

St Mary's University
Research & Literature Summary

Title and Author The EAL Teaching Book by Jean Conteh (3rd Edition) 2019

Summary of Chapter 3: What does it mean to be multilingual?

- The EAL Teaching Book invited us to reflect on the different aspect of EAL learners, from refugees and isolated learners to multilingual learners. He explored myths and misconceptions of teaching students who have English as an Additional Language by looking at case studies, reflecting on identities, ethnic belonging and the complexities of ascription and reluctance to ascribe to their ethnicity and how we can support them in schools.
- The book challenges traditional thinking on the teaching of EAL learners in terms of pedagogies, groupings but also in terms of curriculum design.
- In the book multilingual students is the preferred terminology instead of EAL, as these students come with an extra power of being able to speak more than one language, and it should be recognised as a strength and not a burden for success.
- In chapter 3, Conteh explores the global context and the fact that 80% of the world population is actually multilingual and we need to remember that monolingualism can be systematic in the UK but should be by all means celebrated and encouraged in order to develop the cognitive development of multilingual learners as their academic success depends on their mastery of academic and cognitive language.
- Conteh invites us to reflect on case studies of different students and explored Garcia's research (2009) on cognitive development. The concepts of **translanguaging** or **codeswitching** are important for educators to understand and are a major aspect of the cognitive development of multilingual learners or EAL learners.
- Multilingual people translanguage as part of their everyday thinking, sometimes switching from one language to another to best support their thinking at a particular moment in time. This challenges the myth that EAL students or multilingual students should avoid their first language to avoid confusion. In fact, encouraging students to explain abstract or complex concepts in their first language should be encouraged and celebrated and then followed up in English.
- Conteh challenges the traditional **transitional bilingualism** idea that the English language should replace instead of growing from the first language and opposes it to the concept of **additive bilingualism** where teachers see the English language as another tool in their multi- language repertoires and not a replacement.
- This method of thinking allows multilingual learners to take ownership of their learning in the language that fits best at the time, one of their superpowers!
- Conteh reminds us of the psychology of language acquisition and that there is a difference between everyday language and academic or cognitive language. Teachers need to know their students well to best support them throughout the Curriculum.

Key Considerations for Practice

1. Being multilingual is a superpower not a burden or a problem – it should be celebrated especially when students feel ashamed of it.
2. Find out what language(s) the students speak and their proficiency in them – it values the knowledge of the pupils but also allows us to understand their strengths and weaknesses in the First Language (L1)

3. Understand that there are different levels of language acquisition: a child may be able to speak good English but would struggle with more academic texts or tasks. They will need scaffolding and modelling.
4. Know your students and assess their cognitive skills in their first language as well as in English.
5. Think about literacy as not just reading and writing but also developing academic language. If literacy and oracy is poor in L1, it will need support in L2 or L3. Academic Literacy in the First Language
6. Allow students to think and process in the language of their choice giving them ownership of the learning
7. Support them with the Tier 2 or Tier 3 vocabulary in English once they have embraced the concepts in L1
8. Allow for translation to take place with dictionaries, or technologies. Work in pairs or groups.
9. Allow them to teach the class their language and embrace their home stories where they can enhance the learning of the rest of the class on culture, or methodology (Inclusive practice)
10. Home, and community learning should be celebrated: and cross-linked in terms of cognitive learning, behaviour...) Do they go to Saturday School to study in their first language? Do they play traditional instruments? Do they read at the mosque?

Prompts for Professional Dialogue and Reflection

- XXX comes under the EAL register. What is their level of English? (early English learner, bilingual, multilingual?)
- What do you know about this multilingual student? What else would you like to know?
- How would this inform your practice?
- XXX struggled with this activity, how could you encourage him/her to grasp the key concepts before embarking on the main activity? (prompt for translation, access to online resources in L1?)
- What would XXX find difficult in the lesson you just planned? How can you support him/her to access the content?
- How can you support XXX to develop his/her writing skills?
- What prompts XXX's frustrations in class? How can we best support?
- XXX seemed disengaged or dysregulated in this lesson, what do you think happened? How can you support next time?