

“Daddy, Can You Speak Our Language?” Multilingual and Intercultural Awareness Through Identity Texts¹

Sales Auxiliadora, Anna Marzà, and Gloria Torralba

Universitat Jaume I, Spain

ABSTRACT

The premise of the present paper is that an intercultural approach to multilingualism in schools generates inclusion and a construction of cultural and linguistic identity that respects the diversity of society and classrooms. Students, teachers, and families participated in an action research project conducted in four schools with the presence of varied home languages. One of the objectives of the project is to foster intercultural education by introducing home languages in the school through identity texts. The process was documented through questionnaires, interviews to families and educators, and classroom observations. Results show that the texts and the curricular activities designed around them have provided spaces for the recognition and valuation of diversity. The self-esteem of alloglot students has improved and the collaborative relationship between school and families has increased. Conclusions point at the potential of multilingualism as a way to enrich the curriculum and to promote equality from diversity in the school context.

KEYWORDS

Home language; cultural identity; linguistic diversity; intercultural education; identity texts; multilingualism

Introduction

Bearing in mind the complexity of societies and identities, and considering education and culture as unfinished processes, this paper focuses on cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom, using identity texts that connect the familiar linguistic and cultural background with the school languages. The study takes on an intercultural approach, which implies the recognition of the other, and focuses on complex processes, negotiation, and constant creation of cultures (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2001). The dynamic conception of culture and cultural identity highlights the need to generate intercultural educational contexts and processes where teachers can reflect on and promote intercultural dialogue. Teacher's own attitudes, strategies, and interrelations within the pedagogical act mirror their commitment as citizens to social and school transformation towards interculturality (Banks, 2015). From this perspective, the classroom has been regarded as a communicative space where enriching dialogue takes place, meanings are negotiated, shared knowledge is built, power relationships are managed, and conflicts are transformed in a constructive and inclusive way (Rodrigo-Alsina, 1999).

Intercultural attitudes and competences are essential in a multilingual school context because they are not only an issue of communication but also a concern for intercultural citizenship education, which highlights the need for educators to pay

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attention to how students' identities are shaped by how their existing languages and associated experiences are valued in the classroom. This implies considering multilingualism² from an intercultural approach, taking into account the complex interplay of students' identity in different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Within this framework, home languages could be seen by teachers, but also by families, as an instrument of social interaction as well as identity construction and affirmation (Faneca et al., 2016).

The collaborative action research (AR) project between university and schools *Home Languages, School Languages* represents an innovative perspective on the incorporation of the home languages of immigrant groups to the school system in Valencia (Spain). Stemming from this AR project, the aim of the present paper is to assess whether triggering a didactic situation to create multilingual identity texts (henceforth referred to as "didactic task") favours an increased awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity and promotes an intercultural approach in Valencian classrooms. More specifically, the research questions addressed in this paper are the following:

1. How does the didactic task mobilise the construction of cultural and linguistic identity of students? (RQ1)
2. How do participants perceive multilingual approaches in education (i.e., interdependence among languages, presence of HLs in school, etc.)? (RQ2)
3. Does the didactic task increase awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity in students and families? (RQ3)
4. Do participants show an intercultural attitude through the implementation of the didactic task? (RQ4)
5. Which intercultural/multilingual strategies do teachers implement when applying a multilingual didactic task? (RQ5)

This paper explores the relationship between intercultural education and the didactic use of home languages as a theoretical framework. After introducing the project's aim, background and methods, and describing the initial situation, the didactic task designed for implementation will be briefly presented. The findings will be exposed and discussed, with a special emphasis on answering the research questions. Finally, the conclusions will address the main implications and shortcomings of the study, highlighting key elements to be considered in order to generate intercultural attitudes in a globalised world where cultural and linguistic diversity are not yet managed in an inclusive way.

Intercultural education in multilingual classrooms

The intercultural approach to education focuses on providing equal opportunities for active and transformative participation in society, valuing diversity as an enriching element in the interaction between people (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). This implies, on one hand, the development of competences to know, understand and value different cultural perspectives in order to overcome paralyzing and discriminatory ethnocentrism (Banks, 2015). On the other hand, it promotes the development of an open and flexible cultural identity that incorporates the elements of the multicultural context (Abdallah-Preteceille, 2001).

On the basis of the aforementioned intercultural pedagogical principles, the possibility, need and benefits of multilingualism in educational contexts is worth exploring. Multilingual education refers not only to a quantitative aspect (i.e., the use of two or more languages in a given educational context), but a qualitative approach that implies that schools aim at multilingualism and multiliteracy while taking the sociolinguistic environment into account (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015, p. 2). Within this paradigm, research in language acquisition has shifted towards a more complex, holistic understanding of linguistic processes in plurilinguals, and research in language education has seen a rise in theoretical approaches to language learning that agree with such a view (see Cenoz & Gorter, 2015 for a review). Although there are evident theoretical nuances that identify each of these approaches, this paper draws on all of them and therefore the term multilingualism can be used as an umbrella term that covers these approaches.

