

EFFECTIVE TRANSLANGUAGING IN ENGLISH PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Translanguaging pedagogy refers to the use of first language to support second language learning, which is more common in the context of multilingualism and communicative language teaching. This paper first reviews the development of this practice before examining specific classroom procedures and teachers' reflection in some Vietnam primary school contexts. It is revealed that translanguaging is mostly used to support students' understanding of the task and to manage the class. With older primary students, when they have more knowledge in their home language and get familiarized with classroom routines, translanguaging can be used to give quick explanations to grammar rules and to connect new language with their home language. Teachers should understand the teaching purpose of each classroom activity and make a good judgement of classroom factors to adjust their translanguaging purposefully and effectively to support students' linguistic and social development.

Key words: *translanguaging; pedagogy; primary English; multilingualism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In English Language Teaching, the role of home language or first language has experienced a significant turn regarding epistemology and classroom practices. Before the increasing popularity of bilingualism and multi-lingualism, using home language was not encouraged by monolingualists who support one mainstream language development. They believed that the more exposure to the target language, the better students would acquire it. Learners and teachers were asked to follow the 'English-only policy' to increase mainstream language use and accelerate the assimilation process. Teachers who used their first language in the classroom were seen as either incompetent or violating practitioners (Macaro, 1997). This created a kind of "linguistic muzzling" (Wong, Lee, & Gao, 2016, p. 225) in language classrooms, which limited students' first-language use. The exclusion clearly devalued the cognitive and cultural contribution of students' home language as well as denied the obvious existence of the first language in bilingual classrooms (Canh, 2021).

However, when researchers started to embrace bi-/multi-lingualism, students' home languages are seen to have positive effects on their language learning and identity development (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull, 2018) and are aligned to

a mixed-language online environment (Shohamy, 2006). Li (2017) explains the epistemological turn of L1 additional role:

The actual purpose of learning new languages - to become bilingual and multilingual rather than to replace the learner's L1 to become another monolingual - often gets forgotten or neglected, and the bilingual, rather than monolingual, speaker is rarely used as the model for teaching and learning (p.8).

Classroom practices, accordingly, include more of students' first language via such activities as translation (Cook, 2010), code-switching (Barnard & McLellan, 2013), and translanguaging. Translanguaging is the term first used by Williams (1994) to refer to bilingual children's using their first language resources to maximize the effectiveness of their communication. Recently, more research has been conducted to explore the effective translanguaging in the classrooms as a popular pedagogy in ELT classrooms. Notably, García's (2009) view that translanguaging in the classroom is a way to develop learners' metalinguistic understanding and metacognitive awareness, important for bilingually educated individuals in the 21st century and a revolutionary pedagogy. Kerr (2019) continues to examine language teaching practices involving translanguaging.

An emerging concern, nevertheless, has been reported in teachers' translanguaging practices. While its contribution to students' learning is increasingly accepted, most research findings were related to Western bilingual contexts in US or European schools. There is a shortage of empirical research into and guidance for Asian ELT classrooms. Canh (2021, p.6) points out that:

Although there are a few resources on how to engage in translanguaging, at the time of the creation of this guidebook, there were no practical resources on how translanguaging could be applied in the context of ELT in Southeast Asia. As a result, many teachers, who are keen to use translanguaging in their classrooms, were left without practical guidance.

Clearly, teachers have to work out practical steps to translate those research findings into their own classroom dynamic. Some teachers feel guilty for excessive use of their first language (Macaro, 1997, 2001). Therefore, to support Vietnamese language teachers to effectively translanguage in their classroom, this article will focus on a brief theoretical rationale before examining specific classroom procedures and teacher reflections on translanguaging in the context of Vietnam primary English classrooms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before describing the context of translanguaging in Vietnam primary schools, this section will review translanguaging as a pedagogy at 2 levels: teachers' perception and practice.

2.1. Translanguaging Stance at Schools

Teachers hold mixed attitudes towards translanguaging in primary classrooms. Macaro (1997) has identified three perspectives that teachers hold about the use of home language:

- English only: Teachers see the classroom as a replicated target environment where learners are immersed in the language that they have to learn. They allow English only in the classroom.

