



## Minority language pupils and the curriculum: closing the achievement gap

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# Minority Language Pupils and the Curriculum: Closing the Achievement Gap



Papers from a seminar on  
Teaching English as an Additional Language



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	1
<b>Chapter 1:</b> Closing the achievement gap – challenges and opportunities, Barbara O’Toole and Barbara Skinner	3
<b>Chapter 2:</b> Working towards a multilingual social interaction learning model, Piet Van Avermaet	14
<b>Chapter 3:</b> Inclusive practices for pupils with English as an additional language, Andy Hancock	23
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Creating a plurilingual whole-school environment to support pupils’ learning, Déirdre Kirwan	28
<b>Chapter 5:</b> Opening potential for EAL learners, Jean Conteh	34
<b>Chapter 6:</b> Closing the achievement gap for minority language children: A rapporteur’s thoughts on continuing the march, Rory Mc Daid	40
<b>Author biographies</b>	48

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# Minority language pupils and the curriculum: closing the achievement gap

## Preface

This e-publication is based on two seminars on teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL), which were held at Ulster University (UU) in Coleraine and at Marino Institute of Education (MIE) in Dublin in 2017. The seminars were entitled **Minority language pupils and the curriculum – closing the achievement gap** and were supported by funding from the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) along with funding from UU and MIE.

The coordinators invited leading academics and educators to speak at the seminars in Coleraine and Dublin:

Dr Andrew Hancock, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Dr Piet Van Avermaet, Ghent University, Belgium

Dr Déirdre Kirwan, former principal of Scoil Bhríde Cailíní, Dublin

Dr Jean Conteh, Leeds University, England

The purpose of the two seminars was to provide relevant practical strategies and theory to support minority language pupils in school. The aims were as follows:

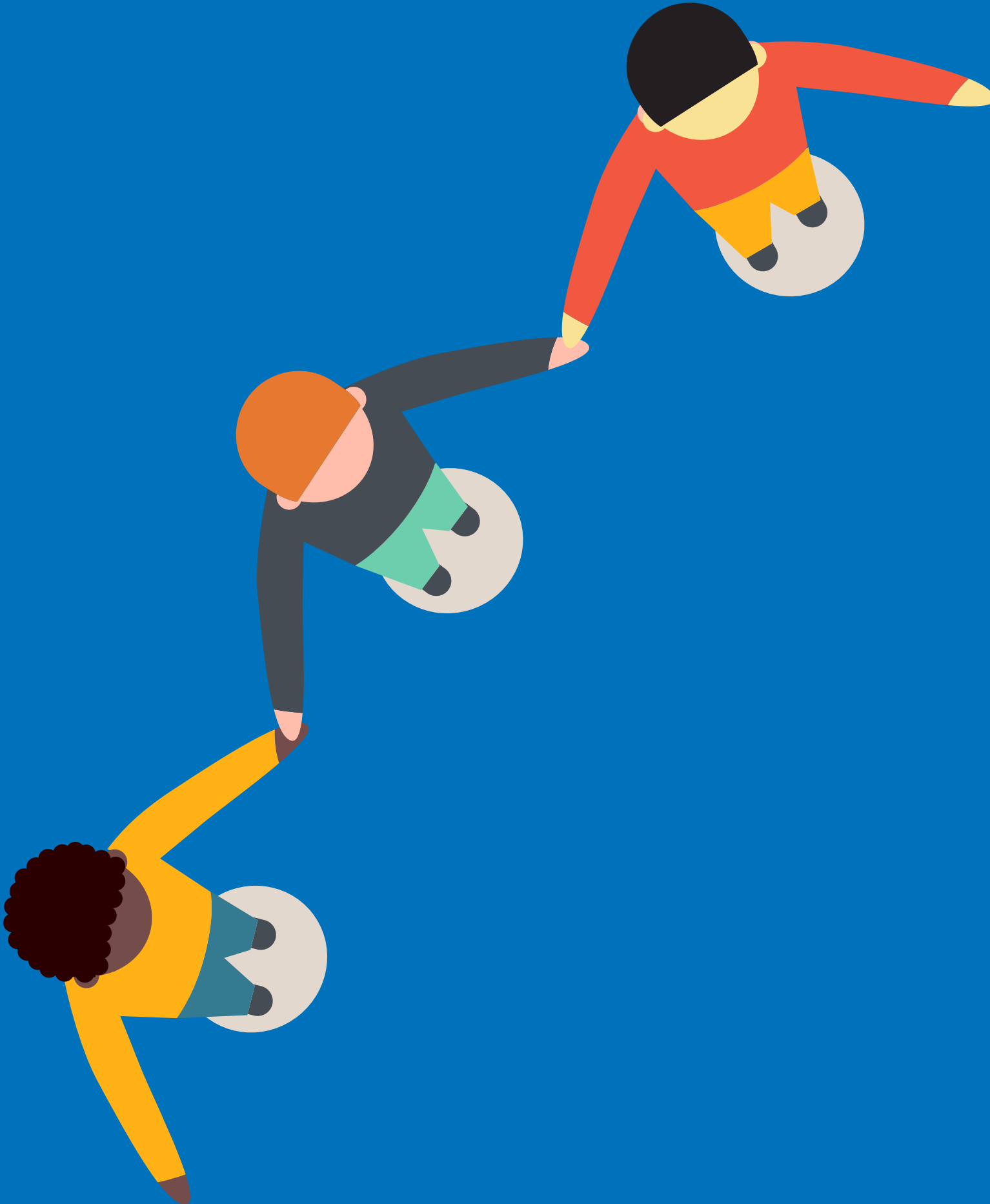
- To develop best practice in intercultural education

- To work towards the integration and quality attainment of minority language pupils
- To provide teaching professionals with opportunities to examine practice, share ideas and develop insights into intercultural education and EAL pedagogy

Both seminars attracted strong numbers of participants comprising teacher educators, primary and secondary teachers, policy makers, student teachers, research students and academics. Each seminar had a rapporteur who attended all of the talks, circulated during group discussions, and then in a ten-minute presentation to close the event, wove together themes that had arisen during the day. The rapporteur in Coleraine was Professor Terri Epstein from Hunter College, New York, and in Dublin, Dr Rory Mc Daid from Marino Institute of Education took up this role.

In this e-publication the terms pupils, students and learners are used interchangeably.

A short digital resource based on the talks at the seminars is available to view at: [https://www.mie.ie/en/Study\\_with\\_Us/Postgraduate\\_Programmes/Master\\_in\\_Education\\_Studies\\_Intercultural\\_Education\\_/](https://www.mie.ie/en/Study_with_Us/Postgraduate_Programmes/Master_in_Education_Studies_Intercultural_Education_/)



# Closing the achievement gap: challenges and opportunities

## Chapter 1

Barbara O'Toole  
and Barbara Skinner



# Closing the achievement gap: challenges and opportunities

## Chapter 1

Barbara O'Toole and Barbara Skinner

### Setting the context

Borders across the world are becoming increasingly fluid; figures from the Migration Policy Institute (2015) indicate that international migration has almost tripled since 1960, rising from 77 million at that time to almost 244 million in 2015. The island of Ireland, North and South, is likely to remain a destination of choice for people from parts of the world that have been 'stripped' by global capitalism (Bauman, 2007, p. 34), or who have been forced to move countries because of wars and conflict. Parekh (2009, p. 81) speaks of the range of human movement across the planet, from economic migration to returning diaspora, to asylum seekers and refugees, saying:

Since none of these and other sources of cultural diversity are likely to disappear in the foreseeable future, and since new forms of diversity appear as the old die out, it is a more or less permanent feature of modern life.

Such cultural and linguistic diversity is reflected in schools and classrooms across the island of Ireland. Statistics show that numbers of minority language pupils in the North of Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (ROI) are increasing. In NI, at the time of writing, there are 11,900 minority language pupils, that is 3.5% of total school enrolment, compared with 7,899 in 2009/10 and 1,244 pupils in 2002 (NISRA, 2015).

The migrant population in the ROI stands at 11.6%; there are currently 200 nationalities in

the country with approximately 182 different languages (Central Statistics Office, [CSO] 2017). Numerically, there are 612,000 people who speak a language other than English at home, with Polish, Romanian and Lithuanian being the most represented in Census figures (CSO, 2017).

In this context, teachers must provide differentiated instruction for pupils whose first language is not English, to ensure that these students are fully included in teaching and learning, and that their achievement is on a par with their English-speaking peers. The underachievement of migrant pupils is a long-standing concern in Europe and North America (Cummins, 2014; Faas, 2014). Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has highlighted the achievement gap in many countries, for both first and second-generation migrant students (Cummins, 2014). PISA data in the ROI is perhaps more encouraging. According to Shiel, Kelleher, McKeown and Denner (2016a, p. 100), no significant differences are observed on overall Science scores among students in Ireland based on immigrant and language background. The authors qualify this statement by noting that "this may arise from the large standard errors around the mean scores for the two immigrant groups"<sup>1</sup> (Shiel et al, 2016a, p. 100). In the 2015 PISA statistics, Sheil et al state that 'native students' have a mean score on Science that is "some 12.2 points higher than immigrant students who speak a language other than English or Irish at home" (Shiel et al, 2016a, p. 100). They also point out:

<sup>1</sup>Two immigrant groups' meaning 1) those with English or Irish spoken at home, and 2) those with an 'other language' spoken at home.



The only significant difference in achievement observed between the groups is on reading literacy, with native students scoring some 25 points higher than immigrant students who speak a language other than English or Irish (Shiel et al, 2016, p. 100, italics added).<sup>2</sup>

The NI Statistics Research Agency (NISRA) provides figures which are food for thought on the achievement of minority language pupils in that jurisdiction. In post-primary education in 2015-2016, 38.6% of ‘home’ pupils achieved 3 or more A levels at grade A\* - C compared with 8.4% of ‘newcomer’ pupils; whilst 66.5% of ‘home’ pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\* - C compared with 21.3% of ‘newcomer’ pupils.

These latest ROI and NI figures may point to a developing trend of underachievement, and therefore need to be monitored; they also underline the necessity for an on-going focus on EAL in pre-service teacher education (Ryan, O’Toole, Quinn, Hagan & Bracken, 2010) and in-service teacher education (Skinner, 2010). Such work must address: creating inclusive curricula, developing sound pedagogical practice, and establishing strong links between communities and schools. The next section explores some of the challenges learners and educators face in closing the achievement gap.

**Vignette: Natalia’s Story**

*“My name is Natalia. I am 12 and from Lithuania. I have been in Northern Ireland for nearly two years. I enjoy Maths and I’m good at it but sometimes I can’t explain what I do or ask and answer questions because I don’t have enough English”.*

Natalia has learnt her mother tongue, Lithuanian, and can use it fluently. However, she also needs to learn to speak, read, write and listen in English at the same time as maintaining her curriculum learning, which is also through the medium of English. Natalia needs subject-specific academic language such as:

*If you divide it by 100 and multiply by ten you get ....*

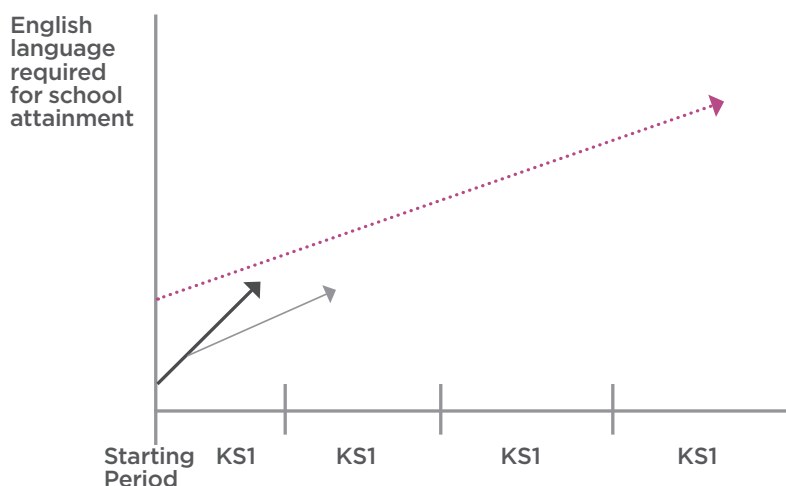
*First you subtract (X) from (Y), then you estimate how many ....*

*The difference between ... ?*

*There are four sets of X, so this means....*

Natalia also needs to socialise with children in a language she has yet to learn – daunting - and learn the social practices of the classroom and the school. These practices are culturally embedded and may be less consistent with her home background than for the majority language children in her class and in her school. Natalia is facing a moving target:

**Starting school - the EAL learner's task**



<sup>2</sup>According to the PISA data in the Republic of Ireland, the mean score for ‘native’ students in reading literacy is 524.7, while the score for immigrant students with a language other than English or Irish is 499.7 (Shiel, Kelleher, McKeown and Denner, 2016b, p. 6).

The graph shows the English language learning required for school attainment. In NI, minority language pupils can start school at any of the Key Stages. For example, at primary school they might join at Key Stage 1 (aged 5-7) or Key Stage 2 (aged 7-11) whilst at post-primary they might join at Key Stage 3 (aged 11-14), Key Stage 4 (aged 15-16) or Key Stage 5 (aged 17-18).

- dotted line = average 'home' pupil progression
- dark line = required EAL pupil progression
- thin line = possible EAL pupil progression

The EAL learner has to 'catch up' (the dark line) from a different starting point to her English-speaking peers. If Natalia can 'catch up' or near enough by the end of her first year, she may do well in the education system, although it is still important to remember that her development in English will not be complete at this stage and Natalia will require continuing support. If she cannot close the gap by the end of the first year it will get more difficult because the demands of the curriculum depend on increasing literacy skills in English. At this point she may find herself following the thin line, 'possible EAL progression', where she is learning but at a lower level than that of her peers. Catching up is basically Natalia's problem. No one waits. The curriculum moves on. Natalia is faced with a moving target (Cummins, 2000, p. 36), as native speakers of English are making accelerated progress through school.

Natalia is moving into the intermediate stage of learning English: intermediate EAL learners would typically be able to communicate successfully and fluently in English ('conversational fluency' Cummins, 2001) and develop more control of functional language. Natalia's spoken English, however, may not be fully accurate, with surface errors sometimes continuing for a number of years. The challenges for intermediate EAL learners remain. They may, for example, be able to use more extended sentences with greater accuracy and control than they could when they were beginners, but often containing errors in plurals, tenses, pronouns and prepositions. For example:

- over-generalisation of rules, e.g. He sitted on the floor; I saw some mouses
- omitting articles or putting them in the wrong place
- omitting 's' on the end of 3rd person singular
- errors with tenses, e.g. She come to school late this morning; We watching a film on Saturday.

At this stage, the focus for teaching and support should be about increasing accuracy; intermediate learners need to be encouraged to notice key features of English and apply them in their own speech and writing.