Integrating the intercultural and multilingual paradigms, a language is not only a means of interpersonal communication, but also a means for the expression of values, meanings and world views of its speakers, and it often conforms an essential aspect of their identity as a distinct cultural group (Byram et al., 2001). Knowing and understanding other people and societies involves knowledge and understanding of oneself and one's own society (Byram & Wagner, 2018). By welcoming all home languages into the classroom, this project intends to allow students to better know and understand their own complex (multi)cultural and social identities.

Methodological diversification is a key factor in the pedagogical and linguistic improvement in culturally diverse contexts (Vila, 2012). Regarding literacy engagement through bilingual identity texts specifically, Cummins et al. (2015) have linked the creation of this type of texts by linguistically diverse students to identity affirmation in classrooms where teachers actively fostered "teacher-student identity negotiation" (p. 577). Against this backdrop, applying an intercultural perspective to multilingual education may provide a classroom environment that promotes favourable attitudes and competences towards cultural and linguistic diversity and the consideration of linguistic diversity as a resource and not as a shortage to be compensated (Souto-Manning, 2006). In fact, teaching intercultural attitudes through active and cooperative strategies has been linked to an improved knowledge of other cultures as a source of personal enrichment, a more cooperative attitude and an enhancement of cultural exchange in interaction and curricular tasks in the classroom (Sales & García, 1997). If teachers collaborate to develop intercultural attitudes rather than promoting "knowledge about" national cultures, then students could value language as a part of cultural identity rather than as the learning of a code that can only be used in some restricted environments (Byram & Wagner, 2018, p. 147).

Home languages at school

Terminology carries specific connotations within specific contexts, so providing an adequate general definition of the term *heritage* or *home language* has proven to be difficult among researchers, as well as the characterization of *heritage learners* (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Considering the specific context where this study took place, the term *home language* (HL) in this paper refers to the languages spoken by at least some members of the students' family that do not belong to the curricular languages of the school system. This definition includes both *heritage learners*, who have been exposed to another language in the home, and *learners with a heritage motivation*, who perceive a cultural connection with another language (Van Deusen-Scholl, 1998), although the

first group is by far the most common. When referring to this group, the term *alloglot* is also used in this paper, referring to students who speak a language different to those present in the society where they live (Bretxa et al., 2016, p. 70). Finally, when referring to the first language of each student, including the societal languages (in this context, Catalan and Spanish), the term L1 will be used.

As Siarova and Essomba (2014) point out, teaching and learning strategies in a multilingual classroom differ from those in a monolingual classroom. In particular, research proves that introducing HLs in the classroom improves the integration of immigrant students and boosts their confidence in their own identities (Cummins, 2001; Holmes et al., 2017). Research has also consistently proven that children belonging to cultural minority groups who continue developing their HL have a better school language proficiency than those who are not literate in their HL, and exhibit less confusion and ambiguity towards their learning abilities (Cummins, 2007; Vila, 2012). Other studies have shown how helpful it can be for bilingual students' personal development to use their first language for learning (Flores & García, 2013; Gort, 2015), resulting, among others, in an increase of their intercultural awareness, an enhancement of their communication competences and of their skills in mediating information in multilingual and multicultural contexts (Kyppö et al., 2015) or facilitating transition from home to school in pre-primary students (Mary & Young, 2017).

Identity texts

Research in multilingualism has produced a range of didactic strategies over the years to assist teachers in the introduction of a multilingual perspective. To cite just a few, Cummins' seminal work with identity texts (Cummins & Early, 2011) has also been tested applying a multimodal perspective (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019); Armand and Maraillet (2013) propose strategies and tasks to implement the awakening to languages approach; the City University of New York-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (CUNY-NYSIEB) has produced several translanguaging guides for educators³, looking for "practices in which bilinguals intermingle linguistic features that have hereto been administratively or linguistically assigned to a particular language or language variety" (García, 2009, p. 51); and Koinos, an Erasmus+ European project, applies and adapts best practices in linguistic diversity and education for the new century (Helmchen & Melo-Pfeifer, 2018). Identity texts have been defined as follows:

... the products of students' creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher. Students invest their identities in the creation of these texts which can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light. (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 3)

As Vila (2002) affirms, the use of bilingual identity texts transforms the school into a meaningful context by taking students' own experience and values as a starting point. HL is regarded by students as one of their most important values, regardless of the language used by schools to deliver content. This type of educational proposal tends to help learners develop awareness of their specific characteristics through approaches that

contrast or compare them with those of other identities and cultures: it is by acknowledging others and their otherness that a full awareness of one's own identity is acquired. This can be the first step towards awareness of the internal plurality of every language and a starting point for multilingual and intercultural education (Cavalli et al., 2009).

However, in spite of the array of strategies that educators can use, research in different countries has shown that teachers may be aware of the importance of HLs, but tend not to take advantage of the linguistic and cultural capital of their students; therefore, activities that enrich the students' cultural and linguistic environment are not often promoted (Faneca et al., 2016). As these authors conclude, the use of HLs as a pedagogical tool has not yet been incorporated in the school curriculum and habitus. Moreover, García and Sylvan (2011,) warned that “without teachers who truly understand how to use students' HL practices to make sense of new language practices and academic content, translanguaging could become random, not sense-making” (p. 398).

