

# From Culture to Classroom: Migrant Voices Creating Cross-Cultural Learning Experiences

## Introduction

This case study explores the transformative potential of positioning migrant communities as cultural educators and content creators within UK educational settings. Through the ENACT Impact project, five male migrants from Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Bangladesh, and Chad collaborated to develop bilingual educational activities that share their cultural heritage with UK school children.

The study traces their journey across five sessions, from initial workshop participation through to direct engagement with primary school students, documenting both the educational impact on learners and the profound personal transformation experienced by the migrant volunteers themselves. By examining implementation across different educational contexts – from a Year 8 EAL classroom to a Year 3 primary setting - this research demonstrates how authentic, community-generated content can foster meaningful cross-cultural understanding while empowering migrant voices as valuable educational resources.

The case study challenges traditional models of educational support by illustrating how collaborative content creation can serve dual purposes: providing culturally rich learning experiences for students while simultaneously building confidence, skills, and community connections for recent migrants. Through detailed analysis of three distinct workshop phases, this research offers insights into effective approaches for creating inclusive, culturally responsive educational environments that celebrate diversity as a source of strength and learning.

## ENACT Workshop 1: Creating Bilingual Learning Activities

### Workshop Overview

A collaborative workshop was conducted with five male participants, all recent migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds including Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Bangladesh, and Chad. The session focused on developing interactive educational content for the ENACT web application, with the specific goal of creating activities that would share cultural heritage stories and childhood tales with UK school children while facilitating language and cultural learning.

### Methodology and Process

The workshop began with participants discussing meaningful cultural heritage stories and childhood tales from their home countries that they felt would be valuable to share with young learners in the UK. Through collaborative discussion, the group identified content that could effectively bridge cultural understanding while providing language learning opportunities.

Following the initial brainstorming phase, participants divided into two working groups, each focusing on developing a distinct activity for the ENACT platform. The creative process involved multiple stages: conceptualisation, physical creation, digital content development, and platform integration.

## Activity Development

### The Best Bee Activity

The first group developed a bilingual activity titled "The Best Bee," presented in both Persian and English. The creation process involved hands-on crafting, with participants constructing paper models of bees and windmills. To enhance the visual appeal and contextual relevance of their content, the group conducted a photography session in the outdoor spaces around the university building, capturing images among natural flower displays.

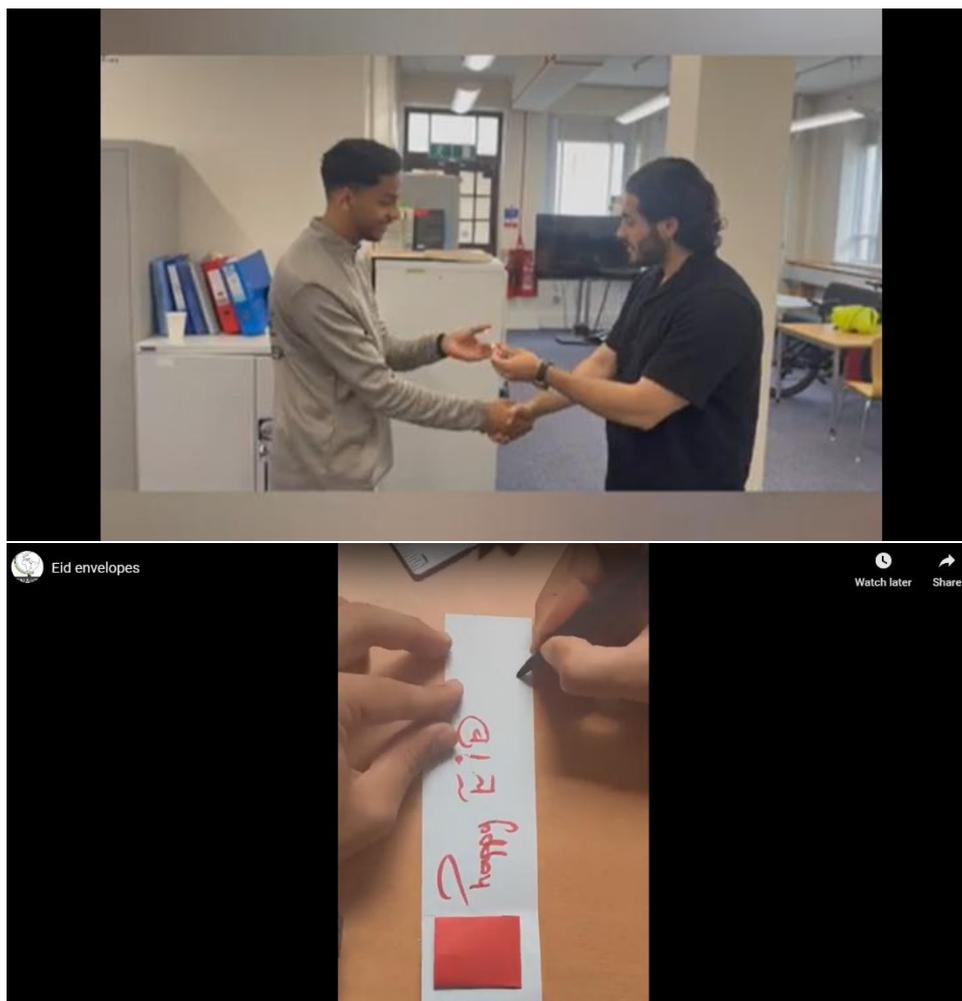
The digital component was developed using the YouCut mobile application, where participants created videos with voiceovers in English. They compiled vocabulary photographs and corresponding audio clips, integrating these elements cohesively within the ENACT web application to create an immersive learning experience.