### Academic language proficiency

This vignette highlights the complexity of tasks facing the EAL learner. Whatever the age of the pupil he or she must catch up with their English-speaking peers and do so in a relatively short space of time. While rates of progress will depend on a range of variables, the learning and social context within the school will play a part in making the task easier or harder. Furthermore, Cummins (2001) has highlighted the distinction between social/conversational language and academic language proficiency. Conversational language is typically context-embedded and supported by paralinguistic cues (Cummins, 1979, 2001; Little, 2010) and is generally acquired within one to two years of a pupil arriving in school. Gibbons (1991) has referred to this as 'playground language', indicating its informal nature and informal origins. Academic language is context-reduced and more abstract; it comprises the more formal register of schooling, involving complex features and vocabulary such as hypothesising, persuading, classifying, arguing, and speculating. As Cummins (2001, p. 68) points out: "mastery of the academic functions of language is a... formidable task". Although Little (2010, p. 19) cautions against clear-cut distinctions between these two facets of language proficiency, noting that "the distinctions are not absolute and boundaries are often blurred", writers agree on the central role of school personnel in teaching academic language (Broeder & Kistemaker, 2015; Cummins, 2001, 2014; Creese & Leung,

2010; Gibbons, 2002; Little, 2010, 2012), along with the importance of academic language for educational success. As Grommes (2014) states, a student's "educational success will in part be determined by the degree to which he or she masters *Bildungssprache*"<sup>3</sup> (Grommes, 2014, p. 137).

Gibbons (2002, p. 6) points to the proactive nature of teaching for academic proficiency, stating that merely placing students in classrooms is not sufficient; rather, teachers must intentionally focus on the development of academic language in their teaching. This highlights the importance of teachers possessing knowledge and understanding of EAL pedagogy. It underlines the need for education about EAL pedagogy to form part of pre-service provision and continuing professional development for teachers. How should this pedagogy be approached?

### Questions for educators

Taking note of the above vignette featuring Natalia, along with the necessity for the development of academic language proficiency in school, there are certain dilemmas and challenges facing teachers who work with students whose first language is not English:

*How do teachers in diverse settings support the development of academic language proficiency while also recognising the languages and cultures of their students?*

*How do teachers avoid holding a deficit perspective on language learners in their classrooms, when they are aware of the potential gaps in their academic language proficiency compared to that of their peers who speak the dominant language?*

In summary: students must learn the dominant language in order to succeed academically. How do teachers approach this work within a social justice framework, i.e. without a) working from a deficit perspective or b) marginalising students' first languages and home cultures?

As Little, Leung and Van Avermaet (2014, p. xxii) point out, while a primary focus on

the development of academic language proficiency is understandable in educational policy and practice, "effective diversity management must address a number of issues in addition to the language of schooling". Such issues include a recognition of students' home languages and cultures. Cummins (2014, p. 9) states that effective education for minority language students must incorporate language support and an inclusive curriculum, and that it must also "view diversity as a resource and... establish respectful collaborative partnerships with parents and the community." In an earlier publication, Cummins (2001, p. 71) notes that "school improvement efforts are likely to be futile if they continue to exclude issues of identity and power from their analyses of the causes of students' academic difficulties and from recommendations for change". Little (2010, p. 16) states that "use of the home language at school affirms the migrant pupil's identity and helps to counteract any tendency to stigmatise him or her for membership of a group that is perceived as linguistically inferior".

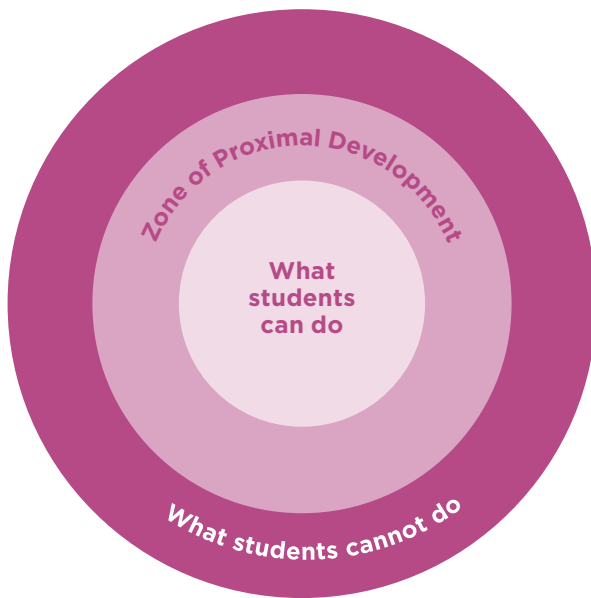
The challenge for educators is to enhance their classroom practice with minority language students in order to reduce the possibility of an achievement gap, and to approach this work in such a way that students' first languages and cultures are included as an integral part of teaching and learning. A sociocultural theoretical framework is a useful starting point for this work.

The theoretical perspective underpinning EAL pedagogy, as understood by the authors, is informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective on education. Vygotsky (cited in Walsh, 2006, p.33) believed learning is a 'situated practice' which occurs in social contexts, through talking to others, before being internalized for cognitive development. Learning occurs best when practical activity and language come together. Vygotsky believed that this learning occurs most successfully through interaction with others who are more experienced than ourselves, the 'expert knower' (ibid.), often the teacher, but sometimes a peer.

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<sup>3</sup>Bildungssprache: a concept introduced by Ingrid Gogolin to denote academic language (cited in Grommes, 2014)

## A sociocultural framework



'Significant Other'

An important feature of Vygotsky's theory (ibid.) is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This can be thought of as a metaphorical location where learners interact to construct knowledge. The term relates to the difference between what a learner can achieve on his or her own compared with when s/he is supported by a teacher or more able other. In an EAL context, learning occurs best if a learner interacts with someone who is within their ZPD, as the student is able to co-construct knowledge and perform at a higher level with the support of the other. Vygotsky proposes that to learn effectively we need a 'significant other' – for a pupil for whom English is an additional language this might be a good native speaker who can model and help *scaffold* their learning in interactive learning activities. A large part of a teacher's role is to scaffold the language of EAL learners by exploring the actual language demands of the task and relating this to the pupil's ability. For example, what key vocabulary needs to be identified so that the pupils can access the content? What is the syntactic complexity of the text, is it full of lots of conditional clauses, if so, does the pupil know the conditional in English and if not, will he or she realise that this is talking about something hypothetical,

not real? Do the pupils know that the structure of some advertisements follows a problem-solution type pattern? And what about subject specific terminology inherent in this task?

In their research, Cameron and Besser (2004) lay particular stress on the problems advanced EAL learners have with what they term formulaic phrases, which they define as "a group of words that are "bound" together, in that certain words must, or tend to be, accompanied by other words" (2004, p. 8). For example 'a black-and-white cat' is a formulaic phrase; an EAL learner might write 'a white-and-black cat'. Other examples would be 'he waited for long', instead of 'he waited for a long time', or 'her best of all friend' for 'her best friend'. The basic premise is that skills need to be developed so that teachers and learners look at language rather than through it – this has become known as the ability to develop a Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy. Lucas and Villegas (2013 p. 99) explain that the key features of linguistically responsive teachers is that they value language diversity, are able to identify key language demands of task, have a repertoire of strategies for scaffolding English language learners and an inclination to advocate for minority language pupils.

In addition to being linguistically responsive, teachers of EAL learners need to develop a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. As Sharroky (2018) suggests, this is about being able to give validation and affirmation of the home culture for the purposes of bridging the student to success in the mainstream culture.

### Culturally responsive pedagogy

The theoretical perspective underpinning this publication is informed by a sociocultural perspective on education, situating language use in its cultural and social contexts (Hawkins, 2010) and drawing from 'culturally relevant pedagogy' (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). The authors were concerned with prioritising the achievement of students from linguistic minorities but not at the expense of those students' languages and cultures. Arnesen et al. (2008), argue that the sociocultural perspective by definition alone implies that

human differences are socially or culturally constructed. Consequently they maintain that from a sociocultural point of view, diversity is not neutral “but implies problems of discrimination and inequality”, (p. 17). By its very term, they argue, there is an implication of different status and recognition, and underpinning these differences, the question of societal power. Fitts (2006) argues that any educational programmes that attempt to address linguistic matters alone, without also looking at issues of status and power, will not succeed.

In her seminal 1995 paper, Ladson-Billings stated: “only the term *culturally responsive* appears to refer to a more dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture” (Ladson Billings, 1995, p. 467, italics in original). She conducted a study in the US to challenge deficit views about the education of African American students through identifying ‘teaching excellence’ in the practice of eight successful teachers. Her aim was to establish how academic success and cultural success can complement each other. ‘Three broad propositions’ emerged from her research: “conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers”; the “manner in which social relations are constructed” by such teachers, and the “conceptions of knowledge they hold” (p. 478). For example, regarding ‘conceptions of self and others’, the successful teachers in her study demanded a high level of academic success from their students and believed students were capable of reaching this level: “students were not permitted to choose failure in their classrooms” (p. 479). Furthermore, in the process of working towards academic achievement, the teachers included student culture in the classroom as “authorised or official knowledge” (p. 483). Ladson-Billings (2014) identified three domains which underpinned the work of these successful teachers: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness, as in “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom...to identify, analyse, and solve real-world problems” (2014, p. 75).

Subsequent work has built upon, developed and critiqued CRP. Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) introduced the idea of ‘funds of knowledge’ which they describe as the culturally developed knowledge, including language knowledge, which students bring to school: the “historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household’s functioning and well-being” and that these are “abundant and diverse” (Gonzalez et al. 2005, p. 91-92). When students bring their own rich cultural and cognitive resources into the classroom, this can tap into students’ prior knowledge and can “bridge the chasm between home and school” (p. 40) through the creation of culturally responsive and meaningful lessons. Moll (2005, p. 276) states that when first languages are not recognized by schools, this curtails the “ability of teachers to build on the language and cultural experience of students” and can also lead to a ‘fracture’ between families and school.

This argument is echoed by other writers in the field. Cummins (1979, 1980, 2000, 2001), claims that the extent to which students’ language and cultural background are valued and promoted within the school actively supports or disables the learning and achievement of minority ethnic students. Cummins (2000, p. 48) states that interactions between educators and culturally diverse students are “never neutral with respect to societal power relations”, and that “in varying degrees they either reinforce or challenge coercive relations of power in the wider society”. Similarly, Phillipson (2003), Flynn (2007), Garcia (2009), Mc Daid (2011), Conteh (2012) and Conteh and Brock (2011) have written extensively on this theme. Delpit and Dowdy (2002), have emphasised the link between language and identity (“the skin that we speak”); while Mc Daid (2011) frames first language recognition as an issue of equality, stating that teachers have ‘pedagogic authority’ based on their institutional legitimacy as school authority, and can impose the selection of meanings by virtue of this authority.

Situating EAL teaching and learning in a sociocultural theoretical framework and within the broader context of acknowledging power differentials in society, is a unifying thread running through the following five chapters. The authors foreground the connection between language and identity, highlight the importance of first language recognition and inclusion of students' cultures in school, while emphasising the necessity of academic achievement.

### **Beyond culturally responsive pedagogy**

In conclusion, the seminars on which this publication is based were informed by a sociocultural theoretical perspective, in which the first languages and home cultures of minority students are recognised and valued as integral components of the teaching and learning process in schools. The concept of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995) was central to the thinking underpinning the events, including the selection of speakers and rapporteurs. In recent years, several authors, including Ladson-Billings herself, have critiqued the ways in which CRP has been thought about and implemented in schools. Ladson-Billings (2014, p.82) states that the concept has "taken on a life of its own...and sometimes in practice is totally unrecognisable to me", noting that simply adding library books depicting diversity or having classroom or school celebrations does not constitute a robust approach to CRP.

Pirbhai-Illich, Pete and Martin (2017, p. 4) offer a further critique of how CRP has been interpreted, arguing that it "has been and continues to be insufficient to address the global colonial power matrix". They identify problems in the typical interpretation of CRP by white educators, whereby much of what was originally intended by Ladson-Billings has become 'lost in translation'. These problems concern, firstly, a "focus on the Other, albeit from a positive rather than deficit position", (Martin, Pirbhai-Illich and Pete, 2017, p. 236), which they say, enables white teachers to side-step white privilege because they can avoid looking at themselves and their own complicity in what Andreotti, (2016, p. 104)

terms "epistemic blindness to ways of thinking". Second, this preoccupation with 'Other' allows educators to ignore the Eurocentric nature of education systems. Finally, Martin et al. (2017, p. 236) state that CRP is generally interpreted at individual teacher level rather than systemically; it typically does not contain an examination of the "systemic and structural inequalities inherent in education systems" which, these authors state, have their roots in colonialism. Martin et al. (2017, p. 239) call for 'critical interculturality' which "requires centring the knowledges of southern, indigenous, and other marginalised peoples" and the creation of spaces for dialogue that address structural and systemic injustice and inequality. They argue for radical, decolonising pedagogy in teacher education.

The authors' critique of CRP is a useful lens with which to examine the limitations of the seminars and to identify lessons learned that can inform future such events. The seminar focus was on the achievement of students from linguistic minorities within a sociocultural theoretical framework in which first languages and cultures are recognised and included. The policy context in Europe was also examined, particularly in the Dublin seminar by Piet Van Avermaet, thereby providing a focus on structural and systemic issues that impact on schools and on classroom practice. However, the 'voice' of the minority language speaker was largely absent from the seminars apart from video excerpts, case studies and stories from classrooms, which were introduced by presenters. So, while the events were deemed successful by coordinators, speakers and participants, a charge of "epistemic blindness" (Andreotti, 2016, p. 104) could well be levelled at the organisers (the current authors). While the perspective was "from a positive rather than a deficit position" (Martin et al., 2017, p. 236), the absence of the minority viewpoint in the selection of speakers could be seen to perpetuate white European privilege and is something to be addressed in future seminars.

