

SEND Teaching Support Team English as an Additional Language

Use of home languages in school

- A Year 4 pupil from Portugal has just joined your school. You are obviously keen for her to learn English as quickly as possible. She can write, but only in Portuguese. Should you let her write in Portuguese or make her copy write in English?
- A Year 9 Italian speaking pupil has now been in school for a year. He labels diagrams in both English and Italian, and sometimes writes answers to homework in Italian first. Is this helpful or not?
- You have a number of pupils within your Foundation stage learning EAL. One is a Bengali speaker, another a Thai speaker and two speak Cantonese. You think it would be good practice to encourage them to use their home languages in Nursery, but you are not sure if this is correct and. Where should you begin?

A number of terms can be used to describe the home language of an EAL pupil, including first language or mother tongue. The advantage of the term 'home language' is that, unlike 'first language' it does not exclude the possibility that the pupil may already use more than one language at home or within their community.

How useful is it to encourage a pupil learning EAL to use their home language in school?

Whatever age an EAL pupil is, it will be advantageous for them to be given opportunities to use their home language in the school environment and it is important that practitioners are aware of why and how home language use can be encouraged in schools.

"No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as though school and home represent two separate and different cultures which have to be kept firmly apart."

'A Language for Life' - The Bullock Report (1975)

Why should you encourage use of home languages in school and at home?

There are many reasons for using home languages in school and at home, which include:

1. Home languages make the curriculum more accessible for pupils new to English

Newly arrived pupils may initially have very little knowledge of English language and encouraging them to use their home language may be a very useful strategy for ensuring that they participate in some way in school activities. Older pupils may have literacy skills in their home language and can therefore use it for writing, whilst they develop English Literacy skills, or they can read a book at an appropriate level in their home language in a quiet reading session for example.

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2. What is learned in one language is easily transferred to another language

If pupils have previous educational experience then they may already have been taught about topics being covered at school. Even without previous educational experiences, some concepts will be familiar to them. If pupils with EAL already understand a particular curriculum concept, they may simply need to transfer the understanding into the new language. Being able to express knowledge in their home language, even if it is just telling someone else the name of an object or concept, will help to give pupils a 'hook' on which to attach the new English word.

3. Supporting children's home language enhances their cognitive and language development

Research shows that bilingual or multilingual pupils perform better than their monolingual peers, so encouraging the continuation of home language use for EAL pupils will support their academic achievement.

4. Time spent on the home language will not damage the development of proficiency in English

Pupils will not be delayed in their English language development if they are encouraged to use their home language. Research shows that continuing to use home languages alongside their new language acquisition will make the process of learning English faster and easier.

5. There is a positive effect on learner's identity, self – concept and self- esteem which increases their chances of successful learning

If home languages are valued and celebrated within the school environment then this sends a powerful message to pupils about their identity. If they feel that their previous experiences of life and learning are not valued within school then this will only hinder their language acquisition. Valuing pupils' home languages will increase their chances of successful learning.

6. Children need to hear their parents or carers speaking their home language

Children will gain a much richer experience of language from a parent or carer speaking their home language than if they are hearing an adult tentatively trying to use English. Parents should be encouraged to keep using the language which is most natural to them with their children. More information

7. Encouraging use of home languages will be a positive experience for other pupils.

Children generally find language learning easier than adults do and opportunities to learn some of another pupil's home language will be a positive experience for all. It will enhance their understanding of how languages function and begin to equip them with a new and valuable skill, in addition to helping them to empathise with the new arrival in their classroom.

Strategies for supporting the use of home languages

How you encourage use of home languages in school will vary depending on the individual pupil, availability of resources in their language, age of the pupil, their previous experiences and other factors.

Some pupils will have literacy skills in their home language, others will not. Some may be learning to read and write in their home language alongside learning English. Sometimes pupils are reluctant to use their home language in school. They can feel self- conscious or new arrivals may already feel different from their peers and so feel reluctant to further highlight differences. Others may be very proud of their home language and opportunities to use it in school will be a real boost

to their confidence. Sometimes parents mistakenly believe that using English all the time will help their children learn it faster. Individual use of home languages may therefore need to be explored with sensitivity.

The following strategies are suggestions that will not be appropriate for every pupil in every situation, but should provide helpful pointers. You will have ideas of your own too and we would encourage you to use and share these with others. The strategies are divided roughly into age groups but some may be suitable for pupils of other ages too.

Strategies for supporting the use of home languages – Foundation Stage

- As a class or group, learn to answer the register in a number of different languages.
- Learn a Nursery rhyme in English and home languages.
- Use dual language signs for objects and places in the setting – even if the pupil is not learning to read and write in their home language text will look familiar and will show them and their parents that home languages are valued.
- Learn to count in home languages.
- Use age appropriate dual language texts.
- Learn to say 'Hello' and 'Goodbye' in home languages.
- Invite visitors into school who share pupils' home languages.
- Use dual language materials such as books from the schools library service or encourage parents to join the local library and borrow them themselves. Talking books or other ICT are useful.

Strategies for supporting the use of home languages – Primary

- As a class ,learn how to answer the register in a number of different languages
- Learn to count in another language.
- Use age appropriate dual language texts in the classroom.
- Learn to say 'Hello' and 'Goodbye' in home languages.
- Use dual language signs for objects, places and displays in the classroom
- When introducing new curriculum vocabulary try to find out how to say or write the word in other languages, by asking pupils or parents or using dictionaries.
- Encourage older pupils to use dual language dictionaries and translation tools and create dual language glossaries.
- Plan for opportunities for pupils to write in their home language.
- Encourage pupils to label diagrams in their home language and English.
- Group pupils with the same home language together for appropriate activities and encourage them to use their home language together.
- Identify key vocabulary for a particular topic or subject in advance and provide pupils with a list in English which they can translate at home.
- Invite visitors into school who share pupils' home languages.

Strategies for supporting the use of home languages – Secondary

- Encourage pupils to use dictionaries or hand held translators.
- Group pupils with the same home language together for appropriate activities and encourage them to use their home language together.
- Identify in advance key vocabulary for a particular topic or subject and provide pupils with a list that they can translate at home.
- Encourage pupils to write in their home languages at identified opportunities and plan for this to happen.
- Encourage pupils to label pictures, diagrams and worksheets in both English and their home languages.
- When teaching Modern Foreign languages encourage pupils to use a language grid with four columns, one for the MFL, one for the English word, one for the word in their home language and one for a picture.

Resources for using home languages

The Language of the month link from Newbury Park School (Click on The Useful links on the school home page and select language of The Month) offers many FREE resources for promoting language awareness. There are video clips showing videos of children saying hello and counting in their home languages, resources for putting up language displays, a booklet with 100+ ideas for celebrating community languages, and lots more.

<https://www.newburyparkschool.net>

Local libraries and the school Library service have a selection of dual language books available to borrow.

Advice for parents

Under the parent section of the EAL NEXUS website, there is advice on speaking your home language. A drop down menu enables the information to be accessed in a variety of home languages.

<https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk/parents/speaking-your-home-language>

EAL information from Cumbria County Council including leaflets on keeping your home language alive by sharing stories songs and rhymes can be found here **<https://localoffer.cumbria.gov.uk/kb5/cumbria/fsd/advice.page?id=Mq3v-a2bPYI>**