



**Multilingual Performance Project**



## CELEBRATING COMMUNITY LANGUAGES IN SCHOOLS

Between January 2018 and June 2020, the exciting **Multilingual Performance Project** reached across England and Wales to showcase and celebrate the multilingual nature of schools and demonstrate how multilingualism can interact creatively with teaching in the classroom, promoting both taught languages and the use of community languages.

Our aims included:

- Celebrating the multilingual nature of schools, and demonstrating how this can interact with modern foreign languages as taught in the classroom, building confidence among learners from multilingual backgrounds and showcasing their home languages.
- Promoting internationalism in schools, encouraging students' interest in other countries and cultures.

Over the 2.5 years teachers often asked for ideas or advice on how to celebrate and integrate students' home and native languages in the classroom and across school life in general. We've also come across some great examples of teachers doing this work in their schools. Following these discussions, the team have written up some of the ideas in this pack.

We hope you find them interesting and useful!

**creative**  
multilingualism

*Releasing the creative potential of modern languages  
Making linguistic diversity more visible, valued, and vibrant  
Inspiring learners. Empowering communities. Invigorating research*

The **Multilingual Performance Project** was an initiative of **Creative Multilingualism**, a four-year research programme (2016-2020) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the context of its Open World Research Initiative. **Creative Multilingualism** investigated the interconnection between linguistic diversity and creativity, and rethinking the identity of Modern Languages. It aimed to strengthen the identity of the discipline, enhancing the visibility and status of languages in society, and giving a new impetus to language learning in schools.

To find out more, please visit: [www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk](http://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk)

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Creative Multilingualism



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## THE MANTLE OF THE EXPERT

Often teachers have often told us they're concerned about using and working with languages at school that they themselves don't speak or understand. We like to see this as an opportunity, for both inspiring creativity and to empower your students who have a language other than English.

If you have not come across Dorothy Heathcote's work on 'The Mantle of the Expert', we would highly recommend investigating it as a teaching practice that you might enjoy. The principle is exploration through which children and teachers can learn together, rather than knowledge being decanted from the teacher down to the student. Giving children responsibility and authority allows them to take control of their learning and helps keep students engaged with the activity. In this frame, we give the students the freedom to be experts and to pass that knowledge on to each other.

You can create an environment where the children who have knowledge of another language are excited to share it with the class. Perhaps you create an activity that requires a special knowledge to complete – a note must be encrypted or deciphered, and only people's knowledge of home languages can solve the puzzle/keep the message safe. When you as the teacher do not know the answer and you are genuinely interested in your student's ideas and knowledge of languages, you can invite them to share their expertise. By elevating their authority and giving them the power to be the most knowledgeable person in the room, they will be more engaged in the activity and want to help, and you can be confident that they are not using the opportunity to undermine your authority – after all, you have relinquished it to them as expert linguists! By establishing a topic-based or historical/geographical setting, or even a fictitious context that relies upon the children having an expert knowledge of something that you as the teacher do not know, you can support your students to use their home languages to enrich the class rather than it being hidden away, ignored or even being used to subvert it.

You can find out more here: [www.mantleoftheexpert.com](http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com)



## **DRAMA ACTIVITIES**

Here are some very simple drama activities which can help you explore community languages in a fun and engaging way:

### **Object Building**

This works best in small groups of 3-4 young people. Each group must think of a common object you would find in your home. They then must work together to build this object using their bodies. Each group will then show their objects back to the rest of the class who will guess what it is. The teacher can then ask the young people in the class how you say this word in their own community language. The teacher can ask them to write this on a large piece of paper which can then be displayed in the classroom so that the words can be used again in future activities.

### **What Are You Doing?**

This is an improvisation game that you can play with the entire class as one large group and preferably with everyone in a circle. One person goes in the middle of the circle and they then act out a physical activity such as swimming, cooking, or reading. Another person then goes into the circle and asks them "What are you doing?". The person must answer in their community language. The first person to guess what this is in English then gets to have a turn. You can also practice asking "What are you doing?" in different community languages.