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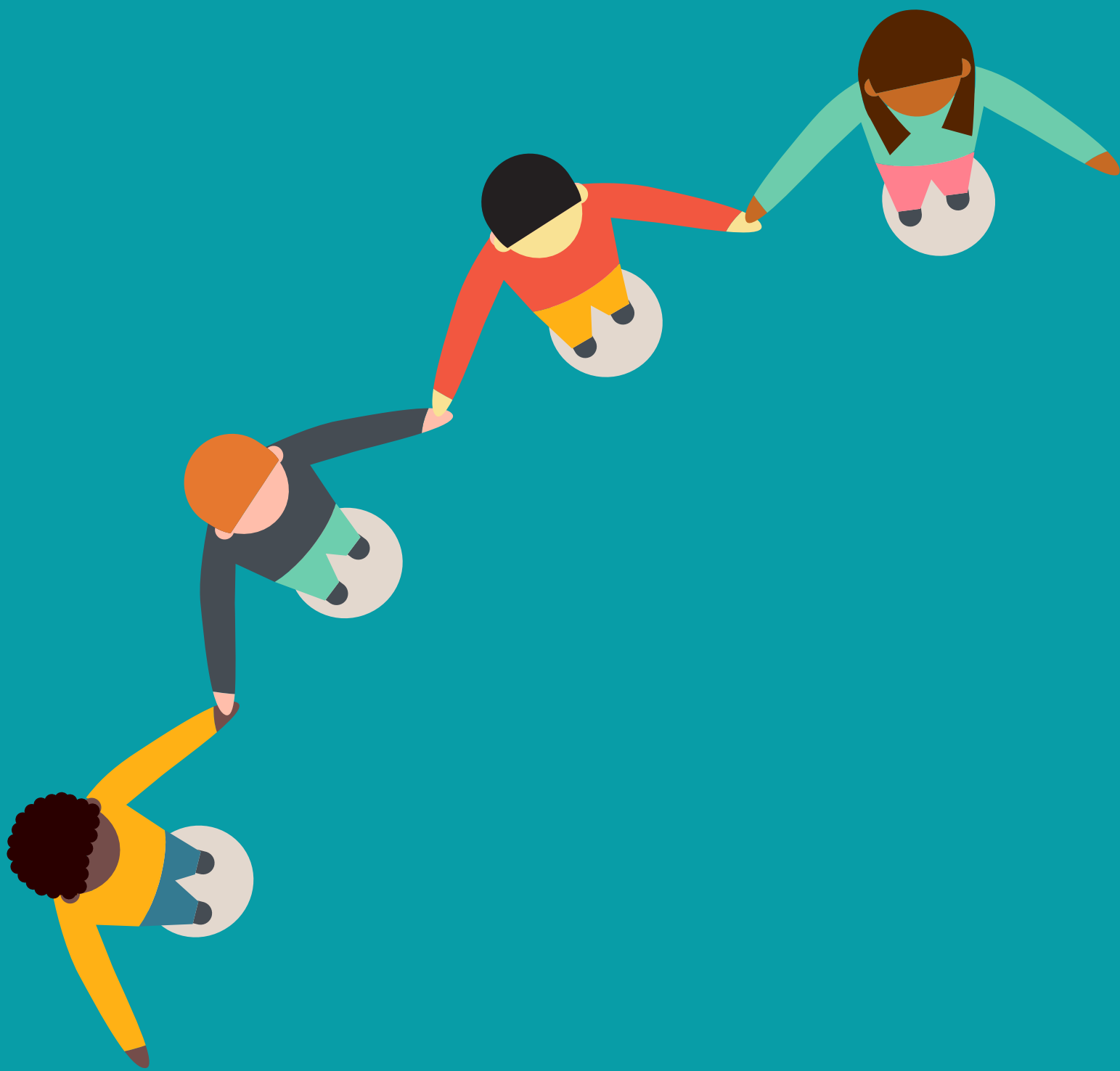
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# Working towards a multilingual social interaction learning model

## Chapter 2

Piet Van Avermaet



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Piet Van Avermaet

### Introduction

In this talk, I would like to share some of the research we have carried out and some of the work that we are currently doing in Belgium with regard to linguistic diversity and ethnic and social diversity in our schools. As regards my own background, I am a member of a university linguistics department so I have a language background along with a PhD in social linguistics; prior to that I was a teacher in primary schools for many years. And it was actually there, in the primary school setting, that I first became interested in the mechanism of a system which reproduces social inequality over and over again, and I began to try to understand how pivotal language is in all of that. My point of reference in this paper will be the education system in Belgium and how we in Belgium, specifically in the northern part of the country in Flanders, deal with languages and with mechanisms of inequality.

I am not going to give you any practical answers or practical solutions; rather, I would like to critically reflect with you on some of the current policies across Europe and specifically in Belgium and in Flanders. I would like to critically reflect on assumptions about language and language learning, and on how to deal with children's multilingual repertoires in the educational context. These reflections will be based on research which we have been doing for the last number of years in Flanders.

The first issue I want to address is that of language and social inequality; as in, the assumed link between language and social inequality. I hope you all agree with me that social inequality and unequal outcomes in education is a tenacious problem. Over and over again, PISA data (OECD, 2009) remind us of the fact that there are mechanisms of inequality in education, and I will return to PISA later in this talk.

### The national context: Belgium

First, some background about the language landscape in Belgium. For those of you who are not familiar with Belgium, Flanders is the northern part of the country where we speak Dutch. In the south of the country people speak French. People always think that historically Belgium is an extremely multilingual country, but this is not the case. Belgium consists officially of three monolingual areas; other languages are not allowed to be used as the language of instruction in official contexts. So if you visit Belgium and you come to one of the municipalities and you want to ask for something, you will officially be addressed in the language of the region. However, it would be fine to use English, whereas if you speak Arabic or Turkish then some people will definitely not want to answer you; they will say, "first learn Dutch and then you can come back". That is the kind of reality we have in the Flemish context.

We also see an enormously increasing segregation in our education system. Just to give you one example: we have an early tracking system in secondary education. After primary education at the age of twelve, children and parents have to choose between vocational, technical tracks and more general tracks. What we see at the end of primary education is that more than 70% of the migrant population is oriented to the vocational tracks. There is therefore an under-representation of migrant pupils in the general tracks and in the technical tracks. At the centre of the arguments which are put forward to orient migrant pupils to the vocational tracks is often the issue of language. Perhaps this is done with the best of intentions, but students are told: "yes because of the fact that you speak Turkish or Arabic at home it will probably be more difficult for you to do the

general track so it is probably better for you to go to the vocational track". The consequences are that when the students reach the age of 18, they have no opportunities to go to further education or to third-level education. The only opportunity they have is to find a job in the job market. Inequality in education is therefore a tenacious problem and we see increasing segregation as a result.

In interpreting this increased segregation, the fact that people use another language at home rather than the language of instruction or the language of schooling, is presented as one of the main explaining variables. And so, speaking the home language is seen as hindering children's development. This idea of language spoken at home as the main cause of educational inequality is what the French sociologist, Bourdieu, calls a 'doxa', as in a kind of unquestioned 'truth' (Bourdieu, 1991). How this operates is as follows: in Flanders, many people and teachers are convinced it is because you speak another language at home that your school results and your cognitive outcomes are poorer than for a child who speaks, or whose parent speaks, Dutch at home. And this is what I want to critically reflect upon and I would like to do this from a diachronic perspective.

### Submersion models

When I compare the 2000 PISA data with the 2015 PISA data what I observe is that language has become more and more pivotal as the main lever or condition for school success. This is the case in Belgium and in Flanders and in many other European countries over the last ten to fifteen years. Now this conditionality, the fact that language is seen as a pre-condition of school success, is very prominent in policy discourses. Sometimes in our education system you have to be able to prove that you have a certain level of Dutch before you can enter primary schools, and children are more and more often being tested for that. As a consequence we see that there is an almost exclusive focus on what I call "L2 submersion models" (Sierens & Van Avermaet, forthcoming). So no languages other than Dutch are allowed in the

classroom, in the playground, or in the corridors of the school. As a result, the languages of the children are not used at all in school. Historically, this has to do with ideological arguments; the ideology of the 19th century European romantic idea of "one language one nation". But it is also because teachers are really convinced that if we do not allow children to use their mother tongue in school this will have a positive impact on their L2 learning, and will increase their chances of success in school across all subjects. As a consequence we have, at least in Flanders, a tradition of pull-out classes, summer schools, weekend schools, and 'remedial' teaching programmes, although we know that most of these pull-out classes and summer schools have hardly any positive effect on children's outcomes and on their being academically successful. At the same time, and this is probably specific for the Flemish context, there is often a ban on the use of languages other than Dutch. In some schools children are even punished for the fact that they speak a language such as Turkish in the playground. In one school a couple of years ago, (fortunately it is no longer the case because they were criticised for the practice), Turkish children who spoke Turkish in the playground got a sticker as a punishment. So this is to some extent the reality in Flemish schools. Some schools have banners at the school gates which say: "from here on only Dutch". And again I do not blame the teachers or the principals; it is with the best of intentions that this happens because there is this idea that banning these home languages will be beneficial for students in making academic progress in school.

### Lessons from research

Now my question is whether there is empirical support for this kind of approach. I accept the fact that as teachers, we look for the best opportunities and the best solutions for our students. What I know from international research (Sierens & Van Avermaet, forthcoming) is that an exclusive L2 submersion model, where children's home languages are not allowed in the school setting, is less effective. One of the examples is PISA itself. When I look at the Flemish PISA data, I see that the

inequality in our education system between 2000 and 2015 has actually increased. In 2000 about 30% of the variance in the difference in cognitive outcomes for 15-year-olds was explained by socioeconomic background. In the 2015 PISA data it is over 50%. So inequality seems to increase in spite of the policy in Flanders to only focus on the acquisition of the dominant language. At the same time, sociolinguistic research (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia, 2009) demonstrates the complex dynamics of children with multilingual practices, including their ability to communicate, to construct knowledge, and to share knowledge. The idea that in constructing knowledge we only use one repertoire is something which might have been the case 20 or 30 years ago but when we look at the language practices of today, this is no longer the case. For example, when I would give this talk for teachers in Flanders, in Dutch, a lot of English words would intervene. I will return to that phenomenon, to the concept of “translanguaging” and Jean Conteh will also speak about it later today (Garcia, 2009). We translanguage all the time. Pupils in our schools also translanguage, or what was previously called “code switching” (Gumperz, 1982): children switch languages at ease, and they use all of their language repertoires in the process.

Sociology research (Agirdag, Van Avermaet, & Van Houtte, 2013; Maerten-Rivera, Myers, Lee, & Penfield, 2010; OECD, 2009, 2010a; White, 1982) also points to a multitude of intervening variables to explain these mechanisms of inequality. One of these concerns a culture of teachability. In Flanders we conducted a study where we have shown that in some primary schools there is what we call a “negative teachability culture” (Agirdag, Van Avermaet, & Van Houtte, 2013). This is a culture amongst teachers which says that whatever you do with students from minority linguistic backgrounds, it will never work. Now we have been able to show that such a negative teachability culture leads to a culture of futility amongst the pupils, who go on to believe: “okay whatever we do we will never be successful”. So these are some of the mechanisms which also impact on the reproduction of social inequality.

An exclusive L2 submersion model contradicts what is known about second language learning processes over the last 20 years (Slembrouck, Van Avermaet & Van Gorp, 2018). We know from language acquisition research that mother

tongues can serve as levers for learning the second language, and that this is very important (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006).

We recently carried out research with almost 800 secondary school teachers (Pulinx, Van Avermaet & Agirdag, 2017); we gave them a set of statements and asked them to indicate to what extent they agreed with the listed assertions or not. For example, one statement was as follows: *“it is in the interest of the children that we punish them for speaking Turkish in the playground”*. The teachers had to score their views on a one-to-five point scale. And we found that three out of ten teachers fully agreed with that statement. Or for instance: *“do you agree that the school library should have books in Arabic and Turkish?”* Only 12% agreed (N=745). All secondary schools in Flanders have books in their library in Dutch, in French, in English, sometimes in Italian, so why not in Turkish or Arabic? Figure 1 shows the scores for all the assertions in our study. It clearly shows the monolingual beliefs of teachers.

The following graph (see Figure 2) is illustrative of the results of the study:

The horizontal axis shows the beliefs of the teachers towards multilingualism, as presented in Figure 1. A dot represents a teacher. A 1-score are teachers who have more multilingual beliefs, while a 5-score shows more monolingual beliefs. You can see from the graph, and from the clustering of dots, that the majority of the teachers are at the right end of the continuum. Our research findings therefore showed that the majority of teachers surveyed are really convinced that it is better for the children’s future, for their being successful at school, if they are not allowed to use their mother tongues at school.

We also asked the same teachers to score their views on what is called a ‘Trust scale’ (Tschannen-Moran, 1999), indicating their response to the question: *“To what extent do you have trust in your children to be successful?”*

The teachers’ scores with regard to the trust they have in their pupils is represented on the vertical axis. A one score indicates teachers who have low trust in their pupils, while a ‘five’ score represents teachers who have a great deal of

Assertion	% (compl) agree.
1. Non-Dutch-speaking pupils should not be allowed to speak their home language at school.	77.3%
2. The most important cause of academic failure of non-Dutch speaking pupils is their insufficient proficiency in Dutch.	78.2%
3. The school library (classroom library, media library) should also include books in the different home languages of the pupils.	12.8%
4. Non-Dutch-speaking pupils should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language at school.	6.8%
5. By speaking their home language at school, non-Dutch speaking pupils do not learn Dutch sufficiently.	72.1%
6. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered regular subjects in their home language.	3.2%
7. It is more important that non-Dutch speaking pupils obtain a high level of proficiency in Dutch than in their home language.	44.7%
8. It is in the interest of the pupils when they are punished for speaking their home language at school.	29.1%

Figure 1: Language beliefs of secondary education teachers in Flanders, Belgium (Source: Pulinx, Van Avermaet & Agirdag, 2017)

trust in their pupils to be successful at school. These teachers have high expectations of their pupils and believe: “Yes, they can be successful, they can learn, they will be successful”.

What we see is a negative correlation between the more monolingual beliefs held by teachers and the least trust they have in their pupils. This is shown by the red line in figure 2. If you have low trust in your pupils you will have low expectations of those pupils. Now, if you have low expectations you tend to give pupils

less turns in classroom interaction. And if you give pupils less turns in the interaction they are less likely to participate in what goes on in the classroom; they consequently become less motivated to learn, and this will have, in the long term, a negative impact on pupils’ cognitive development and academic progress and success. So although we have the best of intentions, we have to be careful, because monolingual beliefs might bring about the opposite to what we intended.

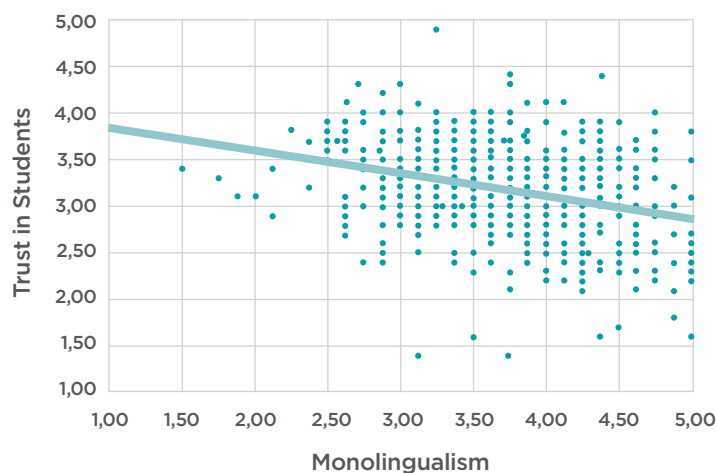


Figure 2: Relationship teachers’ monolingual beliefs and their trust in students (Source: Pulinx, Van Avermaet & Agirdag, 2017)

### A multilingual reality

Alongside the prevalence of monolingual beliefs in schools and in society in general, at the same time there is a multilingual reality; a multilingual reality in social spaces but also a multilingual reality in every person. We all have a multiple linguistic repertoire. I speak some Dutch, I speak a bit of the local dialect; I speak a bit of French, a bit of English, a little bit of German. I am very proud of the fact that I speak Spanish and Italian. And people always ask, oh Spanish and Italian, fantastic. And then I say the only Italian I know is to ask for a Prosecco when I am sitting somewhere in Italy! But for the time being that is perfect. It is part of my repertoire. I can use it, I can be proud of it. The same by the way for Spanish; I can use it to order tapas in Madrid; that is the only Spanish I know! Everybody has a multitude of language resources which we use in our daily interactions. Minority language children in schools would also love to do that. The reality for those pupils is different, however.

Suppose that a parent of one of our pupils gives us a small note trying to say something about her daughter or son and the note is written in 'broken and hesitant' English. How do you perceive that? How do you perceive such a parent? What kind of impact does this have on your perception of the child? We carried out interviews with migrant parents who told us that sometimes teachers respond to a note that has come in from home: *"that is fine but I can't read it, maybe it is better for you to do a course in Dutch"*. Some of the parents do not dare to go to parent-teacher meetings after that. They are afraid of communicating with the teacher or the principal. These are the realities facing minority language pupils and their parents.