Home languages, school languages: The study

Purpose. Aiming at incorporating HLs in the mainstream classroom, the AR study had a dual purpose. On one hand, the promotion of multilingual literacy engagement and analysis of the use of multilingual strategies by students (mainly the management of their own linguistic repertoire, translanguaging uses, and the role of translation). On the other hand, to describe how the use of HLs affects the acknowledgement and validation of linguistic diversity and the promotion of cultural exchange and learning. This paper focuses on the second objective.

As stated in the previous sections, identity texts have shown to be an appropriate strategy to develop intercultural competences and recognise the value of HL. In this particular study, the languages invested in the creation of identity texts were the HL of each student (see Participants) and the school languages (Catalan and Spanish). The study involved children, their teachers, and parents, thus providing a broader and more complete picture of the process, which is rarely seen in the literature.

In order to address the lack of instrumental knowledge and prevent a random use of HL, a successfully tested pedagogic strategy—bilingual identity texts—was presented to three Valencian teachers. With the teachers' cooperation, the tool was adapted to their school and societal context, assessing its adequacy to the particular sociolinguistic situation. Particularly, the status and use of languages in the area was considered in order to determine which languages were used for which purpose (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998). Finally, its accordance to Valencian curricular demands was taken into account.

Background. The Valencian region is legally bilingual (Spanish-Catalan) and has received immigrant population in schools for over three decades, but their HLs have been historically excluded from social contexts such as classrooms. At the moment of implementation of the study, the law regulating languages in education (decree 127/2012, of the 3rd of August) included three languages (Catalan, Spanish, and English), but did not mention the HL of the students and, therefore, its inclusion in the classrooms depended entirely on the teachers' own resources, interests and teaching philosophy. However, right after the implementation of the study a new law was passed (decree 4/2018, of the 21st of February) that explicitly requires schools to “consider the languages of linguistic minorities and to generate intercultural exchange” by

establishing the forms in which these non-curricular languages and cultures will be present in each school (p. 7863)

Participants. Three urban schools from two different towns of the province of Castelló with percentages of immigrant population between 15% and 20% participated. The schools, which presented higher numbers of immigrant students (46% in average), implemented a linguistic programme where Catalan was the main language of instruction. None of the towns had ever implemented specific intercultural projects in the context of formal education. The research team contacted several schools in the area. The teachers who finally volunteered did so after receiving the goals of the project and accepting to incorporate identity texts as an innovative didactic strategy. The participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants.

	No. of teachers	No. of children	Class	Age of children	Languages spoken by children
School 1	1	19	2 nd year Pre-primary	4	Catalan (4) Spanish (7) Arabic (7) Romanian (1)
School 2	1	26	2 nd year Primary	7	Catalan (3) Spanish (5) Arabic (4) Romanian (7) Chinese (2) Romani (1) English (2) English-Edo bilinguals (2)
School 3	2	40 (2 groups)	6 th year Primary	11	Catalan (6) Arabic (7) Romanian (4) Spanish (23) ⁴

The teachers have 26 years' professional experience in average, more than half of which with alloglot students. Two of them have received specific training to work with immigrant population, although these seminars did not deal with the use of HLs as an asset within the class.

Methods

A qualitative case study methodology was used in order to understand the complexity of the educational process, starting from the context and perceptions of the agents involved (Stake, 1995). The research stems from a collaborative AR project between the university and the participant schools, which took place during the first 3 months of the academic year 2017. The methodology includes reflection on linguistic practice in the classroom as a strategy for teachers' professional development, which is coherent with

the intercultural approach to transform school culture (Kemmis et al., 2014). The AR process was divided into the following phases:

1. Planification. The research plan and methodology are negotiated between researchers and schoolteachers and an analysis of the initial situation is carried out through **questionnaires** to define the perceptions of the participant teachers, families and students regarding multilingualism in the classroom.
2. Action proposal. Formative sessions on multilingualism as a didactic resource are held for all teachers of the participant schools. Then participant teachers and researchers jointly elaborate a specific didactic task for the use of identity texts in each level. Families are informed and involved as participants at home and in the classroom.
3. Action. The 3-month didactic tasks are monitored through **systematic observation of the sessions**.
4. Evaluation and proposals for improvement. Researchers and teachers jointly evaluate both the process and results through **interviews to teachers and families**. Improvements are made to consolidate the didactic proposal and to prepare it for other groups.

Data collection

The following instruments were used during the project for the data collection: questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews. All ethical issues were thoroughly considered. The study was presented to the school directors and responsible teachers, who signed consent forms. The authorization of parents or legal guardians to access, manage and analyse the data, and permission to publish the process and its results were collected at specific meetings. Children were informed of the aims of the study and invited to participate in questionnaires, and activities, but not in interviews, since school administrators were reluctant to apply this instrument.

Questionnaires for teachers, families, and students. The questionnaire for teachers was designed following previous surveys on teacher attitudes towards language learning (Garcia-Nevarez et al., 2005; Lee & Oxelson, 2006), focusing on beliefs and attitudes towards cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom; effects of such diversity in language learning; and multilingual didactic strategies in the classroom.

The lack of research that includes surveys completed by parents and students led us to develop the questions based on the topics deemed relevant by research articles on multilingual educational contexts (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2017; Vila, 1999) and the objectives of the study. These questionnaires focused on language use at home and school, parents' opinion on the role of home and curricular languages as a learning asset, and their willingness to participate in classroom activities, and students' interest in schoolmates' languages and cultures. The questions for families were translated into all the languages of the participants.