### Eidiya Activity

The second group focused on the cultural tradition of Eid gift-giving, specifically creating content around "Eidiya" (monetary gifts given during Eid celebrations). Their research phase involved locating explanatory video content on YouTube to provide foundational context for UK learners unfamiliar with this cultural practice.

The practical component involved creating authentic-looking Eid envelopes using paper materials and printed replica money to demonstrate the tradition. Similar to the first group, they produced instructional videos and audio content, which were systematically organised and uploaded to the ENACT platform. To reinforce learning outcomes, this group additionally developed multiple-choice assessment questions to test user comprehension of the cultural concepts presented, and a short video demonstrating two of the participants giving and receiving an envelope.



### Outcomes and Participant Feedback

The complete activity development process required approximately four hours from conception to final platform integration. Despite the intensive nature of the workshop, participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive. All five participants expressed high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction with both the creative process and the collaborative learning environment.

Follow-up focus group discussions revealed the depth of participant engagement and satisfaction. One participant reflected on the nostalgic value of the experience: "It was about idea. It's a good thing because it's, remember I was, like you said, back in time to our childhood, we do it, we used to do something like that." Another emphasised the personal significance, stating: "It was a very special time for me. So, and I want all other children to know that, what we were doing in our childhood."

Participants particularly appreciated the creative and technical learning aspects of the workshop, with one noting: "I think it was creative... it's nice to go through all this, all this project and to know how to use the edit programme and making some videos." The user-friendly nature of the ENACT platform was also highlighted: "I think it's make it pretty easy because you only need to upload on putting the name. You don't need to do hard job."

The cultural sharing potential resonated strongly with participants, who recognised the broader educational value. As one participant observed: "It's also a good application to share culture,"

while another emphasised the cross-generational appeal: "I think they will be interested in that because they will remind them when they was child. Something warm inside."

The workshop successfully demonstrated the potential for migrant communities to contribute meaningfully to educational content creation, while simultaneously providing participants with valuable digital literacy skills and cultural sharing opportunities. The bilingual nature of the activities created bridges between heritage languages and English, supporting both cultural preservation and language acquisition goals.

### **Implications**

This workshop model illustrates an effective approach to community-engaged content creation, where recent migrants can share their cultural knowledge while developing technical skills in digital media production. The success of this collaborative format suggests significant potential for scaling similar initiatives to create diverse, culturally rich educational resources that benefit both migrant communities and UK educational settings.

## **ENACT Workshop 2: Cross-Cultural Learning in a Year 8 EAL Classroom**

### **Overview**

This part of the case study looks at how the Eidiya learning activity was delivered in a classroom with students who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). It explores what happened during the session, how students interacted, and what they learned. The activity was delivered at Excelsior Academy using the ENACT web app, and focused on the cultural tradition of giving gifts during Eid.

