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Action Research to Transform Early Language Practice: Exploring Representations of Plurilingualism in a Private Nursery

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Abstract: Through an exploration of language practices in an early years setting, this paper aims to examine discourses about transforming monolingual practice generated during an internally driven action research. Based on a small private nursery in an affluent part of London, this action research was conducted with the intention of reviewing internal practices that support young children who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Parents and practitioners took part in an initial questionnaire (n=21). This was followed by semi-structured interviews (n=3) and a focus group (n=5) with practitioners. The data was analysed considering some of the theoretical points proposed by Bourdieu and the discourse analysis tools suggested by van Leeuwen. Despite the recognition of potential barriers, encouraging positive dispositions towards language diversity were identified. The most significant feature of our examination was the value of local knowledge and the diverse language repertoires encountered in the setting. Our analysis evidence that action research can empower practitioners to challenge monolingual mindsets and to move towards an exploration of alternative (plurilingual) ideas, despite the monolingual ethos imposed by the curriculum and other external regulatory forces.

Keywords: *Action research, Bourdieu, early years, English as an additional language, plurilingual practice.*

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Introduction

Within discourses of neoliberal education, early years practices have been forced (from the top down) to reduce, for example, the hours allocated to free-flow play in order to give room to school readiness with a stricter assessment framework (enforced by the Department for Education since 2016). An illustrative example of this has been noted with Roberts-Holmes' (2015) term "the datafication of early years", which captures the pedagogical tensions that early years practitioners face when assessment is used to produce "good results" in order to continue competing in the educational market. Within this context, in our professional engagement with early years practice in England we have annoyingly found ourselves disempowered by the regulatory system, one of its limitations, in our eyes, being the lack of recognition of home languages in the early years curriculum (Rojas-Bustos, 2020).

The research reported in this paper was generated as part of our interest in seeking alternative approaches to supporting young children who speak more than one language. Even though learning more than one language from a young age has been considered a cognitive and linguistic asset, substantial research has unveiled the pervasive invisibility of home language in early years services in England (Ang, 2010; Barron, 2009; Issa & Hatt, 2013; Read, 2012; Safford & Drury, 2012). There is a well-established recognition of oral language skills as the foundation of future literacy development (McLeod, 2011); however, young children's home-language repertoire has been consistently ignored (ibid). This substantial contradiction goes even further, as home languages have been constructed as "a problem" (Fernald & Weisleder, 2015; Safford & Drury, 2012) and language provision as "in crisis" (McLeod, 2011; Rojas-Bustos, 2018).

By contrast, our study aims to rescue and expand on local discourses of language practice for young children learning more than one language, providing a critical review of language ideologies at the local level (such as monolingual versus plurilingual ideas). A significant tool was the application of action research, which enabled us not only to identify areas for improvement but to foster solutions to collectively change language practice, thus generating knowledge (Guerra &

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Figuroa, 2018) and finding alternatives that can transform monolingual practice into more inclusive approaches to language diversity (Panniello & Rojas-Bustos, 2021; Rojas-Bustos, 2018, 2020).

Literature Review

We argue for a critical examination of the ideological perspectives constructed around early language learning, and action research opens up opportunities here that are worth considering. The first part of this section introduces the theoretical framework that we have adopted in order to analyse language practice, highlighting the notions of language dispositions inspired by Bourdieu's theory of practice. The second part explores action research as a tool to generate opportunities that can lead to the transformation of language practice.

Bourdieu and Early Language Practice in Multilingual Contexts

This paper applies the theoretical framework developed by Bourdieu (1977, 1991), beginning by picturing nursery practice as a specific field (or *market*) in which children, practitioners and parents (*the members of the market*) are engaged in certain activities (*exchanges*) to produce and preserve what is considered valuable (*capital*). The exchanges that happen in the market characterise specific ways of doing that are considered common-sense practice. Making sense of practice is part of the process of legitimation. This means that certain practices are deemed "normal" and "natural" ways of doing, representing realities from specific perspectives of interest and underpinning particular ideologies (Fairclough, 2009, 2010; Hodge & Kress, 1993; Wodak, 2007). In applying these concepts to language practice, the focus is on what is perceived as valuable and on what has been done, or suppressed, in order to preserve and reproduce linguistic capital.

