



Teaching Multilingual Students

Benefits multilingual students bring to the classroom

- Exposes us to multiple perspectives and world views, allowing us to think critically and examine our own beliefs and assumptions
- Brings diversity of knowledge, experiences, and backgrounds into the classroom.
- Increases cultural awareness and inclusion
- Encourages instructors to be innovative and incorporate inclusive teaching strategies that will benefit all students
- Exposes us to various interpersonal and communication styles, which can help to make us better active listeners and critical thinkers
- Prepares students for an exponentially diverse world and workplace
- Encourages all students to become more empathetic and open-minded, which are important skills for the workplace

Challenges multilingual students may face in the classroom

- Culturally sensitive topics: students may self-monitor what they write or say
- Student belief about what constitutes 'proper' teaching
- Culture shock
- Lack of a strong support network
- Lack of context/background knowledge for North American cultural references
- Difficulties understanding lectures and course readings
- Access to resources/content (e.g., slower internet, shared computers)
- Feelings of exclusion due to accented English/use of English
- Stronger receptive skills (listening and reading) than productive skills (speaking and writing)
- Trouble expressing themselves verbally or in writing
- Lack of confidence to express themselves in an online discussion due to increased visibility of student writing
- Misunderstandings about plagiarism and citations
- Lack of context cues in an online learning environment (e.g., intonation, non-verbal communication)
- Difficulties adapting to the North American educational culture

Teaching Multilingual Students: Practical Strategies

- Get to know your students (e.g., their interests, goals, backgrounds) and build rapport
- Create a [culturally responsive learning environment](#)

- Include multilingualism in your syllabus diversity statement (see an example statement [here](#))
- Communicate differences and similarities in approaches to past educational experiences, acknowledging diversity (e.g., some multilingual students may have been taught that asking an instructor a question or critiquing an idea would be disrespectful)
- Design classes with principles of [UDL](#) and [inclusive teaching](#) in mind
- Consider your course design from multiple student perspectives and show students that language, culture, and viewpoint diversity are assets
- Survey student accessibility at the beginning of the semester and have a backup plan for students with connectivity issues
- Encourage pre-class first exposure with [the flipped classroom](#) concept
- Stage your activities constructively and developmentally (i.e., [scaffold](#))
- Break content into chunks (e.g., integrate lectures, [active learning](#), and [clarification checks](#))
- Create a [positive learning environment](#) and sense of belonging
- Create a communication plan so students know how to connect with you and each other
- Offer support with [study skills](#) (e.g., time management, study strategies, note taking, etc.)
- Encourage the use of the [VCC Learning Centre](#) and other [support services](#) at the college
- Provide constructive and timely [feedback](#)
- Focus on content/expression of ideas when marking student contributions and assignments
- Focus on errors that obscure meaning rather errors that simply distract the reader or listener
- Provide students with clear assignment descriptions, rubrics and performance indicators with which they will be assessed
- Provide examples of the quality of work students are expected to submit (consider having students analyze these models for text structure and type of language)
- Adopt an educative approach to plagiarism
- Monitor student interaction in class and online to ensure respectful discourse
- Provide opportunities for small talk, community building (making personal connections with teachers and other students can increase confidence and a sense of inclusivity)
- Make lectures accessible (e.g., provide an outline or summary of the lecture, emphasize key points, use visuals, record lecture and provide transcripts, post lecture notes)
- Encourage the use of effective reading comprehension strategies (e.g., [SQ3R](#))
- Teach academic skills typical of Western academic contexts (e.g., critical thinking)
- Avoid yes/no questions such as “do you understand” or “is that clear” to check understanding (use [clarification checks](#) to check understanding)
- Give students time to formulate their thoughts before discussion, rather than requiring them to answer on the spot (e.g., through pre-class advanced preparation activities)
- Encourage the use of office hours (some multilingual student may initially find it uncomfortable approaching instructors directly)
- Divide students into smaller groups and provide support with group roles and expectations
- Have students model or explain to other students (peer teaching)
- Provide numerous opportunities for your students to ask questions

Resources

- [Supporting Multilingual Students in Online Courses - Centre for Educational Excellence - Simon Fraser University \(sfu.ca\)](#)
- [Teaching Multilingual Learners - Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Teaching Multilingual Students | Writing \(utoronto.ca\)](#)
- [International and multilingual students - Teaching@UW \(washington.edu\)](#)