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Multilingual tasks as a springboard for transversal practice: teachers' decisions and dilemmas in a *Functional Multilingual Learning* approach

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ABSTRACT

Functional Multilingual Learning (*FML*) aims to leverage pupils' full language repertoire in a strategic and transversal way across the curriculum in order to enhance access to conceptual understanding and improve skills in the language of schooling. This linguistic-ethnographic study explores the pedagogical decisions of four teachers in a French–speaking primary school in Brussels, Belgium as they create 'meaningful multilingual tasks' for their linguistically diverse classrooms. Findings indicate that tasks serving symbolic and linguistic functions were the easiest for teachers to conceptualise, and that class-level learning objectives often took precedence over individual objectives. Multilingual scaffolding only occurred in classrooms already functioning extensively within a socio-constructivist paradigm and needed to be supported by a free classroom language policy to be the most effective. Whole-class tasks generated a new sense of linguistic capital but entailed a reframing of the notion of inclusion as they sometimes generated feelings of linguistic insecurity or resulted in limited participation.

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Functional Multilingual Learning; plurilingualism; language awareness; teachers; innovative pedagogy; Belgium

Introduction

Considerable research over recent decades has pointed to the benefits of implementing inclusive plurilingual pedagogies which systematically encourage and enable pupils to draw from their full language repertoire and to use it as didactic capital (Auger 2007; Duarte 2020; Sierens and Van Avermaet 2014). An *inclusive* approach maximises learning for bilingual students and entails moving away from assimilative, monolingual instructional assumptions and practices. It also goes beyond *supportive* pedagogies which, whilst functioning interculturally, still remain monolingual and mono-literate, often 'celebrating' home languages without necessarily positioning them as individual and collective tools for learning (Auger 2007; Chumak Horbatsch 2011).

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This 'multilingual turn' in educational theory and classroom practice seeks to generate 'new configurations of language practices and education' which challenge mainstream values and ideologies (García and Wei 2014, 3). Yet this ambition belies a critical tension between the 'imagined' potential of the multilingual classroom and its actualisation in specific linguistic and sociocultural spaces. In French-speaking Belgium, whilst the education authorities do promote the valorisation of plurilingualism in the school curriculum (Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles 2014, 22), transversal plurilingual practice remains at the fringes of mainstream teaching. Official guidance notes that the skills and knowledge embedded in a pupil's plurilingual repertoire can constitute 'a veritable springboard for learning' (Ibid 8), yet there is widespread support for the 'bain linguistique' (a monolingual immersion 'language bath') for pupils from immigrant backgrounds. Those mainstream classroom teachers who do seek to go beyond a monolingual, immersion approach enter complex territory in which they are required to pushback against these longstanding ideologies of immersion whilst at the same time develop innovative classroom practice to reframe the linguistic space of their classroom.

This study seeks to understand the decisions and dilemmas of four such teachers in a French-speaking primary school in Brussels, Belgium. It explores their design of 'meaningful multilingual tasks' in a *Functional Multilingual Learning* approach and offers an emic perspective of their evolving vision and operationalisation of home languages as didactic resources.

Literature review

Home languages as resources for learning

Recent years have seen the development of multilingual pedagogical approaches for the mainstream primary classroom. All aim to valorise pupils' linguistic repertoires, yet the conceptualisations of how home languages can function as didactic capital vary considerably. In 'language awareness' approaches (e.g., *Eveil Aux Langues* (de Pietro and Matthey 2001)) languages and dialects are positioned as the object of study; lessons focus on a pre-defined selection of languages and aim to develop metalinguistic awareness and a general appreciation of linguistic diversity. In 2021, the education authorities for French-speaking Belgium are reintroducing their own programme, providing teachers with detailed resources to engage in linguistic comparison in standalone lessons. More syncretic, transversal approaches such as the *Literacy Expertise Framework* (Cummins, Early, and Stille 2011) and *Linguistically Appropriate Practice* (Chumak Horbatsch 2011) take their start point from the language repertoires present in the classroom and the literacy learning needs of dual-language learners. They advocate for opportunities for pupils to move between their languages in terms of both input (e.g., researching a project in any language) and output (e.g., the production of dual language '*identity texts*' (Cummins, Early, and Stille 2011)). In contrast to 'language awareness' approaches, they seek to maximise engagement with learning across the whole curriculum and endeavour to balance the local realities of 'named' languages as social normativities (Spotti and Kroon 2015) alongside the recognition of the multiplicity of languages, dialects and registers which are activated in classroom learning.