When talking about young children's language learning experience in England, what is accepted and appreciated as linguistic capital in early years settings means the inclusion or exclusion of languages other than English in the practice therein. Many studies have reported on persistent monolingual discourses in which the perceived "norm" is to speak/learn only one language (Barron, 2009; Flynn, 2015; Kenner, 2004; Safford & Drury, 2012). A clear example of this is embodied in the instruments used to assess children's progression (Department for Education, 2021a), which do not provide room to include more than one language. What is more, the early learning goals reflect the typical development of monolingual children without acknowledging different patterns for bilingual learners (Rojas-Bustos, 2018). This monolingual mindset does not necessarily represent children's early experiences with languages but, at the same time, the lack of alternative learning resources in other languages perpetuates monolingual practices (Flynn, 2015). Consequently, "other languages" have been marginalised (Barron, 2009) and so have the pedagogical opportunities to enrich early language learning.

Plurilingual Dispositions in Early Years Practice

Dispositions is another term introduced by Bourdieu (1977, 1991) and it refers to the way in which we act and react in practice. Dispositions towards languages are highly influenced by ideologies about what it means to learn one or more languages from a young age and the value of "other languages" within that process. Although not always explicit, the different ideological constructions indicate distinct degrees of awareness, understanding and appreciation of language learning and language practices. Hamel (2008), in his analysis of language policies, identifies monolingual, multilingual and plurilingual ideological orientations.

A *monolingual* mindset perpetuates practices in which only one language matters (Hamel, 2008). *Multilingualism*, by contrast, is characterised by both the recognition that some young children are learning more than one language, and an acknowledgment of their cultural differences; however, this is still seen as a personal interest and a personal commodity (Hamel, 2008; Rampton et al., 2010). *Plurilingualism*, on the other hand, emphasises an eco-system in which spaces for language learning are shared. In this way, parents and children become the experts on their own linguistic background and their knowledge is brought inside early years settings (Hamel, 2008). In multicultural contexts, these ideologies co-exist in a contestable and unstable manner (Blackledge, 2002; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006; Tollefson, 2010; Weber & Horner, 2012) but it is only through a critical review of our beliefs that these ideologies can be fully recognised (Tollefson, 2010).

We advocate for plurilingual practices. Moving towards plurilingualism implies a process of questioning language ideologies and the barriers they impose. If sufficient research has already recognised the advantage of plurilingual early learning environments, what is preventing us from implementing a plurilingual approach? Transforming practice starts by examining the different ways in which we can improve the learning experience of those who have been marginalised (Mills, 2008). For this, action research opens up spaces for a critical review of language ideologies and dispositions.

Transforming Practice from Within (Action Research in Action)

Whereas the literature reveals some level of consensus regarding the benefits of using action research to improve practice (Bleach, 2014; Douglas-Osborn, 2017), in early years in particular such research has been bounded within discourses of continuous professional development with an emphasis on developing leadership and reflective skills

(Anderson & Cook, 2021; Bleach, 2014; Godínez-Martínez, 2018; Guerra & Figueroa, 2018). In this section, we review some of the practicalities of applying action research when examining language practice, arguing for its potential value in generating transformative discourses which, when talking about language ideologies, can influence the formation of new dispositions towards language/s.

Bourdieu's theory suggests that we do things in a particular way because we have been habituated to do so. The particular way of doing is legitimised by institutions and gains a status of acceptance and, therefore, we subordinate to what is there (1977, 1991). By contrast, transformation means to move away from what has been taken for granted. It is a process of questioning what is already there and, rather than focusing merely on what the obstacles are, transformations look at alternatives that are outside current practices (Bourdieu, 1977). We argue that action research opens up spaces for collaborative dialogues to find solutions to local challenges (Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Practitioners are empowered to contribute with their self-reflection, exposing personal beliefs, stances and experiences. Therefore, knowledge is co-constructed, encouraging thoughtful reconsiderations of practice (Godínez-Martínez, 2018). This creates opportunities to evaluate practice, examine new strategies and bring in changes and new understandings (Guerra & Figueroa, 2018; Rodd, 2013), particularly if these originate from the team rather than from "above" (Rodd, 2013).