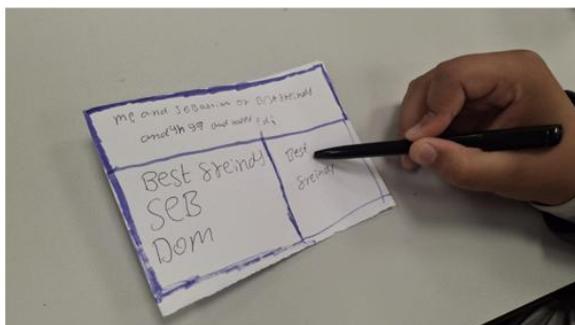
### **Classroom Context**

The session involved 15 Year 8 students, 14 boys and 1 girl, all of whom were EAL learners. Most of the students were from Roma backgrounds, and some also spoke Arabic, creating a multilingual classroom. The Eidiya activity, developed by the migrant group, explored Islamic gift-giving traditions.

As the school lacked basic supplies like paper, pens, and scissors, these were brought in from the University. Students were excited to use coloured pens and to keep them afterwards, as many do not normally have access to such materials.

### **The LEARN Session**

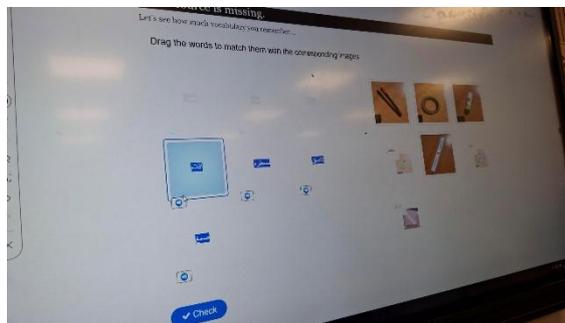
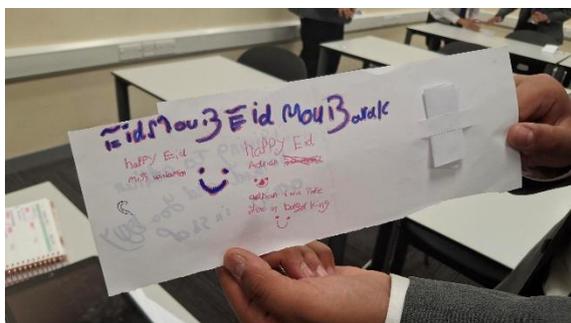
The students engaged well with the activity on the ENACT platform. They asked to watch the instructional videos multiple times, which suggested they were paying close attention and wanted to fully understand the task. They also repeated the matching exercises by choice, showing they were motivated and enjoying the activity.



Arabic-speaking students were especially enthusiastic about the content being available in Arabic. They took the lead in answering questions, writing in Arabic, and showing their work to the teacher, teaching assistant, and researcher. They also helped their classmates understand, acting as informal translators and guides. This happened naturally, without the teacher having to step in, and created a strong sense of peer collaboration.

The practical part of the activity involved making envelopes, and students wrote messages in both English and Arabic. This gave them a chance to use their home languages while practising English, turning the task into a meaningful cultural exchange rather than just a school exercise.

During the quiz at the end, students stayed focused and continued helping one another. Arabic-speaking students kept playing a key role in helping others understand the questions and content.



### What Students Learned

Several important learning outcomes were observed during the session:

- **Cultural understanding:** Students learned about Islamic traditions and showed respect for a culture that might have been new to them. This helped build empathy and cross-cultural awareness.
- **Language development:** Arabic-speaking students used their first language to support others, while also practising English. The activity helped all students build on their existing language skills in both their home and target languages.
- **Peer collaboration:** Students naturally formed mentoring relationships, often based on shared language or cultural knowledge. This peer support boosted learning for everyone in the class.

- **Digital engagement:** Students remained focused and actively involved throughout the session. The ENACT platform's mix of video, interactive tasks, and hands-on activities appealed to a range of learning styles and helped all students engage with the content.

### **Implications for Teaching EAL Learners**

This session highlights a few key lessons for EAL teaching:

- Including cultural content, even if it doesn't reflect every student's background, can help build empathy, curiosity, and a sense of shared learning.
- Encouraging peer support and recognising students' home languages and cultures can strengthen classroom relationships and learning outcomes.
- Digital tools with interactive, multimedia content are especially useful in EAL settings, as they offer different ways to access and understand material.
- Access to basic resources is still a challenge in some schools, and providing materials for cultural activities is important for supporting full participation.

