"Languages are not the Barriers": Learning Together through Multilingual Cross-Curricular Poetry in the ESL Classroom

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Abstract

The evolving linguistic landscape in 21st century classrooms necessitates a re-evaluation of pedagogical approaches, exploring the potential of multilingual writing techniques within TESOL settings. This article draws on my self-study as a TESOL educator navigating contexts and shifting from an English-only approach in the classroom to an openness of language(s) approach (Ortega, 2019). Following Hamilton's (2018) case study approach, I investigate the feasibility of implementing a multilingual pedagogy in an international school in Toronto and explore its influence on students, teachers, and the learning process across the domains of (CMLA) (Prasad & Lory, 2020). For this paper, I focus on data that highlight and reflect the impact of multilingual pedagogy on students, teachers, and the teaching/learning process. I performed a qualitative thematic analysis and found that multilingual pedagogies benefited students on many levels. I conclude with a personal reflection on both the affordances and challenges of implementing multilingual pedagogies.

Résumé

Le paysage linguistique en évolution des salles de classe nécessite une réévaluation des approches pédagogiques dans les contextes TESOL. Cet article s'appuie sur mon auto-étude en tant qu'éducateur évoluant d'une approche uniquement en anglais en classe à une approche ouverte aux langues (Ortega, 2019). Suivant l'approche de l'étude de cas de Hamilton (2018), j'ai étudié la faisabilité de mettre en œuvre une pédagogie multilingue dans une école internationale à Toronto et exploré son influence sur les élèves, les enseignants et le processus d'apprentissage à travers les domaines du CMLA (Prasad & Lory, 2020). Je me suis concentré sur des données mettant en lumière et reflétant l'impact de la pédagogie multilingue. J'ai réalisé une analyse thématique qualitative et constaté que les pédagogies multilingues bénéficiaient aux élèves à de nombreux niveaux. Je conclus par une réflexion sur les avantages et les défis de la mise en œuvre des pédagogies multilingues.

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Introduction

With the growing number of multilingual students from diverse backgrounds in Canada and around the world, there is a critical need to (re)shape pedagogies that reflect the complex linguistic repertoires and social practices of students with multiple, heterogeneous identities in today's 21st century classrooms. According to Statistics Canada (2016) there was a 13.3% increase of the number of immigrants who had a mother tongue other than English or French between 2011 and 2016. Research with immigrant teachers in Canada reveals that "these highly educated and skilled people are an important but as yet untapped group that would help address the need for a more diverse teaching population." (Walsh & Brigham, 2007). Researchers across the globe have called for a shift towards multilingual and plurilingual approaches to teaching and learning such as through functional multilingual learning (Butler, 2012; Martin-Jones et al., 2012; Martin-Jones & Martin, 2017; Sierens & Van Avermaert, 2014). Plurilingual and multilingual approaches to teaching and learning have been growing in the past two decades across different contexts (Candelier et al., 2012; Lau & Van Veigen, 2020; Piccardo et al., 2019; Prasad & Lory, 2020). For example, similarly, the recently published edited collection entitled "Plurilingual Pedagogies" brings together a range of theoretical and practice-based research related to plurilingual approaches to teaching and learning; such approaches have been found to have positive effects on students and teachers at socioemotional, cognitive, and linguistic levels (Lau & Van Veigen, 2020).

The multilingual turn (May, 2019) has promoted an understanding of the dynamic nature of all speakers' communicative repertoires (Rymes, 2014), as a unitary system that changes, develops, and evolves throughout their lives. Flores (2016) argues that the main function of schools has been to fix the so-called linguistic deficiencies of English Language Learners (ELL). The stigmatization of ELL's lack of language proficiency in English can lead to low self-confidence and low self-esteem which in turn leads to poor educational outcomes (Cummins et al., 2015). However, research demonstrates the benefit of integrating students' home languages into mainstream education (Cummins, 2005; Schecter & Cummins, 2003; Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). Accordingly, schools, especially those that serve in diverse communities, need to find ways to develop understanding of students' diverse resources and use them in their classes. One way of building understanding of students' communicative repertoires is to foster critical multilingual language awareness (CMLA) (García, 2017). Critical Multilingual Language Awareness can be understood as being aware of multilingualism to develop a willingness to embrace plurilingual students and their dynamic language practices, as well as to understand the historical aspects of oppression that led to the multilingual societies (García, 2017). In the inquiry reported on in this article, I endeavoured to interrogate my design and implementation of a CMLA project in a secondary international ESL programme. The private international school offers the Ontario curriculum (Grade 10, 11, 12) to international and local students. The school also offers a five-level ESL program based on students' level of English which is determined through a placement test at the beginning of the semester. Located in metropolitan Toronto, the school attracts both local and international students. Although students come from

different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the sense of multilingualism was missing in the school as an English-only policy was enforced in the school. Students were told to leave their L1s outside the classroom and use only English at the school.

The theoretical basis of the project drew on two concepts: first, Community of Practice (CoP) (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019). Martin-Beltrán et al. (2019) conceptualize a CoP as forming through participation in discourse communities where learners engage in an ongoing basis in a common effort. Secondly, I drew on Prasad and Lory's notion of Linguistic and Cultural Collaboration (LCC). Prasad and Lory (2020) "conceptualize LCC as both a process and a product that expands all students' critical multilingual language awareness" (p. 1). Starting from the belief that language and culture are interdependent and inseparable aspects of an individual's identity, and given that students in my classrooms come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the notion of LCC presented itself as a necessity and an opportunity to leverage students' agency in the ESL classroom. My motivation to pursue this project was to investigate how feasible it would be to implement such a multilingual approach to teaching and learning within the specific context of an international high school in Toronto and to explore how such an approach influences students, teachers, and the teaching-learning process across the domains of Critical Multilingual Language Awareness: power, cognitive, affective, performance, and social (Prasad, 2018; Prasad & Lory, 2020). This research project adds several distinctive elements to the existing literature. It focuses on the specific context of an international high school in Toronto. By choosing this unique educational setting, it acknowledges that the feasibility and impact of multilingual teaching and learning can vary depending on the environment. This specificity allows for a deeper exploration of the dynamics and challenges within this context. The project intends to investigate the influence of a multilingual approach on students, teachers, and the teaching-learning process across various domains of Critical Multilingual Language Awareness. This multidimensional approach goes beyond a one-dimensional analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of the effects and implications of multilingualism in education. By examining the impact on different stakeholders (students and teachers) and various dimensions of language awareness (power, cognitive, affective, performance, and social), the research project takes a holistic perspective. This approach recognizes that language learning is not solely about linguistic competence but also involves socio-cultural, emotional, and cognitive aspects. The project's primary motivation is to assess the feasibility of implementing a multilingual approach in the chosen context. This practical aspect is crucial as it addresses real-world concerns and provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing multilingual education in an international high school setting. While the research focuses on a specific context, the findings may have broader implications for multilingual education in similar international or diverse school environments, therefore, contributing to the broader conversation on effective language education strategies for diverse student populations.