Given the contestable position of ideological construction about early language learning in multilingual contexts, action research appears as an instrument that creates opportunities to review (shared) ideas about early language learning, the position of other languages in the early years curriculum and how to create more meaningful connections between home language and English. Rather than focusing merely on developing leadership and reflective skills or on professional performance, our study emphasises the generation of collaborative, democratic and participative spaces (Guerra & Figueroa, 2018), particularly when action research is used as an internal tool to review language dispositions – without external interference or the following of an interventionist approach to continuous professional development (Godínez-Martínez, 2018).

Methodology

Research Design

Action research is seen as a continuous, ongoing, open and dynamic process that is constructed in a spirit of co-inquiry (Coghlan & Shani, 2021). This process can also be seen as an infinite spiral of self-improvement wherein implementation generates new knowledge and new reflections and therefore new action once again (Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Our research question was: What are the ideologies and dispositions towards language diversity (discursively constructed) in the nursery? For that, the project was organised in three different stages (see Figure 1). The aim of the initial stage was to collect teachers' and parents' beliefs about language practice in the setting for children for whom English was an additional language (*Preparing for the journey*). This involved a questionnaire with open- and closed-ended questions for parents (n=17) and all practitioners (n=5), followed by interviews with some practitioners (n=3). Teachers were also asked to keep a research diary of their personal reflections throughout the project (n=4). The second stage of the action cycle involved an initial analysis of the questionnaires and interviews, which were discussed during a focus group meeting with the practitioners (n=5) (*Priorities and Plans*). Finally, data was analysed, and future action determined (stage 3 – *Implementation & Monitoring and Evaluation*). Although the original plan was to implement some of the emergent ideas for improving practice and then to evaluate them, the lockdown imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic affected the continuity of the project.

