

# Translanguaging in UK basic education: Exploring opportunities and strategies

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For: The Society of Heads, UK



# Plan for today: based on your 5 questions

1. “What is translanguaging?” (language, cognition and pedagogy perspectives)
2. Potential implications of translanguaging theory for our classrooms
3. “What are some practical strategies and resources that teachers can use to implement translanguaging approaches in their classrooms?”
4. “How do we create a balance between language needs, language objectives, and learning?”
5. “When and where is translanguaging useful, and when and where would it not be useful/appropriate?”
6. “In what ways can the use of translanguaging methods in classroom have a positive impact on socio-emotional development, linguistic development, and academic development?”

Let's explore these questions together. I don't have all the answers for your school! Please jump in at any time – spoken or in chat

# 1. “What is translanguaging?”

In practice, “translanguaging” is being used widely with different understandings and purposes in diverse contexts worldwide. Here in the UK, we may think of it initially as an umbrella term to enable us to explore and validate diverse ways of making our classrooms more inclusive for all learners, particularly multilingual ones (i.e., so called “EALs”)

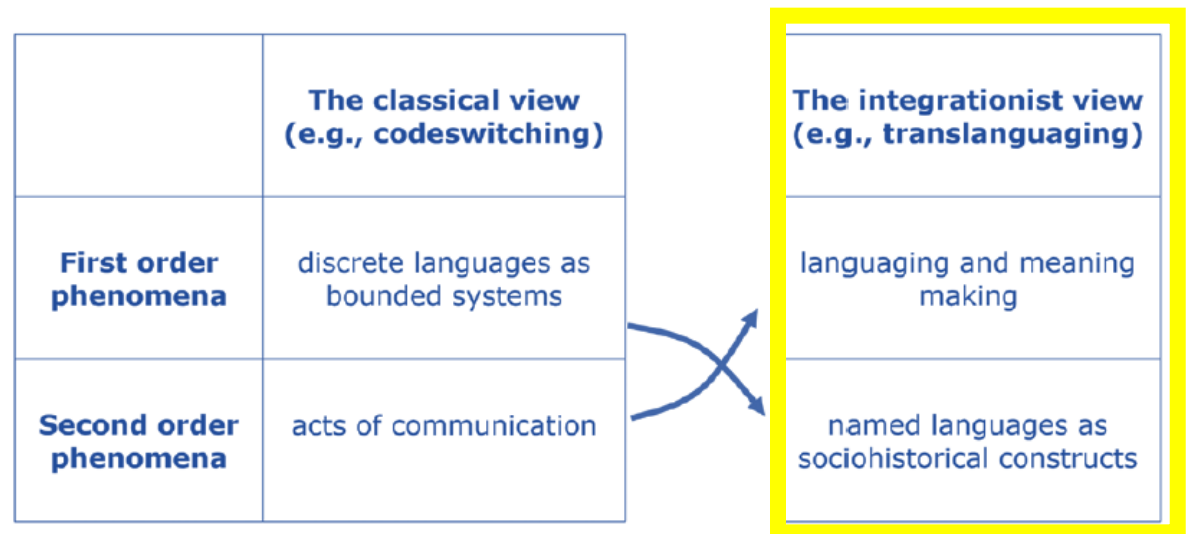
- A theory of **language**: an understanding of what language is and how it works
- A theory of **cognition**: an understanding of thinking from the perspective of multilinguals
- A theory of **pedagogy**: a way to ensure our classrooms offer equity and inclusivity for bilingual and multilingual learners



# Translanguaging as a theory of language

- views named languages as sociopolitical and socio-historical constructs, inventions even (e.g., Makoni & Pennycook, 2005)
- argues that communication, in the first instance, is an act of multimodal meaning making that varies in complex ways depending on interlocutor(s), context and purpose (as does integrationism) (Anderson, 2024; Love, 2004)
- named languages do not come first, they are part of the languaging process
- cf. codeswitching theory
- cf. Chomskian linguistics

*Figure 1 from Anderson (2024, p. 75)*



# Translanguaging as a theory of cognition

- aims to understand (bi/multilingual) minds from an integrated perspective: languages are not separated or isolated within our cognitive architecture
- resources are either partially or fully integrated\*, distributed widely within our minds, not separated into same-language silos
- they interconnect in complex, diverse ways, meaning that each of us has a unique **repertoire** or **idiolect**, from which we select features
- (García & Li, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015)
- \*some dispute regarding degree of integration; MacSwan (2017) accepts partial, but not full integration