### **Conclusion**

Despite limited resources, this session showed how a combination of digital tools, cultural content, hands-on tasks, and peer collaboration can create a rich and meaningful learning experience. When students' languages and backgrounds are seen as assets, they become active contributors to their own and each other's learning.

## **ENACT Workshop 3: Primary School Engagement with Year 3 Students**

### **Overview**

Building on the success of the Year 8 EAL classroom implementation, a further session was conducted with 22 Year 3 students visiting the university campus from Excelsior Academy in Newcastle. This primary school cohort had high numbers of EAL learners and students eligible for Pupil Premium (PP), creating an ideal environment to test the cross-cultural learning activities with younger learners. The session uniquely combined digital learning with direct interaction between the migrant participants who had originally created the Eidiya activity and the primary school students.

### **Session Structure**

The workshop began with students participating in a crepe-making activity, which served as an engaging warm-up and cultural introduction. Following this initial activity, students transitioned to working directly with the migrant participants who had developed the Eid envelope activity during the original content creation workshop, plus one extra volunteer, the wife of one of the participants. This direct interaction between content creators and end users provided a valuable opportunity to observe authentic cultural exchange in action.

### **Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes**

Student engagement throughout the session was exceptionally high. The Year 3 students demonstrated sustained focus and enthusiasm while creating their Eid envelopes, with many expressing genuine excitement about the cultural traditions they were learning about. The

hands-on nature of the envelope-making activity proved particularly effective for this age group, allowing them to engage with abstract cultural concepts through tangible creative work.

Clear evidence of language learning emerged during the session, with students acquiring new vocabulary related to Islamic traditions and Eid celebrations. Students who celebrated Eid themselves or spoke Arabic showed particular enthusiasm and engagement, explaining the traditions to their classmates and serving as cultural bridges within the group. This peer-to-peer teaching created organic opportunities for language practice and cultural sharing.

The bilingual nature of the activity proved especially valuable for Arabic-speaking students, who could access content in their heritage language while simultaneously practicing English.



### **Migrant Participant Experience**

The participants who had originally created the Eidiya activity expressed real satisfaction in seeing their educational content come to life with young learners. This direct interaction with the target audience provided them with tangible evidence of their contribution's impact and value. The participants particularly appreciated witnessing how their cultural knowledge could bridge communities and facilitate meaningful learning experiences for UK primary school children. One said "It was lovely to see them working and to help them, I really enjoyed it." Another added that it was "a beautiful experience." A third participant shared: "I really enjoyed interacting with the children and seeing their creativity and enthusiasm. It was rewarding to support them and watch how engaged they were with the activity."

The collaborative planning process proved equally meaningful for participants. As one reflected: "Working with others to plan the activity was a great experience. It helped me understand teamwork better, and seeing the activity come to life with the children was exciting — it felt like all the planning paid off."

The session demonstrated the authentic educational value of community-created content, showing how migrant communities can contribute meaningfully to UK educational settings while simultaneously gaining confidence in their role as cultural educators and community contributors.

One participant provided feedback after the session, stating: "The most enjoyable part was seeing the children's curiosity and creativity come alive. They were full of questions and ideas, and it was wonderful to watch them engage so enthusiastically with the activity. It reminded me how naturally inventive young people can be, especially when exploring new topics like AI in a fun, hands-on way."

### **Implications for Primary EAL Education**

This workshop highlighted several key insights for primary EAL education. The combination of digital learning tools, hands-on activities, and direct cultural interaction proved highly effective for engaging young EAL learners. The presence of heritage speakers within the student group created natural opportunities for peer support and cultural validation, while the practical nature of the envelope-making activity made abstract cultural concepts accessible to all students regardless of their prior knowledge.

The success with Year 3 students suggests that cross-cultural learning activities can be effectively adapted across different age groups, with younger learners showing particular enthusiasm for hands-on cultural activities that combine creativity with learning.

