First language for learning

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

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.

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

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

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

After lessons
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.

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.

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 – audiocassettes, 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.

Bilingual strategies don’t depend on bilingual staff

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.

Linguistic diversity is celebrated explicitly here.
Parents know that community languages are valued in school.
Children know they can use their first language for learning.
Parents understand that continued development of the first language brings benefits.
Adults and children use all their languages in conversation and play.
Children are encouraged to feel proud of their linguistic heritage.

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.

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

After lessons
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.

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.

Primary National Strategy | L2145-2006 | © Crown copyright 2006
Excellence and Enjoyment: First language for learning
**Bilingual strategies:**

- **build on what children know and can do**

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.

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.

**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.

**help children learn about language**

‘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.’

Bilingual strategies for children can be 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?
  - Lobal.
  - (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 a kela means alone)

Pakistan 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!”

**Finding out about children’s other languages**

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.

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

**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.

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

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 provides 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?
  - Lobal.
  - (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 a kela means alone)