### A hierarchy of languages?

A 10-year-old child made a kind of language passport where we asked her to write down the different languages she uses and in which context and with whom. The child speaks Turkish; she says she also speaks French; she speaks Arabic and she speaks Dutch. She uses Turkish to dream in, to think in, and to do Maths when she is angry. She uses Dutch for Maths activities and for sharing secrets. And she also uses Turkish to share secrets. So you see an enormous mixture. She is of Turkish

descent, but she says: *"I use Dutch with my mother when I have to talk about my homework"*. So these children, in contrast with what we often think, use an enormous variety of language repertoires in all kinds of contexts.

Yet there is a double standard with regards to multilingualism. When an English-speaking child comes into our classrooms we have video data of teachers saying, *"Oh look we have a new child who speaks English; multilingualism is very important. When you get older you also have to acquire languages specifically in a European context"*. And at the same time multilingualism is perceived as something negative when it relates to languages other than French, English, Italian, or even Mandarin Chinese. In Flemish schools, the principal and the teacher often say to parents of certain languages, *"It will be better for your child if you speak Dutch at home instead of your mother tongue"*. That kind of double standard is very common and is something we need to reflect upon.

So, in reflecting on these issues I wonder whether it isn't time for new recipes; new approaches to dealing with multilingualism. Naturally, teachers have questions; everybody has concerns. For example:

- How will I deal with the multitude of languages, the multilingual reality in my school? In some of the Flemish schools we have over 20 different languages. Do we have to forbid them? Do we have to tolerate them? Do we have to teach these languages?
- And what is the impact of such approaches, both social-emotionally and cognitively? What advice do we give to children concerning their use of their L1 outside of the school context and what advice do we give to children and parents about language use at home?

### Two competing paradigms

The main questions that principals and teachers in Flemish schools ask are: *which language education model is actually the best for our children in order for them to be successful at school? Which language education model is the most effective for children's L2 learning, in order to reduce the achievement gap and to contribute to the process of social participation*

*and inclusion? Which language education model works best to boost children's wellbeing, build their self-confidence, and enhance their identity construction and their sense of belonging?*

What we see at all levels of the discourse in relation to these questions is two competing paradigms along with a kind of binary thinking. One side is perceived as the legitimate norm while the other is seen as deviant. The L2 submersion model is the preferred policy model in many European countries (Sierens & Van Avermaet, forthcoming). It is definitely the prevailing discourse and is perceived as the legitimate norm regardless of empirical evidence to the contrary (Blommaert & Van Avermaet, 2008). On the other hand, bilingual or multilingual education is seen as deviant and counterproductive (Blommaert & Van Avermaet, 2008). So these are the two extremes on a continuum. There is a great deal of empirical evidence for multilingual models (Cummins, 2000). We know from research, from Jim Cummins and from many others (Cummins, 2008; Garcia, 2009) that if children have the opportunity to learn and write in their mother tongue this can have an extremely positive impact on their L2 learning and on their being successful in school.

On the other hand we also have to be critical for several reasons of what I call the 'traditional bilingual education model' (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). We know, as I already said, that traditional bilingual education can have a positive impact on metalinguistic awareness, on executive functioning, on cognitive flexibility, and on information processing (for an overview refer to Sierens & Van Avermaet, forthcoming). But at the same time, these traditional bilingual education models often function in a kind of separation arrangement, which means that children miss opportunities in mainstream classrooms. For example, what we saw in the past in traditional bilingual programmes in the Flemish context, for a portion of the week, is children in the Turkish classroom, Moroccan kids in the Arabic classroom, and Polish children in the Polish classroom. These are homogenous groups, and often when these children come back into the mainstream classroom hardly

anything is done with their multilingual realities. There is no exchange across languages. Having segregated groups of learners runs contrary to the idea of translanguaging as it sets up languages as compartmentalised units with no links between them. And this creates missed opportunities for making children aware of the dynamics of languages and of the links across and between languages.

### Creating a multilingual social interaction learning model

So we have to go beyond binaries. We live in hyper-diverse spaces and our schools and classrooms have become hyper-diverse contexts (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). We have to move beyond the binaries between the two extremes on the continuum, of advocating for a monolingual policy on the one hand versus a traditional bilingual policy on the other. I advocate for a model of 'functional multilingual learning' (FML) (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). I would call it a **multilingual social interaction model for learning**. Such an FML approach utilises children's linguistic language resources as didactic capital and as capital for learning. It makes use of their first languages to support L2 learning and to raise multilingual awareness. In the process it also enhances children's metalinguistic awareness (for an overview refer to Sierens & Van Avermaet, forthcoming), which in turn creates positive attitudes towards all languages, and contributes positively to children's identity-building and to enhancing their status in schools.

There is nothing fancy in leveraging these multilingual repertoires; however, it needs a change in our mental structures and in our beliefs. It involves believing that these linguistic repertoires can be a positive asset for learning. For example, if two children in your class are working together carrying out Maths exercises and you see that one child is struggling with the activity, so you proactively say to the other child, "*okay, I know you understand the sums, so you can help and you can do it in Turkish (or in Punjabi or whatever language is appropriate)*". Now there is an enormous concern amongst teachers about this. Teachers ask, for example:



*How do I know that they aren't gossiping? Second, how do I know that they are doing and talking about the Maths activity? How do I know that the 'helper' knows the Maths activity and will explain it correctly? And there are actually two minutes of this lesson which could be used for using Dutch. And I don't understand all these languages.*

So, let's shift a negative frame into a positive frame; see it as something positive that you don't understand all of these languages. After the two minutes that you have allocated for the task you can ask in the language of schooling, "Okay explain me what you have been talking about; tell me". If there are a lot of, 'uuuh, uuuh, uuhs' then it is quite possible the children have not been talking about the task. And then you can intervene as a teacher. Secondly, if you hear the children paraphrasing in Dutch about what they have been talking about in the Maths activity in Turkish, and you hear there was something wrong in the explanation, then you can intervene. And third, the fact that you challenged them to paraphrase in Dutch what they have been talking about in Turkish creates a powerful learning environment. So what you are doing is going beyond traditional approaches and going beyond boundaries and bringing together the multilingual realities to support learning Dutch as a second language and to support the children's academic progression.

### Concluding comments

L2 is essential in order to function in society. Being proficient in the language of schooling is essential for school success. Why do I say this? Because when I advocate for children's multilingual repertoires many people think that I am against the acquisition of the dominant language or the language of schooling. This is not the case. What I advocate for is trying to bring the home language and the new language together instead of seeing them as opposites. However, we have to reflect on the most meaningful pathway to do this. Social inclusion and educational success cannot be realised through a quick language course for newcomers along with a sole focus on the L2. Learning the L2 and succeeding in school involves a continuous complex and dynamic process, which takes on average nine to twelve years (Shohamy, 2011). Language learning takes time

and is an on-going practice. As teachers, we must reflect on how inclusion can be achieved in our schools and how the linguistic repertoires of all children can be used as a strength for learning and achievement and for participation across society.

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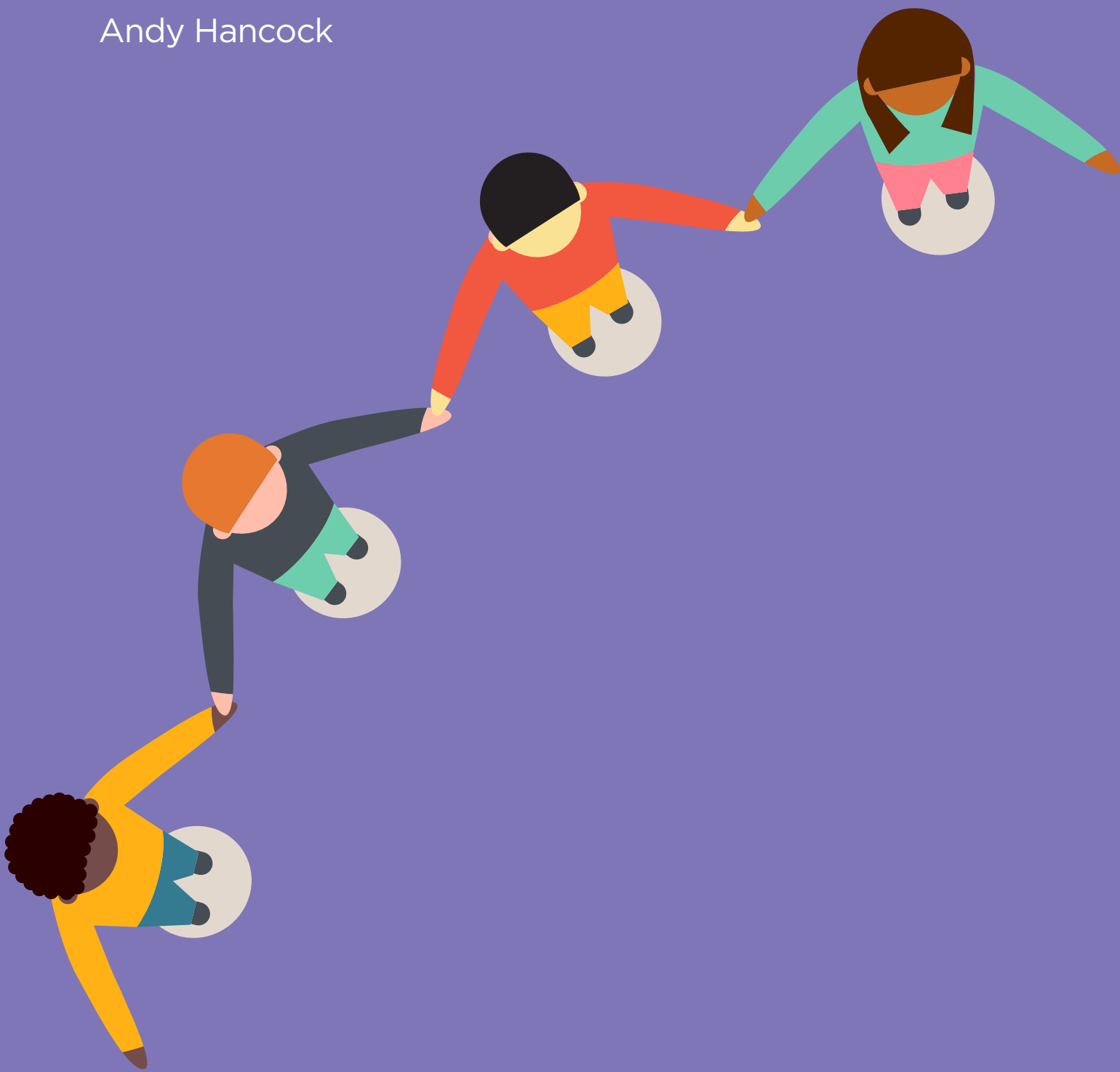
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# Inclusive practices for pupils with English as an additional language

## Chapter 3

Andy Hancock



# Inclusive practices for pupils with English as an additional language

## Chapter 3

Andy Hancock

### Introduction

I first started teaching in a multilingual school in London and in the first class I had, out of all of the children, only three spoke English at home. There was a wide variety of linguistic diversity in the classroom: Punjabi speakers, Urdu speakers, Cantonese speakers, Greek speakers, and during my first year of teaching, many more new pupils with very limited English arrived - a Bengali speaker from Bangladesh, a Tamil speaker from Sri Lanka and an Arabic speaker from Egypt. Nobody had prepared me for this because during my teacher training course there were no sessions at all on linguistic or cultural diversity. In this talk I'd like to share with you the knowledge and expertise I have gained over the years by exploring attitudes and values towards multilingualism, the theory underpinning inclusive classrooms, how additional languages are acquired, and the different models of support which can be implemented.

### Attitudes and values towards multilingualism

Teachers need to think about their own worldviews: about the monolingual mind-set that they may or may not have. Interestingly, in a recent review of teaching standards, the General Teaching Council of Scotland has stated that values and personal commitment are core to teaching. This is so important because the values and the beliefs that you have in your classroom and your relationship with the children are fundamental to good teaching and good learning. An example of a worldview comes across in a newspaper article on migrant children in classrooms, I saw recently - the article used discourse which problematised increasing diversity and migrant children in classrooms, especially in terms of subtracting teaching and learning from those who were thought to need it most, basically working class boys with poor

literacy. What I'd like to do in this talk is to turn that problem discourse into positive discourse and to illustrate through my own experience that this can be an interesting and stimulating learning environment for all involved. What I want to argue is that teachers can implement pedagogy which is going to benefit not just the learners with English as an additional language (EAL), but all the children, even those working class boys with poor literacy. For example, if you do a lot of pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading talk, if you have a lot of writing frames, if you have a lot of visuals, this is going to support all children, not just the EAL learners (Hancock, 2012). This pedagogical approach has been part and parcel of good EAL pedagogy for many years, so it is nothing new.

This is important because supporting children who do not have English as their first language is no longer an issue reserved only for certain schools but is an issue which affects all schools. Traditionally in Scotland there have been settled communities, such as the Chinese with their heritage in Hong Kong, and the Punjabi and Urdu-speaking community with their heritage in Pakistan, all living in the central belt of Scotland. However, over the last ten years, Polish, Hungarian and Latvian and other migrant families have moved to many different parts of Scotland where they can work in the fisheries, hotel and catering industries. This means that no classroom is untouched by linguistic diversity.

### Linguistic diversity

Linguistic diversity is everywhere. At the beginning of our Postgraduate Diploma in Education Primary (PGDE) programme we ask our student teachers to go out on a 'camera safari' and take photographs of our 'linguistic landscapes' or examples of languages other than English in the environment in order that they understand they are living in a linguistically

diverse world. One student produced a poster based on the way over 30 languages were used in a primary school in Edinburgh.

For 70% of the world's population bilingualism is the norm. I was recently in Singapore in a kindergarten with six-year-old children, and what is interesting is they have an English teacher and a Chinese teacher in the same class at the same time. These children are being brought up bilingually and with biliteracy skills as well. This is not seen as a problem; it is seen as the norm. In Scotland, we really only have one example of bilingual education and this is immersion in Gaelic medium classes. When children arrive in Primary One they are immersed in Gaelic and then English is introduced in Primary Five (8-9 years of age) and increased gradually towards the end of primary school. The data collected by my colleagues in the University of Edinburgh (O'Hanlon, Paterson & McLeod, 2013) has shown that by the end of primary school, children in such immersion classrooms are in advance of their monolingual peers in mainstream schools in terms of Maths, problem solving and literacy. This is an example of some of the educational cognitive benefits of bilingual education.

Interestingly, when we think of children for whom English is an additional language, there may be a tendency to think of them as a homogeneous group when in fact they are incredibly diverse. There is diversity within diversity in terms of the languages that the children speak at home, at school and with certain members of the family and in terms of their different cultural, religious, educational, social and economic backgrounds. For example, they have different personalities, different learning styles, and different educational experiences in terms of their home country. Within the Scottish context this has led to the term EAL being included in 'additional support needs' (ASN) rather than 'special needs', alongside gifted children, children with sensory impairments, children with specific learning difficulties, Traveller children, or children who have disrupted lives because of alcohol or drug abuse within the home. On the one hand this is positive for EAL as it has now been recognised within educational policy but on the other hand it is negative, in that the term ASN is frequently viewed in deficit terms. This

is still an issue that needs to be worked through. This diversity leads to differences in levels of support needed. This depends on whether there are other children who share the same language, the geographical location of the school, or if they come from the only migrant family in the whole school. This diversity is also reflected in terms of intersectionality; sociologists talk about it in terms of gender and socioeconomic status. For example, the cultural capital of the children of a PhD student who has come to Edinburgh for three years and whose children are enrolled at the local primary school, is going to be very different from that of a Kurdish refugee child who has gaps in their education and who may have witnessed conflict and trauma.