Questionnaires were validated by three selected judges who worked on areas related with language teaching, intercultural education, multilingual contexts and kindergarten and primary education. The response rate was overall of 100% except among parents from 6th grade (90%) and pre-primary (89.5%).

Classroom observations. During the development of the activities related to identity texts, observational records were gathered through field notes, audio, and video

recordings. Eight 1-hour observations were conducted in each school from October to December. Written registers were taken of any classroom interaction, situation, or statement that could relate to the above-mentioned research questions, operationalised in categories of analysis (see Table 2).

Interviews with teachers and families. The interviews were semi structured and were conducted at the end of the process. Teachers and families were individually invited to evaluate the experience and its results, following the same topics from the questionnaire. All teachers accepted; however, the participation of families in interviews was one of the weakest aspects of the research, since only 12 accepted. This will be reviewed as a potential bias in the Conclusions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

The categorisation process was based on a thematic analysis, focused on the research questions developed in the study. The intercultural and multilingual principles as central themes were used to perform the *a priori* categories for the examination of the corpus data. The results were validated by triangulation using persistent observation of the research team members and the participants' review of categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Table 2 shows the relationship between intercultural and multilingual education principles, research questions, and categories of analysis.

Table 2. Principles, Research Questions and Categories.

Intercultural and multilingual education principles	Research questions	Categories of analysis
Construction of one's own open, complex and flexible (multi) cultural and (multi) lingual identities by acknowledging others and their otherness.	(RQ1)	Knowledge or appreciation HL of home language Self-esteem and appreciation of own identity
Focus on multilingualism in education as a holistic approach that permeates the educational situation, affecting the academic learning of students.	(RQ2)	Importance of home languages knowledge and literacy in school languages proficiency Benefits of the incorporation of home languages (e.g., through Identity Texts) in curricular activities
Competences to know, understand and value cultural and linguistic diversity to overcome discriminatory ethnocentrism.	(RQ3)	Acknowledgement of diversity at school Specific knowledge related to languages and linguistic repertoires

	(RQ4)	Cultural appreciation and exchange
		Learning (about) other languages and cultures
		Discriminatory ethnocentrism
Promotion of cultural exchange in interaction.	(RQ5)	Linking cultural diversity with students' experiences
		Acknowledging and valuing linguistic repertoires and the role of multilingual children as mediators
		Activating participation and communication
		Using strategies of comparison and contrast between languages

Initial situation: languages at home and in school. This section presents the data collected through questionnaires. The category of analysis addressed in each paragraph is presented in parentheses for easier reference.

Families. Of non-Spanish/Catalan speakers, 68.8% consider that knowing their HL can help their children in academic learning in general. When asked about the specific learning of Catalan or Spanish, 28.5% consider that their HL can interfere.

The opinion of families about the role of the L1 in topics such as identity and family relations is quite unanimous: 85.9% consider it plays a key role in strengthening family bonds, and 84.6% in reinforcing their identity. These percentages are slightly lower when considering the alloglot families alone (82.8% in both cases).

Among parents, 84.6% consider that their children value the family language and culture. The disaggregated data shows that this is true for 90% of Catalan speakers and 77.14% of immigrated families.

Finally, 68.6% of alloglot families would welcome the incorporation of activities that include HLs in the classroom and would be willing to participate.

Students. In School 2, 44% of the students recognise 6 of the languages that their classmates speak, except for Edo. In school 3, 52% of students are able to name the 4 languages spoken in the class. Of 2nd graders, 80% consider multilingualism positive, as well as learning traditions and words in the languages of their classmates. The valorisation is also positive among 6th graders, although 10 points lower.

When asked about the possibility to invite their own family into the classroom, only 42.5% of the students would appreciate it. Specifically in alloglot students, 30% would not value positively the presence of family members in the class and 40% would not like to use their HL in front of teachers and classmates. When analysing the classes separately, it is clear that older children are more reluctant in these areas: 45% of 6th graders would not like to invite family members into the classroom (only 17% of 2nd

graders), and 63% would not like to use their home languages at school (again, only 17% of 2nd graders feel reluctant).

Educators. Teachers consider that the presence of alloglot students benefits all classmates and, although they admit that having a majority of alloglot students requires a higher effort, they are confident in their abilities to teach students who do not speak the language(s) of instruction. They all believe in the importance of HLs to strengthen family bonds and affirming identities.

Regarding their didactic approach, the participant educators consider proficiency in HLs as important as proficiency in the school languages, and they explain the importance of maintaining HLs to their alloglot students. They all affirm that they allow alloglot students to use their HLs when conducting activities in the class. However, only one educator states that she prepares projects or activities in which the use of HLs by alloglot students is encouraged (e.g., traditional songs or greetings in each HL provided by students themselves). The other three seldom incorporate HLs in their curricular design. None of the four deliver materials in the HLs of alloglot students; however, these languages are present in more exceptional situations such as cultural or linguistic fairs.

With respect to their relation with alloglot families, all but one encourage parents to speak to their children in their HLs, and half give some advice on strategies to foster bi-literacy development. Finally, they all admit they do not tend to invite families to participate in class using their HLs.