# Translanguaging as a theory of pedagogy

- Stronger and weaker forms/understandings exist (García & Lin, 2017)
- a socio-constructivist pedagogy, one that recognises and values our bilingualism/multilingualism
- argues that learning is more effective when we draw and build upon all of our prior knowledge, understanding and social practices, all of which draw upon our full languaging repertoires (learning argument)
- argues that only when our full multilingual selves are embraced in learning processes can we learn most effectively (identity argument)
- in UK contexts, we can see translanguaging as essentially **inclusion and equity for multilinguals**

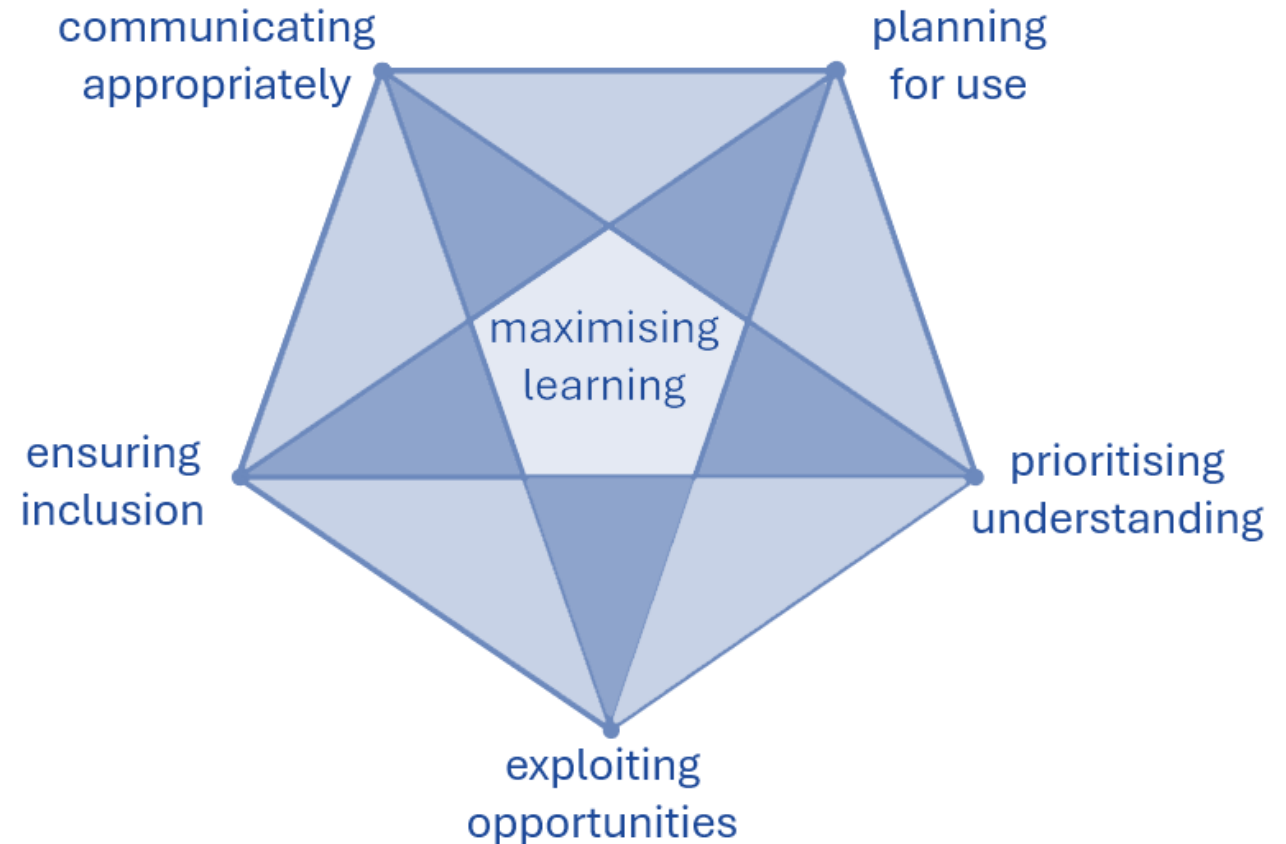


# Key definitions of translanguaging

- [In translanguaging] ... languages are used in a dynamic and functionally integrated manner to organise and mediate mental processes in understanding, speaking, literacy, and, not least, learning. Translanguaging concerns effective communication, function rather than form, cognitive activity, as well as language production. (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012, p. 641)
- ...translanguaging is an approach to the use of language, bilingualism and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages. (García & Li, 2014, p. 2)

# Potential implications of translanguaging theory for our classrooms

- There are different implications for different classroom types at different stages of education in different national contexts.
- **Pause for discussion:** What are the implications of translanguaging theories for teaching, in your opinion?