This study is based on '*Functional Multilingual Learning*' *(FML)* (Sierens and Van Avermaet 2014), an approach conceived for the highly linguistically diverse mainstream classroom, where the teacher does not speak the home languages of their pupils. This form of pedagogical translanguaging aims to leverage pupils' full linguistic repertoire in a strategic, integrated and transversal way across the curriculum. It entails a recognition of heteroglossic, translanguaging practices as natural and valid tools for meaning making, and actively enables peer interaction in additional languages. In *FML*, plurilingual practice oscillates on a continuum between the acknowledgement of each pupil's linguistic repertoire at one end of the scale and the more powerful exploitation of that repertoire in the service of learning at the other (see Duarte and Günther-van der Meij 2018). Although language awareness is an important dimension, this perspective encompasses a broader range of domains, whereby the teacher has the knowledge and skills to construct a powerful learning environment. Pupils' home languages are conceived as 'mediating, facilitating tools' and teaching aims to encourage self-regulated learning which traverses heteroglossic horizontal language practices in order to approach the monolingual vertical language requirements of much formal schooling (Heugh 2018). In short, the development of pupils' L1 is not a pedagogical objective in itself, but rather its use in L2-settings is intended to serve as a cognitive and metacognitive tool, as a strategic organiser and as a scaffold for linguistic-cognitive development.

In practice, instruction based on such a transversal paradigm conceives of learning as pupil-directed, yet teacher mediated and is based on a dual recognition of the singularity of individual students who are learning within a classroom characterised by multiple languages and language practices. In order to navigate the translanguaging 'corriente' or undercurrent (García and Kleyn 2016), a teacher first needs to take up a 'plurilingual stance' (Ollerhead, Choi, and French 2018) i.e., beliefs and ideological understandings which consider pupils' language repertoires from the perspective of the pupils themselves (García and Kleyn 2016) and critically engage with questions of bilingualism and learning, and how these emerge as constructs of power in the education system. This implies a move away from seeing language as structure i.e., a fixed set of linguistic rules that is learned independent of its use, but to considering it from a perspective of 'languaging' i.e. language as social practice, a *process* rather than an object. It therefore entails capitalising on the 'natural' translanguaging practices (Williams 2012) which spontaneously occur in classroom interaction in order to understand and adapt to how meaning-making and learning are taking place. Finally, teachers also need to engage in strategic instructional design which plans for the meaningful use of home languages, particularly as a scaffold for learning, and underpinned by interactional opportunities that enable pupils to collaborate and co-operate using their full linguistic repertoire (García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2016; Probyn 2015; Sierens and Van Avermaet 2014).

Overall, this situates teachers as the 'arbitrators of pedagogy' (Ascenzi-Moreno 2017, 282), controlling the 'who, when, where and how of student learning' (Barrett-Tatum and Dooley 2015, 280). Their decisions about the use of home languages in classroom discourse thereby inherently constitute acts of positioning (Martin-Beltrán 2010; Palmer and Martínez 2013) and of language policy (Varghese 2008).

The implementation of plurilingual practice in the mainstream classroom

In many contexts across the world, mainstream classroom teachers lack the training necessary to translate multilingual policies into practice (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll 2005; Hooijer and Fourie 2009; Mehmedbegovic 2008) and often have inadequate knowledge about L2 acquisition (Auger 2013). This leads to misconceptions, creating fertile ground for generalised 'common sense' perceptions around bilingualism, in particular the notion that use of the home language in school will have a negative impact on acquisition of the language of instruction (e.g. Ağırdağ, Jordens, and Van Houtte 2014; Pulinx, Van Avermaet, and Agirdag 2017). In French-speaking Belgium, the languages of immigration are often regarded as a barrier to school learning and social cohesion as a whole, and linguistic submersion is widely accepted as the most effective means to ensure academic success (Ervyn 2012; Manço and Crutzen 2003). Over half of the teacher and head-teacher respondents to the 'Diversity Barometer 2018' (Géraldine, Jacobs, and Alarcon-Henriquez 2018) considered that pupils from an immigration background should *only* use French when they were in school. This 'monolingual' mindset (Gogolin 2013) is evident in literature around the support of emergent bilinguals which is often framed at 'solving' their language problem i.e., their lack of mastery of the language of schooling and does little to recognise other language skills.