One clear example of the diversity of multilingualism comes from research that I did with Chinese families and the languages they use (Hancock, 2006). When I asked "*what language do you speak at home?*", I expected to hear Cantonese in response. Instead, I got "*Hakka is our first language*" [Hakka is spoken in the New Territories, the rural areas of Hong Kong], English because the children go to mainstream school, Cantonese because that is the language used at the children's Chinese school and Putonghua [which is another word for Mandarin] to the kitchen staff who work in our take-away. These are multilingual children. Diversity in identity formation is just as evident. An example of blended identity is a Scottish Pakistani family who dress up in traditional kilts, as you do in Scotland, for a wedding. EAL children take on different identities in different contexts. I work with a lot of Chinese children and when I go to visit them on a Saturday at their Chinese school they are very vocal because they are in a safe space. Their behaviour is quite different than that exhibited in their mainstream classroom where they are frequently perceived as quiet, restrained and hard-working.

### **Bilingual language theory**

Let's start with Cummins' (2000) dual iceberg metaphor, where the tops of the two icebergs are separate above the water, indicating that two or more languages may look and sound separate when spoken or written, but underneath the

water, the iceberg is one large mass, just as an EAL child's cognition draws on their different languages, creating interdependence among them ([http://eslrw.ucalgary.ca/files/eslrw/Learner\\_profiles.pdf](http://eslrw.ucalgary.ca/files/eslrw/Learner_profiles.pdf)). To take an example, an eight-year-old Italian pupil came to school in Scotland; her first language was Italian and her second was English. She seemed to be more advanced than the other children in terms of her Maths ability so she was placed in the high ability Maths group because cognitively she could cope with it. She didn't have to start to learn Maths again in English, she didn't have to do multiplication or division again because she had learnt how to do this in Italian and could transfer this cognitive knowledge to English. All she needed support with was the language of Maths, not the cognitive understanding of Maths. Another example is Polish children who have learnt how to read in Polish so they know letters represent sounds and they don't have to learn that skill of linking letters to sounds again. These are examples of the interdependence of languages and of children using their languages as a resource for learning.

### Additional language acquisition

Social language, that is, 'playground language', like talking about the football match or the X Factor, takes around eighteen months to two years to develop. However, academic language skills take much longer; Cummins (2000) says between five and seven years. I have personal examples of these different types of language. I go to France once or twice a year and my in-law's neighbour is French and when we go out in the garden we have a conversation. It is the usual conversation, we talk about his vegetables, the lack of rain and how my boys have grown since last summer. And then he must think this person's French is pretty good and he starts talking to me about Catalan literature. Well he must see my eyes glaze over because (a) I don't have the depth and breadth of syntax to deal with a conversation of that type, and (b) I know nothing about Catalan literature. There is a big difference between the social language that children develop in their interaction in the classroom with their peers, and the language that is required to access the curriculum. However, what often happens is that children are given lots of support initially and gain social language relatively quickly, and so superficially appear

relatively proficient in English; then we think, they don't need that support or input any longer and it is withdrawn. Often then EAL children begin to fall behind their monolingual peers and there is a decrease in motivation. Sometimes teachers think the children have a specific learning need other than needing support for learning the second language and they carry out an assessment of their proficiency. However, often these assessments are based on monolingual English-speaking peers so it is challenging for migrant pupils to perform well. Evidence from my experience has shown that there is a disproportionate number of children in low ability groups or who are perceived to have a learning difficulty. So we need to be careful not to misdiagnose. In Scotland we have developed different categories of levels of acquisition to deal with this challenge: 'new to English', 'early acquisition', 'developing confidence', 'competent and fluent', and we have designed resources and support appropriate for those stages.

### Models of support

When I became manager of a Local Authority bilingual support service in Scotland, the first thing I did was close a language unit for new arrivals. The reasons for this were ideological, linguistic and educational. Ideologically, having a separate unit meant those children were seen as different and were often stigmatised because of their lack of English. Linguistically, all the children in the unit were non-native speakers of English so there were no good models of the English language. Educationally, the children were segregated so they weren't getting access to the full mainstream curriculum alongside their peers.

There is a need to think very carefully about different types of provision. There is 'partial mainstreaming' where a separate unit is used but there is good cooperation and communication between the teachers in the unit and within mainstream classrooms. There is also 'undifferentiated mainstreaming'; in other words, you just immerse the non-native speaking children in the classroom and let them get on with it, this could be seen as submersion education. Basically we throw children into the deep end of the pool and see what happens. A lot of them sink, most struggle, sometimes

you come in with armbands, give them a bit of support and see if they can keep their heads above the water. However, immersing them in the mainstream classroom isn't the answer if you are just going to let them get on with it and hope they are going to learn the language through osmosis without putting proper support strategies in place. The EAL service in Edinburgh has bilingual support assistants. Bilingual Support Assistants provide peripatetic support to schools in the most common minority languages such as Polish, Urdu/Punjabi, Mandarin/Cantonese and Arabic. The principle underpinning this type of work derives from Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency model of bilingual development which argues that any learning, through the first language, of literacy skills and strategies, and of concepts which may contribute to the understanding of the content of texts, will support reading skills development and comprehension in the additional language. The bilingual support assistants support the children in paired reading of school texts in English. They listen to the children reading and they discuss the content of the stories in their first language. They also discuss with the children in their first language any unfamiliar vocabulary, alphabet recognition, and concepts. Findings from this type of work indicate an increased use of the children's first language in school and at home. Evidence also suggests that the use of the first language supports access to the content of reading materials and contributes to a greater confidence in using English.

The best place to learn, I believe, is through mainstream education with English-speaking peers as the children will have the motivation to learn the language and to communicate in order to access the curriculum. It is important to provide plenty of listening time, lots of interaction, lots of collaboration and lots of visuals. Be aware too of the 'silent period'. I have had children who talk at me in whatever languages they have in their repertoire from the very beginning, because they are just desperate to communicate. I have had other children who haven't spoken a word for nine months but when they do, it is a perfectly grammatically correct sentence.

To summarise, I have explored the importance of attitudes and values towards children with more than one language; I have discussed the diversity of languages and identities that EAL children may take on; I then looked at theories of multilingual education especially Cummins' dual-iceberg model; challenges of acquiring both social and academic language were explored and then models of support for learning in a multilingual environment.

To end I'd like to point you in the direction of two important documents: the national framework for inclusion (<http://www.frameworkforinclusion.org/>) and Living in Two + Languages (<https://www.education.gov.scot/improvement/modlang5-learning-in-2-plus-languages>) both based on the Scottish context but applicable to other contexts as well. Thank you very much.

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# Creating a plurilingual whole-school environment to support pupils' learning

## Chapter 4

Déirdre Kirwan





# Creating a plurilingual whole-school environment to support pupils' learning

## Chapter 4

Déirdre Kirwan

### Introduction

I am delighted to be here today at this seminar on minority languages, and I'll begin by giving you a brief background to my own career history: I started off teaching in a DEIS<sup>4</sup> school in inner-city Dublin after I graduated from teacher education college. I then moved to the education of children who were hearing impaired, and following that I went to Blanchardstown, an area in West Dublin, as principal of a girls' primary school. I was in that role for a couple of years when the first Bosnian refugee pupils enrolled in the school. This experience of dealing with pupils who were non-native speakers of English proved to be a complete turning point in how we approached language teaching and learning. Having worked with hearing impaired youngsters in the past, I was aware of the importance of language in the learning process. This awareness helped me to appreciate some of the challenges that EAL pupils experience in terms of accessing the curriculum through English, a language that they are in the process of learning. At the same time, EAL pupils have a rich linguistic resource in terms of their respective first languages and I felt it was important that this be explored and used to learners' advantage. In my talk this morning, I will focus on the journey that we made as a school from the arrival of the first Bosnian refugees in the mid-1990s until today.

### Scoil Bhríde (Cailíni)

Scoil Bhríde (Cailíni) is a girls' primary school in Blanchardstown, a western suburb of Dublin, an area into which a very large number of people from abroad moved over the last twenty years. There are approximately 322 pupils on roll. From one native speaker of Bosnian in 1994, the percentage of pupils coming from non-native English-speaking backgrounds has

grown to approximately 80% of the total school population. On the last count there were more than 50 languages in the school in addition to English and Irish. When these minority language children first started coming into Scoil Bhríde (Cailíni) we had a choice; we could have said: *"Look these are your languages, you can speak them at home; that is absolutely fine. But you will have to leave them at the school gate because here, it is about learning English and it is about learning Irish."*

We had that choice, but we didn't take it. When inward migration to Blanchardstown started in the early 1990s, I certainly had huge questions and qualms of conscience about telling anybody not to speak their first language. I couldn't do that. Historically, we can see the legacy of what happened in schools in Ireland in the 19th century when the curriculum was delivered through English; we are now left with the fall-out in relation to the Irish language. I began to think that if we were to impose this kind of situation on people, telling them not to use their home languages, then we would be doing the very same thing to them. A couple of years ago, Dr. John Walsh from NUI Galway wrote about the phenomenon of language loss (Walsh 2011) in the context of the imposition of the English language on Irish-speaking pupils in primary schools in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Within four generations this policy had caused a language shift across the country with the consequent near-eradication of the Irish language.

Mindful of the reality of language loss, in Scoil Bhríde (Cailíni) we identified two overarching educational goals. The first was that all pupils would gain full access to education which meant helping them to become proficient in

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<sup>4</sup>DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2005)

the language of schooling, which in our case was English as it is an English-medium school, with Irish as a curricular language. The second goal was to exploit the linguistic diversity in the school for the benefit of all pupils, both native English speakers and EAL alike. We developed an integrated approach to language education that embraced the language of schooling, English, and the language of the curriculum, Irish. We had also been part of the Modern Languages initiative in primary schools and although this was officially finished in 2011, we continued offering French because we had teachers on our staff who could do this work with 5th and 6th classes. We also brought pupils' home languages into our curriculum delivery. And I can just imagine what some of you are thinking: how did you manage to teach all of those languages? We didn't teach the languages; we couldn't teach them because we didn't know them. It was up to the children to bring those languages in. It was up to us to provide the environment where those languages were valued, were welcome and where children felt secure in using them. We discovered over time that it was actually a blessing in disguise that we didn't know how to teach these languages, because it resulted in a huge increase in learner autonomy on the part of the children. We couldn't have predicted that the children themselves would begin to drive their own learning. They did this with the help of their parents who became involved in their children's education. This also gave the parents from minority communities an opportunity to become involved in the school and in their children's learning in a very valuable way that they may not have previously experienced (Kirwan 2015).

### Primary School Curriculum

One of the underlying principles of the Irish primary school curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999, p. 8), is the importance of being an active agent in your own learning. That active agency is not just about physically doing. It is also about being mentally active; it involves thought processes and cognition. Another very important principle of the curriculum is that the child's existing knowledge and experience form

the basis for learning (ibid.); there is no point in starting anywhere else except where the pupil is currently functioning. Collaborative learning is a further principle underpinning the Irish primary curriculum (ibid., p. 9). And finally, it emphasises the role of parents as the primary educators of their children (ibid., p. 24). Let's have a look at parental involvement. If you have 80% of children in your school who speak 50 different languages between them, and whose first language is not English, it is very important that the parents of these children are brought into all the structures of the school: formal structures such as the Board of Management and Parents' Association, and informal structures in terms of participation in everyday school activities. We discovered the crucial role that parents could play as a resource for learning because they were the only people who could actually assist their children in learning their home languages. Some of the children leaving Sixth Class in Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní) have spoken about this; they said they were really delighted that their parents were involved in their learning over their years in the school. It is a very authentic kind of involvement for parents because they are actually there at the chalk face with their child, and they have a structured way of dealing with their child's education. It is not just something they hear about at a parent-teacher meeting once a year; it is something they are involved in on a daily basis.

### Whole-school approach

If this kind of engagement with parents and with the children's home languages is to be a genuinely whole-school approach, then the entire school community has to become involved. This necessitates formal policies: everyone needs to be aware of what the procedures are in terms of using an integrated approach to language learning and to involving parents in this. The really positive aspect about not knowing the children's home languages is that you are allowing them to become the drivers of their own learning; on the other hand, teachers need the guidance of policies in order to understand how to approach this kind of work. In fact, teachers can continue teaching the way they have always done; they can still deliver

the same programme of teaching but what they are doing is broadening it out; drawing in all the languages of the classroom; creating a supportive, welcoming climate, an environment where children feel secure in making their linguistic contributions. Some people might worry that such an approach could take up a huge amount of time. Yet children learn so much more through the interdependence of languages (Cummins 2000), that by giving time to the first language you are actually allowing the second and subsequent languages to be learned more efficiently and more quickly. English language proficiency will be achieved more efficiently if you pay attention to the plurilingual environment in the school. In our case, the development of a whole-school approach came about organically. As teachers began to invite the children's home languages into their classrooms they themselves began to learn more about language, about language teaching, and about how children learn. The result was a learning environment for everybody and that included parents, children and teachers. Parents became involved in a way that they would not previously have been and it also created a very harmonious environment in the school.

### Involving home languages

I mentioned a key principle of the Irish primary school curriculum as starting with the child's existing knowledge (Government of Ireland 1999, p. 8). David Little has described the child's home language as the default medium of her self-concept, her self-awareness, her consciousness, her discursive thinking and her agency. It is thus the cognitive tool that she cannot help but apply to formal learning, which includes mastering the language of schooling (Little 2014). It is how EAL children have viewed the world up to the day they walked into the school; how they were loved, how they learned to love, how they were supported by their extended family, and how they spoke to their grandparents on the phone or on Skype when they came to Ireland. Look at all of the aspects of a child's life and identity what you are rejecting if you say to that child: *"that language*

*cannot be used in here."* So if you are going to start with a child's existing knowledge – a core principle of the Primary School Curriculum – you cannot get much closer to who the child is, than by means of the language that he or she uses as the primary lens through which to view the world. This is the obvious place to start.

So four principles began to inform our policy. The **first** was that we welcomed the diversity of the pupil population and we acknowledged that each pupil had much to contribute to her own education. **Secondly**, we had an open language policy where there were no restrictions placed on the languages that children used, and we actively created an atmosphere where children felt free to use their own languages. **Thirdly**, we placed a strong emphasis on the development of language awareness, because we believed that having a plurilingual environment is beneficial for all pupils, including monolingual English-speaking children (Kirwan 2014). And **finally**, a strong emphasis was placed upon literacy skills and on the development of oral language. Literacy is a huge support for oral language (Dam, 1995; Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017) and vice versa; oral language will not develop beyond a certain point unless we work to progress literacy and support language that is meaningful for the child.

### Impact on the Irish language

We had questions as to what was going to happen to the Irish language in the midst of this multilingual milieu. In fact what happened was that the status of Irish was raised in the school because indigenous Irish children began to look at and listen to the languages of their peers. They heard their peers saying: *"in my language we say this"* or *"in my language it is called that"* and they then started to wonder: *"what is my language?"* This was a great opportunity for teachers to say: *"well actually you have another language as well and that is Irish and you can use that"*. This allowed the children to see Irish being used as a means of communication rather than simply being learned from a text book. The effect of using Irish as part of school discourse

was very effective, as it is in using a language that we really learn that language. And this is what happened with the Irish language in the school, to the extent that children were coming to the secretary in the morning to buy copies or pencils and they were asking for these items in Irish. The school secretary then enrolled on an internet programme to improve her own Irish so that she could engage with the children in Irish when they asked her questions or delivered messages. There was also a request from the Parents' Association, both Irish parents and immigrant parents, for Irish-language classes for the Parents' Association because they were interested in Irish and wanted to be able to help their children to learn it at school.

