Comprehensive Learning Enhancement Program – 2

Webinar-15

Reading Material

Multilingualism as an Approach

Objectives:

To enable the participants to:

- understand the concepts of bilingualism/multilingualism
- realize how learners are naturally bilingual/multilingual
- understand how native languages can promote second language learning
- explore how native languages can be used in the classrooms effectively

Bilingualism & Multilingualism

A bilingual is someone who can communicate in two languages comfortably. Bilingualism is the ability to communicate in two languages comfortably. A multilingual is someone who can communicate in 3 or more languages. Multilingualism refers to this ability to communicate in 3 or more languages. So we can say that multigualism is an extension of bilingualism.

Background

Indian literary history shows that people used to switch between Pali and Sanskrit, Tamil and Sanskrit, and Ardhmagadhi and Sanskrit with ease. During the Moghul period, there were many scholars who had mastered both Sanskrit and Persian/Arabic. Tulsidas, Vidyapati, and authors of Apabhramsa of the North, and the Azhwars and Nayanmars of the South emphasized the importance of the language styles spoken by the ordinary people, even as they used the language of high literature. Indian classical drama used dialects and 'standard' languages. Writers used Magadhi, Shaurseni, Prakrit, and Apabhramsa, even as they excelled in the use of Sanskrit. The pattern of language use seemed to be flexible depending upon what roles the individual was playing.

The Indian education system is truly multilingual in its character. The Bombay Municipal Corporation runs primary schools in nine languages. The Karnataka State runs primary schools in eight languages. The secondary schools in West Bengal give their students the option to choose from 14 languages. The three-language formula in the country aims at developing and strengthening the multilingual character of our educational system.

Introduction

When children come to school from a familiar environment to a new environment, school is challenging and if language also is challenging children can live in fear. Till children become familiar enough to communicate, we need to build a relationship with them. This will happen only if we use their home language in the classroom to make them comfortable. However, we must remember that children also need to acquire the target languages.

Children coming to schools for formal instructions bring with them a wealth of world knowledge and understandings initially acquired in their first language. Their primary language development in their home language serves as a resource for learning other languages, cognitively, linguistically and socially. Many of them can speak more than one language or dialect quite fluently even before coming to school and they know when to speak what language or dialect to whom and when. This ability to use more than one language for social interaction is termed as multilingualism. A child growing in a multilingual environment acquires various languages of her environment in just the same way as a monolingual child acquires her home language. Therefore, a teacher teaching English at the primary level should tap into the children's familiarity with more than one language/dialect to advance the learning of the target language.

The NCF Position Paper on English Language Teaching states that English can occur in tandem with the first languages(s) of the learners at the lower primary stage, or at least in class I to III and learning activities should be designed to create language awareness of the children exposed to English for the first time. The said Position Paper also wonders if the English-language classroom can "replicate the universal success in the acquisition of basic spoken language

proficiency that a child spontaneously achieves outside the classroom, for the languages in its environment". (NCF, 2006: 4).

Consider the following points from the above lines. Think and reflect about whether you agree with them? Why? Why not?

- Children feel comfortable if home language is used initially
- Their primary language development in their home language serves as a resource for learning other languages, cognitively, linguistically and socially.
- Teachers teaching English at the primary level should tap into the children's familiarity with more than one language/dialect to advance the learning of the target language.

Multilingualism is a natural phenomenon

To understand how multilingualism is a natural phenomenon let us ask ourselves the following questions:

- Do you find any multilingual signs/sign boards around you?
- How many multilingual materials do you see around you for example, wrappers, brochures,
- Posters, wedding cards etc.?
- Are our children naturally exposed to these materials?
- If one language can spoil another, then how can there be so many multilingual things
  around us? Think it over!

A thorough reflection about the above questions could reveal that

- Most of us are all multilingual or at least bilingual by nature
- We have the natural capacity to learn more than one language.
- Children are naturally exposed to other languages
- No language harms other languages.
- Code mixing and code switching are natural strategies of multilingual speakers.
- Multilingualism can be used as a rich resource for learning English.

Multilingualism as an Approach

Multilingualism as an approach attempts to exploit the students' knowledge of native languages in order to facilitate the target language learning. In much of the world, including India, multilingual students are the norm rather than the exception. There is much research and evidence about the cognitive and practical benefits of knowing more than one language. Such knowledge is a tremendous resource for teaching and learning. Whatever their subject specialism, every teacher should seek out opportunities to celebrate, promote and exploit the linguistic knowledge and skills of all their students. As a language and literacy teacher, you have a particular responsibility to do this.

Multilingual classrooms are a growing phenomenon around the world, as a result of rapid increases in global mobility and migration. Within these classrooms, students may have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, may speak one language at home and another language at school, or be learning the language of instruction as an additional language. International agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the European Commission contend that multilingual education can play a significant role in engaging diverse learners. As well as supporting academic success, classrooms that promote multilingualism can foster positive identities associated with their home cultures. This position is supported by Richard Ruiz's notion of "language as a resource" (1984) which advocates for the use of students' home languages as resources for learning and teaching. In practice, a language-as-resource perspective implies that teachers should use students' home languages as a tool for thinking and communication while simultaneously learning and developing proficiency in the language of instruction. It has long been recognized that one of the key characteristics of high-quality teaching is the ability of teachers to engage students' prior understandings and experiences and background knowledge. This prior knowledge is encoded in their home languages, and therefore it is vital that teachers facilitate the transfer of both concepts and skills from students' home languages to English.

