Translanguaging as Transmediation: Embodied critical literacy engagements in a French-English bilingual classroom

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Abstract

Translanguaging theory highlights linguistic and semiotic resources as an integrated communicative repertoire for knowledge construction (Li, 2018). Language is learned and used in conjunction with other modalities through processes of resemiotization (Iedema, 2003) or transmediation (Suhor, 1984) where meaning is made and remade across modes. Through this translanguaging lens, dynamic integration of languages with expressive arts helps mobilize embodied resources, whether cognitive, sensory, or affective, for alternate avenues of knowing and awareness, an aspect much neglected in traditional critical literacy approaches focusing heavily on rational ideological critique (Janks, 2002). A trans-systemic approach also facilities second language learners' full agentive participation as their multilingual and multisensory resources are valorized for complex learning often considered beyond their abilities. This article describes a university-school participatory action research study in a Quebec elementary classroom, where the English Language Arts and French Second Language teachers, through coordinated translanguaging pedagogy (Gort & Sembiante, 2015), facilitated critical bilingual learning while providing respective language models. The children were engaged in a yearlong inquiry into the issue of refugees, through discussing stories of migration and interviewing with refugee-background students in both languages while engaging in visual arts for deepened understanding and embodied reflections. Students responded positively to the coordinated bilingual engagements and multisensory approaches to critical literacy, which afforded an aesthetic experience that fostered reflexivity and civic empathy (Mirra, 2018). The study points to the affordances of translanguaging in critical education, underscoring how embodied multilingual engagements allow students to be *affected* and to *affect* (Ahmed, 2010) others.

Keywords: translanguaging, trans-semiotization, transmediation, critical literacy, empathy, critical aesthetics, refugees, French second language, English language arts, bilingual education

Introduction

Translanguaging highlights an interconnected use of languages and other semiotic resources for communication and knowledge construction. Everyday communicative practices involve processes of *resemiotization* (Iedema, 2003) or *transmediation* (Suhor, 1984), whereby one discourse or semiotic resource is transformed into another mode or a mixture of modes in time and space, mobilizing and rendering new ways of knowing, being and acting. Translanguaging pedagogy hence values the dynamic integration of languages, including the *languages* of arts (e.g., painting, dance, or drama) for creative and critical bi/multilingual and pluriliterate learning (García, Bartlett, & Kleifgen, 2009). Translanguaging and/or transmediation of embodied semiotic resources, be it linguistic, visual or aural, gestural, etc. help disrupt the traditional logo- and verbo-centric notion of critical literacy (Janks, 2002) that privileges rational textual critique over aesthetic or emotional engagements (Misson & Morgan, 2006). Such a trans-systemic approach challenges most deficit-oriented second language classrooms where critical literacy and/or expressive arts are often considered beyond language learners' abilities.

Elaborating on a university-school participatory research study, this article showcases the use of coordinated translanguaging pedagogy (Gort & Sembiante, 2015) in an English-French bilingual classroom whereby the two language teachers collaborated flexibly and creatively to provide target language models while crafting a translanguaging space (Li, 2018) for multidirectional, pluriliterate meaning-making possibilities. Engaging children in a yearlong inquiry into the issue of refugees, the teachers of this multiage class (Grade 4-6) read and discussed related literature in both languages while integrating visual arts to deepen understanding. Results showed teachers' trans-systemic approach to critical bi-literacies extended and expanded students' understanding of refugees' issues such as human rights, discrimination, resilience, and hope. Particularly, these embodied multimodal engagements helped open up creative and aesthetic spaces for students to be *affected* and to *affect* (Ahmed, 2010) others through their expressive arts, affording an alternative avenue of critical awareness and engagement that deepened reflexivity and civic empathy.

Theoretical Frameworks

Translanguaging as Re-semiotization and Transmediation

Translanguaging theory recognizes languages as fluid, hybrid ecologies in individuals and communities characterized by their mutual polydirectional interconnections and interdependence (Cook, 2002, 2012; García, 2009). Languages, rather than being bounded, segregated or complete in bi/multilingual individuals and communities, are constantly evolving and developing as people *language* (Swain, 2006) and *trans-language* features and structures from different languages they learn, adapt, use in creative and functional ways across their life trajectories. Li (2018) draws on *ecological psychology* in his recent theorization of translanguaging as a practical theory of language, highlighting particularly Thibault's (2017) view of languaging as "an assemblage of diverse material, biological, semiotic and cognitive properties and capacities which languaging agents orchestrate in real-time and across a diversity of timescales" (p. 82). Thibault's view (2011) extends social constructivism to include ecological, biological, and material dimensions to understanding language behaviors as a whole-body, intersubjective sense-making process that is "materially embodied, culturally/ecologically embedded, naturalistically grounded, affect-based, dialogically coordinated, and socially enacted" (p. 211). This ecological view of language reconciles psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics to offer a more complex and integrated understanding of language as involving neural, affective and sociocultural engagements while underscoring the multimodal and multisensory nature of communication. Language cannot be processed independent of the auditory or gestural, spatial, visual or other non-linguistic systems; communication is always enacted through an ensemble of

multiple semiotic systems. This latest articulation of translanguaging theory transcends traditional boundaries between linguistic and non-linguistic systems (Li, 2018), treating all languages and other semiotic resources as an organic whole as individuals employ and deploy available cognitive and bodily semiotic resources (of which language is one) to perform communicative acts and identities.

