KWE KWE, Hello, Bonjour, Hola
My name is Stephanie Arnott, and I am an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa. I am a white, female, heterosexual woman and mother to a five-year-old child.

I hope this video finds you all safe and healthy in this precarious time we are living in.

I would like to begin by paying particular respect to the Algonguwin people, who are the traditional guardians of the land on which I find myself today. I acknowledge their longstanding relationship with this territory, which remains unceded. I pay respect to all Indigenous people in this region, from all nations across Canada, who call Ottawa home. I acknowledge the traditional knowledge keepers, both young and old. And I honour their courageous leaders: past, present and future.

I am honoured and excited to have been invited to be a part of this event, which gives me the opportunity to talk about our teacher education program at the University of Ottawa, but more importantly, to share my beliefs and practices in my work as a teacher educator – and hear about the fantastic work of my colleagues who I greatly respect and admire.

SO – I want to start with this idea........that Every Teacher is a Language Teacher. This is the guiding principle that we aim to instill in future teachers of all grades and all subjects in the Teacher Education program at the University of Ottawa.

In our program, we realize this in several different ways:

• First, students in our program are divided into different groups according to thematic cohorts that they choose at the time of admission.
• One of the cohorts is the Second Language Education cohort, or cL2c for short.
• The theme of “Every Teacher is a Language Teacher” is our cohort “slogan” of sorts and is infused across each of the core courses of our program (e.g., inclusion, assessment and evaluation, school and society, etc.)
• Workshops that we give to all teacher candidates get them to critically reflect on what the slogan means to them in terms of their own previous learning experiences in school and to their present and future teaching practice.

• We ask them things like:
  o Experience to date: What are your experiences as a (second) language learner and teacher? ;
  o Challenges: What challenges have you encountered during your teaching experience related to multilingual learners?
  o Course of Action: How might you take action to address the challenges you identified?

• There is also a 36-hour elective course offered to candidates from all levels and disciplines entitled “Second Language Perspectives in Education”, in which we go deeper into presenting simple ways that teachers can differentiate their current practice for English Language Learners of all levels in their class.
• In terms of KEY ISSUES that I believe are central to doing this work...

Over the years of teaching about multilingual learners in Teacher Education programs, I have come to realize and respect the amount of space and time that teacher candidates need to reflect deeply on their beliefs about language learning – not only WHAT they are, but WHY they came to be and WHERE they have been reinforced or challenged (school, home, etc.).

Challenging future teachers to assess WHAT they believe but also WHY they believe what they believe is integral to the work we do at the University of Ottawa.

Teaching this topic is not just about lesson planning or learning strategies. While that’s certainly part of the education that has to take place, for me, it’s all about a paradigm shift.

A paradigm shift away from thinking of multilingual learners as lacking something or being deficient, towards a proficient view of these learners, and empowering teacher candidates to shift the spotlight on what these learners DO have when they arrive in their classrooms and to recognize barriers (either individual ones or system-level ones) that are standing in the way of such a “shift”

Another central aspect of this important work has been emphasizing the inextricable link between language and culture. I find that highlighting the linguistic repertoires that multilingual learners come to our classes with is only part of the work we need to be doing – these same learners come into the class with knowledge, but also with experiences and ways of knowing and living that are a huge part of their overall “proficiency”. Developing their intercultural competence is key.

Validating the teacher candidates own cultural experiences is a first step to them recognizing the power of culture in informing their belief systems.

And this point is a great segue to my final thoughts on key changes I would make to teacher education to better prepare classroom teachers to work with multilingual learners.

If we are telling future teachers in our programs to differentiate their lessons, to embrace a multi-modal approach to their teaching, to validate the linguistic and cultural repertoires of their learners, then WE OURSELVES MUST do the same in our teaching.

We MUST walk the walk.

I’m talking about simple things, like how I encourage my teacher candidates to “show what they know” by using the language(s) they know. OR like dedicating at least one class to analyzing case studies that showcase the power of one’s cultural background to inform our reaction and interpretation of common school-based situations – I find that this creates an
incredible space for teacher candidates and for ME as their professor to develop the very intercultural competence we are looking to develop in our students.

Finally – I believe that the topic of teaching multilingual learners deserves to be more than a simple “one-off” course that future teachers choose if they’re interested in it.

It is multidisciplinary.
It transcends all grade levels.
It is the reality in today’s urban and rural schools.
The feedback I consistently get from students who take my elective course is that ALL teacher future teachers should engage with these topics during their teacher education (preferably sooner than the final semester of their teacher education).
Fellow professors whose classes I have given a workshop in have also felt the discomfort of not realizing that they too have never considered teachers in their discipline to be “language teachers”.

I feel there is an appetite for change in teacher education in this regard, and I am very much looking forward to discussing this topic with my colleagues and all attendees later this month!

Meegwetch / Thank you / Merci / Gracias /