## **Conclusion**

This comprehensive three-part case study demonstrates the transformative potential of community-generated educational content in fostering cross-cultural understanding and language development. The progression from initial migrant-created content through Year 8 EAL implementation to primary school engagement illustrates how culturally rich educational resources can create lasting impact across diverse learning environments, building meaningful bridges between migrant communities and UK educational settings.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Across all educational contexts, the ENACT activities proved highly effective in engaging learners. Students demonstrated sustained enthusiasm for cultural learning, with particular engagement from those who shared linguistic or cultural connections to the content. The bilingual nature of the activities created natural opportunities for peer support and cultural validation, while hands-on elements made abstract cultural concepts accessible to all learners regardless of their prior knowledge or age group.

When students' languages and backgrounds were positioned as assets rather than barriers, they became active contributors to their own and each other's learning. Arabic-speaking

students naturally assumed mentoring roles, creating organic opportunities for language practice and cultural sharing that strengthened classroom relationships and learning outcomes across both secondary and primary settings.

### **Transformative Impact on Migrant Participants**

Perhaps most significantly, this case study reveals the profound impact of sustained engagement on the migrant participants themselves. Having participated in five sessions spanning from initial AI workshops through to final implementations with children, these volunteers experienced a transformative journey that extended far beyond simple content creation.

The participants' reflections reveal deep personal satisfaction in witnessing their cultural knowledge come to life in UK classrooms, with it described as "a beautiful experience." This direct interaction with young learners provided tangible evidence of their contribution's value and impact.

The collaborative process proved equally meaningful. As one participant reflected: "Collaborating to design the activity was really rewarding. Working with others brought in so many different perspectives and ideas, which made the final session much richer. Seeing it all come together on the day - and watching the children respond so positively - was very satisfying."

The sustained engagement allowed participants to witness firsthand the full educational journey, from conception to implementation. As one participant reflected: "Being part of the full journey, from the first AI workshop to the final session, has been eye-opening. It helped me build confidence, communication skills, and it also made me realise how important creativity and collaboration are in education." This comprehensive involvement provided participants with valuable insights into educational practice while demonstrating the profound impact that authentic cultural voices can have in UK classrooms.

Beyond immediate satisfaction, the sustained engagement fostered significant personal and professional development. The same participant noted: "Being part of all five sessions has been incredibly inspiring and has deepened my appreciation for how we can make complex topics like AI accessible and exciting for young learners. It's also boosted my confidence in delivering workshops and working collaboratively to create engaging educational experiences."

### **Building Cultural Bridges**

The participants' journey from workshop participants to confident cultural educators demonstrates the potential for educational initiatives to serve dual purposes: providing valuable learning experiences for students while simultaneously empowering migrant communities to share their cultural wealth and develop new skills. This reciprocal relationship challenges traditional one-way models of educational support, instead creating spaces where migrant voices are valued as essential contributors to UK educational diversity.

The sustained engagement allowed participants to witness firsthand how their cultural knowledge could bridge communities and facilitate meaningful learning experiences. As one

observed: "The process has shown me the powerful impact of combining creativity, education, and community involvement, and I'm very grateful to have been part of it."

### **Implications for Educational Practice**

This case study highlights several key insights for educational practice. The combination of digital learning tools, hands-on activities, and direct cultural interaction proved highly effective across different age groups and educational contexts. The success with both Year 8 EAL learners and Year 3 primary students suggests that cross-cultural learning activities can be effectively adapted for diverse learner needs while maintaining their core educational value.

The authentic educational value of community-created content was consistently demonstrated throughout the implementation phases. Students engaged more deeply with materials created by people from the cultures being explored, suggesting that authentic voices enhance learning outcomes and cultural understanding.

### **A Model for Community-Engaged Education**

The ENACT workshops illustrate an effective approach to community-engaged content creation where recent migrants can share their cultural knowledge while developing technical skills in digital media production and gaining confidence as cultural educators. The success of this collaborative format suggests significant potential for scaling similar initiatives to create diverse, culturally rich educational resources that benefit both migrant communities and UK educational settings.

This model demonstrates that when educational initiatives are designed to value and amplify migrant voices, they create powerful opportunities for cultural exchange, language development, and community building that extend far beyond traditional classroom boundaries. The transformative impact on both students and participants suggests that such approaches should be central to creating inclusive, culturally responsive educational environments that celebrate diversity as a source of strength and learning.