This ecological and multimodal view of language theorized by scholars in social semiotics theory (Jewitt, 2008; Jewitt, Kress, Ogborn, & Tsatsarelis, 2001; Kress, 2009) has been widely adopted by researchers and educators in literacy classrooms. As early as the 1990s, literacy scholars have been advocating for engagements with expressive arts to deepen and expand children's understanding (e.g., Dyson, 1988; Eisner, 1978, 2003; Hoyt, 1992; Leland & Harste, 1994). The term *transmediation* was first coined by Suhor (1984, p. 250) to refer to the process of translating content from one system to another, allowing generation of new meanings and more complex understandings. Language is taken to mean "the language of art, of music, and more" (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988, p. 56); altogether as sign systems, these languages help mediate and make sense of the world around us. Pictures or drawings allow the expression of images and feelings that often precede words, hence visual representations can further assist students' understanding of the world (Elkind, 1988). *Sketch to Stretch* (Harste *et al.*, 1988) has been widely used to foster students' personal connections and interpretation of texts and social worlds, strengthening the reading and writing connections, especially for those whose language, culture and life experience are beyond the mainstream (Gallas, 1991).

According to Mills (2011), the term *transmediation* gradually diminished in its use when Multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and social semiotics theory gained more currency in literacy education. More recently, terms such as *transduction* (Kress, 1997) or *resemiotization* (Iedema, 2001, 2003) refer to the remaking of meaning across modes. Retracing these origins allows us not only to pay tribute to past literacy research work but also to understand how concepts intersect, crisscross and build on each other. Translanguaging is not new in the sense that it too draws on social semiotics theory and Multiliteracies to challenge the artificial boundaries imposed on various semiotic systems. However, positioning itself from the marginal, the in-between and the borderlands (Flores, 2014; García & Leiva, 2014), translanguaging theory and pedagogy help advance a political agenda to advocate for the political and education rights of marginalized languages and bodies, disrupting not only segregation between modalities but also that between majoritized and minoritized languages. It recentres minoritized sociolinguistic practices and identities as crucial to knowledge construction and performance. While the use of expressive arts and Multiliteracies are widely accepted pedagogies in literacy classrooms, it is often not the case in second or foreign language classrooms, particularly those in non-English majority contexts where teaching and learning of discrete and decontextualized language features still prevail. Expressive arts are often devalued in those classrooms and might only be considered relevant for more advanced learners. Promoting the importance of creative employment and deployment of resources across semiotic boundaries, translanguaging pedagogy can potentially close the traditional divide between pedagogy in literacy classrooms and that in second or foreign language classrooms. Some leading scholars in Second Language Acquisition (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016) have recently put forward a transdisciplinary framework for additional language education across material and digital multilingual contexts, urging for its reconfiguration within learners' social-local worlds to involve neurological, cognitive, sociocultural, and socioemotional dimensions at all levels: micro (individual), meso (institutional), and macro (ideological structures). The fundamental principles of this transdisciplinary framework dovetail neatly with those of translanguaging.

Affective Embodied Learning for Critical Literacy – Aesthetics and Affect

Recognizing the cognitive, sociocultural, socioemotional, and ideological aspects of language and learning opens up new possibilities for critical engagements in additional language classrooms. The

affective turn (Clough, 2007) in literary and cultural studies has sparked a renewed interest in the role of emotion in language education, apart from the cognitive-oriented concepts of anxiety, motivation and self-confidence (cf. Krashen, 1982). Critical literacy education traditionally tends to privilege logo- and verbo-centric approaches (Janks, 2002; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012), prioritizing students' cognitive abilities to dissect and deconstruct texts for ideological critique. This rational deconstructionist approach reinforces the mind-body dichotomy, relegating critical inquiry to mere intellectual exercise (Keddie, 2008).

Rosenblatt's (1982) theorization of reading as a process along a continuum of *efferent* and *aesthetic* stances reminds us of the importance of aesthetic experience in critical reading. As we read, past experiences, sensations, and feelings are evoked and lived through in the process. Aesthetic response, however, is not a simplistic reflection of the reader's private pleasures or emotions existing in a cultural or social vacuum; rather it is often charged with one's social and political values and concerns (Cai, 2008; Lewis, 2000). When viewed fully in its "personal, social, cultural matrix" (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 103-4), one's aesthetic response can serve as a starting point for criticism and ideological explorations, rather than the end of the reading process. This idea of emotions as the point of departure for critical engagement is well argued by poststructuralist and feminist scholars who theorize emotions as visceral bodily sensations that shape and are shaped by sociopolitical relations and worldviews (Ahmed, 2010; Benesch, 2012; Misson & Morgan, 2006). As Ahmed elaborates, "To be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluation expressed in how bodies turn toward things. To give value to things is to shape what is near us" (p. 31). Critical education puts great emphasis on students' criticality and reflexivity through which they actively and constantly seek to engage with and question different perspectives and to evaluate and examine our own critical practices (Freire, 1970). Holmes (2010) argues that critical reflections are fundamentally "emotional, embodied and cognitive" processes (p. 140) of individuals who seek to understand and feel about their lives in relation to others and the environment. In the same vein, Gallagher (2016), drawing on Ahmed's conceptualization of affect, posits that "our ability to act in the world is inherently relational, as the outcome of both affect and reason *by means of the imagination*" [original emphasis] (p. 84). To imagine is to go beyond where we are, to engage in dialogue with "a critical other" (Bleazby, 2012, p. 102), just as we do in communal inquiry with empathetic understanding of the others' perspectives. Relations with and feelings about others are hence central in one's critical, reflexive practices. This brings us to the importance of empathy in critical literacy education--its goal is to promote not only students' comprehension of texts but also their empathy and emotional capacity to relate to people and community with a sense of agency and efficacy to act within it (Mirra, 2018). Empathy refers to the ability to "imaginatively embod[y] the lives of our fellow citizens while keeping in mind the social forces that differentiate our experiences as we make decisions about our shared pubic future" (p.7). Rather than a mere popular feel-good gesture of seeking to establish a "nicer" and more understanding society, empathy is conceptualized within the broader sociopolitical constructs and power relations, or what Mirra calls *critical civic empathy*—it propels us to examine and recognize how our own social privilege or marginalization influences our interpretation of others' experience, and to seek ways to promote democratic dialogue and civic action for equity and justice (p.7).