Literature Review

Teachers of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in international contexts have traditionally been trained to teach English to speakers of other languages exclusively through English following the beliefs of Krashen (1985) and Phillipson (1992) among others. The traditional training of ESL (English as a Second

Language) teachers can strongly influence their convictions that students should primarily use English within the ESL classroom. As a result, teachers often encourage students to abandon their first and additional languages when they enter the ESL classroom by asking students explicitly to use English-only for all activities, discussions, and even thinking processes (Cook, 2001). While this traditional conception about language teaching/learning has been emphasized by teacher training programs, it can be further perpetuated by educators who insist that students' first language (L1) should not be allowed in the ESL classroom (Atkinson, 1993). With the multilingual turn in the field of language education (May, 2019), this traditional view about teaching/learning English from a monolingual stance has increasingly been challenged by the view that students' other languages might in fact be a resource for learning rather than an obstacle.

In an effort to incorporate students' other languages as a source in the classroom environment, Seltzer (2020) organized an author study around translingual writers or what she defines as "those who integrate different language practices in their work" (p. 185). According to this author study, when students were encouraged to bring their sophisticated understandings of language into the readings, they were able to enrich the classroom conversations, connections, and debates. The perception of the school and the community of the language practices of English Language Learners (ELLs) has often marginalized those students and depicted them as deficient. Seltzer (2020) argues that "students' articulations of these realities stood in stark contrast to such portrayals" (p. 186). In contrast to that, they exemplified what Rymes (2014) refers to as citizen sociolinguists, individuals who are observant of the intricacies of language in everyday exchanges, within hierarchical systems, and across interpersonal bonds. The connections between language and power in the classroom need to be paid attention to and brought to the forefront to challenge the ideologies of standardization and to resist the marginalization of ELLs in the classroom.

Horner et al. (2011) argue that language variances and flexibilities are valuable assets and resources that should be utilized and developed. Horner et al. (2011) introduce translingual writing as a tool to challenge the mythology of standard language and invite educators to resist such standards by releasing students' translingual voices. Canagarajah (2015) adapts *codemeshing* as the practice of using multiple languages or language varieties within a single conversation or text where the speaker alternates between two or more languages or dialects without adhering to strict language boundaries. Canagarajah (2015) views codemeshing as a way to change "the emphasis from sharedness to diversity, grammar to practices, and cognition to embodiment" (Canagarajah, 2015, p. 420).

There have been several attempts in the Canadian context to implement plurilingual pedagogies in classroom practices. Cummins and Early (2011) have introduced the idea of Identity Texts in which students are encouraged to produce texts using both the language of instruction and language(s) spoken at home. Through the promotion of such plurilingual practices, students go further in their learning by making connections between academic knowledge and their personal experiences. Based on the concept of multiliteracies, Lotherington (2012) has developed a project that integrates new technologies and linguistic diversity into educational practices. Prasad (2013) has also conducted studies with children in English and French schools where she considered children as co-ethnographers of their own language and literacy practices. To enable students to generate collaborative and creative plurilingual projects, Prasad (2013) used several art-based approaches. To incorporate technology into plurilingual pedagogies, Dagenais et al (2017) utilized ScribJab, a multilingual iPad application that allows learners to use different languages to

create and illustrate stories. Naqvi et al. (2013) argue that dual-language book reading in diverse classroom is important to support students' development of metalinguistic skills. The valuable effects of leveraging students' linguistic and cultural diversity in Canadian classrooms are reflected in the above-mentioned studies, among others. By promoting linguistic and cultural diversity and encouraging students to reflect on the power relations of language(s) and the language(s) in their linguistic repertoires, both teachers and students are enabled to develop positive representations of linguistic and cultural diversity.

This research project stands out from existing literature by incorporating unique elements, distinguishing it from a mere replication of similar studies in different contexts or cities. The focal point is an international high school in Toronto, a deliberate choice that recognizes the variability of feasibility and impact in multilingual teaching and learning across different environments. This specificity facilitates a more in-depth exploration of dynamics and challenges within this particular educational setting. The project aims to examine how a multilingual approach influences students, teachers, and the teaching-learning process across various domains of Critical Multilingual Language Awareness. This multidimensional perspective surpasses a one-dimensional analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the effects and implications of multilingualism in education.

Theoretical Framework

Creating a Community of Practice

Drawing on sociocultural perspectives, I highlighted the social contexts of learning and adopted the belief that language learning occurs through partaking in discourse communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For my project, I drew on the theoretical concept of Community of Practice (CoP) as a way to understand language learning. Eckert (2006) defines a CoP as a "collection of people who engage in an ongoing basis in some common endeavour." (p. 683). It is argued that in a CoP, learning happens through the increasing participation in the community. To form a CoP, three aspects need to be taken into consideration: 1) mutual engagement, 2) joint enterprise, and 3) shared repertoire. One of the foundations of a CoP is the commitment to build and maintain relationships. When members participate and carry out shared activities and engage in social practice, they form a joint enterprise. A shared repertoire is the set of shared resources of a community that includes words, gestures, ways of doing things, tools, symbols, actions or concepts which the community has produced or adopted, and which have become part of its practice (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019).