#### **Cultivating a secure classroom environment**

We all know how important it is to cultivate a secure and nurturing classroom environment (Humphries 1996; 2004). And this brings us to the question of withdrawing children for language support classes. As language is the conduit through which learning occurs, it is crucial to success in school. We believed that it was important that every child should get language support, including those who spoke a version of the language of schooling. So we used one of our language support teachers for supporting *all* children in junior infants, and this prevented any kind of stigma that might have been attached to taking out certain children. This worked out very well for Irish children because where you had one or two Irish children being brought out in a small group they became the role models for the English language use in that group. Even if these children were not in the top quartile attainment-wise, they got an opportunity to shine when they were the pupils who were leading the discussion. This enhanced their self-confidence, whereas the other children in the group who were not native speakers of English had the opportunity to learn from English-speaking role models. Along with that, the Irish children in those groups had an opportunity to listen to their peers speaking different languages. So it was a win-win situation for both Irish children and the minority language children as well.

#### **Classroom examples**

What do the children gain from being able to use their first languages in their learning? In Junior Infants, for example, children learn how to *count from one to five*. Counting from one to five in one's first language embeds the sequence much more closely in your being so that it is easier to learn and to retain. At the same time, you are also learning the counting sequence in English and in Irish, and no matter what language you say it in, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 is always 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The concept remains the same across languages and the learning is reinforced through enabling practice in all of the child's languages.

Moving onto Senior Infants: the *days of the week* are normally taught at this level in the Irish and English languages. One of the teachers decided to do this in the additional languages of the classroom as well. Children learned to recite the days of the week not only in English and Irish but in Spanish and French, extending to Polish, Russian, Urdu, and Malayalam and so on, as the year went on. With the cooperation of parents, the days of the week were also displayed in written form in the classroom.

In First class things became more elaborate because the children were *writing texts about themselves*, and were incorporating their languages and language identities into these stories. One text was written in class in English and Russian by a Latvian child. Her parents had learned Russian in school and they had been teaching her to write it at home. This child was able to write a multilingual story in class at six years of age. Another child wrote her story in Yoruba, helped at home by her parents. She brought the completed story into school the next day and experienced the pride of reading out her story to the class in her home language.

#### **Concluding comments**

We had examples such as these all through the school, at all age levels. Along with the cognitive benefits to be gained from incorporating all languages into the learning process, is the increase in social cohesion and

engagement, another principle of the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999). I have interviewed children in 5th and 6th class over the years and one of the things I asked them was: “*what does it feel like to have your home language brought into the school?*” And then my second question was: “*how would you feel if your first language wasn't allowed in, if you had to leave it at home?*” The key words that came out of what the children said in relation to leaving their languages at home were: **closed, empty, pretending, rejecting**, and similar negative words. When their home language was allowed in, this is what one girl said: ***It is like when two people speak the same language there is a kind of bond between both of them.***

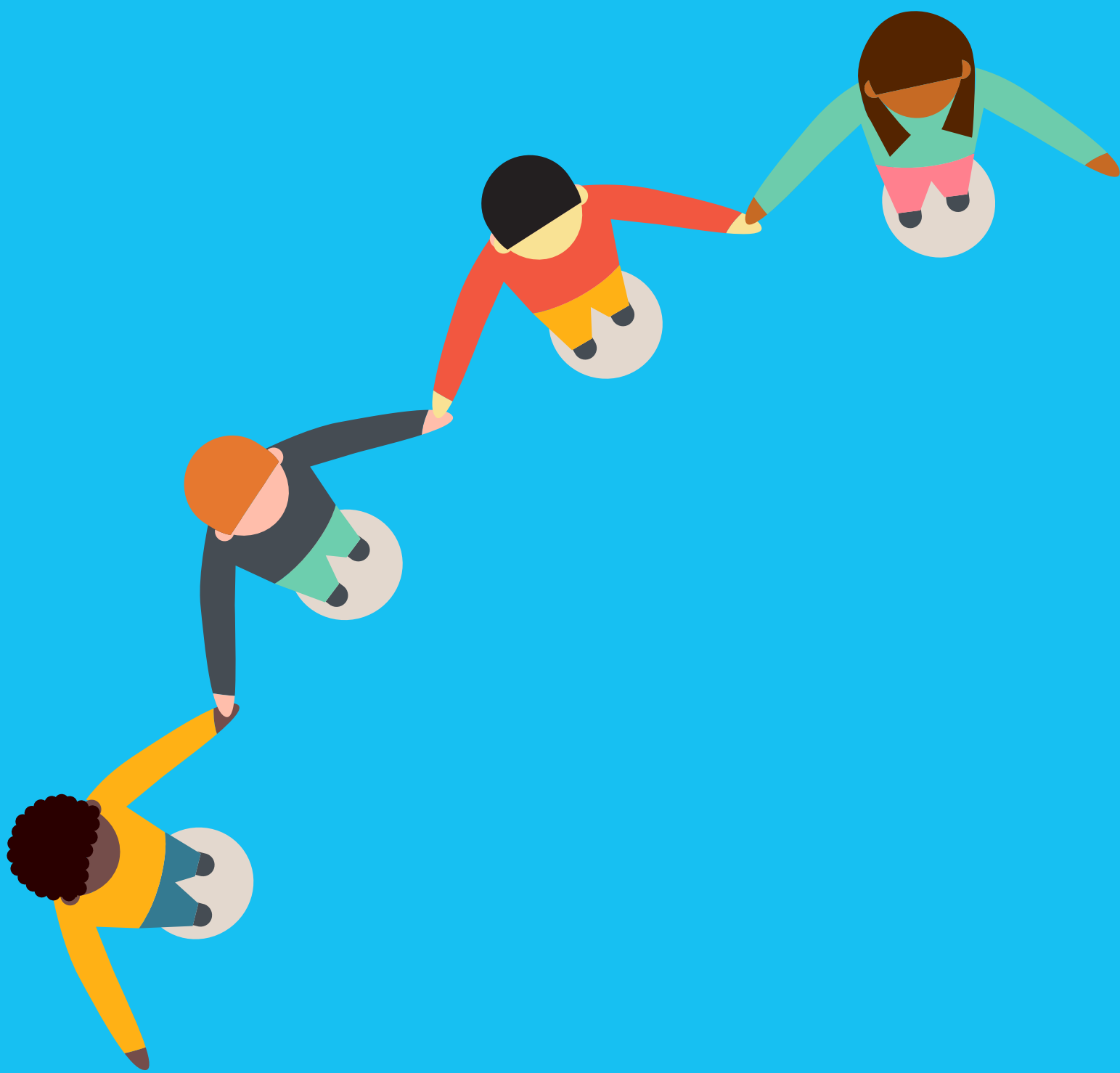
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# Opening potential for EAL learners

## Chapter 5

Jean Conteh



# Opening potential for EAL learners

## Chapter 5

Jean Conteh

### Introduction

I have called my talk “Opening Potential for EAL learners” and in the talk I will be discussing the importance of multilingualism in various ways: its cognitive processes, its definitions, multilingual identities, teachers’ work with multilingual pupils, and current theories related to multilingualism such as translanguaging. I’ll also explore what we mean by language as well as bringing together strands that have emerged in the three previous talks. In particular, Piet was talking about language not just as words and syntax but the power it has in society; whilst Andy talked about language diversity, in particular about diversity within diversity, whilst Deirdre explored learner autonomy and empowerment. That leads into teacher autonomy and teacher empowerment, so that will be discussed too.

### Multilingual world

Multilingualism is normal. We used to think about Western European nation states as monolingual where one language was the national language, but it is no longer the case. We all live in countries which are multilingual; in cities, and increasingly now in rural areas, multilingualism is the normal way to be. England has been a multilingual country for many, many years and these are the most recent detailed figures:

There are about one million children in schools in England, about one in six of the whole population, that fall into the EAL category. There are about 350 different languages represented here, not all in one school of course, but across the board. So 75% of primary and every secondary school in England now have EAL learners. Although we have this huge diversity and numbers of multilingual pupils,

we still actually have a very low proportion of qualified multilingual mainstream teachers. Looking at the 350 different languages, the interesting thing here is that the four languages which I have highlighted (i.e. Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Gujarati) are all South Asian languages and actually the vast majority of children who speak those languages are British. They are not children who have recently arrived from other countries, they are the descendants of people who came to Britain following World War II, in the '50s and later to work in industries; their children were born in Britain and they are British citizens who are multilingual, a point which is sometimes forgotten. So the term EAL learner covers this wide spectrum of language knowledge and experience.

The first point I want to make is that multilingualism is good. Neuroscience researchers have discovered that there is more going on in bilingual brains - they are more active than monolingual brains. So being bilingual boosts your brain power in different ways. For example, bilingual people are much more sensitive to sound and they have much more cognitive sharpness. I listened to a lecture by Ellen Bialystok a couple of years ago who explained images of people's brains to show how bilingual people had greater cognitive strengths. Even when they were suffering from diseases like dementia and so on, they still had this greater cognitive processing. So multilingualism is good news.

### Developing multilingual skills

However, when we refer to education we have got to think about all kinds of other factors. Historical, political and sociocultural factors are very important in mediating success, and Jim Cummins (2001) always reminds us of the

need to consider multilingualism in context. He was the first to come up with the idea of 'the common underlying proficiency'. In his work with children in Canada he found all kinds of evidence to show that children who are French/English bilinguals didn't use French and then switch to English; they used both languages simultaneously, using both in different ways. For example, in his research he would give students texts to read which started in French and then moved into English and often they wouldn't even notice, they would just carry on reading in French, because what they were doing was reading, they weren't thinking necessarily about the specific language. This led to his 'common underlying proficiency' hypothesis where he said that if you know one language it will actually feed your understanding and knowledge of other languages. Those of you who might speak different languages, would you agree that that is what goes on in your head if you are trying to speak in one language, often the other language will be there echoing in the background? To me this is very clear. Cummins also developed the 'linguistic interdependence hypothesis' in relation to literacy; that if you learn to read in one language what you do is then transfer those literacy skills to a new language so you don't have to start again to learn to read in a new language. The third aspect of the interdependence hypothesis is the notion that you need a strong foundation, or 'threshold', in your first language, your home language, in order to go on and learn other languages. Just like if the foundation of your house isn't strong enough then your house won't last; if your first language is weak then learning other languages will be more challenging. So, you need to attain a 'threshold' in both languages in order to reap the benefits of being bilingual and biliterate.

### Defining multilingualism

In Piet's talk he said that being multilingual doesn't mean you are fluent in two languages, it means you can use more than one language to do different things at different times. So, by this definition, I am multilingual, I speak English fluently, I can do a bit of French, I can do a bit of Spanish, I can actually do a bit of Mende which is an African language, but I am certainly not

fluent in those languages. We used to think about bilingualism being like riding a bicycle: you rode along, there was one wheel at the front and one at the back and to keep the bicycle going, everything had to keep moving forward at the same time. Garcia (2009), suggested that multilingualism isn't like a bicycle and a more suitable metaphor might be an all-terrain vehicle. If you have got to go up a rough and rocky road a bicycle isn't going to do you much good, you need an all-terrain vehicle. So, like an all-terrain vehicle, multilingualism gives individuals the ability to use their language resources to negotiate different social contexts and interactions confidently and flexibly.

### Multilingual identity

Generally speaking, schools in England are monolingual and the multilingual situation that Déirdre was talking about in her school in Dublin is rare, though does exist. The following comments come from some of the research I have done with teachers and with children in multilingual classrooms. Shahid is ten, he speaks Punjabi, Urdu and English and he was born in the city of Bradford and English is his main language. He feels proud if the teacher asks him to translate for other children. He would like more languages to be used in his school. The next comments show Shahid is a very forward-thinking young man: "*I might get a wife from Pakistan so it is good if I can learn Punjabi.*" He is also aware of possible tensions in the wider society and says "*when I go down into town sometimes I don't speak Punjabi as loudly as I might like to do because I might get some funny comments from people in the street.*" This comment shows his awareness of his identity as a multilingual individual and a multilingual learner in a monolingual society. Parents said that speaking Punjabi helps their children to keep a link with their grandparents and their extended family back in Pakistan, which is their country of origin. Most of the children haven't been to Pakistan because it is quite expensive but they have phone calls, they have Skype, they have all kinds of connections. One mum said she was really happy that her son's teacher could speak Punjabi as it provided him with an important role model. Remember only 7% of



teachers in England are bilingual which is a very low proportion but those that are, usually see multilingualism as a very positive aspect of their professionalism. It may not be something that is really recognised by the school or the education authorities but it is part of their identity both personally and professionally.

### Bilingual teachers work with EAL pupils

I will now focus on two teachers in particular, Shila and Saiqa. These are two of my former students from Bradford College where I used to work and they both have a very strong ideology and really want to promote bilingualism in their teaching. As part of the complementary classes they run, they organised a workshop for the children and their mothers which was about weaving and it took place in Cartwright Hall in Bradford. The textile industry is an important part of Bradford's history and many people who came from Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s worked in the textile industry in the mills. In this workshop the mothers and their children did some weaving together but also talked about the children's grandparents who had come to Bradford earlier and worked in these mills for the textile industry. The children explored aspects of language through these workshops too, in particular they did some work on vocabulary for family members. In Punjabi there are four different words for cousin but in English only one; this is because it is important in Punjabi to know if the cousin is a boy or a girl and if it is your mum's cousin or your dad's cousin. In Punjabi, the word for aunty if it is your mum's brother's wife would be 'Mavi' but your dad's sister would be 'Pupo' or 'Pupi' and your dad's older brother's wife would be 'Thayee', and so it goes on. In the end this group of children and their mothers understood that there were about 98 words for family members in Punjabi whereas in English we have about eight. So what does that tell you about that community and their knowledge of what is important? Obviously family and extended family is very important to them. The children were fascinated with this and developed the project by bringing into school old photographs of their relatives and explaining who was who.

### Translanguaging

Shahid took this a step further by drawing a wonderful portrait of his uncle. He copied a black and white photograph and explained his drawing technique by saying he used pencil dots to capture the quality of the photo. He explained this technique in writing in both Punjabi and English, a clear example of 'translanguaging' to communicate something which was important to him. This was about Shahid wanting to respect his uncle and show how important his uncle was to him and then to communicate with us the importance of this. Another example of this kind of work is a five-year-old girl who drew a picture of her grandma and wrote, "*I feel special with my 'dadi' (Grandma) because she takes care of me*". She was able to express her meaning and to accomplish something that was very important to her in both languages. Interestingly, although Punjabi is normally written using Urdu script (which looks like Arabic), these children were unable to use the Urdu script so used the Roman script for writing Punjabi. Again an example of translanguaging – this time moving between scripts and languages.

So I would argue that these children are trying to use the languages available to them to do the things they want to do and this happens naturally because the teachers provide the space in their classrooms. The children are not thinking necessarily about language, but about themselves, what they want to do and what they want to communicate. These are clear examples of translanguaging. It is about making meaning using your language resources.