Visual arts, like other forms of expressive arts, provide a "material-discursive tool" (Murris & Thompson, 2016, p. 2) for meaning-making. As the material properties of each medium influence how a concept is expressed, felt and experienced, the transformation from one to the next generates new meanings, raised awareness, and enhanced understanding. Arts affords what Matthews (1991) calls somatic knowing: "an experiential knowing that involves sense, percept, and mind/body—whole organism--action and reaction--a knowing, feeling and acting that is independent of distancing, disembodying, discursive conceptualization" (p. 89). Mallan (1999) argues that aesthetic engagements might seem to run counter to the tenets of critical literacy, yet visuals often stimulate interest and

prompt inquiry which may result in intellectual, emotional and personal shifts. Artistic representations, he explains, give a sense of the real, recasting experience in a different light, thus providing means for discussion, reflection and action (p. 201).

Context and Methodology

The project adopted a participatory action research (PAR) model to seek dialogic inquiry through university-school collaboration, with researchers working and thinking together with practitioners and inquiring into educational theories and practices of concern and interest to both parties. PAR aims to disrupt the university-school and research-practice dichotomies to foster bi-directional flow of knowledge between academe and the classroom (Duckworth, 2005; Paugh, 2004).

The teacher participants were two elementary teachers - English Language Arts (ELA) and French Second Language (FSL) - who shared a multiage classroom (Grades 4-6) with 43 students. Mrs. Smith and Madame Desbiens were experienced ELA and FSL teachers. They firmly believed in language and literacy education as a conduit for fostering critical readers, writers and actors. Both were conversant in the other's language (not academic writing) and both adopted a dynamic, integrated view toward bilingualism. They had previously tried out some ways to connect the FSL and English curricula but not in a systematic manner. Eager to learn more about translanguaging and explore how a coordinated use of both English and French might facilitate social justice education, the two teachers participated in this university-school participatory/collaborative action research project. The project first started as pilot study, which then evolved into a two-year research partnership when we obtained government funding. The research study aimed to explore the educational potential of cross -curricular and -language connections, seeking to answer these questions: 1) In what ways do the FSL and ELA teachers collaborate?, and 2) How does their collaboration facilitate students' complex bi-literacies and critical learning?

The school was located in a small town, which originated as an anglophone community but has now become a mix of both anglophones and francophones. The majority of the children were white and most (61%) came from families with both anglophone parents. A quarter of the class indicated use of both languages with either parents (23%), while a small portion used French only with both parents (16%). Close to two-thirds felt comfortable with reading (n=33) and writing (n=30) in English while 7 found themselves equally confident in reading and writing in both languages. Only 3 felt strong in French reading and 6 in French writing. As an active participant-observer, I made class visits, taking detailed field notes and videotaping class interactions and activities (36 hours in total). Using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2015), based on the teachers' initial assessment, three students of different language proficiencies (2 girls and one boy) were invited for case studies and in-depth focus group interviews (pre, during and post; 30 minutes each) about their opinions on translanguaging approaches and their learning on social topics. Two teacher interviews (pre and post; 45 minutes each) were conducted to collect opinions on student progress and implementation of translanguaging pedagogy. Our bi-monthly research meetings allowed us to plan and evaluate our collaborative action research cycles, discussing ongoing data to build and refine interpretations to co-develop emerging curricular foci and strategies aimed to meet the students' learning needs. Work samples of the nine focal students together with the other data sets helped triangulate our analysis and interpretation of the different literacy events.

Recursive process of qualitative analyses included the use of descriptive codes in the first cycle coding (Sa   , 2013) to establish the basic topic of data segments, then *in vivo* and *emotion* codings to capture the students' and teachers' voices and gain insight into their felt experiences in class. In the second cycle coding, data were clustered and reconfigured in an iterative manner to generate patterns on which the narrative description of the findings were based.

Process and Findings

In response to increasing newcomers to our town, a yearlong theme on Refugees and Immigrants was chosen at the beginning of the school year. Unbeknown to us, the issue of refugees and migrants would become an international crisis by the fall, when the effects of the Syrian civil war resulted in the biggest displacement of people in the world's history. We hence recentred our focus on the refugees' experience aimed to promote: an understanding of the personal and sociopolitical circumstances that force people to leave their countries; an awareness of related social and ethical issues (e.g., human rights, discrimination, resilience, and hope); and an empathetic understanding towards social challenges faced by refugees.

We started with *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (K. L. Williams & Mohammed, 2007), an illustrated picture book about how a friendship between two pre-teen girls in a refugee camp in Pakistan is forged over the sharing of a pair of sandals, each getting to wear the pair for a day. Our original plan was to follow our previous practice to read alternately English and French storybooks on the chosen theme, with French texts at a lower language level to meet the students' needs. We found it relatively difficult to find an appropriate French text in terms of content and language level, so after *Four Feet*, the teachers used a UNHCR video titled *To be a Refugee* (Foster, 2010, March 11) to generate French discussions based on English content. The video, featuring interviews with children and teenagers fleeing their countries for different environmental, sociopolitical and economic reasons facilitated a better understanding of the lived realities faced by refugees. We reached out to my university's Refugee Sponsorship Committee, a post-secondary college as well as a French elementary school to invite their students and/or young adults with refugee backgrounds to share their life stories with the children. We obtained ethical consent from the refugee-background students/adults to be "interviewed" by the school children. To prepare for the literacy activity, the class brainstormed and formulated interview questions in both languages. Most spoke English and/or French as their third or fourth language. After each interview, the children discussed the lived experiences shared by the visitors, based on which they wrote a report similar to a reading response. The life stories of the refugee-background students offered complex and authentic texts for the children to collaboratively explore issues such as world sociopolitical conditions, human rights, discrimination, resilience, and so on. The class also read other texts about migration, for example, *Brothers in Hope* (M. Williams, 2005) and *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007)—a wordless picture book used for French discussion, to continue recursive inquiry into the varied refugee experiences. Towards the year end, the teachers engaged the class in a drama project, including playwriting and performance, recreating the story of a refugee family's journey leading to their resettlement in Canada. Given the expansive nature of the project, this paper focuses mainly on the bilingual inquiry process, particularly the use of the two languages as well as the children's drawings to promote reflexive and empathetic understanding of refugees' experiences.

