

DIVERSIVERSE

LANGUAGE • CULTURE • EDUCATION • BELONGING

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FREE DIGITAL EDITION

LANGUAGE, IDENTITY & BELONGING

We don't simply speak
languages. We live through
them.

THE LANGUAGE OF HOME

Why some words carry
more than meaning

WHO AM I IN THIS LANGUAGE?

Voice, identity &
expression

BELONGING WITHOUT ERASURE

Learning another language
doesn't require leaving
the first behind

*Different
languages
A fuller
me*



You may sound different in another language. *Are you different?*

A language gives us more than words. It gives us ways to express humor, affection, confidence, memory, vulnerability — and sometimes entirely different shades of ourselves.

We often imagine multilingualism as translation: one idea, moved neatly from one language into another.

But anyone who has lived between languages may recognize something more complicated.

A joke that feels effortless in one language may lose its rhythm in another. Affection may come naturally through words learned at home. Anger may arrive in the language attached to a particular memory. Confidence can expand — or suddenly disappear — depending on which language we are expected to use.

“We do not simply collect different words for the same world. Languages can give us different ways of inhabiting it.”

We do not simply collect different words for the same world. **Languages can give us different ways of inhabiting it.**

The voice we use with family may not be the voice we use at work. The language of childhood may carry memories that another language cannot reproduce exactly. A person may feel playful in one language, precise in another, more reserved in a third.

None of these versions has to be less authentic. They can all belong to the same person.

Learning another language, then, is not simply acquiring vocabulary and grammar. It can also mean discovering another way to tell a story, express emotion, build relationships, understand humor, negotiate belonging — and describe ourselves.

Perhaps the question is not: *“Which language is the real me?”*

Perhaps it is: *“What does each of my languages allow me to express?”*



THINK ABOUT IT

Is there something you can say, feel, joke about, or express more naturally in one language than another?

Belonging doesn't require linguistic erasure.

When a learner enters a classroom, their first language does not remain outside the door. It arrives with memories, relationships, knowledge, humor, culture, and ways of understanding the world.

Welcoming a new language does not require making an old one disappear. For multilingual learners, belonging can begin with something remarkably simple: recognizing that the languages they already carry are not obstacles to becoming part of the classroom. They are part of who has entered it.

FIVE WAYS TO MAKE LANGUAGE VISIBLE — WITHOUT MAKING A STUDENT FEEL DIFFERENT

01

LET NAMES SOUND LIKE THEMSELVES

Learn and use a student's name as accurately as possible. A name is often one of the first places where language and identity meet. Asking how it is pronounced — and making the effort to remember — communicates something simple: *You do not have to rename yourself to belong here.*

02

LET MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE EXIST ON THE PAGE

A brainstorm, annotation, vocabulary note, first draft, or personal connection does not always have to begin in English. Allowing another language during the thinking process can help learners connect new ideas to knowledge they already possess.

03

MAKE MULTILINGUALISM ORDINARY

Do not wait for an international celebration to acknowledge that multiple languages exist in the room. Books, examples, pronunciation conversations, family knowledge, and everyday classroom interactions can quietly communicate:

More than one language belongs here.

04

ASK BEFORE YOU ASSUME

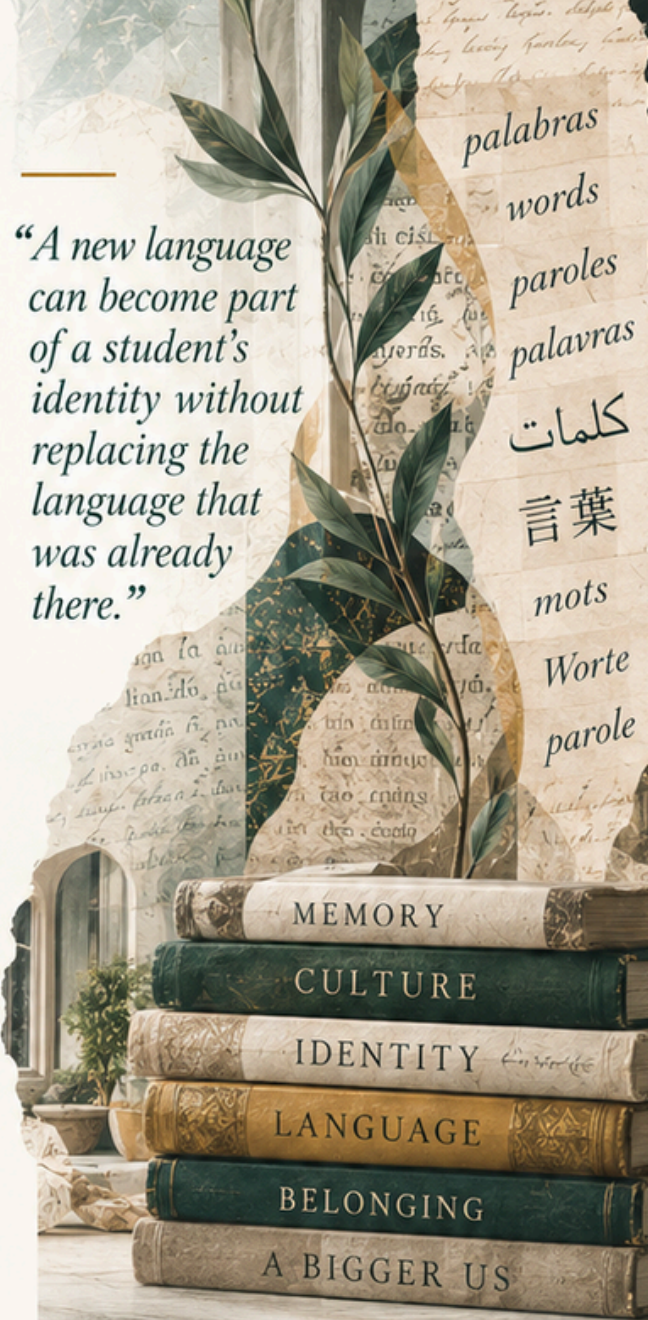
Some students love translating, sharing words, or talking about their language. Others do not want to become the classroom representative of an entire country, culture, or language. Invite. Do not assign an identity role.

05

ADD A LANGUAGE WITHOUT SUBTRACTING A PERSON

English development and home-language belonging do not have to compete. A learner can become increasingly confident in a new language without being asked — directly or indirectly — to distance themselves from the language that helped form their first relationships, memories, and understanding of the world.

“A new language can become part of a student's identity without replacing the language that was already there.”



A SMALL SHIFT

Instead of:

“We speak English here.”

Consider what the learner might hear when the classroom communicates:

“English is something you are learning here. Your other languages still belong to you.”

SAME LEARNERS.
MORE LANGUAGES.
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW.

Add a language. Don't subtract an identity.

What part of a person *disappears* when we decide only one of their languages belongs in the room?

A language can carry childhood, family, humor, memory, affection, history, and belonging.

Learning another language can open another world. It should not require closing the door to the one that came before it.

*There is room for more than one language.
There is room for the whole person.*

CONTINUE EXPLORING

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NEXT ISSUE

The Bilingual Brain

What happens inside a mind that learns, remembers, communicates, and makes meaning through more than one language?

SAME
HUMANITY.
MORE
POSSIBILITIES.

