

# Language Learning in Crisis Contexts

*EiE Community Monthly Call | 21 February, 2023*

## About the Education in Emergencies (EiE) Community Calls

Staff, alumni and participants from across the Teach For All network come together regularly to share ideas, solutions and resources to support students and communities impacted by emergency situations. If you'd like to become a Member of the EiE Community and receive invites for future calls, please complete this [short form](#)!

## Other Useful Links

[Insights from the last EiE Community call](#)

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## EiE Insights

[Connecting With Students](#)

[Mother Tongue Languages](#)

[Making It Fun](#)

## Video highlights

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## INSIGHTS ON CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS



### Build Strong Relationships

Network participants and alumni shared how fostering trust and connection with students has a powerful impact on their language-learning journey. When teachers get to know their students, their lives and their past experiences, this can build critical understanding, respect and empathy. Through this, students are more able to feel accepted, heard and seen in their new school/country, which helps increase their confidence to make mistakes and take risks whilst learning their new language of instruction. Through building these relationships, network participants and alumni have been better able to understand their students' home life - for example if they were displaced with or without their parents or siblings, if/how their family was impacted by a crisis, and under what circumstances they arrived in this new country. This enables them to factor such sensitivities into their lesson planning and classroom conversations.



## **Incorporate Social Emotional Learning**

Network participants and alumni have found that drawing on social emotional learning (SEL) strategies and activities is a great support to their language learning students. They reminded us that these students aren't just having to acquire a new language, but also learn about a new country and its culture, food, norms, etc. Teachers have also found that SEL can be used to enhance literacy skills, for example where students are asked to reflect on the SEL activity and can choose to reflect either through writing or speaking. SEL also supports students with problem solving, confidence, self-regulation and communication - all of which are vital skills for their language learning journey.



## **Enjoy Two-Way Learning**

Network participants and alumni reminded us that language learning is not a one-way process - teachers and the rest of the class are able to learn so much from the language-learning students. They make sure to leverage all the existing knowledge in the classroom, and ask students to share what the different vocabulary is in their native language. By drawing on the expertise among their students, they are also able to tangibly show their classes what the benefits of diversity are, and how to appreciate multilingualism as a norm, not a threat.

# **INSIGHTS ON MOTHER TONGUE LANGUAGES**



## **Encourage Students to Use their Native Languages**

Network participants and alumni shared that when they celebrate and encourage their students' to speak their mother tongue, they are also supporting their students' willingness and enthusiasm to communicate. Through a variety of methods, teachers can help their students to both retain their first language whilst also learning the new language of instruction. Students can be encouraged to translate for their peers or teach them new concepts in their shared language. Teachers can include the mother tongue in classroom games and rituals. Language learning students can also be supported to teach their classmates greetings, phrases and songs in their own first language, which empowers them to teach others.



## **Understand the Importance of Mother Tongue for Identity**

Partners reflected on how language is so deeply connected to people's identity, so when a child has migrated to another country it is important for network participants to find ways to honor the mother tongue, as a way to preserve their culture. They shared many different ways to celebrate this part of their students' identity, for example using books by authors or poets from their country, learning songs or music in their native language. Families and parents can also play a significant role here too, by inviting them into school to sit and drink or eat together, communicate (via an interpreter if needed) and see how the students' native language connects with their home life.



## **Become Familiar with their Native Language**

Network participants and alumni recommended spending time researching and learning about their students' country of origin and their mother tongue. Having this base understanding of their students' existing literacy rules can help inform lesson planning and potential barriers that students will face in acquiring the new language. For example, by knowing that Farsi speakers have difficulty with consonant clusters, or by knowing that Arabic doesn't have any articles (a, an, the), this will help teachers to approach lessons and vocabulary differently.

## **INSIGHTS ON MAKING IT FUN**



### **Games, Games, Games!**

Partners agreed that play-based learning is a great way to make language learning fun and a more enjoyable process for their second language students. Games can break up a lesson, be used as a warm-up or consolidation test, and are also easy ways to expand students' vocabulary. There are a variety of games which network participants can use in their lessons, including:

- *The Whisper Challenge* (Student A picks up a picture card and silently mouths out the word, and Student B has to lipread and guess the word correctly, and then find the matching card with the word written down).

- *Verb + Feeling Theatre* (In groups of 3-4, students are given a verb and a feeling, and have 15 minutes to make up a dialogue or sketch which depicts both the verb and the feeling. The other groups have to guess correctly what their allocated words were. This game also has SEL components where students connect about emotions).
- *Throw the Ball* (A ball is thrown between students to 'quick fire' check their understanding / spelling of new vocabulary or grammar concepts).
- *What's Hiding?* (A student leaves the classroom whilst an object is hidden away. When they re-enter they have to guess, using all the new vocabulary or grammar rules, what the missing object is).



### **Use Your Body**

Active learning and using body language has so many benefits for all types of students, including those learning a new language. Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method of language teaching which uses physical movement to react to verbal input. Using this approach, teachers can use physical gestures attached to a word or concept. For example: to teach past tense verbs network participants point their hands behind them; to teach certain grammar rules, they use different arm movements; when introducing new vocabulary they point at or hold the physical objects.



### **Don't Be Discouraged**

It's helpful to remember that language learning is often a slow and difficult process, for both students and teachers. Students and teachers shouldn't be discouraged by this, and continue to treat one another with care, compassion and patience. Following a mass displacement of people, a teacher's class may double in size with the arrival of many new students who don't speak the same language. In such contexts there is often little technical support from within the education system, and teachers can feel alone in this struggle. Refugee or immigrant students can also arrive at any time throughout the school year, often without any prior planning or preparation by the school. Network participants can be supported through peer support networks to share ideas and pedagogy techniques, or receive specialised training where possible.

### **Attendees dialled in from:**

Empieza por Educar; Enseñá por Argentina; Teach First; Teach First Deutschland; Teach For Afghanistan; Teach For Armenia; Teach For Austria; Teach For India; Teach For Italy; Teach For Kenya; Teach For Lebanon; Teach For Nigeria; Teach For Pakistan; Teach For Poland; Teach For Portugal; Teach For Romania; Teach For Sweden; Teach For Uganda; Teach For Ukraine; Teach For Zimbabwe.