- Feeling of guilt: Teachers aim for maximal use of the new language in class, with home language use being used as the last resort for teachers and learners. Therefore, teachers might have a feeling of guilt about the use of home language.

- Optimal position: Teachers see home language as valuable at certain points during a lesson, providing advantages to learners and learning beyond using only the additional language. This optimal use of the learners’ own language requires principled and informed judgment by teachers, but is also very difficult to define precisely or to generalise across contexts, classrooms and groups of learners. (Hall & Cook, 2013, p.9)

Clearly, recent research findings support the optimal position which values the educational use of home language as a support tool and resource for students’ thinking, communication, and the development of an additional language. However, some teachers still perceive of first language use as guilt.

2.2. Translanguaging practice at schools

Researchers have identified multiple ways to make translanguaging pedagogically sound.

According to Cook (2001), translanguaging in the classroom can be used to:

- develop English language activities
- provide shortcuts for giving instructions and explanations in case it is time-consuming to do these in English
 - create interlinked L1 and L2 knowledge in the students’ minds
 - carry out learning tasks through collaborative dialogues with other students

These suggestions cover all purposeful classroom activities. However, they do not have a direct link to a teaching method or a linguistic function. In Cambridge’s guidebook to translanguaging in language classrooms, the authors look at translanguaging from its communicative core and social functions. The core functions concern with the teaching of language and the social functions concern with the management of the classroom as in table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Core and Social Functions for Use of L1 (Kerr, 2019)

CORE FUNCTIONS	SOCIAL FUNCTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● explaining grammar and vocabulary ● checking understanding of grammar, vocabulary and texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● managing personal relationships (e.g. building rapport, maintaining discipline) ● giving instructions ● dealing with administrative matters

Hall and Cook (2013) found that more teachers used the core functions and that “no evidence that this explanatory function of L1 in language teaching is in a way detrimental to learning so long as it is not overused” (Kerr, 2019, p.7). Canh (2021) has suggested translanguaging strategies applied to stages of one task-based lesson:

Table 2.2. Translanguaging Strategies in Stages of a Task-based Lesson (Canh, 2021)

Lesson Stage	Technique	Translanguaging examples
Pre-task	Bilingual input	Teachers make culturally relevant connections by providing the input both in English and Vietnamese. Teachers elicit students' prior knowledge relevant to the reading or listening texts through either English or Vietnamese, or both.
While-task	Collaborative dialogue	Students discuss in pairs or groups how to carry out tasks in either English or Vietnamese or both.
Post-task	Sandwiching summary	Teachers invite the students to summarize the text in either English or Vietnamese, or both.
Feedback	Sandwiching feedback	Teachers provide feedback on both students' linguistic abilities in the additional language and their emerging language features.

It is clearly evident that translanguaging as a dynamic pedagogy. There are not one-size-fits-all classroom procedures for it. Teachers have to develop their own principles and promptly adjust their practice based on their while-teaching judgement of the classroom elements. Research has identified various factors that influence teachers' translanguaging:

- Student's proficiency. Research shows that teachers tend to use more L1 with students at lower levels. They feel that they need L1 more often to give instructions, maintain discipline, develop a rapport, and explain grammar (Hall & Cook, 2013);
- Class size. Teachers in large classes tend to use more L1 than in smaller classes for creating a positive atmosphere and maintaining discipline (Kerr, 2019);
- Stage of the course. At the beginning of the course, class routines are not set up and the students may have difficulty following teachers' instructions and completing the task. Therefore, teachers use L1 more often for instructions and classroom management (Kerr, 2019);
- Length of the lesson. If the lesson lasts over an hour and is exclusively conducted in English will be tiring for learners. Translanguaging might be needed (Kerr, 2019);
- Students' learning styles and expectations. These factors may put pressure on teachers to consider translanguaging. The students may embrace it or reject it regardless of the benefits or drawbacks (Hall & Cook, 2013; Vaish, 2019);
- Institutional policy. If the institution adopts English-only ideology and approach, translanguaging can be treated as a "smuggling" act (Li & Matin, 2009, p.123). Teachers will not use it to the presence of other stakeholders.