To answer Research Question 1, I focused the analysis on the process of cross-curricular and cross-language collaborations. Below are some key translanguaging practices that disrupted linguistic and non-linguistic boundaries:

Coordinated Collaborative Translanguaging between English and French

The teacher-led translanguaging practices were mostly coordinated and collaborative, meaning they both adhered to their respective language when leading class discussions and posing questions or comments on the side when not leading. Their adherence to their own language of teaching was intended to provide a target language model. Their co-presence and collaborative dialogue, however, opened up a hybrid space where students participated in meaning-driven discussions using the target language as much as they could and only the other language when lacking the appropriate vocabulary

or expressions. Here is an example of their collaborative translanguaging practice. The class was discussing *Brothers in Hope* (M. Williams, 2005), a fictional story about the real-life experiences of the "lost boys" of Sudan who trekked for miles to find shelter when the civil war broke out in mid-1980s. Garang, an eight-year-old boy, makes his way to Ethiopia and settles in a refugee camp. Garang takes up a leadership role for a group of boys and takes personal care of Chuti who is only five. When the class was discussing the story's main message, one student connected Garang with Terry Fox, a Canadian teenager, often revered as a national hero who, despite his illness, ran a marathon across the country to raise money for cancer research:

> Mally: Garang and Chuti, they kept going, not afraid.
> Smith: So what did he need a great deal of? What do we call that word?
> Mally: Bravery […] Kind of like Terry Fox.
> Desbiens: Qu'est-ce que c'est pareil avec Terry Fox? (*What is the same with Terry Fox?*)
> Mally: He walked across the country even he was sick.

The conversation above showed how the two teachers worked together to help Mally extend and elaborate his connections between Garang and Terry Fox on the theme of bravery. As the dialogue continued, Grade 5 student Janet expanded the notion of bravery by building on an earlier remark made by her classmate Mark that being brave is to have the ability to "look at the world different." She illustrated it by referring to Garang's appreciation of the comfort offered in the refugee camp after roaming in the wild for some time:

> Janet: Well, it's kind of like what Mark said about how [Garang] looked at the world different […] They didn't have big houses, but/

> Smith: Yes, so it is in comparing. You said on one of the pages when you go without food for so long and then you get a few lentils and some flour, it seems like a feast, doesn't it? And he said the huts [in the refugee camp] look like/

> Students: Castles.

> Smith: Castles. You're absolutely right, compared to what they had before. It depends on your perspective.

> Desbiens: Est-ce que quelqu'un sait comment on appelle ça? Cette qualité-là que le monde a quand les choses sont difficiles. Quand tu vis des moments difficiles dans la vie mais tu continues. Tu peux avoir… C'est plus que du courage. C'est un peu comme ce que George disait : il faut que tu oublies ce que tu as vécu mais tu continues à aider le monde autour de toi. Il y a un mot pour ça. Et moi je pense que c'est un thème extrêmement important dans ce pays-là. C'est … la résilience. Ok, la résilience. En anglais c'est quoi donc ?

> (*Does anyone know what it's called. This quality that people have when things are difficult. When you live difficult moments in life but you continue. You can have ... It's more than courage. It's a bit like what George said: you have to forget what you've been through, but you continue to help the people around you. There is a word for that. And I think it's an extremely important theme in that country. It's ... Resilience. Ok, resilience. In English, what is it?*)

> Students: Resilience.

Desbiens: Resilience? Ça veut dire que de continuer à vivre bien, de continuer à être heureux malgré les difficultés. Je pense que c'est un thème, un message qui est quand même très important. […]. Ok, la capacité de continuer à sourire, de vivre, d'avoir du plaisir.

(*Resilience? It means to continue to live well, to continue to be happy despite the difficulties. I think it's a theme, a message that's still very important. [...]. Ok, the ability to continue to smile, to live, to have fun.*)

Building on the students' ideas of bravery and the ability to adopt a different perspective, Desbiens introduced the concept of resilience to describe the strength of character Garang exhibits in the process. The two dialogues above show how the two teachers' coordinated efforts helped extend, revoice and refine students' ideas to make the two key themes of bravery and resilience salient and clear with elaboration. The explicit effort in pointing out the cognate (resilence/résilience) also allowed students to build bridges learning in both languages. Bravery and resilience as demonstrated in Garang is a quality similarly exhibited in many refugees and immigrants, which often quickly dissipates from the public discourse after their resettlement in host countries. The teachers were trying to help the children recognize and appreciate these positive qualities displayed in people who experienced shifting and unstable homes and reposition them as strong and resilient individuals in continuing to live with dignity.

Regarding their overall cross -curricular/-language coordination, Smith opined that a yearlong project allowed room for creative maneuvering. Rather than being "compartmental" in content and language allocation, they were fine with doing English for three days, for example because they were "on a roll with something" and then went on to French. Desbiens added that their flexible collaboration followed one key principle: "Let the students guide [them]", that is, paying careful attention to the children's needs, in terms of their language, conceptual and emotional readiness and to work with them. They shared that an emergent curriculum could be "scary" to teachers who felt insecure in not having everything planned out. For Smith and Desbiens, what anchored them was their teaching philosophy, that is, language for critical learning. So they were comfortable in making mistakes, treating them as learning opportunities to better their teaching; just as they would correct each other's language mistakes in front of the children to show them the importance of taking risks in language learning.