Initial results were discussed between teachers and researchers and these discussions informed the planning of a didactic proposal around identity texts to welcome linguistic diversity and acknowledge the enrichment that cultural diversity could imply in curriculum and intercultural relationships. What follows is the didactic proposal adapted to each class.

Didactic task: identity texts

Pre-primary education. The final product was a single oversize notebook for the whole class where each child could fill two sides of one paper sheet with their production (see Figure 1). Each week, one child would take the notebook home where they would prepare an identity text with their families (Usually, the families wrote the text in their HL, and the children illustrated the pages or added some words in the language they chose.) Afterwards, one member of the family would assist the child in orally explaining their text to the rest of the class, first in the HL and then in the language of the class (either Catalan or Spanish). All students were then encouraged to comment or reflect on the story, which they usually did in Spanish.

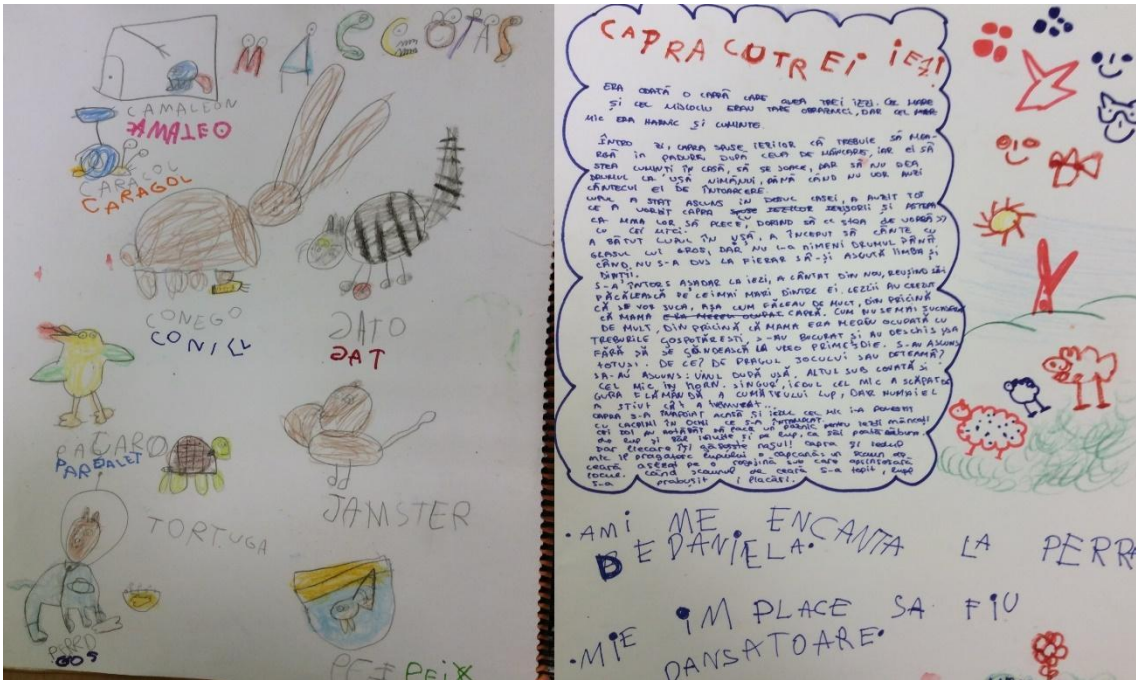


Figure 1. Identity texts: Pre-primary Education.

2nd year of Primary. Again, the final product was common for the whole class. In this case, each child would write their identity text in their HL, with their families' help, and would bring some pictures to accompany the text (see Figure 2). The teacher prepared a presentation with the pictures that would assist the child in their oral presentation to the class (first in the HL and, then, in Catalan). After all the presentations, the teacher dedicated a few sessions to the translation of identity texts into Catalan, where each student would translate their text, cooperating with other students.

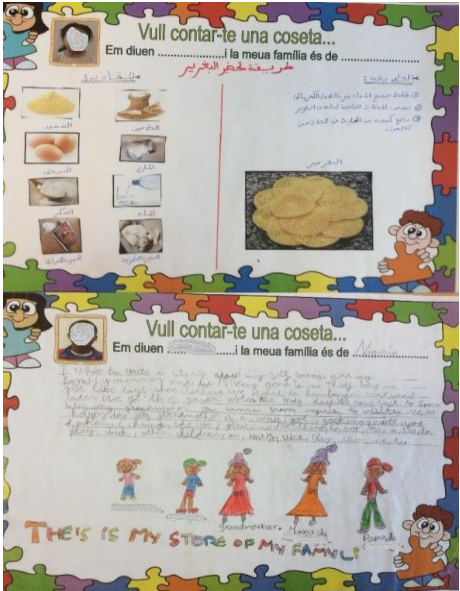


Figure 2. Identity texts: 2nd year Primary Education.

6th year of primary. Each child wrote their own identity book, which consisted of three or four individual texts. Two of the topics could be freely decided and the other two were chosen from a range of topics related to identity issues within the social

sciences curriculum. Children were allowed to choose the language in which to write each text. The last day before Christmas break students presented their works to their peers and families, who commented on the topics dealt with in the presentations.