The local language ecology also contributes to the framing of what constitutes 'legitimate' language in any given school community, privileging 'national' languages or those inherited from the colonial era over indigenous languages or those brought by recent and historical immigration. This underpins powerful language ideologies which, according to McKinney (2001), can result in 'asymmetric relations of knowing', embedded in power relations which determine the conditions and production of knowledge in a particular context.

Some scholars conclude that attitudes and beliefs are shaped, and can be shifted, by classroom experience (Gleeson and Davison 2016; Lourenço, Andrade, and Sá 2018; Palmer and Martínez 2013). Yet others conclude that personal values and attitudes are more influential in determining whether and how teachers implement plurilingual approaches (Mehmedbegovic 2008; Moore and Gajo 2009). Other contributing factors include: the teachers' own experiences learning languages and their confidence in their own linguistic skills (Bailey and Marsden 2017; Lucas and Grinberg 2008); an entrenched identity as a monolingual (Lourenço, Andrade, and Sá 2018); and a fear of immigration and difference (Mehmedbegovic 2008). In some contexts, teachers report finding it difficult to give equitable treatment to all of the languages present in their classroom (Jobo 2013), whilst others are concerned about the challenge of addressing diversity without essentialising it (Conteh 2012). These positions also reflect and refract broader questions of personal and professional identity, including a teacher's own ethnolinguistic heritage (Higgins and Ponte 2017).

The teacher's capacity to innovate plays a critical role (Lourenço, Andrade, and Sá 2018), alongside their perception of their ability (or otherwise) to develop the curriculum (Flores and Day 2006). Research in France indicates that plurilingually 'engaged' teachers tend to be reflexive by nature and demonstrate an "outcome-oriented" approach, whereby their practice is firmly situated in socio-constructivist paradigms (Audras and Leclaire 2013; Auger and Kervran 2013). In these studies, successful practice tended to emanate from teachers who conceived of learning as non-linear and who used home languages to scaffold learning, whereas more reluctant participants often positioned the teacher as expert and perceived learning as an act of the transmission of knowledge (see De Korne 2012). This indirectly echoes Strobbe et al. (2017) conclusions that openings for plurilingually tolerant practices were more likely when teacher felt that they retained control of the learning process.

The literature tends to exhort the ‘transformative’ potential of plurilingual approaches but the impact of contextual and practical factors cannot be underestimated in terms of whether and how teachers will implement them. Where there *is* policy guidance, it can be somewhat idealistic and abstract, often lacking in concrete exemplifications (O’ Rourke 2011). Aside from any ideological positions on the legitimacy of home languages in school, it may not be immediately clear to a teacher how a plurilingual approach might be utilised to address the core learning objectives, particularly when they do not speak the pupils’ additional languages. Where mainstream teachers in Belgium have engaged in transversal plurilingual practice, the shift has been found to be somewhat hesitant, with multilingual tasks a ‘tough challenge’ and teachers tending to limit the pedagogical spaces available for multilingual interaction both in time and scope (Sierens and Ramaut 2018).

Methodology

Study design

This paper arises from a nine-month long study carried out in 2018 within a linguistic ethnographic framework (Copland and Creese 2015). It followed a design-based approach whereby four teacher participants created their own interventions but were supported by training and on-going discussions with the researcher and their peers (Anderson and Shattuck 2012).

At the beginning of the study, the teachers were interviewed in order to understand their attitudes and beliefs around home languages in education and were given a five-hour training course by the principal researcher about FML and recent research on plurilingual education. They were provided with a guide containing examples of open, adaptable activities drawn from a variety of international sources including *Comparons Nos Langues* (Auger, Balois, and Terrades 2005), *Translanguaging as Pedagogy* (Celic and Seltzer 2013), *Activities to Support Multilingualism in School* (Społeczna Akademia 2015) and *Identity Texts* (Cummins and Early 2011; Prasad 2015). The teachers were asked to construct their own ‘meaningful multilingual tasks’ which valorised pupils’ home languages and embedded them as tools for learning.

