



NRT NETHERLANDS 2019

Report

Author: Tomislav Tudjman (Risbo), Ellen-Rose Kambel, Rutu Foundation for Intercultural Multilingual Education

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Context

In 2018, the Dutch Education Inspectorate published its report that in contrast to almost all other countries in Europe, the performance of Dutch pupils has been falling for decades (State of Education 2018). Even more worrying were the figures that showed increasing inequality based on migration and socio-economic status: children with higher educated parents increasingly performed better than those whose parents were lower educated. The same was found for children with parents with a migrant background. The Inspection report paid little attention to the role of language. If language was mentioned at all, it was to point out that migrant children may have a language deficiency or language delay because they do not speak Dutch. Dutch as a second language classes are generally provided only for Newly Arrived Migrants (NAMS) and only during their first year in the Netherlands. After this, all children, including those who were born here but have a different home language than Dutch, are expected to speak Dutch at the same level as native Dutch speakers and to leave their mother tongues behind.

Currently, more than half of school children in the capital city of Amsterdam speak a different language besides Dutch. Schools therefore need to prepare their teachers to close the gap between 'native' Dutch speaking and multilingual children. However, the dominant attitude towards multilingualism in Dutch education can be summarized as a policy which at best ignores, at worst prohibits and sometimes even punishes children for using other languages than Dutch in schools (Le Pichon & Kambel 2017). It is a result of the (mistaken) belief that it is the best way for children to learn Dutch. Yet, research has shown for a long time that the opposite is true: making use of children's home languages will not only make them feel more at home at school and therefore helps in their integration into society, but also has significant benefits to their learning process (Collier & Thomas 2017, NESET II 2017).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education in the Netherlands distributed a booklet to all primary schools encouraging mother tongue use for teaching NAMS. This is certainly a positive step, but simply sending booklets to schools will not change ingrained practices. Teachers and policy makers need practical examples. At the last NRT (July 2018), participants stated that good multilingual teaching practices were hard to find. This is why it was decided to focus on good examples of multilingual teaching practices for the NRT 2019.

National Round Table

Date: 10 April 2019, 19:30-21:30 hrs Place: Amsterdam Venue: Goethe Institut The Netherlands
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Methodology: the evening was divided into two rounds of presentations by experts (three teachers with years of experience using mother tongues as a strategy for learning in the classroom and one researcher) followed by roundtable discussions when all participants were invited to discuss the ideas, experiences and issues put forward during the speeches. To conclude, a panel discussion was held.

Participants: to ensure participation of different stakeholders, the NRT was organised by Multilingual Parents Amsterdam, a network of parents of multilingual children, the Rutu Foundation for Intercultural Multilingual Education (an NGO), Risbo research institute/Erasmus University and Lokomotywa Polish Center for Education and Culture (a language weekend school). The Goethe Institut-Netherlands generously offered the room and equipment.

Participants included: teachers (primary school and from newcomer classes), school principals, school board members, teacher trainers, parents, and independent education and language consultants. Unfortunately, we had some cancellations (including from policy makers), but still had a full room with 35 participants allowing for more in-depth conversations. The meeting was moderated by Umayya Abu-Hanna (Rethink Amsterdam).

The aim of the NRT was to provide participants with deeper insight into the skills, knowledge and strategies that teachers need to have to support the multilingual talents of their pupils.

Questions addressed:

- What do teachers need to know to understand multilingual classrooms and use the languages as a benefit for the whole class?
- How can multilingual materials help parent participation in school?
- What are the costs of creating a multilingual inclusive educational context in schools?

Inputs and debate points

The first presentations was by Lara Rikers and Mindy McCracken, teachers from the International School of The Hague, where 80% of the students speak English as a second language although English is the main language of instruction in the school. The school welcomes all languages and uses translanguaging to support the teaching and learning activities. This is based on Jim Cummins' theory of interdependence, which suggests that first language knowledge can be positively transferred during the process of second language acquisition. Translanguaging allows the students to communicate, participate in classrooms by asking questions and providing answers in one language while processing information in another language that they may be more comfortable with. Their main point therefore was that first language is not an enemy but a tool.

The second speaker was Anouk Ticheloven, PhD student from the University of Hamburg who works with 18 primary schools in Hamburg where more than 90% of students are multilingual. She presented several language inclusion methods that were tested during her research. For example using language portraits to visualize students linguistic repertoire (an example of a language portrait was distributed to all participants). With the language portrait, students gain more confidence with regard to their own cultural background, but it also makes them respect and appreciate their peers' culture and diversity in general.



Finally, Mari Varsányi of the DENISE school in Amsterdam, a public international school, focused on internationalization and the cost-efficient ways to implement internationalization in education. She argued that internationalization is often seen as expensive and should include traveling abroad or participating in foreign exchange programs. However, in her view, internationalization does not have to consist of one big project, but can be a process of many small ongoing projects that do not have to cost anything at all. With a bit of creativity (e.g. the use of translanguaging, discussing other countries and cultures with students, etc.), internationalization can be integrated into daily school life in very inexpensive ways. As an example, using free software, Mari showed how easily all the languages present in the classroom (in our case, the roundtable) could be visualized. Students can benefit a lot from this type of internationalization.

The small group discussions revolved around ideas and doubts about translanguaging, e.g. how the experiences in primary education would be applicable to secondary school, how to deal with non-written languages, and how to deal with a lack of parental involvement. Participants were inspired by the many examples provided by the experts and the positive results that they witnessed in the classroom.

Discussion: How difficult is it to implement inclusive multilingual teaching strategies for teachers?

