

# Linguistic diversity in the classroom: from obstacle to opportunity!

Dr H el ene Knoerr, Associate Professor  
Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute  
Universit e d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa



uOttawa

L'Universit e canadienne  
Canada's university



[www.uOttawa.ca](http://www.uOttawa.ca)



# Linguistic based inclusion

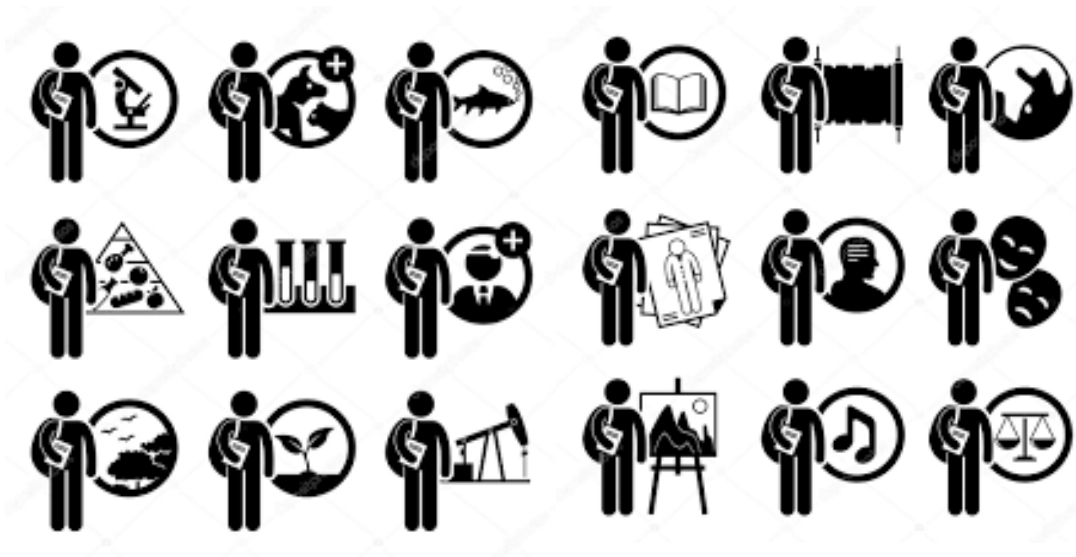
In an increasingly global world where student mobility is expected:

- uOttawa is welcoming more and more students whose first language is not the language of their program of study.
- **Linguistic diversity is now the norm in our classrooms.**
- Are you wondering how to include students taking courses in their second or foreign language?



# Who are you? Where are you from?

- Affiliation
- Language(s)
- Expectations



# Non Anglophone in attendance

- Are there English as a additional language (EAL) students in your classes?



- Is the presence of EAL students a source of challenges?
  - What challenges?

# International students

- Are there non-Canadian Anglophone students in your classes?



- Is the presence of non-Canadian Anglophone students a source of challenges?
  - What challenges?

# A few stats!

	2009	2018	
<b>Undergraduate &amp; Graduate</b>			
<b>Attendance Status</b>			
Enrolled Full-Time	30,826	36,626	
Enrolled Part-Time	7,096	5,630	
<b>Language in Use</b>			
English	26,304	29,701	
French	11,618	12,555	
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	22,875	24,293	
Male	15,047	17,144	
Other		819	
<b>Immigration Status</b>			
Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents	35,993	35,106	
Foreign	1,929	7,150	
<b>Immigration Status by Language in Use</b>			
Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents	English	24,844	24,630
	French	11,149	10,476
Foreign	English	1,460	5,071
	French	469	2,079

[source](#)



# How can we include these students?

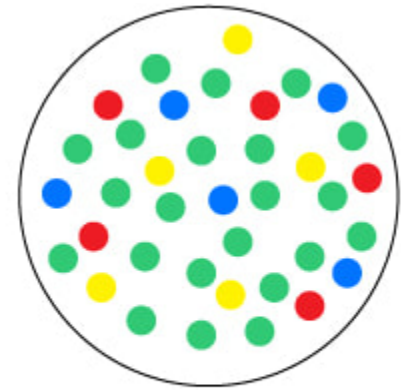
## **Objectives** - This workshop will:

- Present the **characteristics** of these new audiences
- **Explore** ways to use linguistic diversity as a pedagogical driving force
- Suggest **strategies** to make your teaching more efficient and improve the quality of your students' experience.

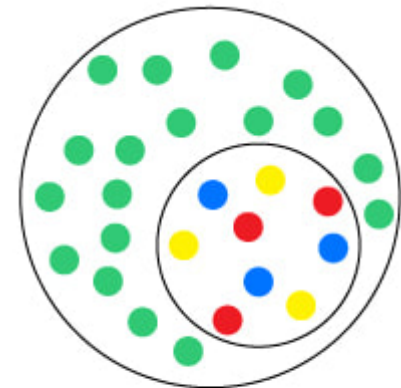


# Definitions

- **Diversity** is about the individual. It is about the variety of unique dimensions, qualities and characteristics we all possess;
- **Inclusion** is about the collective. It is about creating a culture that strives for equity and embraces, respects, accepts and values difference;
- **Accessibility** is about creating communities, workplaces and services that enable everyone to participate fully in society without barriers.