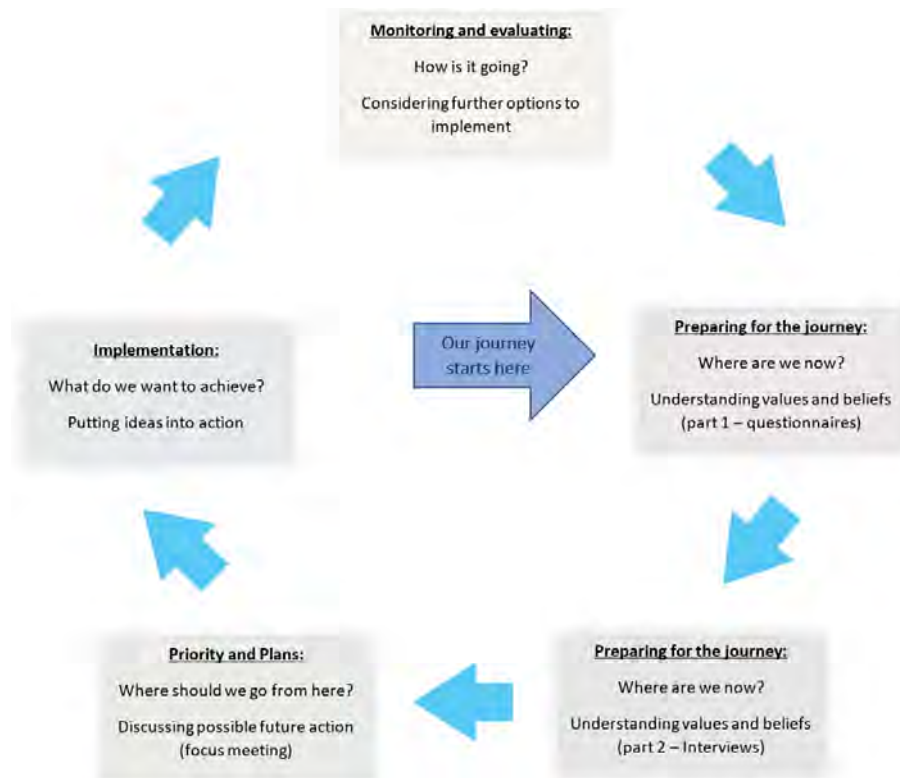


Figure 1. Action Research Cycle

The action research was led by one of the authors as part of her MA in Early Childhood Studies. It was based at her place of work in a small private nursery located in an affluent area of London. Similar to the context in many cosmopolitan cities, the majority of children attending the nursery had English as their second or third language. National statistics for the academic year 2019/2020 in the United Kingdom estimated that more than one million pupils in primary schools had EAL (National Statistics, 2020). In state-funded nurseries alone, 30% of pupils are known, or believed, to speak a language other than English (ibid). This particular context brought with it the opportunity for the staff to engage both in many conversations about the issues, obstacles and difficulties involved in teaching EAL children in the early years and in reflections on how to improve the provision. Therefore, given that the topic was highly relevant to her workplace, the researcher planned spaces in which staff could contribute to improving practice, in order to better support and assess EAL children. No external agenda or framework was introduced to facilitate or influence this process. The school's closure due to the pandemic had an impact on the data retrieved from teachers' reflective journals. Nevertheless, the flexible nature of the interviews generated rich data, including participants' reflections about language practices and possible ways of moving forward.

Data Analysis

Our study seeks to achieve trustworthiness, emphasising the transparency of the research process by making "explicit the theoretical stance from which the interpretation takes place" (Silverman, 2006, p. 282) and also the position of the researchers during the research process (Alvesson, 2002). Qualitative data was analysed by applying critical discourse analysis, merging "the social and institutional dimensions of discourse [and connecting them] with the textual fabric of everyday life" (MacLure, 2003, p. 186). To analyse practice, we (partially) adopted the analytical techniques developed by van Leeuwen (2008), which are also compatible with Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Thus, we identified four categories related to language practices, namely 1) who the actors involved in the planning and delivery of language practice were (members of the market – eligible social actors); 2) what was valued most in the setting (capital); 3) initiatives that the nursery was already implementing to respond to the setting's language diversity (exchanges – eligible actions) and 4) what could be improved, in the future, to better support EAL children (transformational ideas – potential alternative actions/exchanges).

Considering the respective outsider and insider positions of the two researchers in relation to this specific practice, we conducted separate but parallel analyses and later compared the results, identifying commonalities and differences. In general, both researchers arrived at similar interpretations of the data.

Ethics

This study complied with the ethical procedures set out by the University of Roehampton and followed the British Educational Research Association's (2018) recommendations on conducting research in educational contexts in the UK. All individuals involved gave their consent, and we endeavoured to maintain the anonymity of both the setting and the participants.

Findings

The analysis of what was said about supporting young EAL children and about what could be done to improve this practice helped us to understand the dynamics of the language practice in the nursery. Within the analysis, it was possible to connect these ideas with ideological trends that, as pointed out earlier in this paper, are contestable views associated with different language ideologies. In the first part of this section, we identify features of the language practice that could be interpreted as ways to transform practice, thereby challenging monolingual ideologies. In the second part, we review the discourses commonly associated with monolingual ideological orientations.

Opportunities to Transform Practice: Moving towards Plurilingual Practices

Three distinctive features were encountered when analysing the data. These are: 1) the value of local knowledge/expertise and a certain degree of tension between this and external regulatory knowledge; 2) the eligibility of the use of home language during the settling in period, focusing on the child's wellbeing, and 3) pedagogical responses to the language diversity of children.

Local Language Expertise

It has been established that the persistent dominance of monolingual practices is associated with the absence of home language in institutionalised spaces (Barron, 2009; Flynn, 2015; Rojas-Bustos, 2020). Therefore, moving towards plurilingual education enables us to reconsider the status and eligibility of languages other than English in early years. The action research that was conducted created an opportunity to talk about the language diversity and language expertise of parents, practitioners and children within early language practice in which English has a dominant position.

