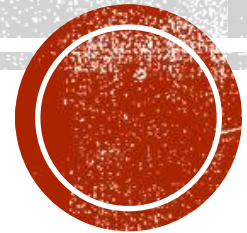


# **1000 WORDS FOR BELONGING**

**VALUING AND CELEBRATING LANGUAGES IN THE  
MONOLINGUAL, MULTILINGUAL AND  
PLURILINGUAL CLASSROOM!**

SIG Spring Meeting 2026



# INTRODUCTION

**Neela Doležalová**

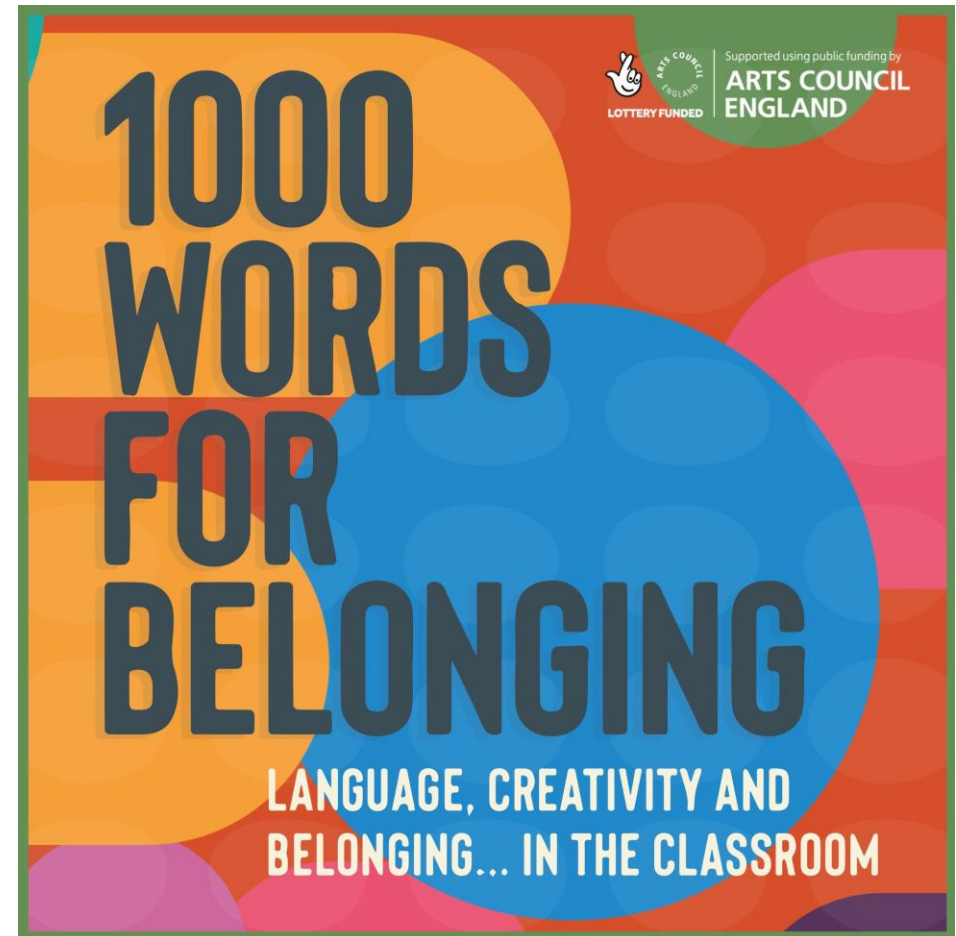
*Writer, teacher and creative producer*

## **Location**

*London based, currently teaching part-time in a 6<sup>th</sup> Form*

## **Session intention**

*To share my own learnings from working on multilingual arts projects, including the 1000 Words for Belonging podcast*



# SESSION PLAN

1. My school experience
2. My teaching experience
3. Creativity and multilingualism – an unexpected path
4. Gearies Primary School
5. 'At Home I Speak'
6. '1000 Words for Belonging'
7. Project insights
8. Impacts on my (evolving) practice
9. Q&A / Discussion



# MY EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL

- I went to schools in Brent and Camden, London
- My name, Neela Doležal, includes Hindi and Czech
- Based on my name alone, it was assumed I had EAL at Secondary School
- Over 70 languages were spoken by students in my Secondary School
- I have always considered myself to be monolingual



# TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Maths and Economic at Secondary School level
- Often working in London schools with rich language environments
- School policies that instructed students to ‘speak in English at all times’
- Not necessarily enforced by me, but not questioned either
- Potentially assumed these policies were evidence-based
- The present: from posters to unwritten, unspoken rules



# THEATRE WORK

- In 2016 I left full-time teaching to focus on community theatre
- Started a project with the School of Advanced Studies (SAS) at the University of London for the 'Being Human Festival 2019'
- SAS wanted a school-based project that also incorporated multilingualism
- Felt out of my comfort zone
- I remembered a primary school teacher (Dan Lea) I had met through an East London teacher meet up