To summarise, translanguaging can be used for general purposes of activating the language resources for the students, for implementing a communicative function, or for a particular teaching technique in one lesson. It is important for teachers to develop their own stance of translanguaging, understand the educational purposes of translanguaging, integrate them to their classroom dynamic, and reflect on their own practices.

3. PROCEDURES

This section will analyse Vietnam's curriculum and exemplify how teachers can deploy translanguaging in their classrooms.

3.1. Teaching English at Vietnam primary schools

The majority of the Vietnamese population are from the Kinh ethnic group, and Vietnamese is the home language of the majority of the population (GSO, 2020, p.12). According to MOET statistics for the school year 2018-2019, there were 1.482.692 primary students out of a total 8.506.562 (about 17%) who came from non-Vietnamese ethnic groups (MOET, 2019). It could be assumed that almost 83% of total primary students speak Vietnamese as their home language. English, selected by 98% of school students (Vang, 2003, p.7), is officially taught as an additional language along with Chinese, Japanese, Russian, French, and German. Students' access to English comes mostly from their English classrooms, where most students and teachers share Vietnamese as their mother tongue. At home, the majority of students use Vietnamese to communicate with family members. However, with increased access to the Internet through mobile phones or computers,⁽¹⁾ many students have access to English on websites, Youtube, films, or chat rooms.

Vietnamese Primary English curriculum covers five grades (1-5) in two stages: In Stage 1 (grades 1-2) English is optional (up to 140 periods) and can be implemented in schools which have adequate resources, classroom facilities, and teaching staff. In Stage 2 (grades 3-5), English is compulsory (420 periods) for all primary students who wish to take English as an additional language. The national English curriculum adopts a communicative language teaching approach and states that by the end of year 5, students should achieve level 1 in the 6-level Vietnamese proficiency chart, similar to the A1 level in CEFR. The students study English 2-4 periods per week over 35 weeks in a school year. The curriculum content has four major themes: Me and my friends, me and my school, me and my family, me and the world around me. The themes are recycled and expanded over the ten-year program from grades 3-12.

The curriculum takes a multilingual stance and considers English language goals as additional and supportive to the learning of Vietnamese and the development of students' self. It says:

English gives students an important tool for international communication, enabling them to exchange science and technology information and to develop mutual understanding and global citizenship awareness as part of their personal development. Through learning English and exploring diverse cultures, the students will understand and appreciate their own language and culture. (Môn Tiếng Anh cung cấp cho học sinh một công cụ giao tiếp quốc tế quan trọng, giúp các em trao đổi thông tin, tri thức khoa học và kỹ thuật tiên tiến, tìm hiểu các nền văn hoá, qua đó góp phần tạo dựng sự hiểu biết giữa các dân tộc, hình thành ý thức công dân toàn cầu, góp phần vào việc phát triển

(1) 84% of Vietnamese population have mobile phone access from the Nielsen Việt Nam Smartphone Insights Report 2017. <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/418482/smartphone-users-cover-84-of-vn-population.html>

phẩm chất và năng lực cá nhân. Thông qua việc học Tiếng Anh và tìm hiểu các nền văn hóa khác nhau, học sinh có thể hiểu rõ hơn, thêm yêu ngôn ngữ và nền văn hóa của dân tộc mình) (MOET, 2018, p. 3).

Students are taught English to develop their identity as Vietnamese who can communicate and work in a multilingual and multi-ethnic setting under the overall approach of communicative language teaching. Translanguaging, therefore, can be viewed as a legitimate tool to facilitate student learning and identity formation, provided that it is pedagogically sound (Canh, 2021). However, translanguaging is a dynamic process which involves various factors of teacher, learner, resource, policy and the learning environment. When Vietnam is implementing multiple textbooks with varied classroom procedures, it is more challenging to identify a fixed classroom procedure. Instead, I would take the view of Garcia, Johnson, & Seltzer (2017) to examine translanguaging with three elements: stance, plan, and shift to help teachers develop a purposeful and beneficially consistent practice. Accordingly, for effective translanguaging teachers are expected to identify their philosophy first, plan some purposeful translanguaging and change their actions to accommodate the classroom dynamic.