In our analysis, internal/local language expertise was attributed to both parents and practitioners; the wide language diversity that was encountered in the nursery was recognised and presented as an asset by both groups. For example:

Extract 1: *Now, having children of different backgrounds and things in one little place it's just amazing. It's amazing because they all speak different languages, first of all, and they talk to each other. How do they communicate? It's just something that I have seen from the beginning. I just was so amazed, how do they just communicate with each other?* (Teacher 1, Line 72)

Within Bourdieu's theory of practice this is particularly significant, as those members who can speak more than one language are not seen to be in a disadvantageous position or to be struggling in comparison with other members of the market. This means that the linguistic repertoires of parents and practitioners and their level of expertise in their own language are valuable capital.

External knowledge-expertise was mostly associated with speech and language therapists and the guidance provided by the early years curriculum (Department for Education, 2021b) both of which provide instructions about language provision. For example:

Extract 2: *So whenever there are speech and language therapists, they all talk about the same thing. They say that parents at home should speak the home language and teachers should speak the language they speak normally.* (Teacher 1, Line 92)

That *they all talk about the same thing* suggests the homogeneity of the external message, which is to keep languages separate.

However, in the conversations generated within this action research the dichotomy between excluding and including home language was permanently questioned by both parents and practitioners. For parents, their main concern was the amount of English input that their children were getting access to. Home language was seen as a home concern and many parents felt that, the setting should exclusively focus on the use of English. By contrast, practitioners were particularly interested on responding to children's needs. For example, despite the external expert advice on language compartmentalisation, a different insight was provided by one of the teachers:

Extract 3: *If they are really frustrated and we cannot communicate or they cannot understand, then of course we have to be flexible and make sure that they understand us, and the only way we can do that is learn a few key words from their language to initially speak to them until they're beginning to understand our language.* (Teacher 1, Line 112)

This reflection resists external expertise and instead responds to the emotional wellbeing of the child. Responding to children's needs creates the opportunity to reflect upon language diversity in the setting, something that is further explored below.

Responding to Children's Wellbeing – Using Home Language in the Setting

From the conversations generated during this action research, it appears that practitioners paid a great deal of attention to responding to the emotional needs of young children, especially those who were new to English. This became the main reason for teachers exploring the use of home language in the setting, as can be seen in this statement:

Extract 4: *It's an emotional thing first with her, and then the English will come.* (Teacher 3, Line 335)

Significant professional effort was made to establish a balance between using home languages to facilitate children's emotional settling in and helping them to speak and understand English. For example, learning a few key words in the children's home language was mentioned as an effective strategy during the initial stage of settling in. This practice was discursively constructed as a way to respond to children's needs by reducing anxiety, frustration and distress and helping them to understand what was going on:

Extract 5: *According to what you gathered from staff the crucial period for this language, you know, exchange of using their key words for example, is during settling in, that what we all seem to agree with* [Focus group, Line 171]

In this way, home language becomes temporarily eligible in the educational practice. Nevertheless, along with the emotional wellbeing of young children, language attainment in English was considered equally significant capital in the nursery; and somehow as incompatible with the use of home language in the setting. Therefore, the strategies that used home language were abandoned after the child had settled into the new environment. When reflecting on the value of language diversity, the apparent expectation to maintain one language only in the setting was problematised:

Extract 6: *"...not everybody agrees with that view as a need, some people are very, very firm in their... they are very black and white, they don't want to [inaudible] they just want to go by what the book says, you know.* (Focus group, Line 212)

Language Awareness Pedagogy

By talking and thinking about language diversity and questioning official external institutionalised guidelines, teachers showed some level of language awareness, opening discussions about their own pedagogical approaches (Brazil, in press). For example, the statements below from Teacher 2 – "I never even thought" and "it made me realise" – suggest that the actions generated around reviewing language practice created an initial awareness of the pedagogical approaches that had been used in the setting up to that point to support EAL children:

Extract 7: *A lot, no? Because I never even thought about...* (Teacher 2, Line 362) [...] *You know, for me to realise... it made me realise that maybe she doesn't ask a question.* (Teacher 2, Line 375)

Similarly, ideas about how to include other languages were shared:

Extract 8: *If we have a little song to say hello, or before circle time we have this hello song, like very brief one in every language, that'll be good, incorporating that... like "Let's say hello", but let's say it in every language.* (Teacher 3, Line 314)

Despite being presented as a conditional, with "if", the possibility of doing this is opening up further exploration of what has been done up to a certain point. Transformation, according to Bourdieu, is an adjustment of existing structures, imposing new meanings through reflections on practices (1977). The data suggests that, despite practitioners sharing different values, there was a common belief that something more could be done, generating (new) ideas of alternative language practice. This pedagogical awareness offers enormous potential for change and action research becomes the medium through which this change can be achieved.

