Multilingualism and Translanguaging in the Classroom (REL Pacific)

Institute of Education Sciences

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USRW-NXJVFc

Narrator 1: REL Pacific is one of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories, often referred to as RELs, which are funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

Narrator 2: Multilingualism is a reality for many students across the world. A student's languages are important aspects of their identity and culture, and being able to use all of their linguistic abilities in school is important to students' development as learners. Some benefits of multilingualism in students include increased problem-solving abilities, attention control, creativity, interpersonal skills, and learning.

Multilingualism is more than simply knowing multiple languages. Recent research has shown that multilingualism is emergent, dynamic, complex, and adaptive.

Emergent. Any additional language skills learned by a child develop from their initial set of language practices, or their home language, or languages. The more developed a student's home languages are, the easier it is, in general, to learn new language skills.

Dynamic. All language skills, abilities and practices are interconnected to form a shared pool of resources students can use to make meaning.

Complex. Language practices are used to create meaning in complex ways. For example, the student might use English to identify a math concept to a classmate during a lesson, but then discuss and describe that concept in greater detail using Kosraean to facilitate deeper thinking about that concept.

Adaptive. Multilinguals adapt their communication for specific cultural and identity purposes. For example, a principal might give a speech mainly in Pohnpeian and Pingelapese to families but write up her report on the event in Pohnpeian and English for school records.

In short, multilingual speakers choose how to use their learned language skills to communicate effectively in different contexts. This concept is known as translanguaging.

Bradley Rentz: Translanguaging is a theory that explains the dynamic way people use language in real life. It is an approach to multilingualism that sees an individual's language skills as an integrated, holistic communication system. Translanguaging might look like a student mixing languages when responding to a teacher's question by drawing on whatever knowledge and vocabulary they know. It might also look like watching a TV show in one language and interpreting it for a friend, or family member, in another language. In other words, there is no competition between the different languages a student knows. Mixing languages should not be

seen as incorrect. Rather, students logically choose how to communicate based on their cultural and social contexts.

Narrator 2: Using translanguaging to teach and learn in school mobilizes all of students' linguistic skills. When used in school, translanguaging has four goals. To support students as they engage with complex content and texts. To provide opportunities for students to develop academic language practices. To make space for students' multilingualism and multilingual ways of knowing. To support students' social emotional development and multilingual identities.

Erin D'Amelio: Mixing language practices through translanguaging reinforces students' existing multilingual practices, allowing them to demonstrate what they know and can do. By valuing students' language abilities as essential resources and modeling flexible oral and written languages, teachers can use different strategies to enable students to develop their multilingual communication skills. Most strategies can be used by teachers who do not speak the same language or languages as their students. While some of these strategies may be more challenging if a teacher is unfamiliar with some of the languages spoken by their students, they can still leverage their students' knowledge as resources for their classroom. In that way, they become co-learners with students. Some translanguaging strategies teachers can use include using multilingual labels and word walls as well as repetition and translation across languages. Students can participate in these activities to reinforce their learning and demonstrate their linguistic knowledge. Creating learning objectives that support multilingualism and are not tied to specific languages. For example, rather than stating, "Students will be able to summarize the main points of a story in English," a language arts objective that promotes multilingualism can read, "Students will be able to summarize the main points of a story," and a teacher can accept whatever language students feel most comfortable using. More advanced objectives can distinguish between languages, but it's recommended that they don't focus on only one language overall.

When integrating students' language literacy and content skills, teachers could introduce a new vocabulary word and describe what it means in different contexts. For example, the word branch has different definitions in a science class versus a history class. Using pictures or objects can better support students' comprehension. Building these connections across content areas, language, and literacy skills, offers more opportunities for deeper student learning.

Creating an assignment in which students read, or tell stories to one another, using one language and then translating them into another language to share with other students.

Pairing students with similar language backgrounds, but different language proficiency levels, so that students can participate in safe, cooperative group discussions with other students. Students with stronger multilingual skills can lead, help, and repeat information for those students needing additional language support. Providing a variety of resources in multiple languages for students. Ideally, there will be resources in languages students are familiar with in the classroom. However, if resources are only available in English, for example, a teacher can

explain and discuss concepts in both English and the other language, or languages spoken in the classroom to facilitate understanding. They can also encourage students to do the same, especially if a teacher might be unfamiliar with the other languages in the classroom.

Scaffolding and using exploratory talk. Providing space for students to use language to try out new ideas and new grammatical forms allows students to process ideas out loud to themselves and their peers in whatever languages come naturally to them. This can look like paired problem-solving in a math class, or group work on a writing assignment in a science class.

Finally, becoming a co-learner with students. For teachers who may be unfamiliar with the language, or languages their students speak, they can leverage their students' linguistic knowledge during assignments or classroom discussion, by asking them to translate, explain, or lead conversations to support comprehension for all students.

Bradley Rentz: Research has shown that multilingualism has many positive benefits for students, especially when their languages are supported and cultivated throughout their education. Translanguaging as an approach can help teachers fully realize all the language skills of their students.

Narrator 1: To learn more about REL Pacific's work, visit our website.