### **The (Fake) Expert Game**

This is a good exercise to try and teach specific words in different community languages. These could be linked to a topic or theme that your young people are currently working on. Write a selection of words in different languages and the young people who speak that language can then pretend they are an expert on this topic and talk about it for 1 minute. This will encourage them to say the word lots of times and help others in the class as they are trying to guess what the word is in English

### **Pass the Word**

This exercise looks at how tone and gesture convey meaning, whilst also repeating a new word multiple times. Get the young people in a circle and pass one word in the target language around the circle. Each person tries to find a different emphasis or meaning for it, for example, "Cześć" ('Hello' in Polish) could be said with a smile, a frown, a sob, through gritted teeth, etc. When someone cannot think of a different way to say the word they are out, or the class could move on to another word. This could also lead on to conversations about feelings and emotions and social wellbeing. You could further engage the young person who has another language to tell you all if there are other words or phrases to use, for example, how might you say 'hello' to someone if you were feeling very excited to see them, or if it was someone you were greeting formally, etc.



## **Postcards**

Perfect for sharing stories when back from holidays and half-term breaks. Students are invited to write a short postcard-length description of what they have done on their holidays, which can be done in their home language. Split the class into small groups, who will choose a postcard to bring to life. They then work to create still images of those events, making the image on the front of the postcard. They present the image to the class whilst the writer reads out the 'back of the postcard'. As it is performed in the home language, classmates can try to identify images from the still scene and pick out key words.

## **Storyboard**

This is a game where home languages can be used within a dramatic scene by the speaker and quickly interpreted by others, as the focus is on the game and not the language. Split the class in half, and from there each half into three groups (you should now have 6 groups and 2 teams). Play with one team performing and the other team as the audience, and then swap. The three groups work separately to create a still image with one line of dialogue to be spoken (this should be in the home language). One created image acts as the beginning, one as the middle and one as the end of a story. The audience watches the three images being performed and works together to form a narrative which could join them.

## **Greetings, Your Majesty**

A game to encourage a student to teach the whole class a phrase from their home language. Choose an innocuous phrase (the traditional example is 'Greetings, your Majesty', but you can choose whatever you like!). Once this phrase is translated into the home language you'd like to explore ensure the whole class is fluent with it. One student is blindfolded on a chair at the front – the monarch on their throne - whilst the other children sit in their seats. One child is chosen to go up and say the practiced phrase then quietly return to their seat, and then the blindfolded student can guess who spoke. Success means they can leave the seat and a new King or Queen is chosen.

## **Focus Counting**

This is a fun game to encourage focus and help teach counting in different languages. This can be played in one large group or in pairs. Every time you play this game you can explore a different language. The object of the game is to count from 1 to 10 in that language without making any mistakes or hesitating. There is no set order for speaking, so if two people speak at the same time you have to start again. You can begin just counting 1 to 3 and building it up to 10 depending on the age and ability of the group you are working with. This will require you all to learn the numbers together first. If playing as one large group then you need to all focus as only one person can say each number and if a mistake is made (or two people say a number at the same time) then you have to go back to the start. If playing in pairs, it can be fun to play around with counting from 1 to 3 at speed. You can then also substitute one or more of the numbers for a physical action or sound effect to develop the exercise and keep it fun!



## What's Your Favourite?

This is a game best played in a large and open space such as a PE hall or a classroom cleared of tables and chairs. The teacher begins by asking all of the young people to stand in the middle of the room (if you have a particularly large group they can be split in two and one group can be the audience then switch). There will be three choices that the students can make and each choice is connected to a specific area in the room. For example, the three choices could be: Chocolate, Ice-cream or Sweets. The teacher assigns each of these words to a certain area in the room and then the group need to choose their favourite by moving to that area. The game can be developed by replacing the three words chosen with the same words but spoken in one of the home languages used by your group. This game is particularly good for young people who may be a bit nervous as it is very much a group activity.