Constraints on Transforming Practice (the Prevalence of Monolingual Ideologies)

In the process of making sense of language practice, the members of the market, within the context of this action research, engaged in useful reflections in order to review what was perceived as valuable and what had been done, or suppressed, in order to preserve and reproduce linguistic capital. The examples presented above are intended to evidence discursive constructions that can be associated with transforming practices towards plurilingual ideologies. In this section, by contrast, we offer some examples in which monolingual mindsets appear to prevail.

The use of home language in the setting beyond the settling-in period was one of the most significant tensions encountered in the conversations about language practice. The main issues were the introduction and maintenance of English:

Extract 9: *Now, it would be helpful I think for you to find out what the parents think at this stage [settling in] whether is important for the children to use their home language in this stage, whether they can use it. Because it makes a big difference. (Focus group, Line 176)*

Whereas parents appeared concerned about the amount of English input that the setting might be offering their children and whether this input was enough to prepare their children for formal schooling (both points were clearly expressed in the questionnaires), the cognitive-linguistic advantages of plurilingual practices were not (yet) considered by participants in this study. Thus, plurilingual spaces were allowed in the setting in order to respond to the emotional needs of the children, but there was little evidence of any consideration of using home language to make connections to the new language and to new learning (Anderson et al., 2015). By contrast, the intention was to switch to English-only as soon as the child had developed sufficient linguistics skills to adapt to the learning environment; not doing so was even considered potentially *dangerous*, as stated by one of the teachers during the interviews.

Within these discursive constructions of English dominance, there is no evidence of any attempt to further develop mutual understanding about the benefit of home language in supporting early learning in a holistic way. It was believed that parents' views must be respected:

Extract 10: *We know from our parents' views that the parents send the children to us because they want them to learn English. Now if that is the case, then we have to respect their views. (Teacher 1, Line 108)*

In this way, a monolingual ethos is accepted and legitimised, and, therefore, perpetuated in everyday practice. What is more, parents also disregarded the possibility of using home language in the settings, emphasising that this was not necessary as the acquisition of English was a priority in terms of school readiness.

Discussion

The discussion presented in this paper highlights distinctive patterns that appear as opportunities for and barriers to developing a plurilingual learning environment. In our view, these discursive tensions are useful differences that generated spaces in which to evaluate and reflect upon current practice, projecting ideas for further changes and developing a critical standpoint to (potentially) transform practice. Whereas some discursive constructions appear to move towards plurilingual ideologies, some elements of the practice were justified within monolingual principles. For example, the compartmentalisation of languages means that the preservation of home language is up to the child's family and English-only is maintained in the nursery (Cummins, 2017). This idea conforms with notions such as that of "one language one person", based both on the misrepresentation that children become confused when two (or more) languages are mixed (Kenner, 2004) and on language hierarchy and affordance for future education (Kiramba, 2018). Consequently, this compartmentalisation is exercised by dedicating every effort to children learning English in the nursery, legitimising the invisibility of other languages in institutionalised spaces (Barron, 2009; Kiramba, 2018; Rojas-Bustos, 2020).

Nevertheless, even this compartmentalisation of the language, which was constructed as a desirable practice and recommended by external experts, was questionable when reviewing the great linguistic diversity of children and families. Brazil (in press) talks about "language-aware" curricula that should reflect linguistic diversity but, equally, enhance learning and inclusion for all learners. Awareness here can be referred to as the ability to imagine possibilities that, through reflection, enable us to question "what is there", thinking forward and seeking internal solutions to local issues. Thus, "action research has not only pedagogical implications, but also critical and transformative meanings" (Guerra & Figueroa, 2018, p. 406).