Findings

The findings have been structured following the main research questions, and include the information extracted from observations and interviews. The categories of analysis have been explicitly stated after each result.

Identity and self-esteem

In pre-primary and 2nd grade students, the proposal to share full stories in their HL with classmates triggered reactions or statements related both to linguistic identity and to self-esteem. Students explain which language they speak as a characteristic that identifies them, with no negative connotations. In general, students feel at ease with the role of experts when explaining their identity stories to classmates. This expertise is also assumed and announced by the other classmates who share the same linguistic background, who even translate the story for the classmates sitting next to them, thus acting as mediators.

However, older students showed a different behaviour. At a very early stage of the project, the reaction of alloglot 6th graders was significant when realising that the questionnaires for their parents were in their HL. Surprise led to a joyful discussion with same-language peers, and also with other classmates. During the first sessions, they read several linguistic life stories and shared their own. Initially, many students showed their intention to use their HL in the stories, even though they felt more confident in Spanish. However, none of the alloglot students eventually used their HL in their final texts, mainly because of a lack of writing skills in these languages, or even illiteracy in some cases.

Interviewed families state that their language and culture is starting to be valued in the school context and this has triggered interest and identity affirmation both in their children and themselves: “She asked me: Daddy, can you speak our language, Romani? If I need something, I will ask you.” (6th grade–Romani speaker)

Finally, teachers observe a higher self-esteem in children due to the recognition and affirmation of their cultural and linguistic identity: “I have realised how satisfied they are of being able to explain things that are important for them, and doing so in their language.” (2nd grade teacher)

Perception towards multilingual approaches in education

As stated in the initial results, a majority of alloglot families are aware of the importance of HL knowledge and literacy in academic learning. By the end of the project, they praise the virtues of knowing several languages and cultures because of academic or occupational success.

Regarding teachers, they appreciate the fact that diversity is positively perceived and valued within curricular activities, not as an extracurricular reality, thus acknowledging the fact that the active use of HLs in class benefits intercultural awareness. Specifically, identity texts are regarded by teachers as a tool for teaching intercultural attitudes within the school context.

I think it was interesting being able not only to speak about linguistic diversity but also to use it... making it real, dealing with it, not only identifying it theoretically, but making it visible in the classroom. I think that is one of the benefits of the project. (6th grade teacher)

The pre-primary teacher highlights the potentiality of this kind of activities to create bonds and a sense of belonging, both among students and families. According to one of the 6th grade teachers, the didactic use of identity texts is consistent with the increasingly urgent need to maintain the HLs of all students, within a social context where these are not valued. Their adaptability allows for their use not only in class activities but also in school projects, such as the school magazine. Teachers value the opportunities that identity texts create to show diverse cultural identities as an enriching asset, and not as a problem.

Awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity

The students' moderate awareness of the diversity of languages within the classrooms (see Initial results) increased during the project. Both teachers and families observe a growing acknowledgement of such diversity:

He talks a lot about “he comes from here, from this country, from that country... she speaks that language.” (pre-primary parent–Arabic speaker)

You help them realise that their classmates have different cultural traits ... but we are all there, together ... I mean, they are much more aware of identities and origins than before. Maybe before not children nor teachers nor anybody spoke about ... sometimes trying to respect diversity you avoid ... avoid speaking about diversity. (pre-primary teacher)

Several instances of an increased knowledge were recorded during classroom observations. In the pre-primary class, students show that they understand the meaning of *home language*, a term they could not define before the project. In 6th grade, two girls explained their linguistic repertoire to the researcher, including details about the cultural and linguistic diversity of the classroom and trying to distinguish language from origin (Luján⁵ is a Spanish speaker from Argentina and Lledó a Catalan-Spanish speaker from Spain):

Luján: My journey to Spain. My future. I will write it in English and Catalan.

Lledó: You could do it in English and Argentinian!

Luján: [hands on her head in astonishment] It's not a language!

Lledó: Ok, ok.

Intercultural attitudes

Initial surprise towards the use of HLs led to curiosity through the sessions. In the pre-primary classroom, when a student showed the text written in Arabic by his mother, all the children in the class showed great interest and asked her to write their names in Arabic letters on the blackboard. The youngest students still find it hard to pay attention

to a full story in a language they openly state they do not understand. However, 2nd graders listen attentively to the stories in different languages and even ask for the translation of specific segments to their classmates.

This eventual acceptance towards linguistic and cultural diversity contrasts with some specific manifestations recorded in the first sessions that show estrangement towards otherness. In 2nd grade, for example, when the first Romanian student started to explain her story in her HL, some kids asked, “Don’t you know how to speak?” In 6th grade, during a conversation about the languages of the classroom, two Spanish girls show specific knowledge about the Arabic writing, but they describe it as “weird,” because “they write from here [pointing at the right end of the paper] and with symbols.”

Families explain that this interest to learn about diversity expands to other contexts. Diversity is perceived as a characteristic that affects us all:

Coming here and listening Rodica telling them something in Romanian, or Hassan telling them something in Arabic has made my daughter curious about this thing called Earth, where many languages are spoken in different places. The other day we went to Valencia and when we arrived, she asked: “Which language do they speak here?” (pre-primary–Spanish speaker)

They also consider that knowing several languages and cultures is enriching for their children because it implies tolerance and openness: “He finds the idea that we are not the same, but we can live together very interesting. It strikes me, because I see him so young and yet speaking about these things ...” (pre-primary–Arabic speaker).