Over a period of seven months, a total of twenty-three lessons of around one hour were observed across the four classes (and also filmed in two of them). Each lesson was followed by a semi-structured reflective interview and/or written feedback exploring the objectives, learning, emotions, as well as social and home-school connections. The teachers completed a final written evaluation and participated in a semi-structured group interview. All data collection was conducted in French and translations in this paper are our own. During this time, the principal researcher spent around two days a week in the school, taking on the role of participant-observer (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999) for example, working with groups of pupils or accompanying trips. This served to deepen her understanding of the didactic norms in each class, as well as the pupils’ language and participation practices.

During the study, emergent themes and patterns were explored through analytical memos, drawn from field and observation notes, which then fed back into the data collection tools, in particular the final evaluation. This allowed us to interactively reframe and refocus our analytical gaze and to verify the teachers’ perspectives against emerging conclusions. Event maps (Green and Castanheira 2012) were used to identify, describe and analyse patterns of actions and moves, both on the part of the teachers and the pupils. Following Merriam (2009), event maps, field notes, interview transcripts and documents (e.g. class textbooks) and photographs of worksheets, the blackboard during lessons and pupils' work were iteratively analysed; open and focused coding was used to identify axial themes relating to individual teachers as well as the different lesson types. These were cross-referenced with scholarship on *FML* and other plurilingual approaches.

Setting

Brussels is a constitutionally bilingual region (French and Dutch) but in reality, is majority French-speaking. However, almost half of children use two languages on a daily basis (Robert et al. 2020). Official guidance on supporting pupils who do not have sufficient mastery of the language of schooling promotes language awareness and a general respect for linguistic diversity, all the while noting that 'French is the cornerstone of all learning' (Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles 2014, 26). Analysis of recent PISA data for the Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles (Lafontaine et al. 2019), the education authority that regulates French-speaking schools in Brussels and Wallonia, indicates a considerable gap between the achievement of children from an immigrant background and so-called 'native' pupils.

Participants

The four teachers (all pseudonyms) were self-volunteered participants in the study, and all spoke French as their dominant language and had studied Dutch in school as children. They cited various elements in their language biographies as influential in their perspective on home languages in the classroom:

> **Primary 5: M. Jean** (first year of teaching). He grew up in a French monolingual household, studied Spanish in school and English and Russian at university, and had previously worked in English.
>
> **Primary 5: Mme Luisa** (second year of teaching). She grew up speaking French and Portuguese at home, but rarely used her Portuguese as an adult.
>
> **Primary 6: Mme Khadija** (sixth year of teaching). She grew up speaking French and Arabic at home, but had decided to speak to her own children in French.
>
> **Primary 6: Mme Caroline** (fourth year of teaching). She grew up speaking French with her French-Dutch bilingual parents. As a student, she had learned Spanish intensively in order to participate in a project in Spain working with Roma children.

There were between twenty-one and twenty-three pupils in each class, all of whom were between ten and twelve years old; they spent the majority of their school day with their teacher, who taught all core subjects except for sports and religion. The teachers generally planned their work collaboratively in year-group weekly meetings but often adapted lessons to suit their own pedagogical style. There were between ten and thirteen additional languages spoken in each class, encompassing a wide range of competences, ranging from recently arrived pupils still learning French, to pupils with a passive understanding of another language, to those who were literate in two. Each class contained around six ‘sole speakers’ of a language and a very small minority of pupils were more or less monolingual in the sense that they were only exposed to French at home.

None of the four teachers were aware of FML at the start of the study but all supported the need to valorise home languages, particularly to support emergent bilinguals. They reported having received virtually no training and efforts by Mme Khadija a few years earlier to include home languages in her classroom practice had been forbidden. Both Mme Luisa and Mme Khadija had suffered linguistic discrimination as children and were determined that their pupils should not experience the same. Nonetheless, these four teachers represented a departure from the clear ‘French only’ policy of the school which was based on the Head teacher’s firm conviction that all pupils needed to be exposed to a maximum amount of French in order to progress in the language.

Results

In this section, we first describe the tasks that the teachers devised and then follow with a more transversal exploration of the function of home languages in learning and the most significant factors contributing to the teachers’ decisions.