Explicit Support for Transmediation Between and Among Semiotic Resources

Apart from fostering development in critical biliteracies, this project also aimed to prepare students with the necessary skills to write school board and provincial exams, particularly reading responses in ELA, reading comprehension and general writing in FSL. From our experience in the pilot, despite having in-depth class discussions, some students struggled to remember and synthesize ideas discussed in class. Reading response is a distinct genre of writing with its own features and expectations. Oral discussions comprise mostly spontaneous speech, with individuals taking turns or sometimes interrupting a turn to offer ideas, comments or musings, seldom complete or polished on their own. It is often through a process of participative contributions will ideas become salient and concrete. Transmediating the collaborative dialogue into a written reading response requires not only clarity of thought but also a metalinguistic awareness of semiotic designs of different texts. The teachers made explicit efforts in building such a meta-semiotic awareness in the students. This included an overt naming and teaching of different comprehension strategies, e.g., making predictions and connections, posing questions, visualizing, synthesizing, and so on, constantly referring students to the Reading is Thinking poster on one bulletin board (see Figure 1) for those skills. They also created another visual aid on response writing to remind students of its text elements and some writing prompts (Figure 2).
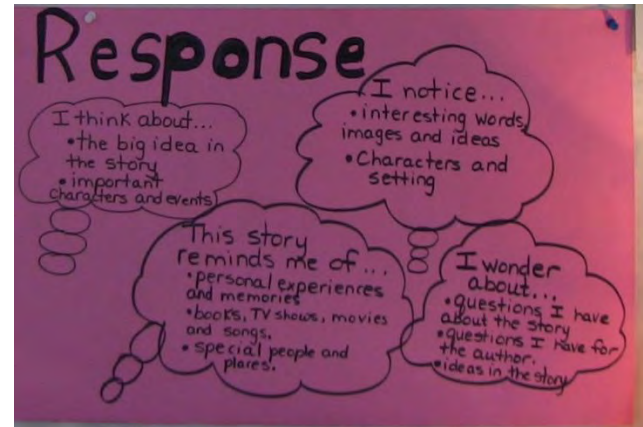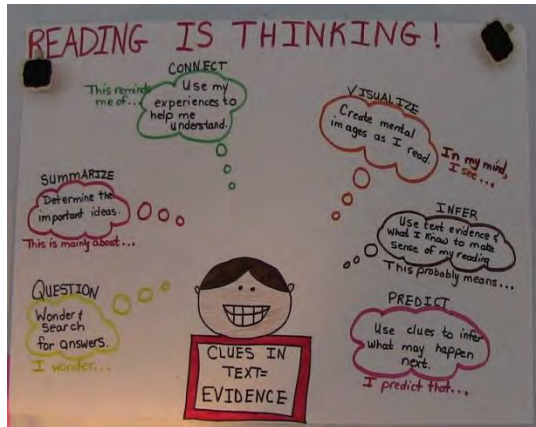
Figures 1 & 2 *Visual aids for reading comprehension and writing reading response*

During class discussions, Smith would stop to ask the class, "Is there something on that page that you think […], 'I should include that in my response', or 'I should make a reference to that'?" Similarly, when Desbiens introduced the term *resilience* as a theme of the story, she reminded students to support the theme with pertinent examples from the story: "Dans le livre c'est où qu'on voit ça qu'il n'y a énormément que resilience? […] Quand on veut parler d'un thème dans un livre, il faut chercher des exemples". (*In the book, where do we see a lot of that resilience? [...] When we want to talk about a theme in a book, we have to look for examples*.)

To prepare for response writing, after class discussions, students were asked to create a mind map in groups, using three different colours to note down respectively the main characters, message and personal connections with the story. Their mind map drafts were then brought back to the whole class for further discussions, explanation and clarification. The final version of the mind map (Figure 3) was co-created (transmediated or resemiotized) from their recursive collaborative dialogue, which was then used as a visual aid for individuals' write-up.
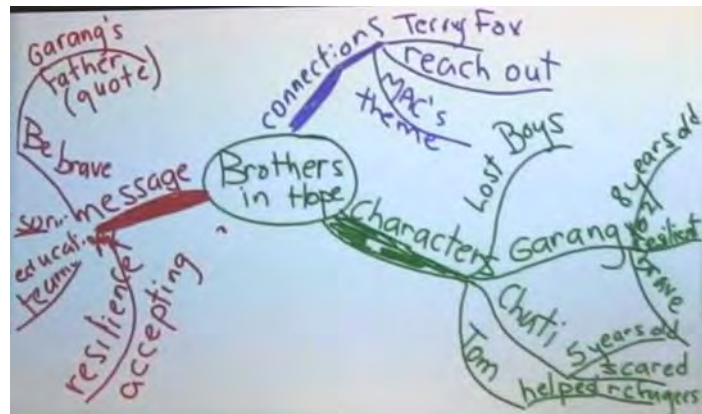

Figure 3 *Resemiotization of class talk into a visual concept map for written reading responses*

Explicit attention was also given to the examination of visual grammar (Serafin, 2009), for example the use of colours, composition, use of symbols and so on to allow students to tap into other semiotic cues other than linguistic ones to make meaning and engage in more complex discussions. Art was used widely in this class in order to provide a different avenue of knowing and feeling. For this purpose, the two teachers worked closely with an art teacher of a nearby high school to do an art project based on the theme of *A Happy/Safe Place*. The idea was to engage students in artistic imagination and expression to show what it was like to be surrounded by danger or sadness, and how one might seek refuge amidst the turmoil. Before the art workshop, the children were invited to observe the art

teacher's class whose students were completing a painting on the same theme. To prepare for the visit, the children brainstormed questions about painting techniques and elements. For example: If you could give a title to the painting, what would it be? Does it remind you of anything? What details, if cut out, would make it a different story? Responding to these questions, the teachers remarked:

> Desbiens : Ok, wow c'est drôle hein ? Moi j'entends beaucoup de questions qui ressemblent aux questions qu'on se pose quand on lit un livre. (*Ok! Wow! It's funny. I hear many questions that resemble the questions we ask when we read a story.*)

> Smith: That's what I was just thinking-- the responses are the same.