Finally, families acknowledge the role played by teachers in the development of their children’s new attitude, and show disposition to continue their cooperation in similar projects:

I am learning a lot with my daughter. When I hear my daughter saying: “Mum, we are all equal,” I am speechless. She learned that here, she learned that living with other children and through her teachers, who have taught her that. (2nd grade–Romanian speaker)

Intercultural didactic strategies

The observations show explicit acceptance of the students’ plurilingualism by teachers, thus helping to affirm linguistic identity and, by extension, cultural identity of all students. This acceptance was brought to light through different strategies:

- The dialogue in the classroom has a diverse cultural referent. Geographical origin, family travels between the two countries, food... are usually discussed. The new vocabulary, the relation between academic disciplines, and the cultural content of identity texts is used to enrich the intercultural relationship between students. For example, by asking about the geographical origin of each family and encouraging the consultation of maps.
- The 2nd grade teacher tends to refer both to language and to the social and cultural context of the students. Thus, she stresses the cultural aspects of their experience and fosters that students who share the same cultural background relate. When Joy comments on her family’s attendance to church, the teacher asks another student: “You go to the same church, don’t you?”
- The affirmation of identity by exploring, exposing and recognising the quotidian

linguistic context of immigrant students is a constant strategy. For example, when an Arabic-speaking mother is using her language in the pre-primary class, the teacher addresses an Arabic-speaking girl by saying: “Djamila, do you understand her?” Immediately, this question triggers the response of another child, who says: “Me too!” Teachers also allow spaces for children to mediate when some students are using their HLs.

- In 6th grade a more explicit reflection on linguistic repertoires is fostered, for example when the teacher starts a discussion on how languages are learned, how many can be spoken correctly, whether we all know them in the same way, the situations in which each student uses each language, and their varied multiliteracy skills.
- Teachers let families and students take the main role in the learning process. They become facilitators, generate spaces to share, talk and discuss, but it is the students and families who create contents, provide other perspectives and ways of life, open the classroom to other voices and have the agency to show and explain the world from their own experiences.
- Regarding their approach to linguistic use and learning, teachers use techniques to avoid inhibiting communication: they allow students to express freely, interacting in the language of their choice and translanguaging (García & Seltzer 2016).
- The comparison is used to attract students’ attention towards different languages, focusing on the idea that they can understand some words with the use of cognates. The linguistic comparison even leads to the analysis of cultural products that are familiar to students and, therefore, can be connected to their own experiences. For example, the 2nd grade teacher expands on Dracula’s real name and true story after the enthusiastic reaction of the class when a classmate explains that her country of origin is also the country of this character.

Discussion

Results show that the didactic proposal to work on identity texts has highlighted the cultural and linguistic diversity of the classroom in a positive and enriching way, which has made heritage language students feel important and valuable regarding their cultural background and their HLs (RQ1). It has triggered spaces for dialogue and collective reflection, which have moved students from initial surprise to a higher awareness of diversity (RQ3) and of how each person builds their identity with different cultural references throughout their lives (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2001) (RQ4). However, both the fact that 6th graders did not materialise such an interest in an actual use of the language, and the scarce implication of families in the final interviews, indicate that more work needs to be done. The incipient results indicate a change in the attitude of teachers and students towards an active use of HLs in the classroom (RQ2), but this needs to be consolidated over time and finally incorporated into the school organization (Sales et al., 2011). The experience developed in these schools should not remain a specific activity, but become a sustainable and systematic strategy, which can transform the school context by giving an intercultural perspective to the curriculum through the recognition of multiculturalism and multilingualism (Portera & Grant, 2017).

Although the main objective of the project was not language learning, the attitudes and competences of 6th grade students point out the need to promote spaces of formal learning of HLs, beyond the inclusion within the mainstream classroom in

specific activities. Intercultural competence also includes a linguistic competence that strengthens cultural identity and allows intercultural communication (Cummins, 2001).

Regarding teacher's competences, working with texts prepared by the students themselves implies a change in the attitude and teaching style while delegating responsibilities related to learning and management of the didactic resources. It involves avoiding folklorism and exoticism in the knowledge of other cultures and languages as a stereotyped attitude of cultural diversity (Banks, 2015). The starting point of this didactic strategy is the students' experiences and stories. The data collected show that working with identity texts allows to start from a situated conception of learning, and to reflect on the position of the different languages in the school and social context. Families value their contribution in school knowledge and a new relationship of collaboration and recognition between school and family has been observed. This experience is an example of a non-peripheral participation of families, which nurtures the core curriculum and considers the challenges of diversity as opportunities to work towards a more democratic school (Webber & Lupart, 2011).