Home languages as resources for learning: task design and objectives

Table 1 shows the different kinds of tasks devised by the teachers and the number of lessons of each type they delivered. The categories were derived by examining the main focus of each lesson, as observed by the principal researcher and elucidated from the teachers’ commentary in the feedback, and the way in which home languages were positioned as a resource.

By far the most frequent construct for whole class tasks was the use of home languages as a linguistic tool, most often through language comparison tasks (Type A). The teachers’ objectives were to enhance metalinguistic understanding and raise awareness of the structures of French. Mme Khadija said:

> I realised that by using another language…I realised that I was really getting to their knowledge, do you see? What they needed for the French lesson….

They often felt that a plurilingual approach was more effective than working monolingually, concluding that explicit comparison brought implicit knowledge to the surface and provoked a certain intensity of reflection in part because learning was de-centred away from the teacher. For Mme Luisa, these lessons also opened up alternatives to teacher-led explanations or situations where she might have otherwise used a worksheet:

> …so, in French…it would have just been … I’ve given you the rule…you’ve seen it and there you go…but here, I think they will remember it more because we have compared with their language…so they’ll say to themselves ‘oh it’s the thing where in my language there is only one letter or there is only one word’

These sessions were also valued for opening up spaces for reviewing basic grammar questions in French.

Table 1. Examples of multilingual tasks and number of lessons per teacher.

Resource and examples of multilingual tasks	M. Jean	Mme. Luisa	Mme. Khadija	Mme. Caroline
A: Linguistic resource (Focus on raising language and metalinguistic awareness) • Comparing negative forms • Translation of a pop song • Sharing metaphorical expressions	1 lesson	4	1	3
B: Own additional language as an academic resource (Focus on enhancing epistemological access in non-language subjects) • Topic mind map: Maths • Science fair presentation in one/several additional language(s) (written/voice recording) • Pupil creation of a vocabulary list about 'division'	1	0	3	1
C: Other languages as an academic resource (Focus on enhancing epistemological access in non-language subjects) • Classifying 5 key words for a geography topic given in 4 class languages • Teaching/learning phrases related to geometry in another language	2	0	0	0
D: Community building resource (Focus on sharing experiences and languages) • Sharing words for social greetings • 'I am proud to be plurilingual because…' • Pupils teaching words in their language to the class	1	1	1	1
E: Creative resource (Focus on creating open ended artistic products) • Group multilingual poems • Interlingual stories embedding several languages	1	0	1	1

The use of pupils' home languages as broader academic tools (B) was less frequent and often more challenging for the teachers to conceptualise. Tasks were framed around the teachers' desire to enable pupils to "use all their resources" for learning (Mme Khadija), often grouping pupils by language to enhance participation by those with weaker home language competence. Mme. Khadija set up an activity whereby pupils reproduced a science report in their home language they had already completed in French. This would be displayed at the school science fair. M. Jean opted to produce the same kind of report, but the pupils recorded themselves on an Ipad so that the science fair attendees could listen with headphones. Individual recordings often contained a mix of two or three languages, sometimes also including French. One interesting dimension emerged from M. Jean who began to develop tasks in which all pupils engaged with a limited number of languages across the class (C). For example, five pupils were tasked with teaching a mixed-language group sentences about geometry in a new language. The added value of this cross-lingual approach for him lay in:

> the change of channel from language A to language B, to strengthen the cognitive dimension……basically, André will remember 'his' Spanish hexagon with 6 sides better, because he has had to explain it to other people, as well as Myriam's Ethiopian quadrilateral, which he has had to learn from Myriam.

He sought to encourage a more multi-dimensional, deeper level of discussion through collective linguistic and conceptual negotiation.

All four teachers placed considerable importance on positioning home languages as a community building resource, creating tasks to affirm pupils' linguistic identity and encourage empathy (D). The tasks were often embedded in citizenship lessons and provided a celebratory platform for the sharing of languages. They were popular with pupils and assumed considerable symbolic value, particularly given how they visibly challenged the monolingual school discourse and situated notions of citizenship in the 'here and now' rather than in a 'home country' elsewhere. Mme Khadija remarked:

> I wouldn't have thought about languages [for citizenship education] …. I would have just talked about respect for others, respect for yourself…respecting other people's possessions and that kind of thing but in terms of tolerance for others, I maybe would have got them to do a presentation about their home country.