Desbiens made a comparison between drawing and reading while Smith extended it to writing, and they continued:

> Desbiens : Avez vous remarqué ça ? Hein, souvent, quand on va lire un livre, on va cacher le titre, on va dire qu'est-ce que ça pourrait être le titre ? Qu'est-ce que vous pensez qu'y se passe après ça ? Qu'est-ce qu'on sent? Qu'est-ce qu'on entend quand on entend cette histoire-là, c'est fou hein ? Ça ressemble vraiment beaucoup. […] c'est le genre de questions qui sont importantes de se poser. […] quand on fait notre propre peinture, […], on a une idée générale, puis on va faire le dessin en gros, […] et c'est les détails […], c'est ce qui rend, c'est un peu comme une histoire, c'est//

> (*Have you noticed that? Huh, often when we read a book, we will hide the title, we will say what could be the title? What do you think happens after that? What do we feel? What do we hear when we hear this story, it's crazy huh? It really looks like a lot. [...] these are the kinds of questions that are important to ask yourselves. [...] when we do our own painting, [...] we have a general idea, then we will do the overall drawing, [...] and it is the details [...], that's what makes it, it's a bit like a story, it's//*)

> Smith: The same with writing—all the words that you put in…the word choice.

Desbiens made links between reading a narrative text and a visual text, both requiring focused attention to, for instance, what the title suggests, how the details excite our senses, etc. Hence, painting requires a similar attention to details to make its story come alive. Smith extended the comparison to writing that like the details of a picture, our word choice matters in the craft of writing. Later in the art workshop, the art teacher introduced and demonstrated the key elements of a painting and demonstrated different ways of representing an idea on a two-dimensional space by changing the composition of objects including their positions, sizes and angles to render new suggestions and interpretations. Tapping into the art teacher's expertise, the ELA and FSL teachers orchestrated and coordinated efforts in creating a translanguaging space where linguistic and non-linguistic resources were leveraged for complex learning and performance. To demonstrate how their fluid collaboration facilitated students' critical understanding of the topic of inquiry (Research Question 2), the following are the three main findings.

Affordances of Language Connections for Deep, Integrated Learning

The constant connections drawn among different languages and modalities, be it English, French, interviews, videos or drawing, allowed students to see all these semiotic resources as equally important and necessary in constructing complex meaning. These semiotic connections helped expand and extend the children's collaborative inquiry about refugees in an integrated and unified manner, as Janet

commented in the second focus group interview:

> *Well, I like it that we are doing the same project in English then in French coz then you're just focusing on one thing more.*

The children also felt that because of the connected learning, students who were highly proficient in English and those in French could consolidate their strengths and offer mutual support to meet the task demands. The teachers' collaboration also demonstrated to the students the importance of co-learning and sharing of expertise, as Grade 5 student Gina commented, "They kind of know how to work with each other […] they're school friend teachers and outside [as well]." The teachers' collegiality and friendship inspired the children's mutual trust and distributed expertise, which further facilitated collaborative, socio-affective learning in class. Below shows how Grade 4 students Alexis (highly proficient in English) and Cherie (highly proficient in French) finished off each other's sentences:

> Alexis: I like it [English-French connection] coz if there is a word in English that I do not know
>   how to say in French then//
>
> Cherie: Then you ask me.

The connected use of languages allowed students to see that their learning went beyond arbitrary institutional and curricular boundaries:

> Terri: You're listening to two languages regularly, like you're always//
> Rowan: Like you don't have to switch classrooms, right?

For Terri and Rowan, two fourth graders, connecting the two languages allowed them more exposure to both—having both teachers present at all times and learning from them simultaneously without restrictions and disruptions from fixed curriculum and scheduling. This comment echoed the teachers, in Desbiens' words: "Because we are now all the time together, we kind of always do things bilingually. […] Some write-ups are in French and others in English, but I don't think that one kid could tell you we have learned this in French about refugees […] compared to this in English." They admitted that the mechanics of language were not their key focus, which needed to be strengthened, but for both, conceptual clarity and coherence and critical language learning took on a higher priority, as Desbiens said:

> *That's my belief--if you don't have ideas, you can have all the mechanics you want, you are not going to put them down and no one is going to see them. The opposite is much easier.*

As with the previous years, the teachers compiled students' different bilingual writings done throughout the year into a book. The preparation process for its publication allowed for not only multiple writing opportunities but also imbued the processes of editing and proofing with authentic social importance, as Smith shared:

> *[The children] write with so much emotion. When I read them, like the poems they wrote, […] there were so many mistakes. I asked them to go back […] they were not happy […], so we talked about publishing. […] And it was pretty good after.*

Painting as somatic knowing for critical civic empathy

Painting was found to be a useful means of deepening the children's embodied understanding of the

refugees' experience. Students were asked to write bilingual descriptions for their paintings, with at least one sentence in French. Figure 4 shows an example from Gina who chose to write her description all in French.

	"L'image que j'ai fai[t] c'est un petit garçon avec rien que du mal ou de la destruction. C'est comme le temps s'est arrêté. Dans tout le mal il y a une petite lumière qui brille. Et ça deviens plus grande chaque seconde. Une place en sécurité. Une place sans noir et rouge. Une place avec une AMI IMAGINAIRE qui le réconforte." [original emphasis] *(The image I made is a little boy with nothing but trouble or destruction. It's like time stopped. In all badness, there is a small light that shines. And it's getting bigger every second. A safe place. A place without black and red. A place with an IMAGINARY FRIEND that comforts him. "*

Figure 4 *Gina's painting*

When interviewed, Gina showed in her painting a little boy surrounded by danger and as such, "he felt trapped" without help as his whole family was killed in a war. The red flicks and dark colours represented all the bad things that had happened in the boy's life, she explained:

> *in this one moment he was just sitting alone and this little creature [...] and that little friendship that was little seconds, it comforted him [...], like nothing dangerous can happen to him.*

The imaginary friend/creature depicted in Gina's painting represents a certain symbol of hope or faith that the child hangs onto as a protective shield against the surrounding chaos and danger. When asked how this activity promoted her understanding of the refugee experience, Gina said:

> *When I was painting and going through what I wanted to show on my paper, I kind of **felt like I felt it** [...] I know it wasn't possible, but drawing and making what I wanted to make on the paper, I felt like what the refugees were experiencing. [emphasis added]*

The material process of transmediating the ideas of suffering and hope through colour contrasts, composition, and use of space afforded Gina certain visceral, bodily connections with the refugees' experience, especially their sense of pain and strength in holding onto hope. Another student, Susan expressed a similar sentiment in the drawing process:

> *Well, while I was doing it, I **could imagine being that girl**, sad and lonely and alone. [emphasis added]*

Rowan mentioned a similar impact painting had on him. In the mid-year interview, he talked about how he got the idea for his painting (Figure 5):

> *I'm not that good with paint, so, I was **imagining** [...] like there is a guy who is laying in his bed in a refugee camp, and so then he'd be thinking of his friends and family. He'd be playing soccer [...] back where he was and so the war came and then he had to get out safely. [But] all of his other relatives and family members didn't make it. [emphasis added]*
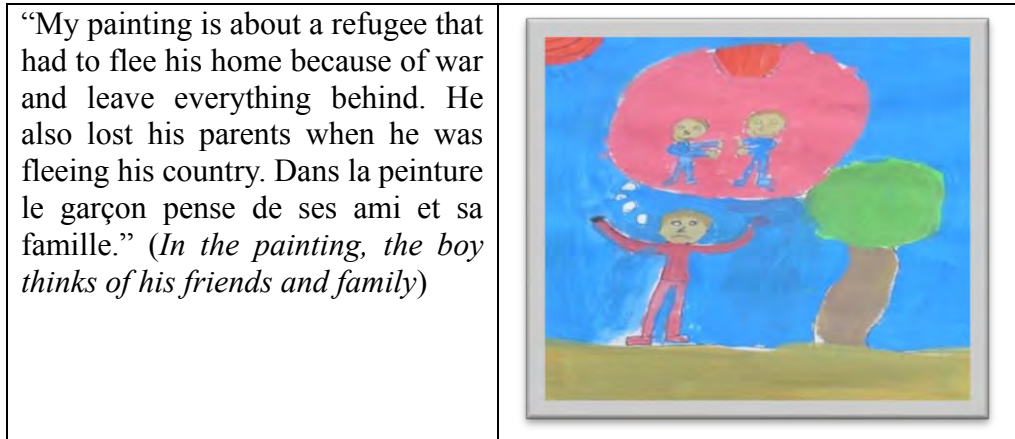
"My painting is about a refugee that had to flee his home because of war and leave everything behind. He also lost his parents when he was fleeing his country. Dans la peinture le garçon pense de ses ami et sa famille." (*In the painting, the boy thinks of his friends and family*)

Figure 5 *Rowan's painting and description*

Despite his alleged poor painting skills, Rowan focused his imagination on the circumstances faced by a little boy who survived his family and friends and reminisced on those good moments of being together. Rowan opined that the painting allowed him to "put [himself] in a refugee's shoes" to begin to understand what it felt like to be alone in the world without friends and family. This affective connection helped him gain a new insight into the issue of Syrian refugees:

> *I think that the refugees that come here [from Syria], they must be like very, very thankful that they were one of the people that came here. But when we interviewed one of the refugees, he said that he came alone, like he didn't bring any of his family members with him.*

The process of transmediating a refugee's life story from the oral interview into a visual representation prompted Rowan to reevaluate critically an assumed belief that with a new home, all problems faced by refugees were resolved and that they must be feeling thankful. The painting process afforded Rowan a new critical affective awareness to feel and realize the possible enduring impact of losing one's loved ones.

Consciousness of one's social privilege and responsibility

Students' embodied learning and civic empathy for refugees also fostered a greater consciousness of their own sociopolitical privilege, hence reflexivity on one's civic responsibilities. Gina divulged that seeing and hearing both the videos and stories shared by the refugee interviewees, especially the meagre living conditions in the refugee camps, she realized the privileges she enjoyed and the so-called difficulties in her life paled in comparison: Losing her iPad was nothing compared to losing her family. As our town was expecting the arrival of some Syrian refugees at the time, the class responded to the Refugee Sponsorship Committee's call to donate and/or knit woollen tuques to extend a warm welcome to these new arrivals. When asked about what they could do to help make change happen, the children had different answers. Gina thought about donating school supplies to newcomer children to let them know they were cared for in their adaptation to the new school environment. Janet, on the other hand, felt she could contribute by sharing her knowledge about refugees gained from this project:

> *At the beginning of the year I'd heard the word [refugees], but I didn't really pay attention to it […] I guess because we know now, we can let other people know how to help them and maybe they can make a bigger difference, since we're just like kids.*

Janet's desire to share her knowledge about refugees was in some way inspired by Garang in *Brothers*

in Hope who takes the advice of a refugee worker to share his story in order to "move caring people to help" (n.p.). Janet felt she could continue with the example set by Garang as well as the refugees who came to share their stories with the class. Another student, Alice, said when her family sponsored a refugee girl before, she had no interest to know more; but now she would ask more questions to get informed of the situation.

The class interviews with students and young adults with refugee backgrounds had made the project real to the children. Sitting together, listening to how they trekked from one place to the next, how they lost touch with their parents or other family members. Particularly, when hearing these newcomers using French or English as their newly learned languages to tell their stories, these children felt inspired to take the risks to improve their second language. As Desbiens said in an interview:

> *I don't think that they will hear the word refugee and not have so many thoughts and images with it.*

The way the teachers viewed critical literacy had also changed. Before, Desbiens thought critical literacy was just about reading and writing:

> *"But now I see it more as a whole process. You know like the [art] and drama we did, the interviews, the talking, the living. And that's how it changed for me."*

In other words, critical literacy is about embodied learning; it is not only through reading and writing but also thinking, listening, drawing, dialoguing, acting, relating, and interacting with people and material to allow for cognitive, socio-emotional, full-bodied ways of sensing, feeling and thinking about the social issue. As for Smith, she found our prolonged collaboration research had made teaching critical bi-literacies easier, as she said, "it has come more naturally". She found that students had made some substantial achievement though often not reflected in report cards because, in her words, "You know we cannot see the critical literacy on the report card."

