Monograph

ELAN

Supporting Translanguaging

Using Translanguaging and the Multilingual Classroom

Curriculum connections

- Language diversity
- Multilingual language learners
- Translingual practice
- Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy

Contents

What it is

Translanguaging is when **students are supported and encouraged to use their home language to support their learning of new language(s)** as well as their academic content. Students learn faster and better when they are able to use both their home and school languages. "Translanguaging refers to both the discourse practices of bilinguals, as well as to pedagogical practices that use the entire complex linguistic repertoire of bilingual students flexibly in order to teach rigorous content and develop language practices for academic use" (Garcia, 2016).

Translanguaging happens when a multilingual person flexibly and dynamically mixes all of their languages to make meaning of the world, and to maximize their communicative and academic potential through reading, writing and speaking. As Ascenzi-Moreno & Espinosa put it, "Translanguaging is a creative process in which multilingual people use their language and other resources in dynamic, flexible, multimodal, semiotic, and purposeful ways…Multilingual people creatively draw from their language and social resources to make meaning, regardless of the language they use" (2021).

An emphasis on translanguaging is new to the Ontario Language, Grade 1-8 and English, Grade 9 curriculum (2023), and this may require shifts in practice in terms of how languages and language learning is supported.

Translanguaging means ...

Instead of...	...making a shift to...
Accepting English/French only as the norm,	Positioning multilingualism as the norm; where possible, making languages visible in the classroom and school (e.g., including multilingual texts/resources classrooms).
Discouraging using home languages at school and home because they might be barriers to MLLs' acclimation to school culture, or to their linguistic development in English,	Encouraging families to speak the languages that they are most comfortable using; teaching students and families about the benefits of being multilingual; showing curiosity about all languages, so that students have rich linguistic models to draw on as they interact within their various communities.
Problematizing students not speaking English yet,	Modeling an asset-based attitude towards multilingualism; learning some basic words in other/classroom languages; and leveraging opportunities to highlight and compare languages.
Setting low expectations for MLLs because they don't speak the language of instruction,	Planning for the development of English and literacy skills through content; integrating language and literacy learning in all areas of the curriculum.
Presenting language as neutral,	Applying a critical, anti-oppressive lens by framing language practices as a reflection of power structures.
Assuming that bilingualism in childhood is natural, and can be attained simply by	Advocating for an active language learning process that is based on planning multiple

Instead of...	...making a shift to...
listening to others speaking the additional language,	opportunities for students to listen, respond to, and create in a variety of contexts.
Limiting the use of home language for the selective translation of vocabulary purposes at the beginning of a lesson,	Encouraging MLLs to use ALL their languages throughout the learning cycle (e.g, translating key terms, brainstorming, researching, collaborating).
Separating languages as if they exist in isolation of one another,	Behaving as if MLLs have one linguistic repertoire where languages are flexibly and strategically drawn on to master content and maximize communication.
Communicating with multilingual families in English only,	When possible, leveraging available resources in both family-friendly English and home language (e.g., interpreters, settlement workers) to build relationships and communication channels with families.

Why it matters

While bringing translanguaging into classrooms has many academic and sociocultural benefits for all learners, it is essential for the success of multilingual language learners (MLLs). This is communicated in the following excerpt from the Ontario Language, Grades 1-8 and English, Grade 9 curriculum "A multilingual classroom that encourages creative and strategic translingual practice enables

students to use their linguistic repertoire in a fluid and dynamic way, mixing and meshing languages to communicate, interact, and connect with peers and teachers for a variety of purposes, such as when developing foundational literacy knowledge and skills and when making, creating, and communicating meaning through various texts and media. When students are engaged in cross-curricular learning tasks, translanguaging also supports knowledge transfer and affirms the cultural and linguistic identities of students" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023).

A classroom that supports translanguaging and that supports a multilingual environment supports all learners.

Benefits for ALL learners

- ⇒ Cultivates an appreciation of multilingualism and diverse perspectives, helping students succeed in an increasingly global world.
- ⇒ Supports academic language growth by increasing students' metalinguistic awareness.
- ⇒ Affirms and positions MLLs' linguistic identities as resources that enrich the learning environment.
- ⇒ Builds a greater sense of inclusion and belonging.

Benefits for MLLs

- ⇒ Scaffolds understanding of vocabulary and curricular content, particularly for beginner English speakers.
- ⇒ Bolsters engagement of MLLs working at all English proficiency levels.
- ⇒ Supports the transfer of literacy knowledge and skills across languages.
- ⇒ Supports the development of the less developed languages.
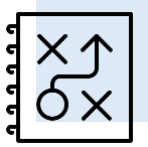
How it works

When educators work collaboratively with students, families, and colleagues to create language friendly spaces, then literacy and language outcomes are advanced for all. **Translanguaging can be applied in all grades, and is most impactful when a whole-school vision and approach is adopted,** including:

⇒ Building their own understanding about their students' diverse culturo-linguistic backgrounds.