### What is language?

I think we need to think about language differently. I think we are too used to thinking about language as a system; we think about language as words and grammar and semantics and syntax and so on and certainly in England that is how language is packaged in the curriculum. It is all about nouns, verbs, adjectives and although this is important, it is not the full story. We also need to think about

language as social practice. What do we want to do with language and how can we do it? How can we achieve it in the social contexts that we inhabit? Sometimes people think learning goes on only in your head, which of course it does, and neuroscience has shown the cognitive processing effects of bilingualism. But learning is also social. Vygotsky says we learn better in social groups and that talking and learning from each other is an important aspect of learning. Learning is also historical because it is what you bring as a learner to your learning situation. It is also cultural and emotional. It is very much about your feelings and your sense of who you are, your identity. It is kinaesthetic too, about what you do with your body as well as what is going on in your head. It is also interpersonal and I think moral. So we need to think about learning in a much richer way.

### Funds of knowledge

There are new ways of talking about language, such as the idea of translanguaging, which have powerful implications for the future in thinking about pedagogy for children who bring different languages to the classroom. It is not just about what you can do to pass a test but also about how you make meaning, how you transmit information, how you perform your identity as a multilingual learner. Cummins (2011) and others have proposed the idea of 'identity texts' - texts that really speak to the identity of the child and resonate with who they are. Texts like these may be cognitive and linguistic but are also sociological. Another idea that I think is very powerful and has the same kind of resonance as identity texts, is the idea that we all have 'funds of knowledge'. This is knowledge that we have gained in our homes and in our communities with the people that we trust, and we bring that knowledge to our learning. The classroom needs to build on and to strengthen those funds of knowledge that are embodied in our identities as learners and as individuals in a society.

Theory and practice intertwine in the classroom. One day I read an article about translanguaging and realised 'oh this is what the children are doing' and that realisation was powerful in terms of how I viewed the children. Theory does not always come first; practice feeds the theory and vice versa and research is important in promoting that cycle of practice to theory and back again. So I think that as teachers, you need to become researchers of your own pupils, of their own practices and of themselves and to find the spaces where you can open out the potential for your EAL learners.

### Conclusion

To end, I'd like to emphasise Cummins' point about the importance of relationships for teaching and learning. If you respect your learners, your learners will actually respect you and you will have the kinds of relationships that are actually about empowerment for these pupils. And this is where change begins, because we begin to move away from understanding multilingualism and multilingual identity from a deficit perspective and move towards a positive perspective.

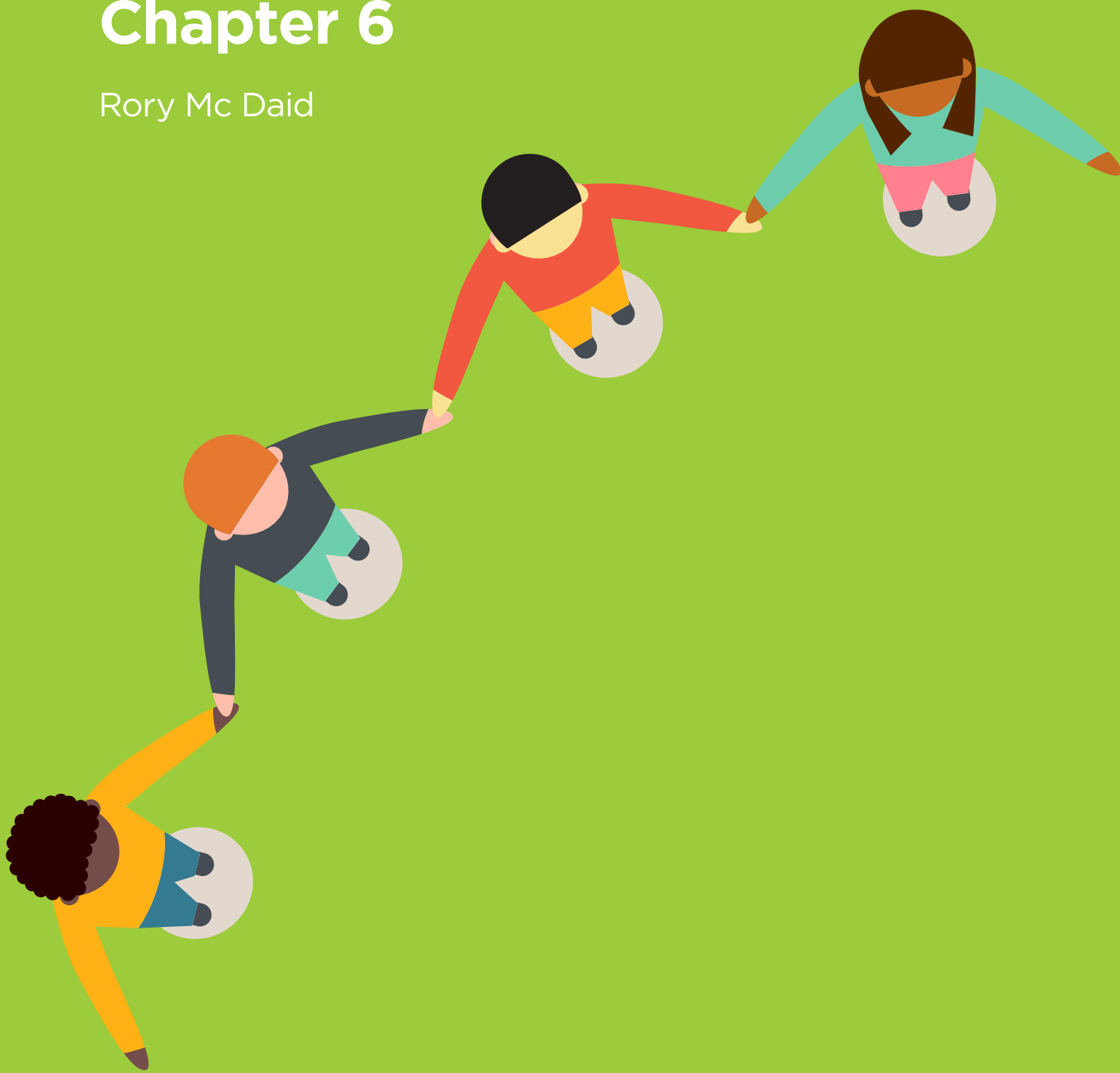
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# Closing the achievement gap for minority language children: A rapporteur's thoughts on continuing the march

## Chapter 6

Rory Mc Daid



# Closing the achievement gap for minority language children: A rapporteur's thoughts on continuing the march

## Chapter 6

Rory Mc Daid

### Introduction

I have had an enviable opportunity to act as rapporteur on the proceedings of today's seminar, and I would like to begin with a little observation of the day and then to point to the future.

In reflecting on today's proceedings, I think it is true to write that we have had a brilliant seminar which has focussed on so many important components necessary to arrest the achievement gap that is characteristic of many immigrant populations across the globe. The centrality of the recognition of the first languages of many of our immigrant children has been brought to the fore, both critically and crucially, and this has helped to frame the seminar in a very powerful way. Such recognition is a vital **pedagogical** activity, and all four speakers have identified the key contribution this makes to learners and oftentimes to their communities. It is, however, also a really important **political** activity, both in terms of affirming the value of linguistic and ethnic diversity in our schools and in broader society, and in challenging the negative narratives that promote a mono-lingual, assimilationist discourse that lowers the creative and caring trajectory of both individual human, and collective potential.

It is important at this point, to remember the significant amount of work that goes into the creation of a day such as today. Significant credit has to be paid to Dr Barbara Skinner and Dr Barbara O'Toole, for the planning and organisation of the seminars. They have succeeded in pulling together a variety of perspectives, each providing rich food for thought, and each of which complements well the other three contributions. They have also worked well to draw large crowds

to both seminars in the series, both here in Marino Institute of Education, and in the Ulster University, Coleraine. It is also important, at this juncture, to recognise the support of SCoTENS in affording both coordinators the opportunity to develop these seminars. SCoTENS continues to offer generous encouragement to facilitate really important cross-border initiatives. The extensive repertoire of SCoTENS-funded projects, (see, for example, SCoTENS, 2012; Jerome and Lalor, 2016) is something that those of us involved in teacher education, both north and south, can rightly be proud of. Finally, by way of acknowledgments of those who made today so successful, it is key to identify the inspirational interventions from the floor. The organisation of the seminar, with a focus on round-table discussions has helped to stimulate these contributions and is an element which can and ought to be considered as key to the structure of similar seminars in the future.

From the pedagogical point of view, this seminar has worked really well to highlight the central importance of recognition of children's first language as a key factor in equalising achievement rates across our education system. This has been woven beautifully through and across each of the contributions, doing justice to this often ignored element of powerful language learning for migrant children. We have also had thought-provoking and conscience-pricking interventions across a whole host of other pedagogical areas. Some of the most important of these include questioning the models of language support available for children learning languages as additional languages within education frameworks. We have been encouraged to reflect, for example, on the value of team teaching and have been pushed to examine how we can

best organise this in our schools. We have gotten into the deeper nuances of exploring other specific strategies for teaching English as an Additional Language, at all areas of the school system, paying particular attention to the use of a withdrawal model rather than that of in-class support. We have also wondered on the usefulness of immersion classes, and their appropriateness at all, or for students of particular ages or experiences.

Of the numerous other issues examined, one, the delivery of language support within a General Allocation Model (GAM) (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2012), is of particular relevance to Irish primary and post-primary teachers at present. Although this model of support has been revised for the school year 2017-2018 (DES, 2017), it is important to note that it was a policy decision replete with a concoction of moral, political, practical and theoretical conundrums. Competition for resources created tensions both within and across schools staff, and within the broader school community. This has a longevity which will long outlive the GAM model. While EAL teacher allocation for schools with high concentrations of pupils that require language support has now been separated from SEN provision, the continued co-location of low-level EAL teaching apportionment within SEN provision problematically conflates these two disparate issues. Somewhat linked to this issue, is the perennial thorn of overall models of assessment appropriate for minority language children, and specifically, the assessment of children for suspected learning difficulties or other Special Educational Needs (SEN). From the floor we were also encouraged to think about the manner in which we as educators engage in deep and meaningful communication with parents and/or caregivers for our minority ethnic and minority language children. In this context we explored an absence of translation and interpretation services and the impact this has on relationships with parents and the link between that and children's rates of achievement. One final, yet really important area for examination here today has been the issue of critical leadership in multilingual and multi-ethnic schools. In so many of the studies of good practice that were highlighted by our

presenters or from the floor, the presence of leaders who could guide projects which challenge the status quo in exciting and sustainable ways, was absolutely key. This, for me, was a particularly fruitful element of the discussion. With the explosion in focus on leadership courses at master's level, I am left wondering about the importance of prioritising this concern on those courses.

In thinking about my own response to some of the key issues and challenges presented here today, I began to think through the lens of climate. More specifically, I want to fracture this lens into three constituent and complementary fragments: Global climate, Linguistic climate and School climate.

### **Global climate**

The primary fragment of climate worthy of consideration when thinking about the aim of this seminar, relates to the global context within which we are currently situated. On a broad level it is vital, in the first instance, to reflect on the globalisation project(s), with its/their accompanying intensification of links and flows between discrete national entities and facilitation of economic liberalisation through privatisation, deregulation and reduced public spending (Nederveen Pieterse, 2015; Beck, 2005; McLaren, 2005). Globalisation drives migration. This is self-evident in the context of the mass movement of workers across borders as they follow potential employment, precarious and all as that employment may well be (Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Deregulation plays an important role in spurring environmental catastrophes, and this role will significantly increase into the future (Anand, 2004). As a project propped up by a concern with maintaining and enhancing consumption (Ritzer, 2010), the feeding of that consumption through exploitation of natural resources and the movement of those resources around the planet plays another key role in environmental degradation (Stiglitz, 2002) and human suffering (Bauman, 2004). Environmental factors will play a heightened role in driving mass migration in the near future (Black et al, 2011). Within this broader context, we must also reflect on the framing of contemporary migration issues. We consider general anti-migrant discourse, particularly,

though not in any way limited to the national level, and a more refined, good versus bad migrant choosing (Kitching, 2014; Kitching, 2011), discourse facilitated through immigration control. The current articulation of this through Brexit, Trump and Le Pen to name but three, provide us with a clear insight into the noxious and potentially highly inflammable localised politicisation of migrant and refugee issues (Taylor, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Wolfreys, 2018; Lentin, 2004). This provides an important contextual backdrop against which we might consider Andy's reference to the negative discourse in the newspaper article which problematized increased diversity and the presence of migrant children resulting in reduced teaching time for majority language children. It is important, therefore, to appreciate that we cannot be so myopic as to think that teachers cannot be racist and that schools as institutions are racist-free zones (Kitching, 2014; Kitching, 2010; Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Bryan, 2009). Indeed, abundant theoretical and empirical literature awakens us to the institutionally racist frameworks within which we educate and the impact of those frameworks on our own attitudes and behaviours. I think this is particularly important for us to bear in mind as we reflect on the attitudes of certain teachers in Piet's work with regard to the Turkish and Arabic languages.

### Linguistic climate

Language learning and language policy is highly political (Blackledge, 2006; Cummins, 2001). We can examine this in the context of Irish history with regard to the use of English language in our primary school system from 1831 onwards and concomitantly the manner in which the school system was used to try to resuscitate the Irish language in post-independent Ireland (Walsh, 2012; Kelly, 2002). This is a story that is not unique to Ireland; rather it is a history repeated across the globe. Language choice regarding Spanish language teaching in the United States (Galindo and Vigil, 2004), the English-only movement (Crawford, 2000) and the linguistic imperialism of a global English movement (Phillipson, 2009) are some of the numerous relevant examples here. Furthermore, it is important to understand

that we cannot separate language learning from racism and we can helpfully read about this through the literature on linguistic racism and/or linguisticism (Skutnabb-Kangas, and Phillipson, 2017). We have known for decades that opposition to first language maintenance is often extensive and vitriolic (Herriman and Burnaby, 1996), with language often acting as a proxy for ethnicity (Walsh and Mc Daid, 2018).

### School climate

Schools are busy places and are becoming increasingly busier. As we hear important and inspirational clarion calls from each of our participants today, how do we return to our schools and maintain that enthusiasm in the context of, for example, "Croke Park hours",<sup>5</sup> extended expectations regarding supervision and substitution, and other such changes to teachers' working weeks? Where does a commitment to elevating minority language learners' achievement become positioned in the context of the observations from the floor regarding high, and increasingly higher, stakes teaching and assessment in numeracy and literacy, with often attendant shrinkage of curricular width (Ó Breacháin and O'Toole, 2013)? What does this emphasis on English language literacy tell us about which achievement gap we wish to close and that which is prioritised for us by legislators and national policymakers? Furthermore, in the Irish context, it is vital to reflect on these developments in the context of Déirdre's work on the benefit of multilingualism in helping the children in her former school to close, or at least lessen, the achievement gap in learning the Irish language. These are not insignificant areas of worry and tension for practising teachers and need to be borne in mind, for it is through these tensions that the promise inherent in many of today's presentations will be mediated and refracted into our children's learning experiences.

