



# Embracing multilingualism

with Dr Sandra Zappa-Hollman

## Talking points

### Understanding and valuing linguistic diversity

1. Reflect on the linguistic diversity present in your classroom. How aware are you of the languages your students speak, and how do you demonstrate that their multilingual identities are valued and respected?
2. To what extent do you view students' multilingualism as an asset to the learning environment? How could you better leverage their linguistic and cultural knowledge to enrich discussions and broaden perspectives?
3. Are your teaching materials inclusive of diverse linguistic and cultural contexts? How could you adapt lessons or resources to reflect the multicultural backgrounds of your students?

### Interrogating your beliefs and underlying ideologies

4. Examine your own beliefs about language in education. To what extent do you (deliberately or unconsciously) prioritise a monolingual approach to the point where other languages are not welcome in your class? How might a multilingual ideology shift your teaching practices?

5. Reflect on any unconscious biases you hold about multilingual students. Are there practices you could adopt to challenge linguistic stereotypes and promote equity in your classroom?
6. How would you address resistance from students, parents or colleagues who prefer a monolingual approach? How would you advocate for the benefits of linguistic diversity in education?

### Classroom practices and pedagogies

7. If you do not yet know enough about embracing multilingual pedagogies to create inclusive learning spaces, what is your plan to address this potential gap in your pedagogical knowledge?
8. How often do you intentionally incorporate students' home languages into classroom activities? To what extent do practices like translanguaging enhance engagement and comprehension?
9. How do you scaffold both language and content learning in your teaching? To what extent do you provide clear examples, visual aids or targeted feedback to help multilingual students bridge gaps

in language proficiency and academic content?

10. Reflect on the participation dynamics in your classroom. How does the participation of multilingual students compare to that of their monolingual peers? How might you create a safe, supportive environment for all students to share their perspectives?

### Assessment and equity

11. How fairly do your assessment methods evaluate students who are developing English proficiency? How can you make changes as needed without compromising your ability to measure student learning? For instance, how can you incorporate diverse formats or allow for multilingual explanations to assess content knowledge more equitably?
12. To what extent do you actively seek input from your multilingual students about what strategies help them learn best? How could you involve them in shaping classroom practices that support their needs?

### Professional growth and collaboration

13. To what extent have you sought out



## More resources

“I strongly encourage teachers to actively seek opportunities to learn from each other and from the rich body of research- and practice-informed work,” says Sandra. “Incredibly helpful resources about multilingual pedagogies are accessible through books, open access journals and educational websites. These can be complemented with collaborative exchanges with colleagues, which can constitute a wonderful form of professional development.” Sandra recommends the following:

- **Supporting multilingual learners:**

[journal.canadianschoollibraries.ca/supporting-multilingual-learners](https://journal.canadianschoollibraries.ca/supporting-multilingual-learners)

This is a curated reading list of research-informed books tailored for teachers.

- **Language and higher education** (2019), co-edited by Saskia Van Viegen, Meike Wernicke and Sandra Zappa-Hollman, *The Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Canada Journal*, Volume 36: [teslcanadajournal.ca/index.php/tesl/issue/view/159](https://teslcanadajournal.ca/index.php/tesl/issue/view/159)

These articles offer key insights into how multilingualism can be better supported in increasingly diverse and multicultural educational contexts, including conceptual and practical aspects of translanguaging, the impact of deficit perspectives on multilingual students, and tensions that arise when multilingual students use their first language to mediate the learning of a second language.

- **Preparing teachers to support multilingual learners and counter raciolinguistic ideologies in teacher education** (2024), co-edited by Shakina Rajendram and Jeff Bale, *The Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Canada Journal*, Volume 41: [teslcanadajournal.ca/index.php/tesl/issue/view/187](https://teslcanadajournal.ca/index.php/tesl/issue/view/187)

These articles expand on topics covered in Volume 36 and include helpful illustrations of hands-on approaches to embrace multilingualism in the classroom.

- **Preparing teachers to work with multilingual learners** (2021), co-edited by Meike Wernicke, Svenja Hammer, Antje Hansen and Tobias Schroedler: [www.multilingual-matters.com/page/detail/Preparing-Teachers-to-Work-with-Multilingual-Learners/?k=9781788926096](https://www.multilingual-matters.com/page/detail/Preparing-Teachers-to-Work-with-Multilingual-Learners/?k=9781788926096)

This book explores multilingualism in teacher education programmes across Europe and North America, showcasing approaches to preparing pre-service teachers for multilingual students. Practicing teachers would also find this helpful to gain a better understanding of how instruction can be informed by multilingualism theories and to learn about compatible pedagogical strategies to guide their teaching.

professional development opportunities focused on multilingual and inclusive pedagogies? What resources could you use to enhance your capacity to support linguistically diverse learners?

14. To what extent have you created opportunities for students to learn from one another’s linguistic and cultural expertise? How could structured, scaffolded activities like peer teaching or collaborative projects highlight the strengths of multilingual students?

### Vision and advocacy

15. Reflect on your role in supporting language development alongside content learning. To what extent do you feel this is part of your responsibility as an educator? How might this mindset affect your teaching approach?
16. What is your long-term vision for creating an equitable and inclusive classroom? How can you continuously adapt your teaching practices to ensure all students, regardless of linguistic background, feel seen, supported and empowered?