Linguistic & Cultural Collaboration

In diverse communities, and in order to foster a dynamic living together between diverse students, teachers, and communities (Ceginskas, 2010; Cummins, 2017; Flores & Rosa, 2015; García, 2017), it is not enough to be aware of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the community (Prasad & Lory, 2020). Prasad and Lory (2020) suggest that educators should take actions through meaningful and purposeful instructional design to foster collaborative power relations among diverse actors in the community. Schools have not only historically devalued heritage, home, and minoritized languages, but also devalued

and stigmatized users of these languages (Lory, 2015; Prasad, 2015). Building unbiased and inclusive societies requires adopting the concept of a dynamic living together. To achieve such a goal, students should be encouraged to adopt openness and understanding of linguistic, cultural, and social diversity inside and outside the classroom. Since conventional schooling has not served all students and communities equally, it is important to utilize critical pedagogies that highlight power, affective, and social aspects of the teaching/learning process. In other words, we need to utilize pedagogies that include and value *all* students as well as their diverse repertoires (Prasad & Lory, 2020).

To build an inclusive and just community, schools should acknowledge and value the languages that are part of their ecologies; users of those languages should also be acknowledged and valued (Cummins, 2001a; García, 2009). Critical and creative engagement between students, teachers, and different actors in the community, to transform the deficit view of linguistic and cultural plurality and to restructure power relations and exclusionary policies, are important for linguistic and cultural collaboration to take place. Traditional power relations in the classroom that led to the misrepresentations of minoritized languages and cultural groups can be reconfigured through the implementation of meaningful and purposeful instructional choices that lead to the "co-construction of ALL students and educators as agentive plurilingual social actors." (Prasad & Lory, 2020, p. 6)

One of the ways that Prasad and Lory describe enacting Linguistic and Cultural Collaboration is through the collaborative creation of multilingual projects. This idea extends work that Cummins (2001b), along with others, have done on Identity Texts (Daniel & Eley, 2018; Lotherington et al., 2008; Prasad, 2015; Taylor, 2011). The MCPC has supported students to bring together their linguistic and cultural resources to work collaboratively on poetry writing across languages.

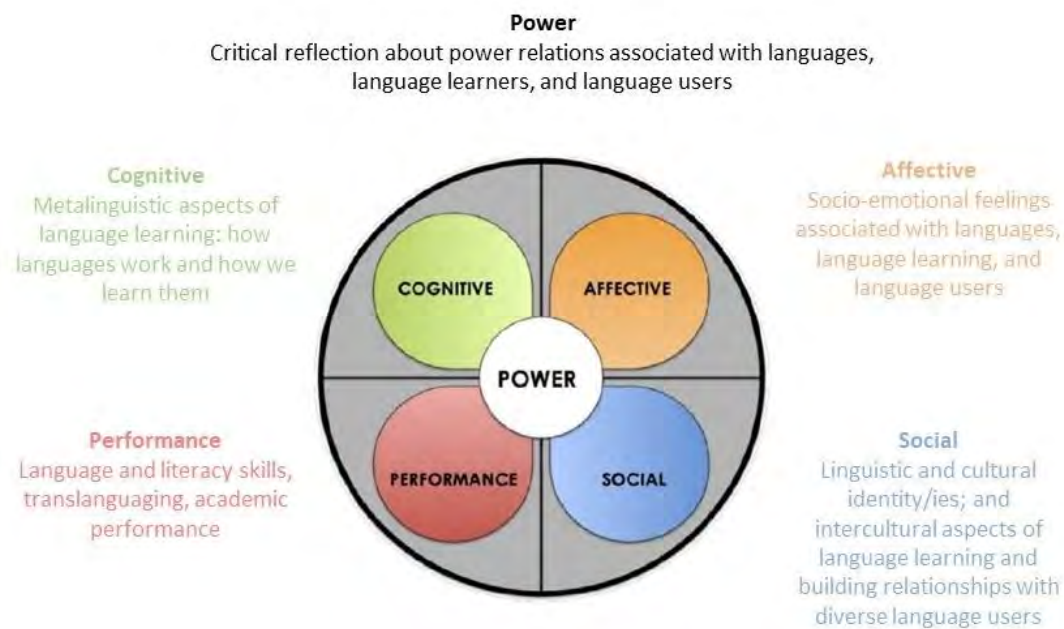## Critical Multilingual Language Awareness (CMLA)

In the 21st century classroom, it is important for all teachers to develop a critical understanding of language use in societies; in other words, it is important to become aware of the multilingualism of students and to develop a willingness to embrace multilingualism and multilingual students and to understand the historical aspects of oppression that led to the multilingual societies. For teachers to give voice equitably to all students, they need to develop an understanding that language is socially constructed. Teachers need to engage all students and encourage them to develop an awareness of language as a social practice (García, 2017). Teachers will also have to help all students voice their own multilingual experiences and mobilize their communicative repertoires. This will lead to changing what it means to practice language in schools. García (2017) argues that "CMLA is not a separate educational *program* available only for certain specialized teachers who work with minoritized populations. It is part of the *educational project for all*. And thus, all teachers must develop these understandings" (p. 7). In this way, the research provided an opportunity for students not only to become aware of one's another language(s), but also to develop metalinguistic and multilingual awareness through collaboration.

I drew on Prasad's (2018) domains of CMLA to analyze student learning through the research and to reflect on my practice to teach CMLA to my students. Figure 1 depicts the five domains of CMLA: power, cognitive, affective, performance, and social. The CMLA domains are important in the context of my research because students' learning will be analyzed in relation to each of the five domains. Power relations in the classroom play a

vital role in the learning process, thus it is placed in the center of all the domains. The purpose of this research was to explore the effects of implementing multilingual pedagogies in the ESL classroom on the teaching/learning process across the CMLA domains. The question that drove the inquiry is: how does the implementation of multilingual pedagogies influence power relations in the classroom, learners' performance as well as the cognitive, psychological and social impacts on learners and the teaching/learning process?