Five principles for language use within a translingual mindset.



# General implications of translanguaging theory for UK classrooms

- We can first think about any given (EAL) learner's general abilities in both their home language(s)/dialects and English, and how the former can help scaffold and support the development both of their English and their ability to learn through English, and potentially vice versa (Garcia et al., 2016).
- In primary education, a key focus is (text) **literacy** - how developed is this in both their home language and English, and the relationship between these writing systems, but also how these interconnect with oracy in the home language and English. Because of frequent disconnects between home and school languaging practices many multilingual learners never explore their literacies and oracies in different languages together. Can support be provided in the classroom, at home, from teaching assistants, heritage community centres, etc.?
- In both primary and secondary education, a key focus is learner **identity** and links to their language heritage; how can we make use of, celebrate and include their wider languages and repertoire in the classroom without oversimplifying or essentialising their languages and culture? We want to make the whole person feel welcome, including who they are with their family and friends, yet to avoid stereotyping them (e.g., "You're Chinese, so you speak Mandarin, right?").

## 2. “What are some practical strategies/resources that we can use to implement translanguaging?”

- Language (and cultural) inclusivity: a general principle that most schools already follow; we can welcome, show interest in, learn about, learn with and integrate all our learners’ languages in our lessons.
- Many schools and classrooms have welcome posters which include greetings in all our languages, but can we go beyond this and involve these languages a little more, even if our classrooms have to be mainly English-medium, for obvious reasons?



**Discussion?**

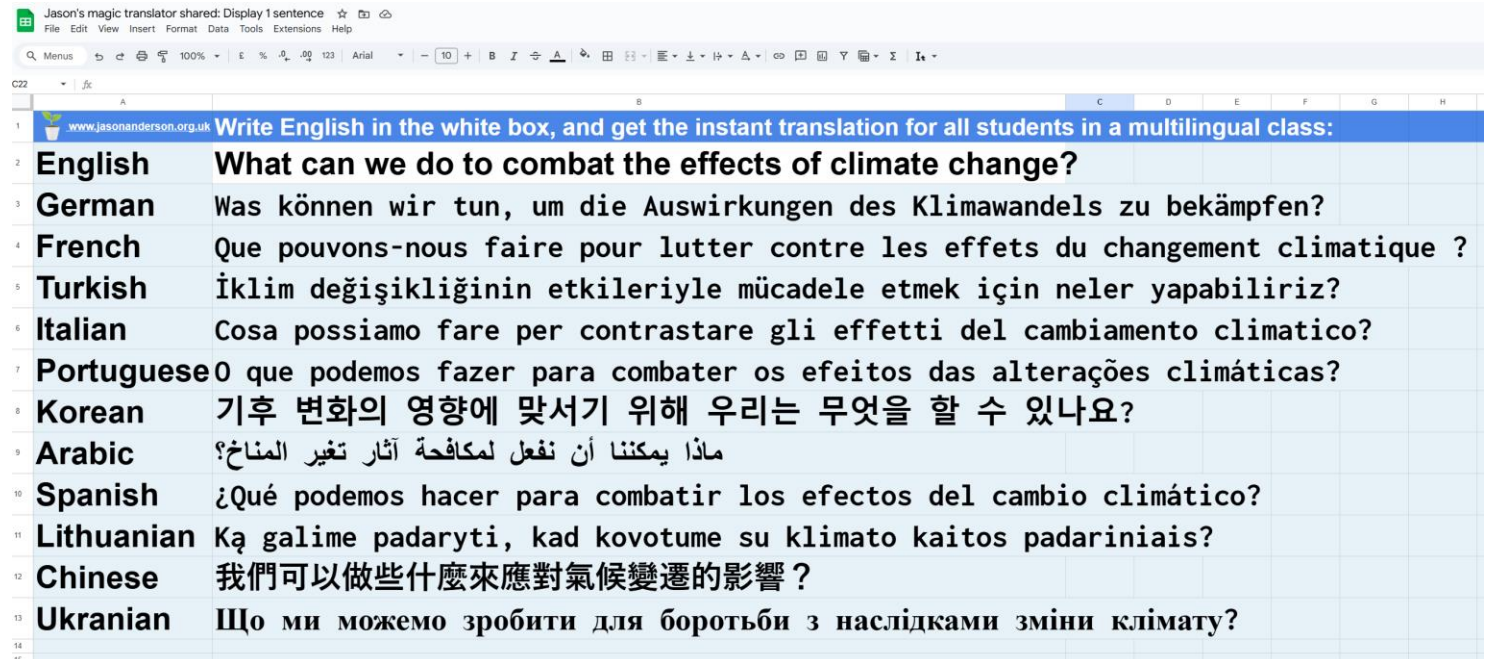
# What are some practical strategies/resources that we can use to implement translanguaging?

