts, reflections, comments and whether you have been able to use any of the ideas in your teaching.

Detailed notes

Use these notes to find out more about the contents of Episode 8.

Phrase	Explanation and Further Information
Using multilingual approaches: moving from theory to practice	
Report	<p>The original report can be downloaded for free here. As it states, the aim of the book is to “introduce important evidence relating to language learning in multilingual contexts and develop the practice of using multilingual approaches in the classroom. It has been especially designed to support teachers who teach English as a subject and for teachers who use English as the medium of instruction in classrooms with students in linguistically diverse and often resource-poor communities. The resource has three main parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A guide that explains relevant research evidence2. Strategies, activities and projects that teachers can use in their classrooms <p>An abridged list of resources for multilingual education for further exploration.”</p>
Sue Ollerhead	Find out more about Sue and her research here .
The use of their mother tongue is seen as somehow subversive or deviant.	Click here for an interesting article on this topic by Munene Mwaniki entitled “Mother tongue education in primary teacher education in Kenya: a language management critique of the quota system”.
Multilingual ecology	As this academic article argues, “A multilingual ecology creates an environment that is welcoming to all students and families and acknowledges student identities”.
Languages of South Africa	According to this website, which contains a lot of useful information about the languages of South Africa, “IsiZulu is South Africa’s biggest language, spoken by almost a quarter (23%) of the population. Our other official languages

	<p>are isiXhosa (spoken by 16%), Afrikaans (13.5%), English (10%), Sesotho sa Leboa (9%), Setswana and Sesotho (both 8%), Xitsonga (4.5%), siSwati and Tshivenda (both 2.5%), and isiNdebele (2%).”</p>
<p>Language map</p>	<div data-bbox="539 349 1168 712" data-label="Diagram"> <p>Karimeh's language map</p> <p>French and de Courcy 2016, p. 159.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="528 752 1187 1077" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Examples of languages maps given in the British Council Publication.</p>
<p>Mei French</p>	<p>Find out more about Mei and her research here.</p>
<p>Kamala Harris ... mispronouncing her name</p>	<p>Read a Forbes article about this here.</p>
<p>Kerry Taylor-Leech</p>	<p>Find out more about Kerry and her research here.</p>
<p>Home language</p>	<p>A home language is a language (or the variety of a language) that is most commonly spoken by the members of a family for everyday interactions at home.</p>
<p>Interview with Tony Capstick</p>	
<p>Tony Capstick</p>	<p>You can find out more about Tony's work and research here. As his website says, his main areas of interest are “teacher education, multilingualism and migration. He carries out research in formal classrooms as well as informal out-of-school contexts in order to explore the role of home language use in institutional settings, with a particular focus on literacy and power. He draws on sociolinguistics and discourse analysis but as an</p>

	ethnographer he is most at home working in diverse settings tracing the educational trajectories of learners and finding pedagogic solutions to the challenges faced by teachers.”
Applied linguistics	Applied linguistics is the branch of linguistics concerned with practical applications of language studies, for example language teaching, translation, and speech therapy.
Multilingual education	According to UNESCO , the term refers to the use of at least three languages, for example, the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language in education. The 1999 Resolution of UNESCO’s General Conference supported the view that the requirements of global and national participation and the specific needs of culturally and linguistically distinct communities can only be addressed by multilingual education. UNESCO supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.
Different registers and genres of language	Click here for a simple explanation about different registers and genres in English.
Codeswitching	<p>Code switching refers to the practice of changing between languages within and across sentences. Historically, this practice has been seen negatively in the language learning classroom. The reason given for this, generally, is that the most effective way of learning an L2 is by using only the target language. However, most research now shows that moderate and targeted use of L1 can be effective in acquiring L2. This process is known as scaffolding, and it enables students to work more effectively in the zone of proximal development. This is because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ using L1 allows students to work at a higher cognitive level ▪ students are more interested in the tasks ▪ students are better able to manage tasks ▪ students can better check and clarify their understanding with each other. This kind of learner cooperation is especially useful in large classes. <p>It respects students’ individual identities, which in challenging circumstances is important. Students can</p>

	express themselves how they want. Making the classroom a safe space can be more important than the tangible learning outcomes.
Translanguaging	Translanguaging is a similar communicative practice to code switching. Indeed, the two are often confused. Translanguaging is a related but deeper process. The process is one where people use the resources they have from different languages together, using elements of each language to communicate more effectively. As García and Kleifgen explain, “Translanguaging includes code switching – the shift between two languages in context – but differs from it in significant ways, for it includes other bilingual practices that go beyond a simple switch of code, such as when bilingual students read in one language and then take notes, write, or discuss in another.”
Named languages	Named languages are social, not linguistic, objects. It is defined by the social, political or ethnic affiliation of its speakers
A long history of colonial language policies	This interesting blog from the University of Reading provides an overview of British language policy in its colonies.
Epistemic justice	As outline in this article , “Epistemic injustice is the idea that we can be unfairly discriminated against in our capacity as a knower based on prejudices about the speaker, such as gender, social background, ethnicity, race, sexuality, tone of voice, accent, and so on”

Useful links

- [Programs and structures in multilingual education](#)
- [Creative Multilingualism: a research programme at Oxford University exploring the links between creativity and languages](#)
- [List of resources from UNESCO on languages in education](#)
- [Multilingual learning from Goldsmiths University, London](#)
- [Bloom Library – create your own books in different languages](#)

Glossary

The following words at the B2, C1 and C2 level (according to the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#)) are used in this episode.

B2 words

academic
accessible
act as
adapt
adding to
additional
adopt
appropriate
aspect
associated with
barrier
basically
beliefs
beneficial
code
column
come to
community
compose
concepts
confidence
confidently
confuse
consequences
considerable
context
council
creativity
culturally
current
delight
denying
designed to
diverse
educational
ensuring
entitled
episode
evidence
expressing
focus
follow up
formal
gathered

gradually
handout
host
identify
identity
impact
individuals
informal
initially
introduction
justice
kingdom
learner
linking
look at
majority
meaningful
media
mental
necessarily
occurs
optional
oral
origin
personalities
policies
policy
potential
practical
precious
presenting
primary
process
productive
prompt
publication
reality
refer to
reflect
reflections
refugee
relevant
represent
research
resources

settings
significant
simply
source
specific
states
strategy
strength
structure
successfully
summary
target
task
tend to
theory
tradition
truly
try out
turn to
unfamiliar
united
universal
valued
variation
vary
visual
widely
work on

C1 words

aid
applaud
associate
assumptions
awareness
displacement
dominant
draw on
duration
ecology
engage
fit in
graded
implications
inclusive

interactions
linguistic
listeners
migration
mode
motivating
nicknames
oneself
outcomes
perceived
prior
relate to
relates to
reluctant
sacred
significance
similarly
speak for
status
subtitles
sue
workplaces

C2 words

adolescents
advocates
arouse
aspiration
complexity
conditioned
entity
heritage
parallel
practitioner
prompts
resistance
sedentary
siblings
stance
talk about
vice