Discussions and Conclusions

The findings above showed that the teacher-directed translanguaging practices were mainly collaborative. In other words, the two teachers spoke their respective languages most of the time to maintain a language model, yet their co-presence and translanguaging efforts focused on coordinating meaning-driven discussions, working together fluidly to extend, challenge and support the children's thinking and discussions. This echoes studies on *coordinated bilingualism* (Gort & Pontier, 2013; Gort & Sembiante, 2015) where language teachers used similar collaborative, parallel monolingual practice to create and coordinate a *translanguaging space* (Li, 2018) in the classroom for students to take risks using their target language but switching to the other just so they could participate in and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. The children in this multiage class felt that their learning in/of English and French was not truncated or compartmentalized but rather integrated with new building each other. They saw their English and French lessons as a coherent unit, fostering transversal development in both language skills and conceptual depth and clarity. Coordinated bilingualism also helped protect a pedagogic space for students' weaker language (French in this case), ensuring rich input and exposure to the target language while tapping into new learning from their stronger language (English) to make sense and connections. In the process, they each felt their own language strengths could be put to good use as they collaborated and shared expertise.

There was relatively less effort in explicit teaching of discrete cross-linguistic comparisons (for example, how certain grammar structures are different between French and English), although

consistent effort had been made in drawing students' attention to shared cognates to expand their vocabulary and strategies. The teachers acknowledged that this discrete focus on grammar and mechanics was one limitation in their coordinated bilingual class. However, they both prioritised students' deep and critical understanding of social issues. For them, language education is critical education; one could not be separated from the other. They believed that children's mastery of the conventions and mechanics would improve, especially when they were asked to read and write with a real purpose, something socially meaningful in which they had great emotional investment. The yearend publication of their bilingual writing as a collection of their research and developing understanding of the topic of refugees was an impetus for the children to perfect their writing skills, not just in idea generation and experimentation of creativity but also in editing and proofreading, two very difficult skills they had come to learn in action.

Given the importance placed on critical understanding, rather than mere discrete language structures, the teachers saw the benefits of connecting all language and modal resources to stretch students' learning and provide different avenues of somatic knowing involving the whole body experience (Matthews, 1991). They did that through, first, constant meta-talk on the designs of different semiotic resources. Through the recursive, explicit references to inter-textual relations (for example, the similar skills used in reading/viewing and writing/designing narrative and visual texts), students were sensitized to how design features in multimodal texts construct meaning and in turn learned to make agentive choices themselves about these design features to articulate ideas and express emotions. Further, transmediating/translanguaging between and among the different media--class reading, oral discussions, videos, posters, mind maps, interviews, painting, and writing, all done in both languages in a coordinated manner, the teachers facilitated multi-layered, multi-sensory, multi-systemic learning experiences for the children to gain nuanced understandings. Through discussing, thinking, feeling and imagining, the children became aware of their own privilege and imaginatively embodied the lives of the new arrivals, albeit momentarily. They showed appreciation of such an integrated way of learning, making in-depth inquiry into a topic that they felt intimately connected and compassionate about. Language learning became imbued with a meaningful social purpose, an intellectual pursuit and critical inquiry that they were proud to participate in and to be able to act on. The varied embodied multimodal engagements opened up aesthetic spaces for students to be *affected*, and some came to believe in their ability to *affect* (Ahmed, 2010) other people through donations (like Gina), sharing what they learned and engaging others in related conversations (like Janet), or getting themselves more informed of the matter (like Alice). Some, such as Rowan, came to question the social assumptions behind the general savior attitude in erroneously believing that finding a new home for refugees was the be-all-and-end-all remedy for the challenges faced by them. Through his drawing, Rowan connected viscerally to the pain refugees endured in losing their loved ones, gaining a more mature understanding of the issue and intimating to more diversified support beyond resettlement. It was definitely our wish to move these students beyond the mere do-good-feel-good sentiments to become more critically aware of the broader sociopolitical inequities and our own complicity in perpetuating those power structures. These surely cannot be all accomplished in one academic year; we saw these efforts to promote students' critical reflexivity and civic empathy as all necessary "drops in a bucket" that need to be continued and sustained.

As Smith and Desbiens commented, teachers might feel insecure about translanguaging practices, but it is important to feel "secure" about the centrality of critical affective learning in any language classrooms. This recognition will help guide translanguaging practices to go beyond surface language connections or transfer to transmediation between and across multimodal, multisensory, and multilingual resources for critical inquiry that promotes reflexivity, multiple perspectives, and civic empathy and engagements. As Desbiens succinctly put it, "Let the children guide you": What do the class discussions tell you about the thinking or concerns of the children? What needs to be further

supported, explored, expanded, and challenged? The same applies to language: Who is stronger in the target language and can be pushed further and who needs more help? Code-switching, translation or re-voicing ideas in another language can provide a scaffold for these students to continue participation, clarify concepts and express emergent understanding. The two teachers' flexible, responsive teaching was akin to the concept of *translanguaging shifts* (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017) which describe teachers' momentary instructional decisions and shifts to flexibly address students' emerging language and learning needs. It is the care, willingness and flexibility to adapt content and language use in a coordinated manner that helps de-compartmentalize content and language learning. Translanguaging practices can and must take different forms depending on the contextual needs, as they present themselves in language policies, curricular guidelines, assessments, multilingual practices at personal and societal levels. Smith and Desbiens' creative and critical collaborative efforts described here extend an invitation to other teachers to, whether individually or with others, create and orchestrate a translanguaging space unique to their own contexts to expand language boundaries and enable multiple opportunities for students' learning that reflect authentic multilingual environments within and outside classrooms.

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