## Body Words

This is a good activity to encourage young people to use their bodies and think about the spelling of new words they are learning. In groups, ask students to spell out a short word using their bodies to form the letters. They can either do this as upright words or lying on the ground to be 'read' from above. Each letter can be made by one, two or three people.

## Whispered Languages

This activity can be lots of fun and creates a safe environment to make mistakes with pronunciation which can be a challenge when learning to speak in a different language from your own. It works best if the group can sit in a very tight circle together or in a line. Everyone is given a number. To begin, the whispered language can be English to make sure everyone understands the game. Number One thinks of a phrase and whispers it to Number Two. Number Two repeats it to Number Three and so on. To develop the game, you can ask young people to choose a phrase spoken in their home language. How near or far from the original phrase is the message when it gets back to Number One?

*Many more MPP activities and exercises could be adapted for use with community, rather than taught, languages. Be sure to check out the other packs at: [www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/resources](http://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/resources)*





## COMMUNITY LANGUAGES IN THE DAILY LIFE OF YOUR SCHOOL

We've collected examples of how teachers in England and Wales have tried to integrate and celebrate community languages in school and describe them below. We've also added in a few of our own ideas:

### Form Time

A few simple ideas you can easily add into your form time to start celebrating the home languages your students speak:

- Encouraging young people to answer the register in their own languages. Then you can all practice answering in someone else's language.
- The teacher and class can learn some greetings in different languages. Maybe there could be a new greeting every week that you learn together.
- Practice singing 'Happy Birthday' in your students' own languages for singing on their special day.
- You could have a word of the day, topic of the week and celebrate a new language regularly.
- Asks students to share special activities they do at home such as religious practices or family celebrations, and learn key vocabulary related to these things together.

### Teaching Time/In Class

Here are some activities which you can easily try out during your teaching time:

- Try to create, read and listen to **menus** of food in foreign languages.
- Invest in bilingual English-Community Language **dictionaries** for any students you have that year.
- **Class rules** – create a version of these in all the languages spoken in your class.
- Find out key info about the country/ies the languages come from that are spoken in your class. You could **compare and contrast** cultures in British Values classes.
- You could spend focused time on **fact-finding** things about each county and then display on the classroom walls to showcase the diversity of your class.

- **Letter writing** in your own language can be fun to explore and you can develop this into sharing of these letters with each other and/or displaying them for others in the school to see.
- **Early Years settings** - Learn some nursery rhymes together in different languages
- **Numbers** - Practice 1 -10 in all the different languages your young people speak
- **Famous People projects** – Imagine you have a Polish student, ensure you pick an artist or writer from Poland. Alongside the subject learning, you could prepare a short lesson to be taught by your Polish student (with support) on key words, phrases etc. that link to the famous person’s life.
- **PE** – when the sport you’re teaching is the national/favourite sport of a country from which students’ families originate, you could ask them for team names, learn the rules in their languages, or key phrases etc.

### Assemblies

Assemblies are a great time to explore the diversity of languages in your school, and encourage your children to celebrate their language instead of hide it away at home. Here are a few suggestions of themes you could try:

- If children can be encouraged to create performances that include their home language, excerpts of **poetry, plays** or their own writing can be performed to the school.
- ‘Where our families are from’ – this assembly could focus on the **geography, history and facts** about the countries that their families originated from. Involve all the young people in your class sharing where they are from and teaching others some key phrases in their community language.
- Relatedly, assemblies could be based specifically on the **culture** linked to the language, e.g. exploring Bangladeshi culture and language.
- Assemblies can also focus on **festivals and important dates** linked to cultures that predominantly use other languages. The list of examples below is by no means exhaustive, but it is included to give some examples of term-time dates that are important to specific countries, nationalities and religions. Focus on the days that are most relevant to your schools’ students and their heritages.