When a teacher perceives the benefits of translanguaging, they can translate this stance into a classroom procedure through planning lessons. This section will show some sample plans for primary English lessons regarding vocabulary and structures, which are common in primary schools

3.2. Example 1: Grade 1: Vocabulary (English Discovery 2- Teacher A)

In this lesson, the main objective is to help students to learn vocabulary, e.g. to identify and name some words related to body parts. To achieve these goals, they need to understand the meaning of the words, classroom instruction and teacher's feedback. Translanguaging can be implemented to facilitate comprehension (of word meaning or tasks) and check their understanding (see the lesson plan below).

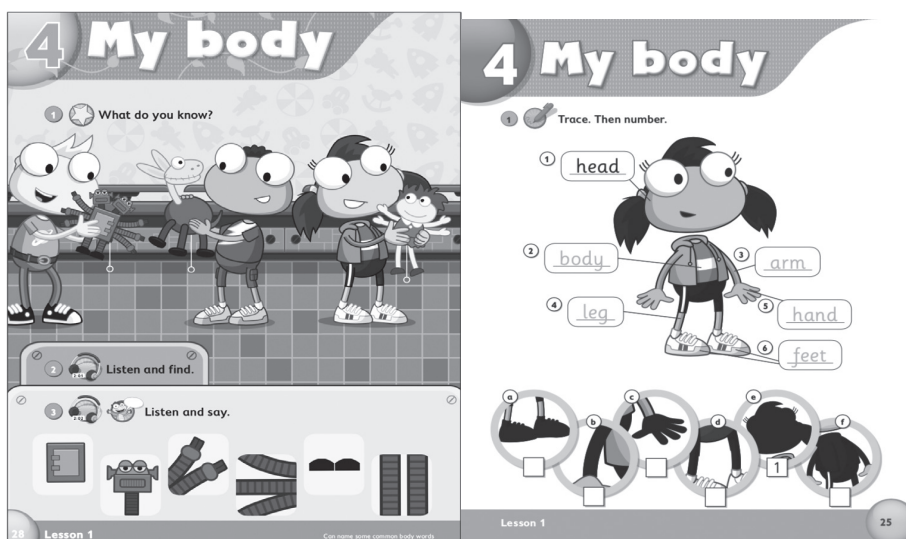


Figure 1: English Discovery 2- Unit 4 (<https://canhbuom-edu.vn/san-pham/sach-tieng-anh-tieu-hoc/english-discovery-2.html>)

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<p>UNIT 4: MY BODY- LESSON 1 Learning objectives: Can name some common body parts Language focus: Arms, body, feet, hands, head, legs</p>		
STAGES	TEACHER'S ACTIVITIES	TRANSLANGUAGING
INTRODUCTION		
Warm-up	<p>Review the previous lesson.</p> <p>Ask pupils to remember the new words they learnt in Unit 3.</p> <p>Write the words on the board as they are said.</p>	<p>If the students are familiar with this review activity, the teacher can use English to give instruction. If not, it is possible to explain the task in home language. As it is a revision, to make a stronger connection between the home language and English, the teacher may use bilingual technique to say the words in both English and their home language.</p>
Learning adventure	<p>Elicit what words students know.</p> <p>Have pupils look at the picture and ask pupils what body words they know, e.g. hands, feet. Write them on the board.</p>	<p>This may involve task instruction and the students say the words in home language.</p>
PRESENTATION		
	<p>Indicate your body and say, "This is my body." Point to your head and say, "My head. Continue with your hands, legs, arms, feet. Introduce the new words using flashcards. Show the image and say the words for pupils to repeat. Ask individual pupils to say the words.</p>	<p>This vocabulary presentation has visual aids from the body and the pictures in the flash cards. Translanguaging may not be necessary here. Say the words in English will help the students to get familiarised with them.</p>
PRACTICE		
Listen and find.	<p>Ask pupils (in L1) what Harry and his friends are doing. (They're designing their own toys.) Ask questions about the picture, e.g. Who's this? What's this? What colour is it? Play the audio. Pupils listen and point to each item in the main illustration as it is mentioned.</p>	<p>This activity may involve the use of L1 to help students understand the context and the task as they might not understand the context or have enough language to answer the teachers' questions.</p>