Figure 1
Critical Multicultural Language Awareness Framework (adapted from Prasad & Lory, 2020)

Power
Critical reflection about power relations associated with languages, language learners, and language users

Cognitive
Metalinguistic aspects of language learning: how languages work and how we learn them

Affective
Socio-emotional feelings associated with languages, language learning, and language users

Performance
Language and literacy skills, translanguaging, academic performance

Social
Linguistic and cultural identity/ies; and intercultural aspects of language learning and building relationships with diverse language users

COGNITIVE   AFFECTIVE   POWER   PERFORMANCE   SOCIAL

Research Design

Based on the theoretical concepts of Community of Practice (CoP), Language and Cultural Collaboration (LCC), and Critical Multilingual Awareness (CMLA), the project was designed as a *case study* (Hamilton, 2018) of the implementation of multilingual education in my teaching practices. This classroom-based project was carried out in an ESL classroom in a private international high school in Toronto. The private school offers the Ontario curriculum (Grade 10, 11, 12) to international and local students. The school also offers a five-level ESL program based on students' level of English which is determined through a placement test at the beginning of the semester. The participants in this project were international students from China and Vietnam. Students attend the school to obtain the Ontario High School Diploma to qualify for undergraduate programs in Canadian universities (Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2012). Toronto is considered to be a mosaic of languages with more than 40% of its residents having a mother tongue other than English or French (Statistics Canada, 2016). The age group of the students is 15 to 20 years old. During their high school study, most of the students lived with host families

(homestay). However, some students lived with their families in Toronto. Depending on their English proficiency, most students were required to take the ESL program to improve their English level to equip them with the necessary tools to complete the high school credit-bearing courses such as English grade 11 (ENG3U), English grade 12 (ENG4U), Functions (MHF4U), and Business Leadership (BOH4M), to name a few, towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The researcher in this study is the classroom teacher. The researcher is a dedicated English language teacher who received most of his education in the Middle East and later pursued his post graduate studies in Toronto, Canada. The topic of multilingual education is particularly relevant and important to the researcher as he went through several personal experiences where language, English in particular, presented itself as a powerful tool that can either facilitate or hinder a person's ability to progress in education as well as in life. As a teacher, he also witnessed how a monolingual approach to language teaching confines the teacher and the learner to certain roles such as a source "the teacher", and a recipient "the learner". Having the opportunity to teach English language in different countries with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds brought the researcher/teacher to the conclusion that linguistic and cultural collaboration plays a vital role in the teaching/learning process. The researcher intends to explore the potentials of a multilingual approach to language teaching and hopes to achieve the best possible outcomes for his students.

In the first stage of the project, students were required to work in groups to write a poem about a topic of their choice. Students were given the freedom to choose the length, topic, and form of the poems. Most groups decided to choose either narrative (Schaffenrath, 2015) or spoken word (Kelly, 2017) as the form of their poems. The length of the poems varied between 6 to 10 stanzas depending on the topic and form of the poem. Students were encouraged to choose topics that are related to their personal experiences or important issues in their daily life. Some of the topics that were covered in the poems are: unrequited love, depression, and the environment. Poetry is chosen as a medium of multilingual literacy because it invites students to "voice their perspectives not only to be heard by others but also to support their own process of negotiating the changing realities involved in social and educational integration" (Burton & Van Viegen, 2021, p. 78). The student-produced poems are viewed as identity texts through which students' identifications and affiliations are reflected in a positive light (Cummins & Early, 2011; Pahl & Rowsell, 2019). As per the design principles for Linguistic & Cultural Collaboration (LCC) laid out by Prasad and Lory (2020), the groups were formed in a way to ensure that students from different linguistic backgrounds were collaborating together to achieve the task. After writing the poem in English, students were asked to recreate the poem in their first languages (Mandarin and Vietnamese). The teacher took part in this stage as a facilitator providing feedback where needed and engaging the students in discussions that would improve their poem writing. The teacher also provided help for students in the use of literary devices in the poems.

In the second stage, students were asked to interpret their poems through a different medium, drawing. To achieve this task, students from the Poetry Club collaborated with students from the Design Club. Members of the Poetry Club met with members of the Design Club and exchanged ideas and explained their poems and opinions about how to illustrate the poems in a different form. This stage of the project reflected the concept of multimodality where students depended on different forms and styles of expression to communicate ideas and convey messages. The teacher's role in this stage was to facilitate

the meetings between the two clubs and provide feedback where needed. For the purpose of this study, the poem-writing stage was researched in the context of the research question.

The MCPC was held three times (rounds) between 2019 and 2020. Each round was approximately two months or the equivalent time to a school semester. Students met twice a week during study hall hour (4:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.) after they finished their daily classes.

A survey was sent by email to the participants in this project. The survey was structured around gathering feedback and insights from the participants. The survey consisted of open-ended questions which allowed the participants to express their experiences, thoughts and opinions about the MCPC project. The survey questions can be grouped into three categories. The first category inquired about the participants' personal experiences in the project, their roles, and their interactions with their classmates. The second set of questions delved into the participants' reflections on language, collaboration, and the emotional aspect of the project. The third set of questions asked for recommendations, lessons learned, and reflections on the different aspects of the project (language, writing, translation). The last question in the survey specifically targeted participants who have experienced both in-person and on-line rounds of the project, aiming to identify any differences or similarities in completing the work under different circumstances. After that, participants were invited to a follow-up interview to reflect on their experience in multilingual poetry writing. The data from the participants' answers to the survey questions, the interviews and classroom observation were collected and analyzed by the researcher using Prasad's (2018) and Prasad & Lory's (2020) CMLA Domains framework.

Students' responses to the survey were received by email and WeChat (a social media app) and the researcher started the analysis process by grouping students' responses to each question in separate files. The survey included twelve questions related to the students' experience. After grouping the questions and responses in separate word files, the researcher used a word processing program to identify emerging themes from the students' responses. The researcher used the Text Highlighter Color function in Microsoft Word to highlight students' responses that reflected the effect of implementing a multilingual pedagogy on the students and the learning process across the five domains of CMLA. In examining the multilingual poetry writing experience the researcher analyzed how ESL high school students became meaning makers and collaborated to form a CoP throughout the process of creating their poems. Follow up interviews were carried out over Zoom due to the restriction of gatherings enforced by the government based on the rising numbers of new cases of Covid-19 in the province during the study. Students' consent was obtained to keep an audio recording of the interviews. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher used a word processing software to identify and code emerging themes from the data through a careful reading of the text (Lichtman, 2014) following a similar procedure as the one used with students' responses to the survey questions. The interviews served as in-depth extension of the students' responses to the survey questions.