19 January – World Religion Day

January/February – Chinese New Year

21 February Maha Shivaratri (Hindu)

1 March – Saint David’s Day

10 March – Holi (Hindu)



- 10-12 March – Hola Mohalla (Sikh)
- 22 March (date varies) – Isra and Mi'raj (Islamic)
- 26 March – Independence Day (Bangladeshi)
- 3 May – Constitution Day (Polish)
- 7 May – Vesak (Buddhist)
- May-July – Eid Al-Fitr (Islamic)
- Just for fun - 19 September – International Talk Like a Pirate Day!*
- October/November – Diwali (Hindu)
- 11 November – Armistice Day & Independence Day (Polish)
- November/December – Hannukah (Jewish)

### **Extra-Curricular Time**

- **School plays / Nativities** – Get different characters or groups of characters to speak in the home languages present in your school, for example, the Hedgehogs all speak Bangladeshi, the Foxes all speak Polish, etc. Any dialogue in a home language can be translated in a variety of ways – you could project translations onto the stage, performers could hold up translation cards on stage, an interpreter character could translate for the audience and other groups on stage. Some dialogue may not even need direct translation, as a narrator's speech might provide enough context for it to be understood.
- **Cultural calendar days/activities** – Use the expertise already available to you in your students and their families and get them to teach skills and languages they have. Traditional dance, music and instruments, song, storytelling, cooking... all these and more could be incorporated into a multicultural celebration event, where students and families lead workshops and lessons or give performances to the rest of school.
- **Talent shows and competitions.** Prompt students to turn a 'normal' school talent show into one integrating their other languages. How about a song contest? Or a poetry recital with poems from across the world? Or scenes from traditional cultural performances?

### **Display Boards**

Use one or more of your most prominent display boards/walls to celebrate the number of languages in your school. Have a large map with pins and labels for the countries that speak the various languages. Include pictures by and of your bilingual students.

When a big international event happens – Commonwealth Games, the Olympics, even the Eurovision Song Contest, etc. – make explicit links between your students' heritage and the countries taking part. Make banners and posters in different languages to display around the school.

## How Does Your School Talk to The World (and Parents)?

The MPP team have seen some really great examples of schools integrating their community languages – the home and native languages of students and staff – on their websites, in newsletters, within social media posts and even in their letterheads. Schools doing this are outwardly celebrating the languages they speak and their diversity whilst empowering and welcoming those with other languages.

We also wanted to highlight how PTAs and parent ambassadors can contribute to this effort. Parent bodies can sometimes be an untapped resource in terms of engaging with communities. If you have a Parent-Teacher Association or 'Friends of...', speak with them about their communications and the languages they use. Are they communicating effectively with the whole parent body? Do they use multiple languages to communicate?

One example is a primary school in Birmingham with 900+ students who use their Friends of... Association to run a multicultural event. The parent body are asked to set up stalls with food/crafts/activities that represent their home culture and languages. A printed treasure trail leads children around the stalls, asking them to fill in a word from each language represented and a completed sheet wins a prize. This event can take place after school on a day when you have run in-school activities celebrating the array of cultures you have in school or your local area.

Parent Ambassadors could also be introduced to enable more communication between the parent body and school in terms of engaging parents who might use different home languages. Identify those parents who are engaged with the school community and speak the home languages you are targeting, and facilitate them being a conduit between parents and the school. They could have an easily accessed meeting space onsite to meet with parents as and when needed.

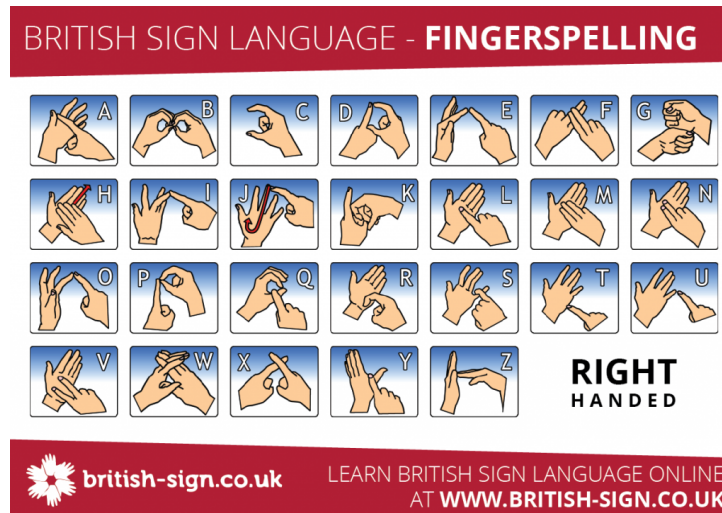




## SIGN LANGUAGES AND MAKATON

Here are some activities which can be a fun way to explore Sign Languages and Makaton in the classroom:

**Alphabet** – this is probably the first thing you should all try to learn together as this will help introduce you to sign languages. There are many useful videos online that can be accessed to help you with this.



There are lots of useful resources, games and links at the website above. And videos for the following areas can be found at <https://www.schoolofsignlanguage.com/learn-online/learn-online-free-only/> and there are lots of free short video tutorials on YouTube. Try out:

- **My name is... (What's your name?)**
- **Greetings**
- **My favourite colour is... (What's your favourite colour?)**
- **Who, What, Where, Why, How**
- **Animals**
- **Hobbies**
- Once you learned the above questions and answers, challenge your class to create a short conversation using only Sign Language/Makaton in small groups
- **Singing and signing** – This can be a fun way to learn Sign Language/Makaton. Choose a simple song to sing and sign together. The song you choose could be linked to a topic you are working on and it could even be performed as part of an assembly. There are many useful videos online to help you with this. Cherry Oak School in Birmingham have created this fantastic link which will help introduce you to some singing and signing songs: <https://www.cherryoak.bham.sch.uk/singing-signing/>

**WORLD'S STAGE** - This film project is an example of how the MPP worked with schools to celebrate community languages (for more examples please visit [www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/blog](http://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/blog)):



Working across communities in Birmingham this film project engaged with all the 93 languages that can be found in the Library of Birmingham's Shakespeare archive. Non-professional community performers who speak one or more of these languages worked with the MPP Director, Daniel Tyler-McTighe, and professional actors on lines, speeches and scenes from Shakespeare to create a multilingual collage.

81 students from the West Midlands took part in the filming of *World's Stage* performing in their community and taught languages. Partner schools, colleges and universities who hosted filming and provided multilingual talent included Rockwood Academy, Birmingham Ormiston Academy, the University of Birmingham, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Hillstone Primary School.



The headteacher of Hillstone, Gill Sparrow, said: *"The 'World's Stage' project had an unexpected impact in our school. We are a school that loves participating in Shakespeare study and have a Shakespeare season every year. We were happy to be involved with this project which had a different slant. 20 different languages are spoken at our school (including English) but each of those different languages are only used by 1 or 2 children rather than a much larger number as happens at many of the inner-city schools. As a result, their language is not shared in school and their ability as dual language speakers not recognized or valued. This project allowed those dual language speakers to use their own language and make comparisons with other languages. The children blossomed as a result of their involvement in and as a result we have appointed somebody responsible for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and intend to value those different languages more highly around school."*



And teacher Sarah Gillett, also from Hillstone, said: *"For the EAL children involved in the project, I think that their experience will have a lasting impact on them personally: not only were they treated as equals (to the adults present) during the session, but when exploring the various texts and artefacts in their home languages, they suddenly found themselves as experts, sharing their knowledge with the interested adults. And as a school, this experience has prompted us to think more carefully about how we value and promote our EAL children, which in turn will lead to us promoting and valuing children's home languages more so than previously."*

**100%** of participants said that they enjoyed the creative use of languages through using or hearing them in different ways, through live performance, filming and their own reciting of Shakespeare's lines in different languages.

*"Being Welsh, being asked to speak Welsh on film, however basically, was the best thing for me. I loved hearing the other languages too."*

**80%** said that the project had made them think that different community languages were more valuable to the UK than they'd previously thought.

*"it was a project that promoted and celebrated the multiculturalism of British societies, and especially the diaspora communities of the Midlands"*

**90%** now thought that these community languages were **very** important.

*"It was great to meet people who speak other languages, some I have never heard before."*