

CURRICULUM

Translanguaging and Linguistic Diversity: Practices for the International Classroom

By *Cara Templeton*
 Head of the Intensive English Programme
 Prem Tinsulanonda International School



"We are faced with the bizarre scenario of schools successfully transforming fluent speakers of foreign languages into monolingual English speakers, at the same time as they struggle, largely unsuccessfully, to transform English monolingual students into foreign language speakers."

- Cummins, 2015

POWER & PRIVILEGE

"English only!"

Who has heard this before... or perhaps even said it?

I know myself that when I first joined the world of international education, I not only defended but argued for this practice, thinking that if my students wanted to learn English, they needed to use English and only English. No excuses.

Whilst this is not a complete fallacy, as teachers we should not isolate students' prior knowledge and experience from present opportunities for learning. By restricting the language used, we are restricting their thinking.

We live in an increasingly diverse world and yet, this is not reflected in education policy or classroom practices and it actually misaligned with the current goals of international education, which are to promote global citizenship and international mindedness.

While this is a complex issue it can largely be attributed to relations of power and cultural capital. Historical assimilationist policies sought to discourage/eradicate native voices due to the belief that it

affected the ability of students to identify with the mainstream language and culture (Cummins, 2001) and it seems that more recent policy has yet to move away from such a perspective. Indeed, current educational policies largely fail to acknowledge the multilingual nature of students and subsequently linguistic variation.

Although the rhetoric of these policies appears to reflect positivity towards multilingualism, there is a concerning attachment to linguistic and cultural homogeneity; and there is little to no provision for the maintenance or promotion languages (and cultures), which are associated with minority or indigenous varieties (Yiakoumetti, 2014).

TRANSLANGUAGING

Cen Williams first coined the term translanguaging (in Welsh) to refer to pedagogical practices in which English and Welsh were used for different activities and purposes (Garcia & Ofelia, 2017). Baker (2001) translated the term into English as "Translanguaging" and it is now widely understood to refer to how bilingual (plurilingual) people fluidly use their linguistic resources—without regard to named language categories—to make meaning and communicate (García, 2009).

Translanguaging pedagogy both views and promotes language as fluid and transferable; allowing students are able to make connections between, across and beyond language. Although most research thus far has been in bilingual contexts, there is a strong argument to be made for the consistent use of translanguaging in international school classrooms.

Translanguaging pedagogy can be used to celebrate our students' plurilingualism as part of their personal and cultural identity. As such, we should design instruction to leverage students' plurilingualism as a resource (moving away from deficit and towards asset).

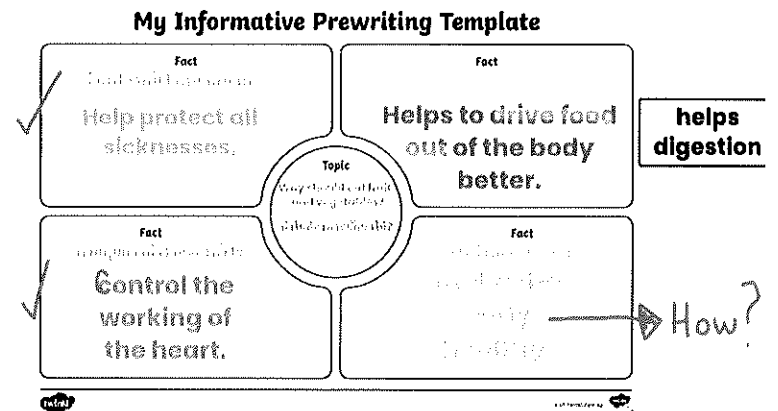
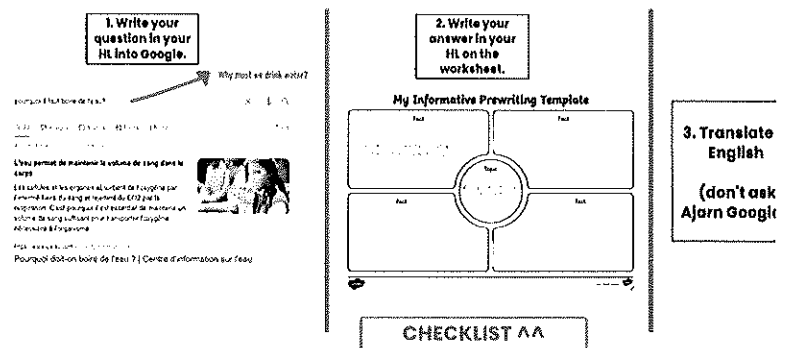


Fig. 1 My students were having difficulty understanding how to structure an information text. By utilizing a translanguaging approach, I was able to “bridge the gap” by engaging learners with their home language first. I modelled the activity to the class, students then researched and answered in their home language and then we worked together to translate it into the target language.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EAL STUDENTS

Small Group and Pair Work

Collaborative activities are great for EAL learners because they encourage speaking and listening whilst reducing anxiety related to attempting answers in the target language. Also, collaborative learning is a key feature of inclusive classrooms and highlights the importance of social interaction and active participation in language acquisition (it also allows students to hear language from different sources - not just the teacher).

Think, Pair, Share

A major benefit of Think-Pair-Share is the wait time. This initial phase of silent thinking provides students with an important opportunity to retrieve their prior knowledge (in whatever language!) This strategy gives every student a low-risk opportunity to formulate a response and practice it with a peer before ‘going public’.

Modelling

Modelling is providing a strategy whereby learners are provided with a written or oral model of the language that the teacher would like the learner to produce. It is important to note that EAL learners need to notice language in order to be able to practice using it effectively. Providing learners with modelled texts allows teachers to be explicit about the key features of the target language.

Pre-teach vocabulary

This strategy introduces students to new vocabulary words before reading them for the first time in a text. Examples include pronouncing the new word, giving students the meaning, writing the word on the board, using the word in a sentence or creating a word wall/glossary.

Research has shown that this strategy helps in improving their comprehension (Miller and Veatch, 2011, p.19) as it reduces the number of unfamiliar words the students will encounter when reading. It also boosts vocabulary acquisition when combined with visuals and repeated exposure.

Using pictures

What do you notice?

- ants (süd lüce)
- fien-ly
- the life girl is trying to save the ants
- a map
- a bank

Predicting/ inferring
> war

Fig. 2 It might seem counterintuitive but picture books (rather than text heavy options) can provide a rich environment for supporting EAL learners through provocations, predictions, inferences and more. I employed two different learning strategies with my students - Harvard's Project Zero Visible Thinking Strategies and Calhoun's Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM). Each method promotes student agency even with teacher modelling or teacher led questioning.

VALUES & ACTIONS

“There is a tendency to characterise EAL learners from a position of deficiency rather than asset – that is, a preoccupation with students’ lack of English, while failing to recognise and value the skills and experiences they have developed through their home language.”

- Cummins, 2005

EAL learners deserve the opportunity to draw from their entire language repertoire and by nurturing a translanguaging mindset, we are demonstrating through our actions, that we recognise and value students’ native languages.

Indeed, if we wish to understand what our students *know* and what they can *do* with language, we must separate their ability to use certain forms of one language from the ability to use language, period (adapted from Ofelia Garcia).

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About the Author

Cara Templeton is the Head of the Intensive English Programme at Prem Tinsulanonda International School. She can be contacted at carat@pts.ac.th