- **Primary example 1:** when exploring vocabulary in a specific area (e.g., animals, food, hobbies), we can include words from many languages, and then link to, and explore English equivalents.
- **Primary example 2:** book reports - we can encourage learners to read books in their home languages, and to present on these mainly in English, but also introducing keywords, ideas or aspects of culture from the book itself in other languages.
- **Secondary example 1:** culture share activities in which learners bring in an item, a photo or even a video link to something they would like to talk about related to aspects of culture, language/dialect or heritage. Note how this is likely to also be important for identity development.
- **Secondary example 2:** project research – in situations where learners have access to the Internet for research purposes, can we empower and encourage them to do this research in multiple languages, and even to develop their critical literacy when comparing sources in different languages? Might we even build a project around class multilingualism?

# What are some practical strategies/resources that we can use to implement translanguaging?

- **Home language buddies:** for some learners, particularly those new to learning in English, it may be useful to pair them up with a buddy who speaks a more enabled language (usually, but not only, their home language). This buddy can then help them as required, providing our classroom environment is inclusive of the use of other languages.

- **Translators on hand:** we can make use of online translators by having them available for learners who may benefit (think about training, availability), and even customise these (see [Jason's Magic Translator](https://www.jasonanderson.org.uk))



Jason's magic translator shared: Display 1 sentence

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	www.jasonanderson.org.uk Write English in the white box, and get the instant translation for all students in a multilingual class:							
2	English	What can we do to combat the effects of climate change?						
3	German	Was können wir tun, um die Auswirkungen des Klimawandels zu bekämpfen?						
4	French	Que pouvons-nous faire pour lutter contre les effets du changement climatique ?						
5	Turkish	İklim değişikliğinin etkileriyle mücadele etmek için neler yapabiliriz?						
6	Italian	Cosa possiamo fare per contrastare gli effetti del cambiamento climatico?						
7	Portuguese	O que podemos fazer para combater os efeitos das alterações climáticas?						
8	Korean	기후 변화의 영향에 맞서기 위해 우리는 무엇을 할 수 있나요?						
9	Arabic	ماذا يمكننا أن نفعل لمكافحة آثار تغير المناخ؟						
10	Spanish	¿Qué podemos hacer para combatir los efectos del cambio climático?						
11	Lithuanian	Ką galime padaryti, kad kovotume su klimato kaitos padariniais?						
12	Chinese	我們可以做些什麼來應對氣候變遷的影響？						
13	Ukrainian	Що ми можемо зробити для боротьби з наслідками зміни клімату?						
14								
15								

### 3. “How do we create a balance between language needs, language objectives, and learning?”

- (Obviously) this will be learner-specific, and also depend on your context, objectives and curriculum
- In most UK contexts, EALs will transition to English from a range of L1 backgrounds at different levels of proficiency – so individual needs are key here.
- But we can also value and document their wider multilingual development, esp. if parents are supportive (e.g., a Ukrainian refugee family; parents want to develop Ukrainian literacy and oracy). Garcia et al. (2016) have done a lot of work in USA on developing learners’ bilingual profiles (esp. English and Spanish); this is more complex in multiculturally diverse classrooms (see discussion of Justin’s classroom)



# How do we create a balance between language needs, language objectives, and learning?

Students	Languages Used at Home	ELL Status	English Language Proficiency Score (ACCESS for ELLs)	Spanish Language Proficiency Score (LAS Links)	Spanish Reading Level (EDL2)	English Reading Level (DRA2)
Erica	Mostly English, some Spanish	No	NA	3	30	40
Jennifer	Mostly English; but also Spanish	No	NA	4	40	50
Moisés	Spanish with parents, English with siblings	Yes Newcomer	3	4	40	30
Ricardo	Spanish and Mixteco with parents, Spanish and English with siblings	Yes Newcomer	3	4	30	20

Erica can answer opinion questions with details.  
Jennifer can summarize information from multiple texts.  
Moisés can explain strategies in solving problems across content area.  
Ricardo can interpret oral information and apply to new context.

