

Linking plurilingualism principles to language teachers' classroom practices: understanding, enacting and reflecting

ALAN HUANG (1) JOANNA MCPAKE (1) INGE BIRNIE (1)

(1) UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

The present study will focus on ways in which the plurilingualism principles set out in the National Framework for Languages (Scotland) are, or could be, translated into classroom practice, and the nature of professional education which teachers believe has supported their competence in these areas, or could help to develop competence in future.

The National Framework for Languages or NFfL (SCDE Languages Group, 2018) takes a broad view of what constitutes languages education, encompassing not only the teaching of modern foreign languages (MFLs) in primary and secondary schools, but also the teaching of Gaelic and teaching through the medium of Gaelic (GME), and providing support for bilingual learners, in the process of acquiring English and, potentially, other languages (including sign languages). Languages education is therefore not only considered to be formal, direct provision (e.g. a 'French lesson') but also both formal and informal support for the use of diverse languages across the curriculum, for a variety of educational purposes. As is stated in Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2018), all teachers have a broad responsibility for language development across the curriculum; and, in the light of the 1+2 languages policy (Scottish Government, 2012), all primary teachers will, from 2021, be expected to be able to teach at least one other language in addition to English (or Gaelic in the case of GME).

Theoretically, the study draws on existing thinking around teacher agency, in the context of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2016), and in the field of language policy and planning (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Ricento, 2013). Although these traditions have developed separately, both place teacher agency in an ecological context, in which the enactment of policy is understood to take place simultaneously at diverse levels of an education system, with ripple effects inwards and outwards and over time. Both traditions view teachers' understandings of policy, and the scope and limitations to the action they can take as policy changes and develops, as critical to effective implementation. Thus this study will adopt an ecological perspective on teachers' understanding of the Framework principles, which draw on several different policy initiatives and on how teachers enact these principles in their classrooms.

Framed within a broader understanding of language use in education, the present study will also draw on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural psychology which posits that language use and other semiotic tools can be perceived as mediating artefacts between the social world and the development of an individual's inner thinking. For teachers, this may refer to their day-to-day interactions or conversations with their colleagues, mentors and other professionals in the wider school community, also known as professional dialogue. In agreement with Littleton and Mercer (2013) and Warwick et al. (2016), we argue that the dialogic space created by teachers plays a pivotal role in enhancing their instructional practices and in promoting teacher professional learning. Another dimension of our project is to study teacher professional learning as reflective practices. Kramarski and Kohen (2016) argue that it can be particularly powerful and even transformative when teachers learn by thinking back and articulating the acquisition of knowledge and strategies. As will be outlined later on in this paper, we intend to ask the participants to reflect on their

teaching practice and to use concrete examples to demonstrate their understanding of the plurilingualism principles.

Research questions:

1. How do teachers relate the plurilingualism principles set out in the NFFL to their current and future classroom practices?
2. What kind of professional education do they consider most valuable in developing the competences they need to do this effectively?

Method

Broadly speaking, the study draws on the work of Florian and others (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Florian, 2012) who developed the Framework for Inclusive Pedagogy – work which inspired the NFFL – and subsequently investigated its implementation in Scottish schools. Their schools-based research reflects a social constructivist approach which has many similarities to the ecological model outlined above. Florian & Spratt (2013) stress the value of open-ended qualitative research in the early stages of the investigation as a way of acknowledging and valuing diverse perspectives on practice, avoiding the imposition of the researchers' own views and values. The method they adopted (Florian & Spratt, op.cit.) – of observing a lesson and following this up with a semi-structured interview with the teacher in question (a well-established method dating back at least to the work of Brown, 1975) – is replicated here. Three data collection methods will be employed in this study: 1) Short questionnaires inviting open-ended responses has been circulated to student teachers and language professionals. Submission of questionnaire data was voluntary and there was no penalties or other consequences if participants chose not to submit or wished to withdraw from the study. 2) With the goal of diversifying observation contexts, we have selected three teachers who all agreed to invite the researcher to observe one lesson of theirs in March 2019. During the observation, the researcher will take hand-written field notes to create a record of the event; no structured observation schedule will be used as, in each case, the classroom actualisation of NFFL principles cannot be determined in advance, and lessons are likely to be very diverse; the main purposes served by the fieldnotes are (a) to serve as an aide-memoire for the researcher, during the subsequent interview and (b) to contextualise research findings in the analysis, reporting and dissemination stages. 3) Following the observed lesson, the researcher and the teachers will conduct semi-structured interviews, lasting 30-60 minutes. The data collected via each of these instruments will be analysed qualitatively, using the plurilingualism principles in the NFFL as an analytical frame. Given the exploratory nature of this study, however, a grounded theory approach is also relevant as the researchers cannot know at this stage how participants understand and interpret the NFFL principles.

Expected Outcomes

In this initial, small-scale study, our goal is to explore existing understandings of what plurilingualism principles set out in the NFFL 'look like' in the classroom, from the perspectives of newly qualified teachers whose teacher education has not been directly influenced by the NFFL. The responses of the participants will constitute baseline data against which the outcomes of subsequent interventions, based on the NFFL, in initial teacher education and professional development for languages teachers, can be measured. There are several expected outcomes from the research: (1) findings will deepen our understanding of language teacher education in culturally and linguistically diverse settings; (2) findings will directly influence our own provision for languages education on the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, including the establishment of a benchmark position

for teachers' understandings of how the plurilingualism principles are enacted in the classroom; (3) findings will contribute to the Scotland-wide study and will therefore benefit our collective understanding of the diverse needs of ITE students and how these can be met; we will similarly benefit from the findings of studies in other institutions; (4) findings will explore the experience and practice of educators who draw on their own as well as their students' multilingual and multicultural repertoires in the learning process; (5) findings will advance understanding more generally of ways in which teachers enact plurilingualism principles underpinning languages education in the classroom, and of the kind of professional education that they see as most supportive.

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