

First language for learning



Other opportunities to use bilingual strategies include:

- when sharing learning intentions and success criteria
- partner talk in a shared first language to extend, check and consolidate understanding during whole-class teaching
- during guided work with small groups where discussion in first language develops and consolidates learning. This will be greatly facilitated where groups of children all share a first language
- during independent collaborative work
- during questioning and dialogue to probe children's understanding
- during discussion about language.



Bilingual strategies don't depend on bilingual staff



The following strategies will be supportive for children learning EAL in situations where no one else in school shares their first language.

- Show a general and academic interest in children's languages, and encourage them to be interested in each other's languages (this develops understanding and use of metalanguage by all children).
- Use ICT resources – audiotapes, video and film clips, dual-language texts – as well as texts in the languages of the classroom.
- Explore options for involving others: links with other schools, parents and the wider community.



See Unit 1 for more about how the use of the first language enhances learning.
See Unit 2 for bilingual strategies.

In Unit 3 find sections on:

- valuing and building on bilingual children's knowledge of other languages
- finding out about children's other languages
- investigating attitudes towards the use of other languages in school
- celebrating children's bilingualism; building on bilingual children's knowledge about language
- teachers and practitioners in the role of language learners.

See the accompanying DVD for examples of children using their first languages in the classroom.

- Bilingual learners are able to understand and articulate in their first language, including concepts and knowledge they have acquired in that language.
- It requires proficiency in English to be able to transfer that learning into the language of the classroom.
- It is well established that effective learning builds on what children already know and can do. Therefore, effective teaching of bilingual children needs to build on what they already know, i.e. their first language and what they can do in that language.
- A well-developed first language serves as a scaffold for English language development. Even children who are conversationally fluent in English benefit from bilingual strategies in the classroom.
- Research has established that a child's first language has a significant and continuing role to play in supporting the development of cognitive and academic language proficiency in English.



Before lessons

Pre-teaching or preparation in the first language provides a supportive context for children learning EAL.

It is easier to learn a new label for a concept that has already been developed in the first language than it is to learn new concepts in a new language when children will have few 'hooks' on which to hang their new learning. Children who know they are going to hear a teaching input interpreted into their first language will listen with much less attention than they would if they had been provided with a context for that input in advance of the lesson.

Support from a bilingual adult is very much more supportive of the child's developing English when organised in this way.

During lessons

Appropriate interventions during teaching enable children to contribute to class discussion and provide opportunities for checking understanding. These may include using the child's first language to explain and discuss idiomatic phrases; figurative language or culturally specific references; translating new lexical or grammatical items; encouraging children to compare and contrast their languages; using cultural knowledge to make connections; providing analogies and identifying and addressing misconceptions.

After lessons

Discussion in first language after whole-class teaching enables children to review and consolidate learning and facilitates assessment for learning.

Where available, productive support can be offered by peers, cross-age peers, parents and carers as well as by bilingual school staff. Bilingual additional adults should be involved in initial planning wherever possible. They need to be clear about learning objectives and they may well contribute ideas as to how to embed new learning in culturally familiar contexts.

Building on bilingual children's knowledge about language

The Primary Framework (2006) provides opportunities to build on bilingual children's knowledge of other language systems, for example as follows.

- Children identify everyday words which have been borrowed from other languages. Bilingual children could provide examples of recent 'borrowings' from their languages. They could also identify words borrowed from English by their languages.
- Children collect and explain the meaning and origins of proverbs. Bilingual children can collect examples from their first languages. These can then be compared with similar English examples.
- Children practise and extend vocabulary through inventing word games such as puns, riddles and crosswords.

Collecting and explaining bilingual jokes provide an enjoyable context for talking about language which builds on bilingual children's knowledge of languages and supports children to learn new vocabulary in English.

These examples can be enjoyed by bilingual people from many South Asian heritage communities as the words they play on are common to Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati:

What do you call a man with one hair?
Iqbal.
(*Ik* or *eyk* means one and *bal* means *hair*)



What did the green peas say?
Nothing, they just muttered.
(*mutter* means green peas)



What did the lonely banana say?
I'm a kela.
(*Kela* means banana and *akela* means alone)



Pakistani heritage children comparing and contrasting their languages:

In our language we've got lots of different words for auntie.

In Urdu we say, 'it's raining mortars and pestles!'

Bilingual strategies:

- build on what children know and can do

'We've built in time for our TA to provide a "jog around the text" in Portuguese, for an underachieving group who share that language. This intervention has improved their concentration and engagement during shared reading.'



- scaffold learning by supporting access to the curriculum

'We use "partner talk" as a strategy to check and consolidate understanding. When we learned that using both languages to explore new concepts helps bilingual children to develop higher-order language skills, we encouraged the children to use their first language as well as English during opportunities for "partner talk". We were able to arrange partners who shared their first language for most of the bilingual children.'

'At first some children were reluctant because they weren't used to using their first language in the classroom. Asking them to talk about something really familiar that they did at home helped them get over that and it happens really naturally now. We've tried to pair children who are more proficient in their first language with partners who are more confident in English. In this way we hope to maximise the language development opportunities.'

Try including words and phrases from children's first languages during shared writing: *Imran put on his new embroidered topi and set off to visit his dadde. 'Accha beta', said his mother, 'You're a good boy.'*



Bilingual strategies can be an effective way to unlock prior knowledge of curriculum content. Bilingual staff may be able to provide a stimulus which helps children to make connections and draw analogies.

Children with literacy skills in their first language, such as children newly arrived from overseas and children who are learning to read and write their community languages through supplementary education, should be encouraged to use these skills as tools for their learning.



Becoming bilingual 'boosts' brain-power!

Extract from the BBC News website:
Researchers from University College London studied the brains of 105 people – 80 of whom were bilingual. They found learning other languages altered grey matter – the area of the brain which processes information – in the same way that exercise builds muscles.

Article from BBC News at www.bbcnews.co.uk

These children can speak Punjabi as well as English

Tanveer
Ahmed
Mohammed Sadiq
Latifa
Baldeep
Suraya

The first language is an inherent part of identity. Valuing it impacts positively on how children see themselves and their place in the world.

Celebrating bilingualism

Displays can celebrate children's language skills by:

- listing the names of the children who speak each language
- showing where in the world this language is mostly spoken
- including a few facts about each language
- including the same sentence written in the scripts of the various community languages with a romanised transliteration to allow comparisons to be made.

Finding out about children's other languages

Dear Parents,
This school is proud of the fact that many of our pupils speak other languages as well as English. We want to find out as much as we can about the children's other language skills. Please help us by

Parents and carers are more likely to want to provide this information if they know the school values bilingualism, has very high expectations of bilingual children and will provide the appropriate support for their child where necessary without restricting their access to the curriculum.

- help children learn about language

'We have admitted Pakistani heritage children from Denmark and Norway this year. Children from one of these families spoke Punjabi as their first language but their early schooling was in Danish and they had some literacy skills in that language. The child from Norway speaks Norwegian as her first language and knows a little Urdu learned in a religious school in Norway. Last year a Somali child arrived from Holland. He had learned to read and write in Dutch although his first language was Somali. Another child in our school of Somali heritage spent many years in a refugee camp in Kenya before coming to the UK and speaks Swahili as a first language. Some of our Pakistani heritage families speak English as their first language. We never take anything for granted!'