ACCESS, Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State; DRA2, Developmental Reading Assessment; EDL2, Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura; ELL, English language learner; LAS, Language Assessment Scale.

Adapted to Carla's classroom.

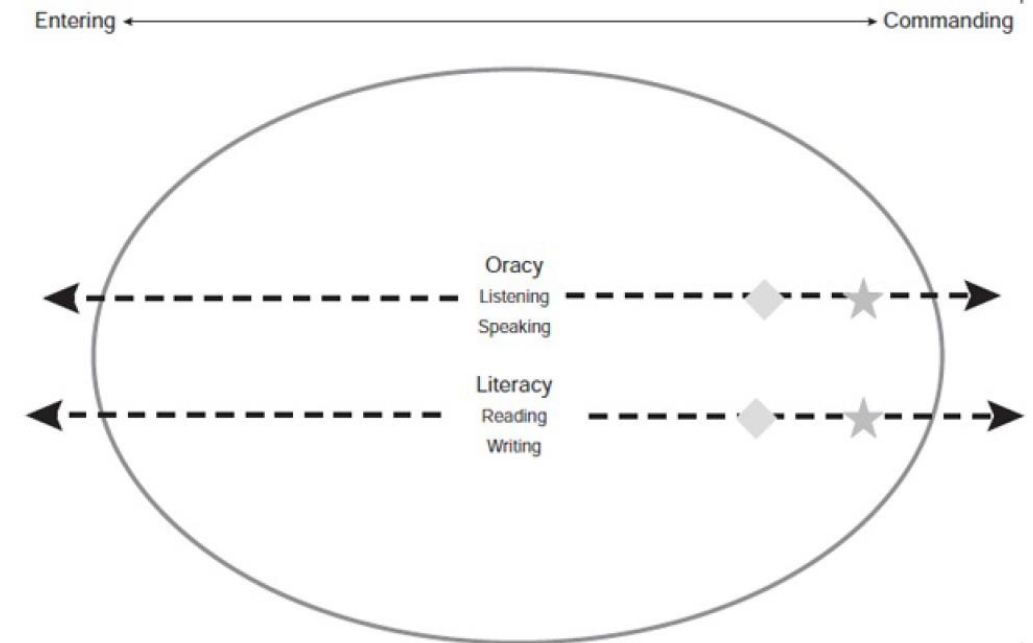


Figure 3.1 Noemí's translanguageing progression, as evaluated by her parents at home.

- ◆ Language-specific performance in English
- ★ Language-specific performance in Spanish

- From Garcia et al. (2016), p. 62, p. 65.