- teachers often feel the need to protect themselves from too many extra tasks to an already stressful job. Integrating home languages seems to them often as one other extra thing to organise and worry about.
- many multilingual children come from a low social and economic class and that, categorised as “those” children, they are considered unable to handle the same things as children from higher classes.
- teachers need practical application of the (academic) literature, literature that is often too inaccessible and/or time-consuming to them.
- Implementing translanguaging takes time and requires teachers to be more creative. However: the investment is worth it. Besides: the vulnerable position of the teacher (not being able to understand everything that is said in the classroom) is one in which the children find themselves in every day, the whole day.
- educating, convincing and training new (younger) teachers may be more beneficial because their convictions about mother tongue education might not be as deeply entrenched as those of their older colleagues.
- three crucial steps in integrating multilingualism in education: (1) differentiating between different contexts. Diversity can look completely different between one school and another. A bottom-up school wide approach is necessary where each school develops its own policies according to its needs and involving everyone: from teachers to multilingual support staff, students and parents. (2) spreading the word and inspiring other schools about what is possible; (3) governments, school inspectorates and eventually the ministry of education should be convinced and engaged in the process.
- The examples provided by the speakers were practical, time and cost-efficient and based on academic literature showing the benefits for pupils. Every teacher can start the next day with experimenting.

The Language Friendly School concept, a pilot currently running with three schools in Amsterdam, is seen as a way to engage the ‘bottom’ (the schools: parents, teachers, principals) as well as the “top” (policy makers: school



boards, city council, ministry of education). In November 2019, the first two schools will receive the label Language Friendly School (www.languagefriendlyschool.org).

Conclusions and way forward

At the first NRT it was concluded that there should be a series of meetings with three goals: (1) to put more pressure on the policy level regarding multilingual education; (2) to create a network of professionals and parents to collaborate on multilingual educational issues, and (3) to help schools adopt a more language friendly school approach.

After NRT 1, we organized two more meetings under the name “[Multilingual Amsterdam](#)”, drawing an audience of educators, parents and policy makers. The themes around which the discussions evolved were ‘the role of emotions’ and ‘language weekend schools for multilingual children’. At NRT2, it was agreed to continue with these meetings as there still remain a lot of questions about the benefits, challenges and opportunities of multilingualism in Dutch education. There were no specific objectives and actions identified. Having a place to come together and meet like-minded individuals, was considered a good place to start the conversations and bring in more people who may be reluctant about the need for linguistic inclusion and diversity in Dutch education.

For the next year, we will continue to focus on three target groups:

(a) parents: providing organizational support to strengthen the Multilingual Parents Network Amsterdam and weekend language schools (which are often managed by parents)

(b) teachers: supporting teachers with evidence based information and good practices on mother tongue and multilingual education, among others through the Language Friendly School, our online library and our social media platforms (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram)

(c) policy makers: engaging policy makers by inviting them to the meetings, through personal contacts (among others by empowering parents to engage directly with the school boards) and by raising their awareness about the many benefits of language inclusive education and the human rights implications when use of home languages are prohibited or punished at schools.

Continuity with the NRT 2018

The NRT 2019 was a direct follow-up to the NRT organized in 2018 when the focus was on the value of multilingualism. This roundtable we wanted to delve deeper into the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of teaching.



Challenges

- In 2018, our methodology did not fully conform with the 'round table' principle. This year we had fewer speakers (4), so there was much more room for participants to participate. Also presenters were able to walk from table to table and get into different discussions of the various themes.
- The discussions did not produce concrete outcomes. This was partly due to the theme which focused on how teachers could apply multilingual strategies in the classroom – which was an explicit demand from participants, but is more a 'technical' discussion.
- Also: we were not able to get many policy makers. Again this may have been because the topic may have been too technical for them. For the next NRT we will therefore focus explicitly on the role of the policy and regulations, and we will try to invite as many policy makers from different levels (school, school board, inspection, city councils, ministry of education, and ministry of justice).



NRT NETHERLANDS

Participants

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Name	Organisation/ institution	Position in organisation/ institution
MIGRANT-LED ORGANISATIONS		
Nello Allocca	Multilingual Parents A'dam	director
Astrid Echteld	Joereke	director
TEACHERS, TEACHER-TRAINERS, SCHOOL-LEADERS OR OTHER SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES		
Anya Beemster	ISK MCO	teacher
Dieneke Blikslager	St Jan school	School leader
Anne Eikelboom	School 'Vijf Sterren'	Teacher
Cynthia Groff	Leiden University	scientist
Fadie Hanna	Unversity of Amsterdam	scientist
Jonathan Heiner	Gymnasium	teacher
Karijn Helsloot	Espirit schools	teacher
Pleuni Hooft van Huysduynen	Applied University of Amsterdam	Professor
Merel Kroese	DENISE School	teacher
Ute Limacher-Riebold	Ute's International Lounge	teacher
Mindy McCracken	International School of The Hague	Specialist
Lara Rikers	International School of The Hague	Specialist
Anouk Ticheloven	Hamburg University	Professor
Stijn Ticheloven	University Utrecht	scientist
PARENTS- AND STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES		
Annisa Asrini	Rutu foundation	Student
Hilda Heyde	Rutu foundation	Student
OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS		
Allen Haim	Alley Cat	
Monique Denkelaar	Fryshuset	Global manager
Arie Blom	Alley Cat	owner
Annette Schutte	Spreekwerk	worker
Margriet Sick	Spreekwerk	worker
Tessa Spätgens	Nuffic	worker
Tomislav Tudjman	Risbo	Researcher and manager
Sabini Vola	Taalcoach meertalig onderwijs /onderwijzeres	Coach
Marga van Mil	OnderwijsAdvies	Advisor
Ellen-Rose Kambel	Rutu foundation	director
Laurinde Koster	Rutu foundation	
Katja van der Schans	Rutu foundation	