Creative tasks such as group multilingual poems (E) were invariably mixed language group activities which bridged academic objectives and the production of texts, alongside goals to create social links between pupils through the collective use of multiple languages. This can be seen in Mme Caroline's objectives for a multilingual Easter-themed story task. Her first goal was for pupils "to compare and recognise different languages, to share them with the class and small groups", but this was supplemented by her aim to foster "discussion, co-operation, interaction and finding solutions". These activities were often quite light-hearted, with Mme Caroline describing them as "a moment away from functioning only in French".

Home languages as transversal resources for learning

Effective *Functional Multilingual Learning* cuts across the curriculum and serves an epistemological function, i.e., to secure and enhance knowledge of both content and language (Duarte 2020). In this study, this function was most clearly established when language and content overlapped i.e., in language awareness activities. These tasks were deemed to create new access points for abstract linguistic concepts and the teachers comfortably established links to their French language programme, itself heavily focused on language-as-structure rather than skills.

A more transversal approach could be seen in tasks such as multilingual science reports, but in order to be meaningful, and indeed possible, across a class, they needed to include a multiplicity of participation frameworks, including moving flexibly between oral and written texts, using Dutch (a school–taught 'foreign' language) to ensure inclusion for monolingual pupils, and planning for support from parents for those pupils with lower competencies in their home language. These tasks sometimes paved the way for more spontaneous micro-practices that enhanced epistemological access on an individual level. For example, the science reports enabled Mme. Khadija to identify the benefits of her emergent bilingual pupil working first in Portuguese and then in French, not least because the pupil produced a long, complex text, in line with class expectations. In Mme. Caroline's class, a pupil asked to use a Turkish newspaper article for his homework (there were no French newspapers in his home), suggesting that this more flexible approach legitimised existing heteroglossic literacy practices.

It must be acknowledged that it is inherently challenging to design meaningful multilingual tasks that enhance epistemological access across a class of pupils with highly diverse linguistic repertoires. However, the epistemological function of plurilingual practice was significantly strengthened when it took on a scaffolding function, particularly when directed at emergent bilinguals. These 'temporary but systematic bridges towards other languages'(Duarte 2020, 13) included actions such as M. Jean using his limited Spanish for written and oral instructions to two emergent bilinguals, and his encouraging their use of translation software. Critically, the reorientation of the class monolingual norm gave rise to pupil-generated scaffolding practices which were often amongst the most powerful opportunities, opening up spaces for knowledge mediation that the teachers didn't themselves see. Mme Khadija's emergent bilingual asked if she could participate in a group sketch in Portuguese alongside her classmates performing in French, thus positioning her as a competent participant and allowing the teacher to evaluate skills such as audience awareness. Pupils began to bring in work done at home in other languages and there was evidence that they felt freer about asking their L1 peers for help understanding words in French.

From planned tasks towards capitalising on interactional opportunities

At the end of the study all four teachers were enthusiastic about FML, citing varying benefits for learning, emotional well-being, class cohesion and the public valorisation of individual and community linguistic repertoires. Nonetheless the ways in which they interpreted the framework varied within the group. The most significant and systematic shifts towards more individualised scaffolding approaches were in M. Jean and Mme. Khadija's class, both of whom had installed a relatively free language policy whereby pupils could decide for themselves how they moved across their language repertoire. In contrast, Mme. Luisa and Mme. Caroline felt that the teacher should decide when home languages could be used, either during specific plurilingual activities or when they identified that a child was struggling. Mme Luisa's perspective changed little over the course of the study; she remained convinced that immersion conditions were beneficial in the long run for emergent bilinguals and was concerned that the free use of home languages would lead to a certain 'ghettoisation' of friendships.

All four teachers were clear that the teacher-led, whole-class tasks were a key element in the construction of a plurilingually sensitive classroom; they were seen variously as providing momentum and a framework to ensure *appropriate* use of home languages as well as a platform for the teachers to develop an understanding of their pupils' plurilingual repertoire. However, M. Jean's perspective went much wider than the other teachers:

> So we get an activity going but at a certain moment, it's them who come and say 'can I do this in my language?'…and so it creates all these opportunities… and I think it's that this we need to keep alive in the classroom…this openness to all these opportunities….to go and grab the language of this pupil or that pupil and do something with it….for me that's the most important because that is what learning is really about.