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Listen and say.	<p>Ask pupils to look at Activity 3 in their Pupil’s Books. Focus on the small pictures at the bottom of the page. Ask pupils to find the body parts in the main picture and to say which toy they belong to (Harry’s robot).</p> <p>Play the audio. Pupils listen and point to the body parts. Play the audio again. Pupils listen, point to the body parts and repeat the words.</p>	<p>In this activity, a teacher can demonstrate actions “listen and point”, using gestures. However, the task to find the body parts in the main pictures might be challenging to the students. Use L1 if necessary to explain it.</p>
Trace. Then number.	<p>Ask pupils to look at Activity 1 in their Activity Books. Pupils read the text labels and say the body parts, then trace the words.</p> <p>Pupils then write the correct number next to each silhouette that corresponds with each part of the body. Check pupils’ answers by calling out a number and have pupils say the part of the body that corresponds with it.</p>	<p>This activity involves translanguageing in explaining the task and giving feedback to the students by checking their answer.</p> <p>The students are supposed to be able to say the body parts in English.</p>
QUIZ		
Say the body parts.	<p>Show the activity on the board and nominate a pupil to name the body part (Body!).</p> <p>Ask for 5 volunteer pupils and ask them to line up at the board. Then go through the words and ask pupils to say the word. Check the flashcard to confirm the answer. Once all words have been said, ask another group of pupils to line up at the screen and go through the activity again.</p> <p>body, head, arms, legs, hands, feet</p>	<p>As the students are familiarised to the words, they may understand the task and can name the words. They may, however, need guidance on how to do the lining up for the first group.</p>

3.3. Example 2: Grade 4: Structure (English 4) Teacher N.

In this lesson, the main objectives are to help students to learn a new structure and practice the structure in some communicative activities. To achieve these goals, they need to revise some words, understand the structure, classroom instruction and teacher’s feedback. Translanguageing can be implemented to facilitate comprehension (of grammar rules or tasks) and check their understanding (see the lesson plan below).

Lesson 2

1 Look, listen and repeat.



2 Point and say.



3 Let's talk.

- What do you like doing?
- What's your hobby?

Figure 2: Tiếng Anh 4- Unit 7 (<https://www.sachmem.vn/trial/books/3/units>)

UNIT 7: WHAT DO YOU LIKE DOING? LESSON 2		
Learning objectives:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the words and phrases related to the topic of my hobby. ● Ask and answer the questions about someone's hobbies. ● Skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing 		
Language focus:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vocabulary: playing the piano, playing the guitar, singing, riding a bike, playing badminton, flying a kite, taking photos, watching TV. ● Sentence patterns: What's your hobby? - I like 		

STAGES	TEACHER'S ACTIVITIES	TRANSLANGUAGING
Warm up	- Greeting - Sing the song "What do you like doing?" to review lesson 1.	This is an easy and routined task. Translanguaging might not be needed.
Learning objectives	- Students watch a video to guess the topic. - Teacher introduces the objective: ask someone about their hobbies.	This eliciting task can be explained in English to the students. At this stage, they can understand the questions. The students might respond to the teacher's questions in Vietnamese. The teacher may wish to use a Vietnamese translation for the topic if he/she wants to make a connection with what the students know.