Inclusion



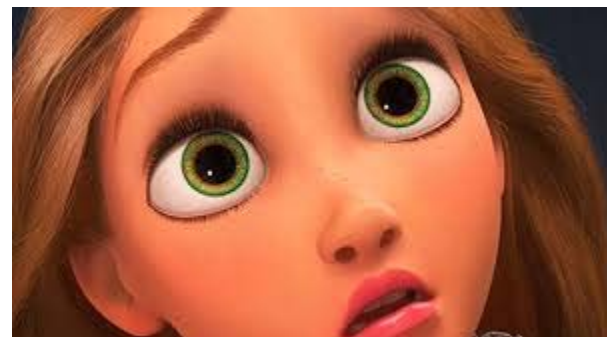
Integration



# Getting to know these audiences

- Language(s)
- Academic literacy/ culture  
(codes, rules, usage – explicit or implicit)
- Culture/ tradition
- Affect
- ...



How to address them?



# Turning obstacles into opportunities

- From « They will not get it »  
to « They will provide a new perspective on the subject »
- From « Why don't they just take the course in French? »  
to « This is a great way to promote bilingualism  
AND the English culture! »
- From « I am a content expert, not a language teacher »  
to « Here is my chance to improve my communication  
skills »
- From « I am not going to redesign my course for them »  
to « Now is the time to broaden my references  
and my examples »

# Turning obstacles into opportunities

- From « They will slow us down »  
to « How can I give all my students more chances to succeed? »
- From « I don't have time for them »  
to « Which resources and services can I direct them to? »
- From « They don't understand the system »  
to « How can I explain this simply? »
- From  to 

# How can I improve my teaching and their learning?



## Equality



## Equity



## Justice



# Strategies to improve inclusion:

- Share lesson outline before class to allow, for example, students with learning disabilities to prepare for note taking
- State learning outcomes and session outline at onset
- Regularly move in the room to reach audience
- Use a microphone; speak facing the audience
- Communicate messages in multiple formats
- Repeat questions and summarize answers from learners for everyone to hear

Source: [15 things you should know about accessibility](#)



# Strategies to improve inclusion 2:

- Contextualize, summarize and reframe content  
(e.g. use transition slides, wrap-up before switching topics, introduce and situate theme within course)
- Use images and graphics
- Use contrasts and colours to highlight key ideas (words)
- Ask for feedback and adjust  
(e.g. look for non-verbal cues)



Source: [15 things you should know about accessibility](#)



# Strategies to improve comprehension / communication:

- Speak slowly
- Rephrase, don't (just) repeat
- Demonstrate, don't (just) explain
- Use a variety of examples from a variety of contexts
- Post your PowerPoint before each class
- Use visual aids
- Write key words/ concepts/ names on the board
- Check the level of difficulty of required readings
- Check the readability of your documentation



# Strategies for assignments, tests and exams:

- Make your instructions short and simple
- Give an example illustrating what each question means / requires
- Use simple, common vocabulary in the questions / instructions
- Read aloud each question and ask if clarifications are needed
- Do NOT penalize language errors



# Let's try it!

- Syllabus
- Assignments / exams
- Course delivery
- Communication / Documentation
- Other?



COURSE CALENDAR		
<i>These dates are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.</i>		
Day	Date	Agenda/Topic
Tue	08/30	• Introductions/Syllabus review
Thu	09/01	• Standards: identifying, locating, and navigating • Fieldwork Analysis Overview • Interdisciplinary Unit Overview: Form Groups
Tue	09/08	• Backward Design
Thu	09/08	• IDU Group Work: Learning Goals
Tue	09/13	• IDU Group Work: Essential Questions
Thu	09/15	• IDU Group Work: Assessment
Tue	09/20	• Classroom Management, Part 1
Thu	09/22	Release Day #1: Class will not meet so you can fulfill observation hours.
Tue	09/27	• IDU Group Work: Assessment
Thu	09/29	• Classroom Management, Part 2
Tue	10/04	• IDU Group Work
Thu	10/06	• Lesson Planning: Basic Structure
Tue	10/11	• Lesson Planning
Thu	10/13	Release Day #2: Class will not meet so you can fulfill observation hours.



# Questions?



uOttawa

Institut des langues officielles  
et du bilinguisme (ILOB)

Official Languages and  
Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)

[Helene.Knoerr@uOttawa.ca](mailto:Helene.Knoerr@uOttawa.ca)

## Notre mission

Promouvoir l'excellence et l'innovation en matière de bilinguisme et d'acquisition des langues.

## Our Mission

Promote excellence and innovation in the fields of bilingualism and language acquisition.