His analyses of his evolving plurilingual practice were striking in the way they drew on a pupil-centred, non-linear, socio-constructivist model of learning which also recognised wider sociolinguistic inequalities embedded in the education system's exclusive (and to his mind excessive) valorisation of the mastery of the structural patterns of French. He focused more on learning processes than outcomes, drawing on a variety of metaphors to explain to himself how a child moved naturally across their language repertoire, for example that they instinctively “switched train tracks” or “opened up different suitcases”. In contrast, the other teachers’ accounts of the transversal benefits of plurilingual practice were more general, focusing on enhancing well-being through the symbolic valorisation of home languages through presentation and sharing. The individual learning gains they identified were mostly in the field of language comparisons, as discussed above, and they cited the generic importance of “not putting up barriers” rather than actively constructing openings for access to learning.

Reframing inclusion and managing repertoire diversity

When the study began, the teachers often didn’t know the additional languages used by their pupils and their lesson design was influenced by their gradual familiarisation with their linguistic repertoires. Many of the whole-class activities were delicate balancing acts that sometimes struggled to include *all* pupils in an active way, particularly when they were a transposal of an academic activity normally conducted in French (e.g., writing a science report). These tasks in fact required considerable scaffolding *towards* the home language, particularly for pupils who did not regularly use that language to read or write. This challenge could be mitigated to a certain extent through language-group collaboration, whereby those with higher home-language competence could lead their less able peers. For example, Mme. Khadija noted that Zafirah, a strong Arabic speaker who could also write the script, “pulled her group up” and that “they trusted her”, meaning that they could present to the class even though they were “a bit lost”. Mme. Luisa felt that language groups prompted certain pupils to “dare to do more” with their home language. However, around a quarter of the pupils in each class did not have language peers, and of those, some spoke languages that were not available on translation software. The preparation of activities at home went some way to widening participation opportunities but the teachers were sensitive to the fact that in some sessions, certain pupils, particularly monolinguals, ended up more or less excluded from full participation and keenly felt their lack of plurilingual ‘capital’. M. Jean described the uncomfortable identity position this left certain pupils in:

> [I have] a slight reservation for some of the Arabic speakers, the ones who don’t speak it as well as they think they do or as well as they would like: for example, I felt that Ridouan and maybe Javier for Spanish, he was kind of between two poles, neither completely accepted by the Arabic speakers (who made him keenly feel his lack of Arabic), nor included (by his own choice) by the French [monolingual] speakers.

Some pupils found their new position uneasy and unwelcome, sometimes even refusing to participate. Ultimately, tasks with a strong symbolic function (e.g., pupils teaching each other words in their home language) transpired to be the most inclusive as they tended to be less demanding, both cognitively and linguistically. As they became more sensitive to these dynamics, the teachers’ initial instincts to organise the pupils in language groups gave way to more mixed language groups and cross-lingual tasks. M. Jean in particular, gradually moved from prescriptive task organisation to giving pupils more agency in deciding the languages used to participate.

Discussion and conclusion

Functional Multilingual Learning entails teachers creating powerful learning environments underpinned by a single, yet complex, conceptualisation of home languages that goes beyond the system-level dichotomy of home vs school language and actualises the potential of individual and community linguistic repertoires to support content and language learning. This study set out to understand how four mainstream classroom teachers navigated this new pedagogical practice and the tasks and mechanisms they developed to deliver their vision of this goal. It supports research which indicates the importance of a pupil-centred approach as a key factor in a teacher's capacity to go beyond symbolic practices and towards effective scaffolding to enhance epistemological access (see Audras and Leclaire 2013; Auger and Kervran 2013; Palmer and Martínez 2013). Mme Luisa's more transmission-oriented teaching style led her to favour teacher-controlled, bounded tasks whereas flexible practice ran far deeper in M. Jean's class, where the new dimension of plurilingualism fitted logically into his existing practice, characterised as it was by extensive differentiation and discovery learning. In line with Menken, Funk, and Kleyn (2011), this study also underlines the potential for considerable diversity in teachers' conceptualisation of home languages as a resource, even when they are ideologically well-disposed towards implementing plurilingual practice.