### Looking Forward

Much of what has been identified today points to the absence of cohesive support systems for schools, teachers and other educators of learners of English as an Additional Language. The invaluable support provided by the now

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<sup>5</sup>The "Croke Park hours" refers to the additional time of one hour per week that has been required of all teachers in the ROI as part of a Public Service Agreement in 2011.

closed English Language Support Teachers' Association [ELSTA], is now sorely lacking from our educational landscape. The Trojan voluntary effort which it took to maintain ELSTA, particularly in recessionary Ireland wherein emphasis on educational support for all children, but quite explicitly for minority language children, experienced a dreadful decline, is something that should be borne in mind as we think about once more prioritising the achievement of those learning English as an Additional Language in our primary and post-primary schools. In recessionary Ireland, teachers and schools who were subjected to a barrage of changes to workloads coupled with reductions to pay, became swamped with competing concerns and it is true that the focus on minority language children was not as clear as it had been previously. While the deleterious impact of budgetary decisions continue to be experienced across wide sections of Irish society, it is possible that teachers can once again prioritise the achievement of these minority language children. In the absence of appropriate state or local structures, the best way of achieving this will be through the development of various forms of Communities of Practice. These communities will help teachers and others in schools connect to something larger, allowing them to look outside of the class and school. Jean has identified the importance of teachers investigating their own practice. Central to this development might be the identification of perennial problems, many of which have been extrapolated in this seminar, and then following up with coordinated research projects culminating in evidence-based actions, to the benefit of all members of the school community.

Andy referred to diversity within diversity and this is really important to consider in the context of the wide variety of different schools and other education institutions we are drawn from here today. While there are global principles, and really insightful practices, we do have to mould these to fit into our own teaching and learning environments. These environments are not static, rather they are both dynamic and fluid, spurred, for example,

by the sudden arrival or departure of children from our schools. Local responses, building on what schools already do in these instances are really the only way forward. To this end, there might be three points of action for such a community of practice: Whole community education; provision of Continuing Professional Development and broader political work.

### **Whole education community**

Teachers are very well placed to activate connections across a variety of educational boundaries in a community. These may range from early education, through primary and post-primary and extending out to community-based education initiatives, in particular for our purposes, complementary language schools and places of worship. In certain schools this work could be undertaken in conjunction with the designated Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCL) who in many cases would be the person on staff most accurately positioned to act in the nexus between these various community subsets. Additionally, there may exist a possibility of tapping into local community resources such as the North West Inner City Network (NWICN) in Dublin's north inner city. For those schools who lie outside of the DEIS categorisation, it may mean individual teachers taking a lead in fostering links across the aforementioned boundaries. It would be particularly exciting to see schools leading the way in forging synergies across these sectors with the ultimate aim of addressing the achievement gaps among minority language and minority ethnic children. One really good example of this is a project which I was involved with in pre-recessionary Dublin, the Schools Cultural Mediation Project (SCMP), which provided translation, interpretation and cultural mediation resources for the schools in Dublin 7 Schools Completion Programme. A highly positive external evaluation of this project (Murray, 2008) pointed to the transformative impact the project had on children, parents and teachers alike within the schools who availed of the services provided. These were the services which were required at that particular point in time in that location but of course these needs will be dictated by the local context.

### Promoting and demanding CPD

In speaking with the organisers of today's seminar, I was made very aware of the significant number of people who expressed interest in attending but were left disappointed as there were no spaces available. There were a lot of upset teachers and other educators who were hungry to learn about the topic core to the seminar. In addition to that, given the energy in the room and the palpable enthusiasm for more learning, in a variety of different areas related to closing the achievement gap, I think it quite obvious that there exists a very real need for further Continuing Professional Development in the broad area of teaching and learning for minority ethnic and minority language children. I think that all of us who work in this field at third level, most especially those of us in Lóchrann, our Intercultural Education centre here in MIE, need to hear that message clearly and respond appropriately. The provision of CPD utilising a variety of platforms and targeting a diverse yet complementary range of topics is a challenge for us to rise to. This will be aided, of course, by the possibility of drawing on the practitioner expertise which lies, quite clearly, within this room, and in many other classrooms around the country. While we can develop these points for CPD, I think we do need the help of practising teachers to guide us as to what is important for their own learning. A dialogue in this regard would be particularly helpful so that teachers would contact us with ideas for conferences, seminars and shorter learning events.

### Broader political work

All teaching is political, more so for what we decide to silence through our curriculum as for what we decide to accentuate. I am reminded in this regard of the observations of the aforementioned Jim Cummins when he was told that his dual language identity text stuff was really interesting but we don't have time to teach it and where does it fit into our curriculum. His response was unequivocal, if this does not fit into the curriculum, then why not? Is that not the problem? We should now consider adding to this, interrogation of the recession, critical examinations of racism and all other forms of discrimination and, I

think particularly importantly, critical media studies. Such political work is vital to enable our children to understand and respond to the world which they currently inhabit. In a sense, then, we engage in broader political work when we make our curriculum fit for purpose. Thus, there is a need to push today's conversation into some other corridors of power and decision-making, for example within the DES, including the Inspectorate, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), teacher unions, and management bodies. This will be a key action to prioritise the achievement of minority ethnic and minority language children in our schools. School communities may also examine the need to get involved in anti-racism and anti-deportation movements and other critical social movements. Solidarity will prove to be the key to success.

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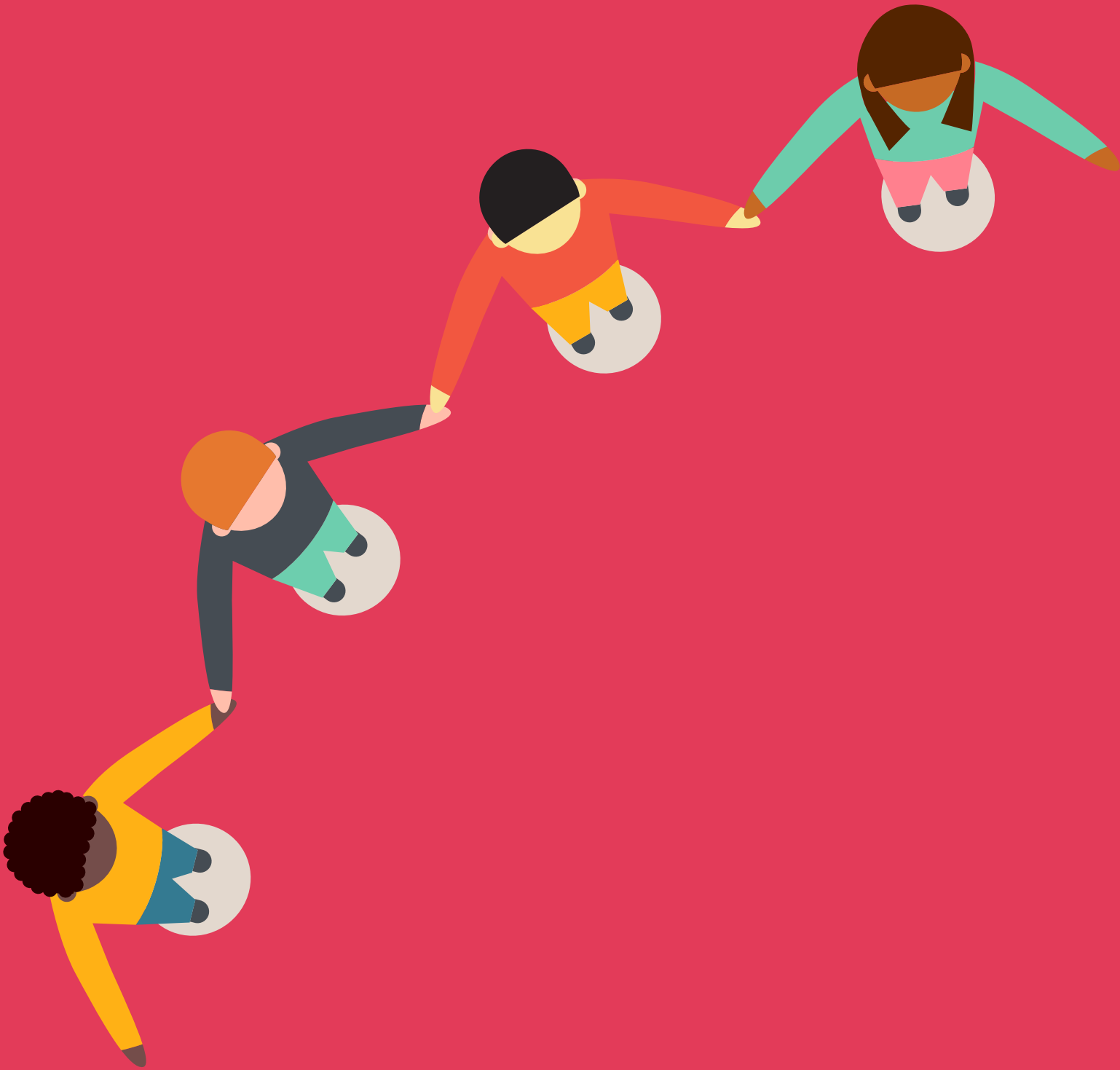
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# Author Biographies



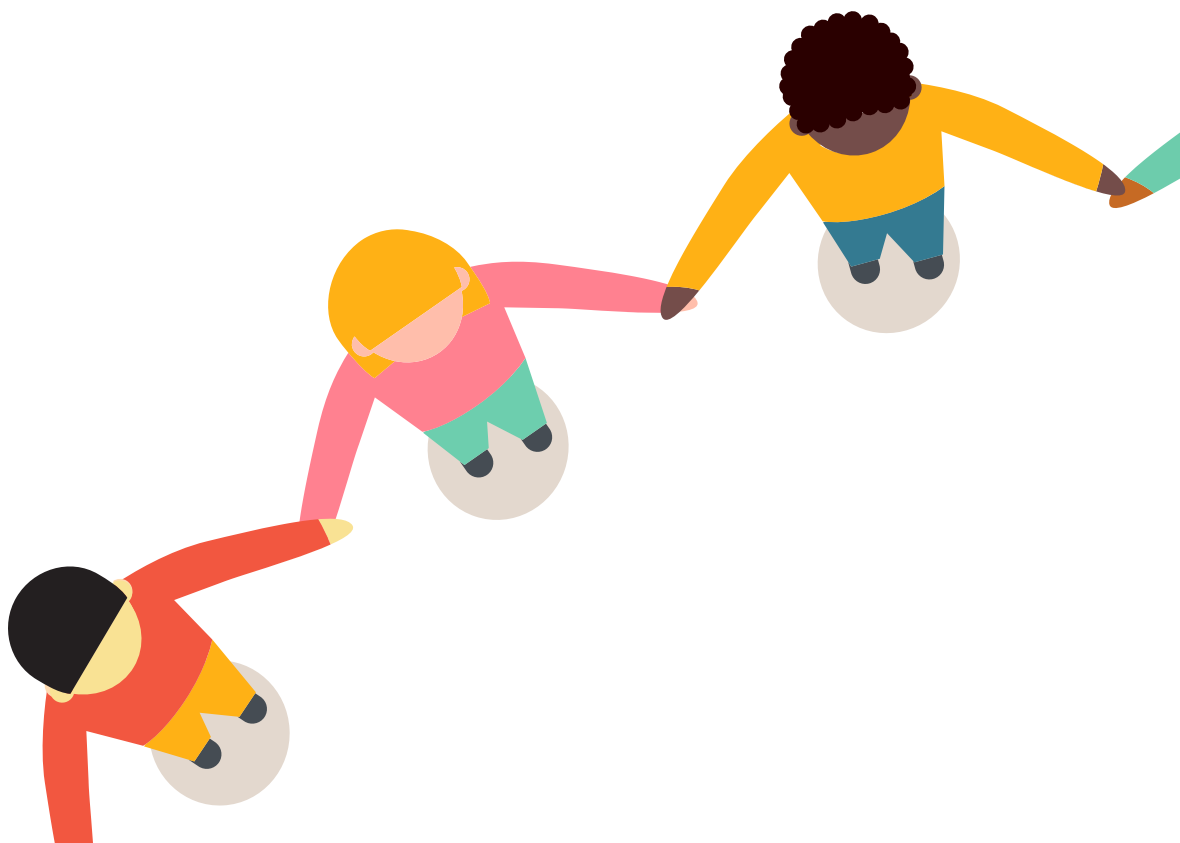
**Jean Conteh**, a senior lecturer in primary education, has worked in multilingual contexts her whole career, first as a primary teacher and teacher educator in different countries and then as an academic at the University of York and Leeds University. Through this she has gained considerable experience in the growing field of English as an Additional Language (EAL). This experience continues to fuel her interest in the roles of language and culture in the processes of learning, particularly in multilingual settings. She has carried out research with successful bilingual learners at KS2 in Bradford and since 2003, has worked with a group of qualified primary teachers who run bilingual complementary classes where they support children's bilingual learning in order to enhance their achievements in mainstream school. She has also developed an MA in EAL and Education, designed for teachers and other professionals working in multilingual contexts.

**Andrew Hancock** is from Edinburgh University and has a background in teaching in multilingual primary schools in London, working in a secondary school in Zimbabwe, as a peripatetic support teacher to bilingual and Traveller pupils in primary and secondary schools across Scotland. Prior to becoming a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University

of Edinburgh he worked as Manager of the Bilingual Support Service in North Lanarkshire. Andy's research interests include English as an additional language (EAL), multilingual literacy practices, Chinese children's experiences of biliteracy learning, bilingualism and social justice and student teachers' understandings of linguistically diverse primary school classrooms.

**Déirdre Kirwan** is the former principal of Scoil Bhríde in Blanchardstown in Dublin, where 80% of the school's enrolment consists of pupils from more than 50 cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In 2008 Déirdre received the European Ambassador for Languages award for promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in the school. Déirdre has presented papers on the topic of multilingual education at national and international conferences, and she has delivered courses to teachers at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Déirdre is strongly committed to promoting plurilingualism in schools. She is currently working with the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) on a think tank exploring issues with regard to early language learning.

**Rory Mc Daid** is a lecturer in Sociology of Education and Research Methods in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. He is co-ordinator



of the Migrant Teacher Project which enables migrant teachers secure employment in Irish public primary and post-primary schools. He is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Cultures, Academic Values and Education research centre in the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin. Current research interests include the experiences of migrant teachers seeking work in Ireland and educating for refugee and asylum seeking children and young people.

**Barbara O'Toole** is a senior lecturer in education at Marino Institute of Education in Dublin, where she lectures in intercultural education and development (global) education. She has been a director of the Master in Education Studies (Intercultural Education) at MIE since 2012, and lectures on MES modules on English as an additional language and on religious diversity. She is a coordinator of the research module on the Professional Master of Education (Primary). Current research interests include language education (EAL), teacher education, and postcolonial perspectives on global citizenship education.

**Barbara Skinner** is a senior lecturer in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the School of Education at Ulster University in Coleraine. Her work

explores issues concerning language teacher education, higher education pedagogy and intercultural competence. Projects have included the EAL training needs of initial teacher trainees in Northern Ireland, cross cultural partnerships for international and home students; cultural diversity in primary schools through international playground games; embedding the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language proficiency in online language teaching materials and the assessment of non-native speaking student teachers' practicum. She is currently working on an Administrative Data Research Network project to explore socio demographic and in particular educational data on ethnic minority children in Northern Ireland.

**Piet Van Avermaet** is Head of the Centre for Diversity and Learning, at the Linguistics Department of Ghent University. He teaches 'multicultural studies', 'multilingualism in education' and 'language policy'. His expertise and research interests cover topics related to multilingualism in education, social inequality in education, language policy and practice in contexts of (social) inclusion, language assessment, diversity and inclusion, integration and participation, discrimination in education, migration.