The teaching strategies have focused especially on the dialogue among students about their own identities and the cultural and linguistic diversity of the classroom. Comparison and contrast and the active participation of families and students as competent cultural agents in a multicultural context have been recurrent. When comparing and contrasting languages, teachers have been able to focus on a fundamental element of culture. From an intercultural approach, this leads to valuing diversity and promoting exchange (Sales & García, 1997), thus raising awareness of diversity and its intercultural management. (RQ5)

Finally, experiences must take into account the social situation of home and school languages. In the Valencian context, the situation of the normalization process of Catalan/Valencian as a minority language compared to Spanish is combined with the co-existence of English as a predominant foreign language and other minoritised languages (Romanian, Arabic, Chinese, etc.), which are part of the society but invisible in the school context. Therefore, our didactic proposal has proven to be positive in highlighting the multilingual capacity of families and students themselves.

Conclusions

The highlight of the research was that the didactic implementation of multilingual identity texts has increased students' awareness, acceptance and interest for linguistic and cultural diversity. Moreover, a boosted self-esteem and an affirmation of cultural identity have also been recorded, especially among younger students. Despite these positive achievements, it is important to stress the inability to write in their HLs among 6th graders, and that their unwillingness to use them in the school context may indicate an undervaluation of their linguistic identity. Therefore, it can be said that older students still conceive their first languages as only valid for home use—a position which is possibly strengthened by a natural wish to be part of the group and not identified as being different at that age, and the project has not been able to shift that perception. Using their HLs in contexts different to those they are accustomed to seems to still be confusing for them and we consider more time and work with families and teachers may be necessary to carry out this change.

Teachers' implication has been essential. While recognising and valuing the group's diversity and the students' socio-familial context they feed on this diversity to generate collaborative and respectful interactions among students that foster

intercultural interest and learning.

Besides, teachers' attitudes have made families feel closer to the school. After participating in the project, some of the families state that the valuation of their own identities has increased, and they are aware that their identities are welcome in the classroom. However, teachers and families perceive the project differently maybe because teachers were partners, but families were not treated as equals in the conception of the tasks. A participatory AR approach would possibly improve the participation and engagement of families to these experiences (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Regarding the methodology, we verified that the elaboration of identity texts has emphasised a positive view of cultural diversity. The teachers' attitudes when developing each didactic proposal in the classrooms have fostered respectful interaction, cooperation and intercultural learning. As Cummins and Early (2011) state, educators met curricular expectations while at the same time acknowledging and respecting students' identities. The project has demonstrated that a multicultural and multilingual classroom can enhance the sense of belonging, empathy, active listening, cooperation and respect. However, the didactic proposal presented here cannot presuppose equal conditions among students, but consider their visibility as a strategy to claim a public space in the real implementation of multilingual educational policies in a Spanish and regional context where comprehensive intercultural policies have not been developed in the last 20 years (Zapata-Barrero & Pinyol-Jiménez, 2013).

The AR approach has provided the participant educators with specific strategies to integrate home languages in curricular activities from an inclusive, non-folkloric approach towards culture (Aguado & Malik, 2011). As Vilar & Sales (2013) pointed out regarding inclusive language learning, "the need for training is at the core of research devoted to making language learning accessible for all. Teachers who are new to inclusive practices will have to gain expertise in alternative ways of teaching foreign languages" (p.67).

This project confirms that teaching in diversity implies the management of content, materials and classroom environment so that intercultural competencies and attitudes are developed. Such an intercultural curriculum can only be implemented with the cooperation of community and families, and rooted in a given territory (Gundara, 2011). Besides, regarding families, it is important to emphasise that the attitude of parents in this project contributed to affirming the knowledge available in the community (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 43).

Plurilingual and intercultural education needs to be conceived as a global language education, across all languages of the school and in all disciplinary domains. This provides a basis for an identity open to linguistic and cultural plurality and diversity, insofar as languages are the expression of different cultures and of differences within the same culture (Beacco & Byram, 2007). Multilingualism is thus conceived as a resource to achieve interculturality, to facilitate intercultural communication and promote social justice and equal opportunities for all cultural groups (Coelho et al., 2013). In these multilingual and intercultural contexts, didactic proposals such as the elaboration of identity texts are an empowering and transformative educational strategy (Cummins et al., 2015).

The results and shortcomings of this pilot study open avenues of research within similar sociolinguistic contexts. Considering that most participant teachers admitted not having used specific strategies to incorporate HLs before, it would be interesting to carry out a survey to map the reality of HL-related didactic strategies among Valencian teachers. This would be an especially interesting avenue since the present law requires HLs to be considered at school (see Background). Secondly, the short-term scope of the

present study should be addressed, since this could be the cause of the few emerging changes among older students and some families. Therefore, a longitudinal study that covered at least one school year and the implementation of a wider range of plurilingual strategies would shed light into the possibilities of profound change of this approach. Finally, the pilot study suggests a stronger resistance to change among older students, especially regarding the use of HL in class and the attitudes towards the participation of their families in school projects. A study designed to be carried out in secondary education could dig deeper into the reasons underlying these attitudes and specific strategies to change them.

Note

1. Regarding the terms multilingualism and plurilingualism, this paper follows the distinction proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages who advocates to use multilingualism as the societal use of different languages, and plurilingualism to denote individual multilingualism (Jessner, 2008, p. 18).
2. <https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/project/translanguaging-guides-resources/>
3. Two of the Spanish-speaking students have a Portuguese-speaking parent, but the students do not speak this language.
4. Participants' real names have been substituted by pseudonyms.

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Declaration of interest statement

The authors state they do not have any relevant interests to declare.

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