



FREE SAMPLER

ONE CLASSROOM, MANY LANGUAGES

A Teacher's Guide to Multilingual Learning

by Farina Marriott

Inside: a full chapter, real classroom tools, and your first week's plan.

Welcome

This sampler is three real pieces of *One Classroom, Many Languages*, not a trailer for it: the opening chapter in full, a practical slice of the "First Days" chapter you can use with a new arrival tomorrow, and the quick-reference toolkit from the back of the book. Nothing here is locked behind a sign-up form or watered down — it's the actual book.

If it's useful, the full book covers ten chapters: the research worth knowing, terminology and the EAL-vs-SEND question, belonging on a normal budget, teaching through every subject, assessment that doesn't accidentally test English instead of understanding, and more.

Why This Book Matters

I have spent my career watching classrooms sort children into two invisible piles: those who arrive ready to learn, and those who need to be fixed before real learning can start. Multilingual children are handed the second pile more often than any other group I know, and almost always for the wrong reason. A language gap does not mean they are behind. They are mid-journey, in a language most of us in the room have never had to learn ourselves.

This book is my attempt to close the gap between what the research has established — clearly, and for decades — and what actually happens on a Monday morning when a new arrival sits down at the back of your class with no shared language and a room full of expectations. I have taught in international settings for many years, trained teachers across several countries, and made most of the mistakes I now warn against. What follows is the version of this work I wish someone had handed me on day one.

A different starting point

Most training on language learners starts with deficit: what the child cannot yet do. I want to start somewhere else, because where you start changes everything that follows.

A child who cannot yet write a paragraph in English may already be able to negotiate a fair price at a market, translate for a parent at a hospital appointment, or reason fluently about fractions in Urdu. None of that disappears because the classroom cannot see it. It sits underneath, waiting for a bridge. Our job is not to fill an empty vessel. It is to build that bridge — deliberately, and without asking the child to leave the rest of themselves at the door in the meantime.

I call this an asset stance, and I will return to it constantly. It is not a slogan. It is a set of concrete decisions: which errors we treat as evidence of thinking rather than failure, whether we let a learner draft in their first language before writing in English, how long we are willing to wait before a child speaks aloud. Every chapter after this one is really just this stance, applied to a different part of the school day.

A QUICK GUT-CHECK

Think of one multilingual learner in your class right now. If you had to finish the sentence "They can't yet..." — could you also finish "They already can..."? If the second sentence comes slowly, that's worth noticing.

Why this is a whole-classroom issue, not a specialist one

It is tempting to treat multilingual learners as someone else's responsibility — the EAL teacher's, the language coordinator's, the pull-out programme's. I understand the instinct. You already have a curriculum to deliver and thirty children in front of you. But the maths does not work in the specialist's favour: a child spends perhaps a few hours a week with a language specialist, and twenty-five or more with you. If the only place language is taught deliberately is the specialist's room, the child is being taught for a fraction of their week and left to sink or swim for the rest of it.

The good news is that teaching language well and teaching your subject well are not competing demands on your time. They are close to the same skill. Making the vocabulary of your subject visible, giving learners structured chances to talk before they write, checking understanding through something other than a rushed verbal answer — these are good teaching for every child in the room, not an accommodation bolted on for a few. Many of the strategies that most help multilingual learners are simply good teaching for everyone.

What I am not asking you to do

I am not asking you to learn every language spoken in your classroom. I am not asking you to lower what you expect a child can achieve, or to give them an easier version of the task while their classmates get the real one. And I am not asking you to treat a child's home language as a problem to be managed, contained, or gently discouraged so that English can take its place. Most of the research in this area points the other way, and I will walk through why — with sources — in Chapter 3.

What I am asking for is curiosity: about the languages already in your room, about what a child can do when the language barrier is temporarily lowered, and about your own instincts when a learner struggles. Curiosity is cheaper than a training budget and more reliable than good intentions alone.

TRY THIS BEFORE YOU READ ON

For one week, keep a small note of every moment a multilingual learner in your class surprises you — a word they knew, a connection they made, a joke they told in another language. By Friday you will have the beginning of an asset-based picture of that child, built from evidence rather than assumption.