The Multilingual Cross-Curricular Poetry Club (MCPC) was created on the bases of student collaboration and engagement. Students mutually engaged in the process of writing multilingual poems as these poems touch upon and reflect their personal experiences and issues. Throughout the process, students developed a sense of commitment to build and maintain relationships. Students engaged in a social practice activity with other group members to achieve a certain task which required that students rely on their shared resources such as routines, words, tools, stories, and languages, to name a few. The

instructional design of the MCPC helped set up the conditions that allowed this community of practice to thrive in the classroom environment. Students were encouraged to set goals and collaborate and socialize with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to achieve those goals while exploring and utilizing their linguistic and cultural repertoires.

Table 1
Participants of the Study

Student Name (Pseudonym)	Grade	Languages spoken
Adam	11	Mandarin, English
Axel	11	Mandarin, English
Amanda	12	Mandarin, English
Bailey	12	Mandarin, English
Clare	12	Mandarin, English
Charlotte	12	Mandarin, English
Emma	12	Mandarin, English
Jasmine	12	Mandarin, English
Jennifer	12	Mandarin, Cantonese, English
Jack	11	Mandarin, Cantonese, English
Julianna	11	Vietnamese, English
Kayla	11	Mandarin, English
Katherine	11	Vietnamese, English
Maria	11	Mandarin, English
Rachel	12	Mandarin, English
Sophia	11	Vietnamese, English
Victoria	12	Vietnamese, English

Three rounds of the MCPC were offered from 2019 to 2021. In each round of the project, data were collected including classroom observation, surveys, audio-recorded interviews with students, student-generated multilingual poems, and student-produced drawings. Data from each round informed the design and implementation of multilingual poetry writing in the classroom. For this paper, I focused on data from the survey and interviews that highlight and reflect the impact of multilingual pedagogy on students, teachers, and the teaching/learning process across CMLA domains: power, cognitive, affective, performance, and social (Prasad, 2018; Prasad & Lory, 2020).

Findings

In the framework of the Multilingual Cross-curricular Poetry Club project, the study's findings examine the intersection of multilingual repertoires, identity, power dynamics, metalinguistic insights, cultural and linguistic collaboration, and ways of communication. Through the creation of multilingual poems, the project emphasized student agency and voice revealing complex translanguaging processes and the influence of cultural backgrounds on language use. Students demonstrated metalinguistic awareness, developed intercultural knowledge, and empowered themselves through personalized, collaborative, and culturally rich poem creation. The study also considers the transition

from in-person to on-line interaction, emphasizing the value of embodied human interaction in creative teamwork.

Multilingual Repertoires, Identity & Power

From a pedagogical perspective, the project drew on content-based and task-based approaches to teaching. A content-based approach to teaching is a strong form of communicative language teaching where the mastery of subject matter and proficiency in speaking are prioritized in language-sensitive courses (Chou, 2013). A task-based approach to teaching is a way of teaching languages where the language educator uses tasks to coherently frame their teaching. This approach emphasizes the concept of linking classroom instruction to the real-world use of language (Jackson, 2022). The main emphasis of this project was to highlight learners' agency and voice through the creation of their own multilingual poems. The traditional interpretations of communicative language teaching indicates that L1 should not be allowed in the classroom (Cook, 2001). However, the expectation in this project was that the poems should be created multilingually.

Throughout the creative process of multilingual poetry writing, students engaged in translanguaging in various ways. While collaborating in groups, some students appeared to switch to their L1 for planning, designing, and discussion. Interview data revealed that some students used their L1 to create their poems. Charlotte stated:

> Because when I'm using Chinese, like, I can directly transfer my idea into words and sentences. If I'm using English there is another process, like another thinking process before I actually write it. I need to translate the language in my brain and sometimes it costs like misunderstanding or something.

Charlotte's reflections highlight that even when students are expected to produce a text in the target language, the thinking process is carried out in their L1. This translanguaging process allows students like Charlotte to improve their product by bringing in their prior knowledge and cultural background to the work.

However, other students preferred to use English to accomplish the task of writing a poem. This may reflect the English proficiency level of those students. Jack, who expressed his preference to do the writing process in English, confirmed that this preference is influenced by his level of proficiency:

> because growing up I listened to a lot of English songs, like, the majority of music I listened to would be English. so, I just tend to, like, just express the feelings in English, like, I will not take the step to think in Chinese and then translate it to English

Jack's reflection illuminates how he draws on his communicative repertoire differently for different tasks. He associates expressing his feelings more naturally in English because he grew up listening to English songs that allowed him to do so. This could also be related to Jacks' background as an Asian student. Through my observations as the teacher of the class and through students' responses to other assignments in the course where they had to reflect on their personal experiences, I noticed that those students were encouraged to be respectful and reserved since they were children; they were not expected to share and express their

feelings and emotions often (Soto et al., 2005), whereas in the Western cultures associated with English, there is less concern with expressing feelings and emotions and children are encouraged to voice their feelings. Thus, Jack associates the act of expressing his feelings with English as representative of the Western culture. Jack's response relates to the level of agency when translanguaging; in other words, when Jack uses English or Mandarin in his multilingual repertoire. It is important to notice that fostering agency and multilingualism does not always mean using all languages in one' repertoire or using only one language at a certain time.

Although some students, like Jack, preferred to write in English, most students who took part in the survey confirmed that they relied on different parts of their linguistic repertoire either in the planning, discussion, or writing process. In her answer to the question "*How did you feel working with both English and your first language?*", Kayla, expressed having a positive attitude toward being allowed to use both languages to accomplish the task:

> I think work with both English and my first language is better than work with English only. Because I am better at using first language and feel free. I can also generate more ideas at using my familiar way of thinking.