The Misconception

For many years, teachers of English have been told that using student's home languages in English lessons should be avoided at all costs. In reality for many multilingual students, especially English language learners, it has been that their home languages are left at the classroom door or regarded as an obstacle to the development of the language of schooling and learning in general. But the growing body of research literature shows that drawing on students' home language and cultural backgrounds in classroom teaching validates their identities and provides a strong foundation for additional language learning.

The benefits and purposes of this approach

• To respect the child's language.

• To teach a difficult concept.

• To generate interest in the class.

• To bridge the gap between home and school.

• To use this as a pedagogical tool

Useful classroom strategies

Code mixing: Code mixing refers to the mixing of words and phrases from different languages while communicating

examples:

Bedroom lo light ledu

Nuvvu first ikkadiki raa

Geyser off chesi tap thippu

Code switching: Code switching refers to the switching from one language to another while communicating

examples:

Chaala pani undi, I'll come later

Where is the book, nenu chudaledu

What are you eating? Intha sannaga ayyavu

Translanguaging

Translanguaging' is a relatively new term for an age-old practice – that of switching between the languages one knows in order to maximize communicative potential. Translanguaging is flexible multilingualism. Whether it involves combining elements from different languages in the same utterance ('code switching') or alternating between languages in different parts of a task, it is a natural means of employing one's linguistic resources to their greatest effect. Translanguaging is something most people do all the time with their friends, family and other members of the community without even thinking about it.

In the classroom, translanguaging may involve:

- translating between languages
- comparing and being playful with different languages
- mixing words and expressions from different languages in the same spoken or written utterance
- using the home language in one part of an activity and the school language in another part.

Thus, students might listen to information in one language and explain the gist of it orally or make written notes about it in another. Similarly, they might read a text in one language and talk about it or summarize it in writing in another.

As a resource for both teachers and students, translanguaging has many educational benefits because it:

- validates multilingualism, viewing it as a valuable asset rather than a problem or a temporary transitional interactional tool in early schooling
- represents a more efficient and effective teaching and learning technique than is possible in one language only

- offers opportunities for individuals to develop rich and varied communicative repertoires for use within and outside school.

Current scenario

At present, the mother tongue enters the English class as a surreptitious intruder; teachers may "concurrently translate" and "explain" texts before dictating answers. It can be given its due place by being used for discussion and understanding along with an engagement with English. One illustration of this is in Prabhu (1987); the limits on the use of the mother tongue in the Bangalore Project were naturally set by the requirements of the task, which was input in English, and required responses in English; the mother tongue made the language comprehensible where necessary. Given a variety of inputs in English, and a genuine attempt to understand them, the mother tongue need not be an interloper but a resource. Krashen (1985: 94) points out that "(while) concurrent translation is not effective", the use of two languages in the classroom can be "done in such a way as to provide comprehensible input in the target language, using the first language to provide background information". An understanding of what constitutes legitimate use of the mother tongue needs to be arrived at by the involvement of the teacher in the framing of vehicles for English teaching. There is a need to address the mindsets that teachers have on what levels of language mixing are legitimate.

Some possibilities

Removing the barriers between languages, and between "languages" and "subjects" in the primary school. At the lower primary stage, or at least in Classes I– III, English can occur in tandem with the first language(s) for learning activities designed to create awareness of the world around the child (Das 2005). Materials need to be designed to promote such multilingual activity, and clear methodological guidelines need to be worked out in cooperation with teachers to see how more than one language can be naturally used. Linguistic purism, whether of English or the Indian languages, must yield to a tolerance of code-switching and code-mixing if necessary. Introducing parallel texts in more than one language. These may be the same story; for example, National Book Trust

(NBT) has published stories written in English as well as in the Indian languages (cf. Amritavalli and Rameshwar Rao 2001). The Promise Foundation has Big Books in four Indian languages and English; CIEFL has bilingual books using a Whole Language approach. Such parallel texts may not be precise translations of one another but may convey the same or similar meaning, or involve similar language activity such as rhymes, sound games, etc. that sensitize the child to language-sound structures. Reading is a transferable skill; improvement in reading in one language results in reading improvement in general (West 1914), not just for languages sharing the same scripts, but also in bi-scriptal situations (West worked with Bangla and English; little more is now known about bi-scriptal situations and the transferability of reading skills). (source: NCF2005 position paper on the learning of English on page no 12)

Conclusion

We speak many languages. Whatever we do, multilingualism is going to come into our classroom directly or through back door entry. This is because it is the identity of today's children; especially Indian kids. They eat in one language, play in other language, study in another language, work in some other language; as we need respect for our language, the child too needs respect. If we take away child's language, we are taking away the child's identity. We will be stopping the child from learning successfully because the child had already learnt so many things in its own language. We need to use the previous knowledge of the child.