⇒ Making space for, and valuing multilingualism and diverse ways of knowing.

⇒ Treating reading, writing, speaking and listening as dynamic, multimodal, inter-related processes with skills that are transferable across languages.

⇒ Welcoming all languages in the classroom by creating opportunities for MLLs to access their full linguistic toolbox, and including languages spoken in the school community in school displays.

⇒ Positioning MLLs and their families from a strengths-based perspective capable of making valuable contributions to the learning environment.

As one Ontario principal of a Language Friendly School in a CBC interview puts it, "If you walk the halls of [the school] … you would hear the diversity, you would see it, but you would also hear it through the languages. Students are speaking their mother language proudly in the school and it's a really nice feel" (2023).

In addition, educators, particularly classroom teachers, can consider adaptations that might be made when integrating translanguaging into existing literacy practices.

Using multilingual texts

One approach to supporting translanguaging is to use multilingual texts; that is, **texts that provide the text in one or more languages or that feature multiple languages as elements within the text** (e.g., characters speaking more than one language). Texts such as *Alego* by Ningeokuluk Teevee and *A is for Bee: An Alphabet Book in Translation* by Ellen Heck can be used as read alouds. Where possible, make multilingual and diverse multimodal texts available in the classroom and school libraries.

Using texts where multilingualism appears, for example in this excerpt by Donna Barba Higuer in *The Last Cuentista* "Yes," she answers, pulling me closer. "In a few days, the fire snake will finally find his mother. Y colorín Colorado, este cuento se ha acabado" (2021), can be used as mentor texts to show all readers how to access the various languages. In addition, using multilingual texts as mentors allows students to use as a reference when creating their own multilingual texts.

Inviting MLLs or their family members to read in the school in their home languages is another way to honour a variety of languages while also using diverse texts.

Supporting academic vocabulary learning

By spending time doing word work, and **focusing on how words and language function can help students learn the meaning of a target word; how it is used in context; how it connects to other related words; and, what the word is in their home language(s).** As the Ontario Curriculum Language and English curriculum Strand B: Foundations of Language promotes, this is important for all students.

To support this learning, explicitly and systematically teaching routines for developing metalinguistic understanding so that students learn to strategically reflect, compare and use their understanding of language structure (phonology, syntax, and

pragmatics) in English and their home language(s) to build their reading. This can be done by comparing languages and pointing out phonemes (sounds) and building cognate awareness (words that share common meanings/morphemes and spelling)

Example:

energy in English,
energia in Spanish
ενέργεια in Greek

Further ways to foster the acquisition of academic vocabulary includes co-constructing multilingual, subject-specific word walls and using translations tools and AI apps that offer texts in multiple languages and reading levels.

Making assessments culturally relevant

The principles behind translanguaging can also extend to assessment. That is, by **using a variety of multimodal assessment sources (e.g., a variety of writing samples from across the curriculum, including those in home language, oral interviews) can give a better understanding of MLLs' language and literacy strengths and needs.**

Using assessment practices that are culturally relevant includes

⇒ Building MLLs' language profiles/portraits (e.g., use Steps to English Proficiency (STEP)) to inform how they are effectively growing their English language proficiency.

⇒ Allowing students to access ALL their languages when making their thinking and learning visible (conversations, multimodal responses/products).

⇒ Using care when interpreting data from universal screeners and diagnostics designed for monolingual (e.g., English) speakers. Interpreting information from these tools may need to be teased out as to whether

reading ability or developing English proficiency is at the root of reading errors. Knowing the cause of difficulties is key to planning appropriate and responsive reading instruction.

Resources

[CUNY-NYS Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (external resource)](): A collaborative project of the Research Institute for the study of language funded by the New York State Education Department that focuses on improving the education of multilingual language learners.

[Libros for Language (external resource)](): This resource includes over 80 books with translanguaging to support the implementation of translanguaging into classrooms.

[Planning Language Programs for English Language Learners (external link)](): The front matter from the Ontario Language, Grades 1-8 and English Grade 9 curriculum outlines key considerations for effective literacy and language program for multilingual language learners.

[Storybooks Canada (external resource)](), [Indigenous Storybooks (external resource)]() and [Global Story Books (external resource)](): This resource provides a number of narrative texts in multiple languages, and that feature audio readings.

[Supporting English Language Learners e-Course (external resource)](): Free educator resources to support the instruction and assessment of MLLs that are accessible to all educators with Ontario school board emails. Educators self-enroll in the e-course to access professional learning materials to support MLLs.

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Updates

When updates are made to this document, they are tracked below with date and description of update.

- February 2025: initial release