The rest of this book is organised around the questions I get asked most often by teachers who want to do this well but have no spare hour in the week to become a linguist. Chapter 3 gives you the research you actually need — not all of it, just the handful of ideas that change what you do on Monday. The chapters after that turn those ideas into things you can try tomorrow, whatever subject or age group you teach.

The First Days

A new arrival rarely walks into your classroom carrying just a backpack. They are usually carrying a new country, a new building, a new set of unspoken rules about when to speak and when to stay quiet, and a language they may understand only in fragments. Nothing about that first day is small. Our job in the first hours and weeks is not to teach as much content as possible — it is to lower the load enough that learning becomes possible at all.

MEET AMIR

Amir is nine, and it's his first morning. He arrived from a school where he was thriving — top of his class in maths, popular, confident — and none of that is visible to anyone here yet. He understands almost no English. The instinctive read is a quiet, possibly anxious child who needs a lot of help. The more useful read is a highly capable child who currently has no way to show it.

Before they even sit down

A little preparation in the days before a new arrival's first lesson pays for itself many times over. None of this requires a budget or a department — just a bit of forethought.

Do this	Why it matters
Learn to say their name correctly	A mispronounced name, repeated daily, is a small exclusion that adds up fast.
Prepare one welcome phrase in their language	Even a single mangled sentence in a child's own language tells them you tried.
Choose a low-pressure first task	Something visual or hands-on lets them participate without needing to speak.
Pick a seating spot with a kind neighbour	A calm, patient classmate does more for a nervous first day than any resource.
Have a simple visual timetable ready	Knowing what happens next, without needing language to find out, removes one whole layer of anxiety.

The words worth teaching first

Vocabulary lists can wait. In the first days, a much shorter list matters more: the handful of words and phrases that let a child function independently.

Situation	Phrases to teach first
Basic needs	Toilet, please. I'm finished. Water, please.
When stuck	I don't understand. Can you help me? Again, please.
Joining in	My turn? Can I play? Yes / No / Maybe.
Feelings	I'm okay. I'm tired. I need a break.
SAY THIS To the learner (with gesture): "Show me" / "Point to it" / "It's okay, take your time." To classmates: "[Name] understands lots already — they just don't have all the English words yet. Show them, don't just tell them." To a worried parent: "Right now we're focusing on [child] feeling settled and confident. The English will come — we're not worried about the pace yet."	

The rest of Chapter 4 covers the silent period, welcoming a child with interrupted schooling, and a buddy system that doesn't need a whole school behind it.

Your Toolkit

A short, practical summary of the strategies in the full book. Pick one or two to embed properly rather than trying everything at once — that's how any of this actually sticks.

Quick reference

Area	Try this first
Belonging	Learn names properly; give every new arrival a low-pressure first task and a kind neighbour.
Home language	Let learners think, discuss and draft in whatever language gets them to the idea fastest.
The silent period	Never require speech on demand. Accept pointing, matching and drawing as valid participation.
Vocabulary	Spend your explicit teaching time on the words that cross subjects — analyse, compare, however — not just the subject-specific terms.
Struggle	When language is the barrier, raise the support before lowering the challenge.

Glossary

Term	Meaning
BICS	Everyday conversational language — usually develops within roughly two to three years.
CALP	The academic language of the curriculum — commonly takes five to seven years to mature fully.
Scaffolding	Temporary, targeted support that lets a learner do with help what they'll soon do alone.
Silent period	A period some additional-language learners experience in which they listen and participate before producing much spoken language. Duration varies considerably.
Translanguaging	Drawing flexibly on a learner's whole linguistic repertoire to build understanding.

The full toolkit chapter also includes your first 30 days — a simple, week-by-week way to start applying this without an overhaul.

Want the rest?

One Classroom, Many Languages continues with the research worth knowing, EAL vs SEND, belonging on an ordinary budget, teaching through every subject, adapting across ages, assessment that separates language from understanding, and the mistakes worth avoiding.

Nearly thirty years of classroom and leadership experience across Greece and Denmark, distilled into one practical guide — built for one teacher, in one classroom.



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