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Look, listen and repeat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elicit the characters and the context in the pictures. (<i>Who are the students? Where are they? What are they talking about?</i>) - Listen to the recording and read the dialogue. 	This task involves simple and routine activities. The students can understand the instructions easily.
Point and say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use pictures and TPR to teach new vocabulary: <i>riding a bike, playing badminton, flying a kite, taking photos, watching TV</i> - Play the game “hot seat” to review the phrases. 	With the support of pictures and TPR, the students can understand the instruction and guess the meaning of the phrases easily.
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain the structure to ask and answer about someone’ hobbies, using “<i>What’s your hobby? I like</i>” - Model the task with the first pictures: (<i>T: What’s your hobby? P: I like riding a bike.</i>) - Ask students to say the questions. - Students practise in pairs with the remaining pictures. - Explain the rules about how to add “ing” to a verb and gives examples. - Call students to give examples. 	<p>With this activity, the presentation of the structures in English is understandable for the students. They have learnt What do you like? I like ...before.</p> <p>When we need to focus on using a gerund in this structure, the teacher may need to switch to Vietnamese for explaining rules.</p>
Let’s talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Sun Flower” to practise asking and answering questions about someone’s hobbies (a flower is passed around with music. The student who holds the flower has the turn to speak) 	If it is a game that the students have played before, the teacher may not need to use Vietnamese. He/She can explain the games in English and check their understanding with demonstration. If the students have difficulty understanding it for the first time, translanguaging may be needed.
Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make a video and tell us about your hobby - Prepare for the new lesson 	Translanguaging can be used for quick classroom management here.

4. DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Translanguaging can be planned out ahead of time as described in the previous section. Teachers should plan ahead when and why they translanguaging in the classrooms to strengthen learning in the classroom activities. The previous section has examined the lesson plans and suggested translanguaging. However, it is possible that teachers shift their translanguaging plans in real teaching situations. To explore how some Vietnamese teachers applied translanguaging, we interviewed and observed some volunteer teachers who attended our translanguaging workshop and implemented translanguaging in their classroom to reflect on their practices.

Case 1: I had to use more Vietnamese than I had planned

Teacher N. had one demo 35-minute lesson with year 1 students. There were about 35 students in a big hall, not a classroom. The students were into the second unit of the course and it was the first time N worked with this group. The lesson was observed by several teachers and one trainer from the Department of Education and Training. The teacher used Vietnamese for most instructions, group setup, feedback, praise, and the welcome song. She admitted, “I abused Vietnamese. I didn’t plan that, but when I noticed that the students did not collaborate with me during the lesson, I changed. I had to use more Vietnamese than I planned. I myself was not satisfied with this. I used too much Vietnamese”.

Case 2: I did not have to use any Vietnamese at all

Teacher H. taught a 35-minute lesson with year 4 students about animal vocabulary in a public school. There were about 32 students who had learnt English for four years. The teacher organised games, group work, and new word presentation. She used flashcards and miniatures, but she did not translanguange at all. The students could understand and respond to her instructions attentively. She explained the reason she did not use Vietnamese because the students were familiar with the activities and classroom language she used for instructions.

“Pictures help a lot, I think. I could easily show the meanings of the words with the cards. Also, the students were fast. They could understand me”.

Clearly, teachers adapt their plan to the classroom dynamic. In these situations, the stage of the course was one factor that influenced the teachers’ translanguaging (Kerr, 2019). Teacher N. changed to Vietnamese language as she realised that the students were new to the activities and needed more support to understand the instruction and words (case 1). As the students were familiar with the tasks and could understand the routined instruction, the teacher did not use any first-language (case 2). Another factor could be students’ proficiency (Macaro, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Hall & Cook, 2013). In the first example, students were beginners and they had limited English proficiency compared to the students in case 2, resulting in higher frequency of first language use by the teacher.

To sum up, as a pedagogy, translanguaging can be planned and changed to respond to students’ learning needs and the objectives of the activities. It is advisable to teachers to be open to continuous reflection of their own translanguaging and make better judgement of when and how it should be implemented to facilitate students’ learning.

5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the view of translanguaging for Vietnamese English classrooms at primary schools. Generally, the adopted approach of the curriculum and the uniformity of the student population, students’ language proficiency are enabling factors for translanguaging as an effective pedagogy. Theoretically, with early primary students, translanguaging is mostly used to support their understanding of the task and to manage the class. With older primary students, when they have more knowledge in their home language and get familiarized with classroom routines, translanguaging can be used to give quick explanations to grammar rules and to connect new language with their home language. It is noted that translanguaging is only one of the multiple pedagogical options in the classroom and can be used in providing demonstrations, using TPR, flash cards, providing examples, and using

real objects. Teachers should understand the teaching purpose of each classroom activity and do translanguaging purposefully and effectively to support students' linguistic and social development.

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