Similarly, Jennifer demonstrated a positive attitude toward using different languages in the classroom by saying, "I found that although we speak different languages, we can use different words to express the same feelings. Languages are not the barriers and what makes communication important is the information that the words carry." Her response reflects a sense of multilingual awareness that is developed by taking part in the project. Another student, Rachel, expressed that the translanguaging process was an unconscious one, a process where the student did not plan to switch to their L1 to express their ideas or accomplish the task at hand, "I often subconsciously think of expressing in Chinese". These students' perspectives demonstrated that even though teachers may insist on using only the language of instruction in the classroom, teachers cannot restrict what happens inside the brains of their learners (García et al., 2017) - and in fact, trying to do so may result in students feeling less free or capable of engaging in learning and demonstrating what they know. An important question arises here about whether multilingual approaches are ultimately more student-centered than monolingual approaches to teaching/learning. Traditional (monolingual) approaches to language teaching/learning imply that all students are expected to be at the same level and to achieve the same results (García & Sylvan, 2011). This is not possible when students have different English language proficiency levels as well as having different literacy levels in their home languages. In today's multilingual classrooms, complex discursive practices of multilingual students are used in sense-making in the classroom. Implementing multilingual approaches to language teaching/learning results in students becoming not only more knowledgeable and academically successful, but also more confident users of academic English, better at translanguaging, and more multilingual-proficient. Multilingual approaches to language teaching require teachers to change their roles from providers of knowledge to facilitators of a process that enables students to learn while making language choices to accomplish meaningful activities (García & Sylvan, 2011).

Metalinguistic Insights

Interview and survey data revealed important metalinguistic insights including students' awareness of the need to avoid literal translation. Students demonstrated their awareness of the cultural aspects and differences between named languages. In an answer to a survey question "*What have you learned about translation?*" Bailey revealed that:

> Translation has no use for poetry. For example, every word or literary devices in a Chinese poem is considered and used repeatedly by the author. When we translate it, it cannot fully express the original idea of the poem. So does the English poem. The rhetoric of English poetry and Chinese poetry have something in common, but there are also many differences. It requires us to combine the similarities and differences when we write the different version of the poem.

Bailey's reflection demonstrates a level of awareness and control of linguistic components of the language, specifically the translation aspect of poems. Bailey is aware that literal translation should be avoided when writing multilingual poems and that languages are culture specific. While literal translation aims for a word-for-word equivalence and may not consider cultural or contextual factors, translanguaging is a dynamic language practice that embraces the fluidity of languages and prioritizes effective communication across language boundaries. Translanguaging is particularly relevant in multilingual and multicultural settings where speakers naturally draw on their linguistic repertoires to convey meaning. By taking part in this multilingual project, Bailey has arrived at this metalinguistic awareness of the translation aspect of language; being able to analyze and manipulate language for effective communication and comprehension. Thus, it can be said that the implementation of multilingual pedagogies in the classroom enhances and supports the student's development of metalinguistic skills (Naqvi et al., 2013). By promoting linguistic and cultural diversity and encouraging students to reflect on the power relations of language(s) and the language(s) in their linguistic repertoires, both teachers and students are enabled to develop positive representations of linguistic and cultural diversity. While Bailey's answer revealed the metalinguistic aspects of translating poetry, other students' answers demonstrated their multilingual awareness. For example, "translation should never be done directly like what translate software does, because every culture has different modes of thinking, and it is reflected in their languages. So, it is important to apply different cultures' expressions into the translation work" (Jack). Here, Jack expresses his understanding of the way culture shapes language practices and the need for cultural sensitivity with translation, especially in poetry. Jack's insight aligns with the concept of Linguistic and Cultural Collaboration (LCC) as presented by Prasad and Lory (2020), which emphasizes the collaborative utilization of linguistic and cultural resources.

Students also expressed their confidence in presenting poems that they created across their linguistic repertoires. This sense of confidence can be interpreted as an act of resistance against dominant monolingual discourse. As one student explained,

> I think in some way it does [affect self-confidence and self-esteem] because even though I can, like, speak fluently in English, sometimes I still need the help of Chinese to communicate with friends so that they could better understand my idea. So, when you can fluently express, like, everything you want to say, you surely be

more confident with yourself because you have a better communication with others. (Jack)

Prior to the MCPC project, students were instructed to rely solely on the target language to think, discuss, and present their product which led students to feel that their funds of knowledge were not necessary for the learning process. As such, students were positioned as passive receivers in the learning/teaching process which ultimately had a negative impact on the students' power and status in the classroom. Through their participation in a multilingual pedagogic approach, students became active participants by embracing their linguistic and cultural diversity (Prasad & Lory, 2020), promoting interactive and collaborative learning, fostering critical thinking, and empowering them to take ownership of their education. Presenting multilingual poems had a major impact on the students' identity and agency in the classroom. The positive impact on students' power and status in the classroom produce a greater sense of agency through the participation and carrying out of activities and engaging in social practices to create a shared repertoire that becomes part of the practice. When students are given the opportunity to explore and utilize their communicative repertoires and when they are considered as a source where they were encouraged to bring their sophisticated understandings of language into the classroom, they were able to enrich the classroom conversations, connections, and debates, (Seltzer, 2020). Thus, the students' position in the classroom changed from a passive recipient to an active participant. Accordingly, the power dynamics in the classroom ecology evolved in a way that brought the student to the forefront of the learning process where they actively participated and enriched the process.

Cultural & Linguistic Collaboration

Creating the multilingual poems inspired students to delve into culture and identity in a critical and flexible way. By taking part in the MCPC, students engaged in the process of planning, discussing, and creating multilingual poems within diverse groups which allowed them to actively explore other cultures and develop empathy in the process. Data from the interviews revealed that students have experienced a real impact in terms of intercultural knowledge:

I worked with Vietnamese or Chinese. We become friends, not just in school. Although in other class we're not classmates but we are still friend and we still hang out and also I learned a lot from them, like their culture, ah their language. (Charlotte)