# GEARIES PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Gearies Soundcloud (now 12 years old):  
<https://soundcloud.com/dan-lea-2/sets/gas-the-gearies-archive-of>
- Gearies already saw languages as valuable assets
- We started a project together called 'At Home I Speak'
- I made a verbatim play about the school, which included performances in over 10 languages
- One class of students wrote their own short plays; encouraged to write in any language



# 'AT HOME I SPEAK'

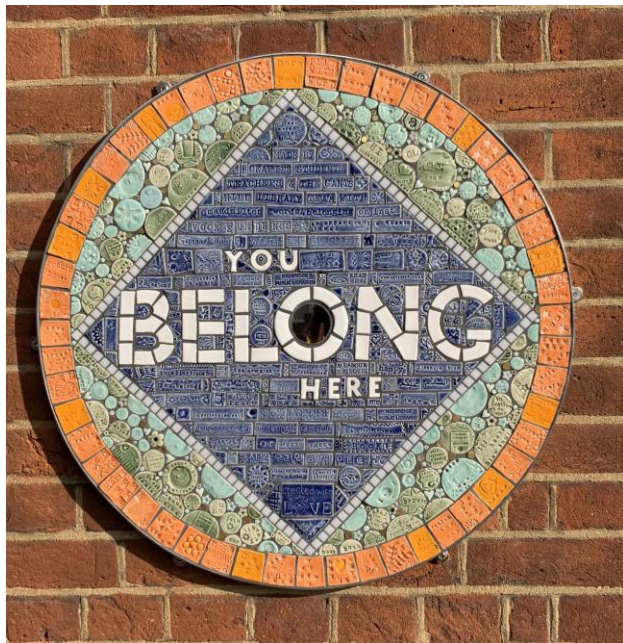
- **A realisation:** my practice is very monolingual but the contexts I work in are often multilingual. Acknowledging multilingualism seemed to boost confidence and improve academic assessments in English.
- **An outcome:** series of collaborations with Gearies Primary School and the School of Advanced Study (Dr. Joe Ford).
- **A question:** how can the learnings from these projects be shared with a wider audience?



# '1000 WORDS FOR BELONGING'

- Working with the whole of Year 6 to create...
- A multilingual dictionary of belonging
- A poetry anthology (over 30 languages): <https://www.the-space-between.org/100-poems-for-belonging>
- A series of public mosaics with Maud Milton:
- Short plays (13 languages)
- The podcast to share learnings: <https://www.the-space-between.org/1000wordspodcast>





# THE NEW MOSAIC TRAIL AROUND GANTS HILL

- Gearies Primary School
- Gants Hill Library
- The Redbridge Institute of Adult Education
- <https://artyface.co.uk/wp/projects/street-mosaics/1000-words-for-belonging/>





Photos  
by  
Craig  
Bernard



# MAIN INSIGHTS FROM THE PODCAST FOR MY OWN TEACHING

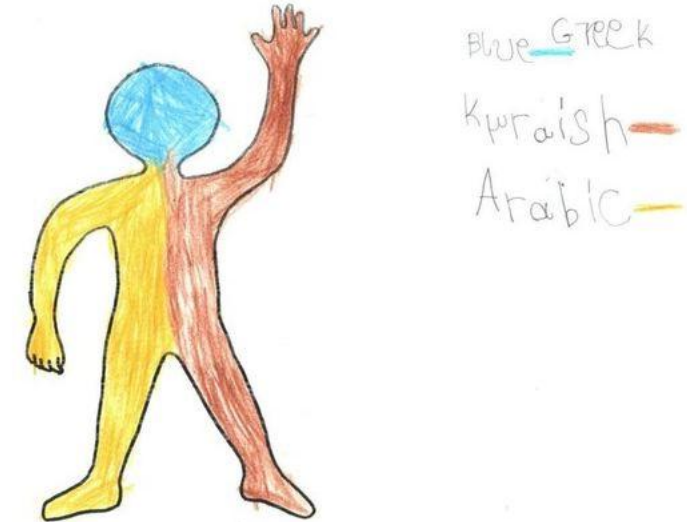
- Two types of shame
- Communication is a muscle we can flex in any language
- What is a 'monolingual' classroom? Do they exist?
- The need to explore my own relationship with language and control in the classroom
- Can I acknowledge and respect the whole child without acknowledging and respecting their forms of communication?



# IMPACTS ON MY PRACTICE

- The language body map activity / plurilingual portrait:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13670050.2024.2430257#d1e681>
- Speaking about communication more broadly than language
- Thinking about all forms of language (coding, music, humour)
- Using the map activity to support other aspects of my curriculum
- Encouraging students to use all their languages as a resource
- Regularly ask: 'any other words for this?' / 'is this the same for all languages in the room?'
- A re-evaluation of what 'being in control' means

Figure 5. Language portrait3.



# Q&A AND DISCUSSION