The experiences of these teachers nonetheless highlight the challenge of equitable plurilingual practice in the mainstream classroom which is characterised not only by linguistic diversity but also repertoire diversity. Multiple studies cite how teachers must draw on children's 'expertise' in their home language as though it is a unitary, unquestioned competence (for example Duarte 2020), yet in reality this is complex uneven terrain that must be navigated with great sensitivity, particularly if *all* plurilingual repertoires are to be positioned as potential sources of didactic capital. Chumak Horbatsch (2011) maintains that plurilingual classroom practices that are merely 'supportive' (i.e. not 'inclusive') risk short-changing immigrant children's language and literacy learning, and they should go beyond displays and celebrations. Whilst this is clearly a critical difference, which we fully support, we would argue that there is still a place for tasks and activities that fulfil a symbolic function in classrooms with wide repertoire diversity. Language awareness activities such as teaching words of greeting in multiple languages do not get to the heart of learning processes, and indeed risk embodying the 'part-time attention' to cultural and linguistic diversity that Chumak-Horbatsch critiques. Yet they potentially can contribute to a collective, and inclusive foundation and springboard for individual, flexible pedagogical actions that more closely addressed the scaffolding and epistemological needs of emergent bilingual pupils and long-term dual language learners. Nonetheless, this study indicates that further research is needed on how to ensure that FML adequately addresses diverse competences across a class, and in particular how to ensure that monolingual pupils are not excluded.

The teachers in this study tended to accord primacy to class-level objectives, which stands in interesting contrast to a study conducted by Rosiers et al. (2016) in which they found that primary school teachers in Flanders, Belgium who were implementing *FML* focused predominantly on learning gains for the individual. The teachers in their study rarely elaborated an understanding of the classroom as a collective multilingual space and did not embed plurilingual practice in activity design. It is salient to consider that the start point for Rosiers et al.'s intervention was encouraging the teachers to enable pupils to freely use their home language to support learning, perhaps suggesting that a generic focus on pupil-led interaction prompts reflection on opportunities for the individual. Conversely, in this study, whole class activities required inclusive planning for all pupils and included the teacher to a greater extent in the plurilingual 'corriente' of the classroom. Whilst this enhances a teacher's sense of control, it can also run the risk of practice remaining at a more superficial level and limited to standalone activities. Considered in parallel, these two studies suggest that training and support materials for plurilingual pedagogies need to clearly articulate the interface between whole-class and individual dimensions, enabling teachers to more purposefully navigate the opportunities each presents and blend them into powerful classroom practice.

To a considerable extent, the whole-class activities positioned home languages as separate structural systems rather than as part of an integrated repertoire. They often treated languages sequentially (complete an activity in French first, then another language) or in parallel (e.g. in language awareness and translation tasks) and whilst they explored and valorised collective plurilingualism, at an individual level could be considered as the "pluralization of monolingualism" (Makoni and Pennycook 2006, 147). The potential metalinguistic benefits of plurilingual practice were identified and operationalised by the teachers, however, when this remained confined to bounded language awareness activities, potential transversal and metacognitive opportunities remained untapped. Only in the classrooms which moved between official, teacher-led translanguaging towards natural languaging practices did scaffolding and epistemological functions begin to emerge as powerful practice. These teachers showed greater sensitivity towards the dynamic processes of language acquisition at an individual level and were more rooted in an empirical perspective of how children 'do being bilingual' (Auer 1984). They conceptualised plurilingual competence not as simply the acquisition or sharing of new linguistic forms but as the 'use of language' in interactive practices (Llompart and Nussbaum 2018); they created opportunities for their pupils not only to participate in different kinds of tasks but also to engage in qualitatively different modes of participation.

The implementation of effective transversal plurilingual teaching requires us to provide teachers with reflective mechanisms to conceptualise the interface between the reality of their pupils' linguistic repertoire and their understanding of learning. The Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles will make '*Éveil Aux Langues*' language awareness lessons compulsory in early primary classes as part of its 'Pact for Excellence' programme of school reforms (Wattiez 2019). Whilst this will create welcome spaces to explore linguistic diversity and develop metalinguistic awareness, this study suggests that it is unlikely to lead to powerful learning environments which chip away at the unequal access to learning embedded in mainstream monolingual practice.

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