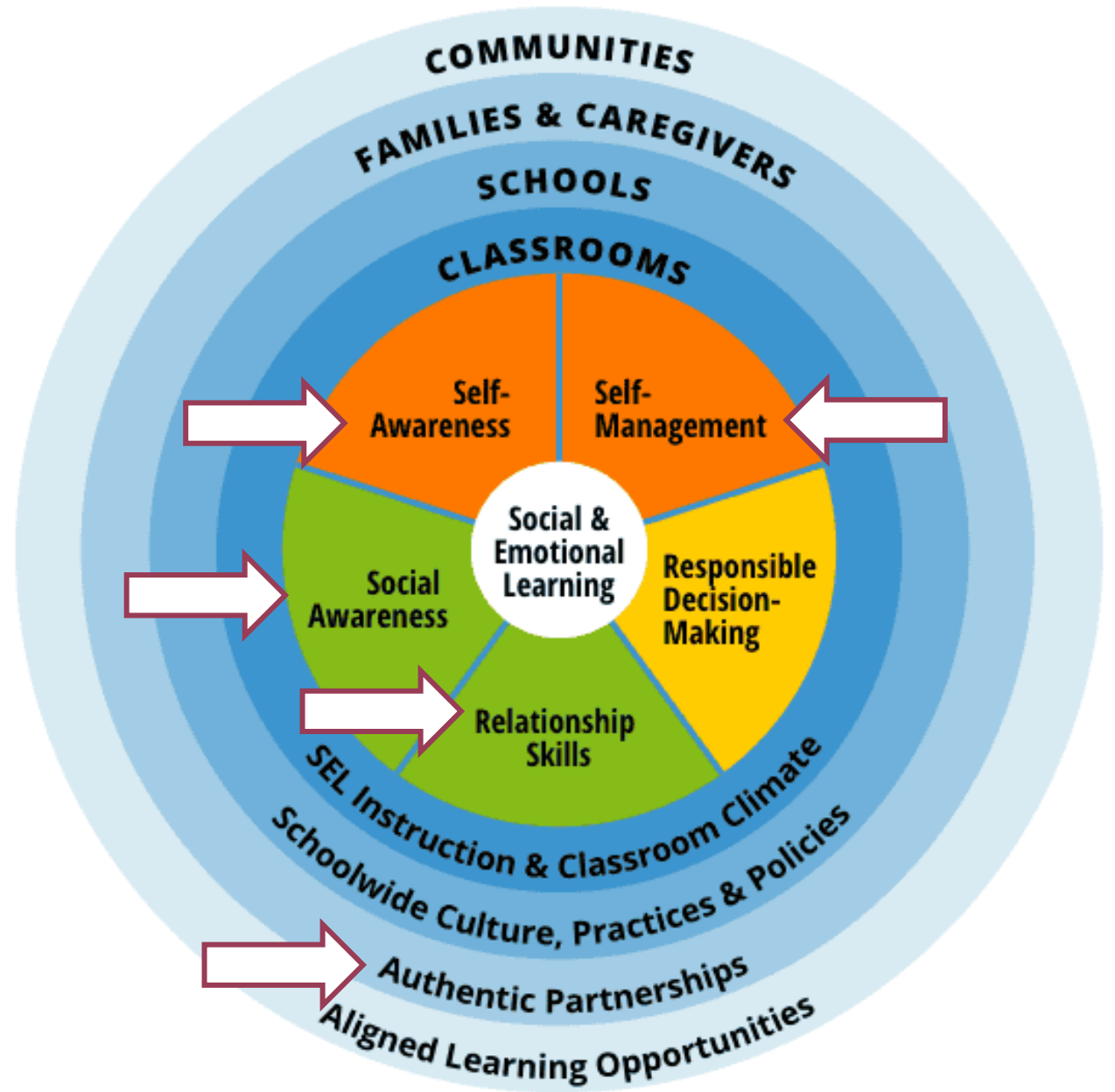


## 4. “When and where is translanguaging useful, and when and where would it not be useful/appropriate?”

- Translanguaging is always happening for multilingual learners (arguably for monolingual ones as well)... Internally, cognitively, they are building up schema and understandings across their language repertoires and registers, and also through personal devices and notes.
- But a key consideration is **our learners’ wishes and preferences**. In many UK schools, many multilingual learners have had to essentially hide or close off part of who they are (i.e., their home-language self) in order to integrate with peers. Encourage (but avoid forcing) them to (re-)embrace their multilingualism in the classroom gradually.
- Celebrating multilingualism: also think also about UK dialects/ languages, (London) multicultural English, etc.

## 5. “In what ways can translanguaging have a positive impact on socio-emotional (linguistic) and academic development?”

- [CASEL framework](#) (CASEL, 2020):
- Note: self- and social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, family and caregivers – **‘authentic’** partnerships



# In what ways can translanguaging have a positive impact on academic development?

- Particularly for learners who have undergone most of their academic studies through a different language medium, consider ways that you can embrace, allow and even encourage opportunities for this language to continue developing alongside their English, and potentially even be involved in assessment practices
- E.g., a 15-year-old student arrives in our school but speaks little English - can we allow them to use auto-translation and generative AI to help them cope with understanding assessment questions and/or producing answers in English?
- Even if the learner has developed the ideas in a different language their English will be developing as they do this, and we can then draw upon these assessment outputs formatively to scaffold their awareness of key English resources in their answer).
- See Elena Shohamy's work on multilingual assessment (e.g., 2011)

# References... and further questions?

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