Working in diverse groups had a positive impact on students' relationships inside and outside the classroom. Students developed a sense of appreciation toward the work of others and created a CoP where they enjoyed collaborating with students from different backgrounds. In an answer to the question "*What changes would you recommend if we formed a multilingual poetry club next year?*" Amanda answered, "There must be students from different countries in a group" (Amanda). It is clear that students like Amanda enjoyed working and collaborating with students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, otherwise, they would not have asked to make the groups more diverse. The excitement that is expressed by students reflects the positive impact of this multilingual

experience on students' attitudes toward learning. This interest in working with students from different linguistic backgrounds gets at what (Prasad, 2022) describes as developing students' competence not only as multilingual speakers, but also multilingual listeners. Having a positive attitude to work with others increases students' engagement in the learning process and leads to enhanced academic performance. One of the foundations of a CoP is the commitment to build and maintain relationships. When members participate and carry out shared activities and engage in social practice, they form a joint enterprise (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019). Students produced lengthy poems through the poetry club. Their work was sustained through their collaboration and collective effort. In the context of this school, an international school, the social aspects of students' lived experiences have a huge impact on their attitude, academic performance, and mental health as expressed by Charlotte:

> I have more friends and friends are really important to youth, and especially in a school like we're all international students, we all feel lonely sometimes, we all like apart from our parents. So if we got support from, from our friends it's a really good thing and also when you're, when I'm like doing the conversation with them, I have more, more thinking, I have more idea and maybe those can translated into my poem or writing or anything else. (Charlotte)

In creating the multilingual poems, students were empowered to draw on their lived experiences, and communicative repertoires (Rymes, 2014) and learned to take pride and ownership of their own experiences working independently and collaboratively in diverse groups. The poems reflect the students' cultures and lived experiences and during the process of writing they started negotiating for the language that accurately represents their feelings, emotions, and ideas. Classroom observation data revealed that students have personalized the project which means that they were owning the project rather than it being imposed on them. For example, as the teacher, I noticed that throughout the project students were interested in the idea of writing multilingual poems rather than being interested in grades. In another incident, students approached me to ask permission to invite students from other classes to participate in the project. This reflects that students approached this project as a joint enterprise (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019) in which they were invested and wanted to share with their classmates and friends rather than a classroom assignment that they had to complete to receive a grade.

Data from the survey revealed that through the process of creating the poems, students planned, discussed, and negotiated ideas, vocabulary, and literary devices they wanted to use in their poems. In other words, the students have created a shared repertoire that has become a part of their practice while carrying out the project (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019). For example, Jennifer stated that "Our poetry club had a meeting every week so our group discussed the detail including the plots and work specialization in the meeting." And Clare added that "We worked together. We have 4 people In the group and we talked about our ideas face to face. Each person chooses differ aspect of the topic then write by their own. Once we finished, we decided which parts goes first stanza, second, or third." Students were expected to apply their knowledge of literary devices studied in class in their poems. For example, one of the groups used simile in the following line: "We retreated into our shells like turtles." In another example, students preferred to use personification to

express their idea, "The soft sound was buried in the noisy canteen." A third group used alliteration in their poem: "Darkness, despair, and desolation entangled in my heart."

Discussion

Taking part in the (MCPC) required students to take on a more active role in their learning by mutually engaging in the creation of joint enterprises and forming a shared repertoires as a group leading to the creation of a community of practice (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019). As a teacher, I also had to endure a shift to establish classroom practices and relationships that enabled this project to happen. At the early stages of the project, I experienced a sense of hesitancy on my part as a teacher. Even though I valued student-centered approaches to learning, I found it threatening to give so much control to the students over their own work. I worried about the way this may affect behavior and relationships in the classroom. However, as the project progressed, it was clear that students were learning without the teacher dominating everything. More importantly, learner agency and students' sense of ownership were notable among the students throughout the different stages of the project. The MCPC project created a space for collective thinking, planning, discussion, and peer review process which makes the project consistent with critical and dialogic views of learning. Moreover, the MCPC project is seen to fit pedagogically with project-based, task-based (Jackson, 2022), and content-based (Chou, 2013) approaches. The implementation of the MCPC project represented a departure from the traditional monolingual approach to language teaching, which aligns with the emerging multilingual models that emphasize the value of students' linguistic and communicative repertoires. Cook (2001) and Atkinson (1993) suggest that traditional ESL teaching approaches often encourage students to abandon their first languages and rely almost completely on English. However, the MCPC project, consistent with the views of Seltzer (2020) and Horner et al. (2011), recognizes students' multilingualism as a valuable resource for learning. By integrating students' diverse language practices into classroom activities, such as poetry writing, the project enriches classroom conversations and fosters a sense of ownership among learners.

The multilingual dimension holds a distinctive importance in this project. The expectation that poems are created in multilingual versions was important because it acknowledged how languages interrelate both in the mind and in use by the students. This led to a holistic representation of students' communicative and linguistic repertoires and helped construct identities, build confidence, and encourage a better understanding and appreciation of multilingual skills. The MCPC project aligns with the principles of plurilingual pedagogies promoted by Cummins & Early (2011) and Lotherington (2012), which emphasize the importance of incorporating students' home languages and experiences into educational practices. Through collaborative and creative projects like the MCPC, students can make meaningful connections between academic content and their personal linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This approach challenges the marginalization of English Language Learners (ELLs) and promotes positive representations of linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom, as highlighted by Prasad (2013) and Dagenais et al. (2017). Data from the survey and interviews revealed that students' metalinguistic skills were stimulated and enhanced throughout the project, which can be seen in students' avoiding literal translation when re-creating the poems in their first languages. Students' intercultural skills and competencies were among the critical outcomes that stood out in

students' responses to the survey and interview questions. For instance, some students indicated that more languages should be included in the project and that being introduced to new languages and cultures opened new horizons for them.

The process of producing multilingual poems and the collaborative experience that featured the linguistic and cultural diversity in the school led the way to reconfigure power relations among languages and language users. By engaging in collaborative multilingual activities, students not only enhance their metalinguistic skills but also develop intercultural competencies and a deeper understanding of power dynamics in language use (Canagarajah, 2015). A CoP (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2019) was established among students through a collaborative process that supported culturally and linguistically sustaining practice where students developed a sense of ownership for their collective work. Through this experience, students were positioned as essential members of their multilingual groups. Students' linguistic and cultural expertise were brought to the forefront rather than being ignored which made students aware of how their linguistic and cultural backgrounds contribute to the classroom's language ecology rather than being an obstacle to learning. The promotion of linguistic and cultural collaboration (Prasad & Lory, 2020) through the multilingual poem writing project in the ESL classroom brought students together through collaborative dialogue and action that went beyond the classroom boundaries. Engaging students in multilingual projects created a space for students to collaborate and work together to leverage their collective cultural and linguistic resources to achieve academic work. The creative space that is created through this project built a classroom environment in which students not only learned the subject matter, but also learned about, from, and with their peers. It was not my expectation that all students develop multilingual proficiency, but rather develop the ability and capacity to work and collaborate with others from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Prasad, 2018). Through this collaborative work, students developed a sense of ownership for their product and pride in themselves as a diverse CoP.