Our findings suggests that this action research opened up participative spaces in which to explore initial ideas around language practice for children who speak more than one language. Many ideas emerged during the interviews, casual exchanges and meetings. Our experience delves into the use of action research beyond neoliberal discussions on performance and accountability. What is more, by talking and thinking about language practice, teachers increased their awareness about both language diversity and the language learning space created in the setting, and, most significantly, they reflect on what could be changed. Ideas, beliefs and understandings around language diversity were shared and new reflections generated, creating a domino effect whereby newfound self-awareness naturally resulted in new actions. The project has without doubt hosted spaces for self-reflective and collaborative practice, initiating conversations about transforming early language practice.

Conclusions

Our findings recognise some level of language-awareness manifested through initial concrete ideas for changing linguistic practice that were already in an exploratory stage (for example, collecting survival words for new arrivals,

learning greeting songs and counting in different languages), and alternative ways to respond to children's needs (learning/using comforting words/sentences in the child's language). Therefore, it was possible to trace favourable dispositions towards the diversity of language/s encountered in the setting. At the same time, our study exposes the persistence of mythical-tells about language confusion and language struggle which are associated with monolingual ideologies as well as reproduced and legitimised by external regulatory guidelines that perpetuate monolingual practices (Rojas-Bustos, 2018, 2020). There is no sufficient evidence to sustain the idea of plurilingual learning environments having a negative effect on early language learning. By contrast, recent publications have highlighted the significant connections that children establish when home language is allowed in the process of new learning in a school where English is the main language (Anderson et al., 2015; Brazil, in press; Cummins, 2017).

Contestable ideological positions about early language learning are encountered in this nursery. Whereas action research helped to review and challenge these ideas, the main tensions is the division between home-language and setting-language which are still highly controversial. What is more, responding to multilingual children's emotional and cognitive-linguistic needs has become particularly important during the current long period of lockdowns due to the global pandemic; children's social relationships have been drastically reduced, with their close family as their only social contact. Therefore, home language should, more than ever, be at the heart of their knowledge and identity.

Recommendations

Transformation, as presented by Bourdieu, is a way to move away from what has been done, from institutionalised and taken-for-granted ways of working. We believe that it can take just a few small steps to continue exploring the advantages of plurilingual learning spaces beyond the settling-in period. One of the most important steps is to explore the benefits of plurilingual learning spaces (also called translanguaging), which enable critical connections not just at the linguistic level but also metalinguistically and cognitively. For example, activities could be planned to enhance holistic (cross-curricular) learning, both by designing separate projects and through incorporating such activities as part of the daily routines.

Ideological constructions about early language learning and early language practice can also be transformed by a process of collective reflection about the ways in which the learning spaces converge the linguistic repertoire of children, parents and practitioners. Internal initiatives such as action research can facilitate this process of reflection. More opportunities for collaborative work with parents and practitioners can help to demystify the idea that the use of home language in the setting would have a negative impact on the learning of English.

Language learning in the early years should not (artificially) divide children's experiences into those at home and those in the setting. Therefore, policy makers and other external regulatory forces in early years (such as inspecting bodies from the local authorities as well as from central government) should be aware of the benefits and advantages of learning more than one language from a young age. New and further guidelines for language practice should explicitly legitimise languages other than English in early years spaces.

Limitations

Our findings and analysis referred to a specific local context in an affluent area in London. This private nursery perceived their linguistic diversity as an asset, and it is not necessary generalisable to other contexts. Commonly associated to bilingual elites (Baker, 2003), the diversity is part of their commodity and linguistic capital. By contrast, other studies have reported that language diversity has been perceived as problematic (Safford & Drury, 2012) and bilingual children discursively constructed *at risk* and under *performance* in comparison with their monolingual peers (Rojas-Bustos, 2018). More local experiences and, perhaps, from different social class are required to gain a better understanding of the dynamic and tensions of language ideological orientations in early years language practice. Therefore, we call for more critical studies particularly at the local level, with a clear exploration of the contestable tensions between monolingual discourses and plurilingual practices.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Rojas-Bustos: Conceptualisation, design, supervision, drafting and critical revision of manuscript, analysis, writing.
Panniello: Data acquisition, data analysis, drafting and critical revision of manuscript.

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