This experience has contributed to (re)shaping conceptualizations about language(s) and language teaching/learning. As opposed to previous insights about language teaching where students were required to "think in the target language" and "leave their L1 outside the classroom", the implementation of multilingual pedagogies as seen in the MCPC project opened the door to the exploration of new dimensions of language teaching and establishing new power dynamics in the classroom which led to enhanced academic, cognitive, social, and affective aspects of teaching/learning. One of the key characteristics of high-quality teaching is the teacher's ability to engage and draw on students' prior knowledge and experiences. This prior knowledge is embedded in the students' home languages and, therefore, it is crucial that teachers encourage students to utilize their funds of knowledge (Smythe & Toohey, 2009) and linguistic repertoires (Busch, 2017). This can be achieved through planning and designing activities in purposeful ways as shown in the MCPC project to allow and encourage students to draw on their diverse cultural and linguistic repertoires. On the other hand, denying the students' right to use their first languages in the English classroom leads to negative impacts on students' academic, social, affective, and cognitive aspects of learning and, more importantly, prevents teachers from opportunities to draw on students' diverse resources.

Conclusion

As the 21ˢᵗ century ESL classroom is characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity, teachers and students hold the responsibility of developing strategies to sustain and support students' diverse cultural and linguistic practices. More importantly, students' acceptance and respect of self and of others must be supported and encouraged by educators. In the current project/research, my goal as a teacher-researcher was to address the power relationships in the classroom and to challenge the traditional monoglossic habitus (Prasad & Lory, 2020) that has historically characterized modern schooling. To challenge the monoglossic habitus, it is not enough for educators to be aware of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the classroom. Actions should be taken through meaningful and purposeful pedagogy to reshape the power dynamics inside and outside the classroom. Students should be encouraged to adopt openness and understanding of linguistic, cultural, and social diversity inside and outside the classroom. Through the MCPC project, I laid the ground for students to form a CoP (Martin-Beltran et al., 2019) to accomplish a particular task. Throughout the project, students participated and carried out shared activities and engaged in social practice. Participants also formed a shared repertoire that includes words, gestures, ways of doing things, tools, symbols, actions, or concepts that they have produced or adopted, and which have become a part of the community's practice. It is important for teachers to recognize that language is socially constructed to be able to give voice to all students in an equal fashion (García, 2017). It is also important that teachers engage and encourage all students to develop an awareness of language as a social practice. This implies that teachers need to help all students voice their own multilingual experiences and repertoires.

Having the opportunity to carry out this practitioner research has allowed me to adopt a CMLA stance towards my TESOL practice. If I were to give advice to my younger self now — as a teacher — as well as to other TESOL practitioners, I would emphasize that students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds are valuable sources for learning that should be leveraged in the ESL classroom. Students should be encouraged to explore and utilize their communicative repertoires as much as possible. It is of great importance that instructional design is revisited and modified to invite and include students' diverse repertoires in the learning/teaching process. Raising students' multilingual awareness should be included in lesson/unit planning and curriculum design. Instructional design should be focused on empowering students and helping them become autonomous and active learners. Implementing multilingual pedagogy in the MCPC project helped bring the focus on the classroom strategies that my students and I employed to raise language awareness and foster intercultural awareness and competence to support learning in the class. Using students' languages in the classroom does not mean that we give up prioritizing English use, but rather that we can use some expressions and words from the students' languages strategically to create a welcoming environment such as in greetings and words of encouragement. We can also make explicit with students how their first languages can support not only their understanding of English but how they can be used as a tool to support metalinguistic and multilingual awareness for all learners. Marshall and Moore (2018) underscore that "the most notable distinguishing feature of plurilingualism [is] its use with reference to individuals in teaching and learning contexts (students *and* teachers) who critically and reflexively exercise their agency/plurilingual and pluricultural competence to enable communication" (p. 31). In this way, I have ultimately come away

from this work with insight and tools to design my teaching and learning in the ESL classroom to support multilingual learners to use their full communicative repertoires (Rymes, 2014) in creative and powerful ways. Prasad and Lory's (2020) domains of CMLA framework offers a powerful tool for educators and researchers alike to investigate and to target both teachers and students' development of critical multilingual language awareness while teaching and learning English.

This research project represents an attempt to introduce several unique elements. Rather than merely replicating a similar study in a different location or city, this project zeroes in on the specific context of an international high school in Toronto. This deliberate choice acknowledges that the feasibility and impact of multilingual teaching and learning can vary significantly depending on the educational environment. This specificity enables a more in-depth exploration of the dynamics and challenges within this particular setting.

The project's main objective was to investigate how a multilingual approach affects students, teachers, and the overall teaching-learning process across various aspects of Critical Multilingual Language Awareness. This multidimensional perspective goes beyond a simplistic analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the consequences and significance of multilingualism in education. By examining its impact on diverse stakeholders (both students and teachers) and considering various dimensions of language awareness, such as power dynamics, cognitive factors, emotional aspects, performance outcomes, and social interactions, the research takes a holistic approach. It recognizes that language learning encompasses not only linguistic proficiency but also socio-cultural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.

The driving force behind this project was to evaluate the practicality of implementing a multilingual approach within the selected context. This practical aspect was vital as it addressed real-world concerns and provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with introducing multilingual education in an international high school. While the research primarily focused on a specific setting, its findings held broader implications for multilingual education in similar international or diverse school environments. As a result, it contributed to the wider conversation surrounding effective language education strategies for diverse student populations. The second stage of the project, transforming the multilingual poems into drawings, was not researched in this paper for limitations of space. However, it is worth mentioning that studying this stage would lay the ground for future research that investigates the multimodality aspect of multilingual poetry writing.

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