

Enablers and barriers for plurilingual practices: How EAL/D teachers support new arrivals in a rural secondary setting

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Abstract: This paper explores the reported practices of five specialist EAL/D teachers from a rural Australian town. They work with a cohort of refugee students from a single cultural group, who recently arrived in Australia with minimal English and with generally low levels of literacy in their first language. A questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used as data collection tools to explore how plurilingualism was being supported amongst these students.

Our findings indicated that plurilingual practices occurred predominantly in the EAL/D setting, where participants benefited from favourable conditions. These conditions were characterised by a homogenous student group and allowed for a slowing down of the curriculum and the incorporation of students' first languages in the learning process. The presence of skilled bilingual aides was the lynchpin for the success of plurilingual practices in this study.

Our research highlighted the need for further investigation into the enablers and barriers of collaborative practice between EAL/D and mainstream teachers and the role bilingual aides play in supporting plurilingualism in schools. There is evidence from this study to support reframing the concept of bilingual education in Australia, to better capture the complexities of plurilingual interactions in school contexts.

Introduction

The recent arrival of a significant number of refugee families in rural Australian towns has created new challenges for teachers, as they respond to the complexities of catering for EAL/D learners

in what have previously been largely monolingual school contexts. The challenges can be situated more broadly within the Australian educational context, where there is ongoing debate about how best to support EAL/D learners in mainstream settings. Many mainstream teachers may lack the knowledge and pedagogical strategies needed to cater for EAL/D learners (ATESOL, 2022; Hammond, 2006; Ollerhead, 2019; Watkins et al., 2013), leaving English learners in a ‘sink or swim’ submersive environment without appropriate support. The knowledge gap is compounded by a lack of systematic pedagogical direction for EAL/D at the policy level, which may limit the availability of expert guidance (French, 2016; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007).

By contrast, in specialist EAL/D settings certain conditions may support English language learners (Faltis, 1993). In this paper, ‘EAL/D settings’ refers to secondary schooling settings that specifically cater for EAL/D students. In some areas, newly arrived EAL/D students are catered for in Intensive English Centres (IECs), where students spend thirty to forty weeks receiving specialised English instruction before joining mainstream classes (NSW DoE, 2023b). In areas where there is not enough demand to establish these centres, the EAL/D setting may consist of intensive English classes or parallel EAL/D classes that support students’ language development before they fully transition to a mainstream environment where they are commonly taught by classroom teachers and supported by specialist EAL/D teachers.

Students in EAL/D settings benefit from teaching that is specifically designed to be comprehensible and commensurate with their current language proficiency, whilst fostering English language learning and development (Baker & Wright, 2017). Teachers in these settings also tend to use more culturally inclusive teaching and learning practices, and students have opportunities to develop a collective sense of belonging through interacting with students in a similar situation (Faltis, 1993).

Additionally, specialist EAL/D settings may give space to teaching practices that draw on students’ ‘plurilingual linguistic repertoires’ (Lüdi & Py, 2009), exploiting their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge to support new learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013). The meaningful incorporation of students’ first languages (L1) in learning acknowledges the existence of students’ already-rich linguistic tapestry (Blom et al., 2021; Kerr, 2019; Seng & Hashim, 2006), and offers both students and teachers a valuable pedagogical resource (Slaughter & Cross, 2021). In particular,

students with a low level of proficiency in English may draw on their L1 in their learning (Seng & Hashim, 2006), which can be enhanced when L1 is meaningfully used by both the student *and* the teacher (Cook, 2001; Ma, 2019). The use of students' L1 also aids in developing linguistic awareness and metacognitive strategies and supports students to function more effectively as social actors (Coste et al., 2009). Such inclusive teaching practices have the potential to shift EAL/D learners from being “academic outsiders to intellectually-capable insiders” (Feez & Harper, 2021, p. 12).

This paper explores the reported practices of a group of five specialist EAL/D teachers from a rural Australian town. The teachers work with a cohort of refugee students from a single cultural group, who recently arrived in Australia with minimal English and whose home language use is largely oral in nature. To explore how plurilingualism is supported amongst these students at school, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used to gauge how the teachers draw on students' linguistic resources for learning. The teachers' responses allow us to identify specific conditions that may act as enablers and barriers for supporting plurilingual practices in schools. We propose that a clearer understanding of the conditions that support plurilingual practices in specialist EAL/D classrooms can in turn inform teachers' choice of practices. Although the practices are most easily applied to specialist EAL/D settings, we reflect on how they can also be applied to mainstream settings.

In the following sections we explore the notion of plurilingualism within the field of EAL/D education. Then, drawing on our study's findings, we discuss the enabling and constraining factors that influence plurilingual practices in schools.

Plurilingualism in EAL/D education

In this paper, we follow the Council of Europe in defining plurilingualism as “the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience in several cultures” (Coste et al., 2009, p. 11). Due to the unbalanced nature of their linguistic and cultural knowledge, plurilinguals operate in an emergent state (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020), with their plurilingualism developing throughout the course of their lives (Coste et al., 2009). EAL/D learners can be described as plurilingual as they are language learners whose L1 is a language or dialect other than

Standard Australian English (SAE), who may have varying levels of competence in their other languages (ACARA, 2014). As plurilingualism is not seen as a fixed competency, the lens of plurilingualism counters the widespread understanding that EAL/D learners have a language deficit (Baker & Wright, 2017; Cummins, 1981; García, 2009) and fosters a more holistic perspective of language learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013). When we understand EAL/D learners to be plurilingual, we can observe how they draw on their varied linguistic and cultural skills, as well as the pre-existing knowledge encoded in their L1, to support their learning (Cook, 1999; Cummins et al., 2005; Deda, 2021).

Recognising the benefits of plurilingualism and teaching practices that support plurilingual contexts is particularly relevant to the Australian educational context which has traditionally embodied a monolingual orientation (Clyne, 2005; Ellis et al., 2010; Fielding, 2016). The adoption of a plurilingual lens inverts a tradition of language separation and advocates for more equitable education outcomes for marginalised EAL/D learners (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020). Plurilingualism as an inclusive approach to EAL/D education highlights students' complex and hybrid language behaviours (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020) and rebuts the concept that plurilingualism is a "marginal phenomenon" in favour of seeing plurilingualism as a common linguistic behaviour of many (Lüdi & Py, 2009). This is particularly relevant when students' formal education has been interrupted. Migration and refugee experiences, often intensified by experiences of trauma and limited access to formal schooling, can exacerbate the challenges of learning through L2 (Baker & Wright, 2017; Hammond & Miller, 2015).

Enablers and barriers of plurilingualism

Research suggests that students' plurilingual repertoires can be enabled through various teaching practices (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013; Heugh et al., 2019; Soares et al., 2021). Three practices stand out as relevant to the scope and context of this study. These are: the use of spontaneous translanguaging, the use of bilingual aides and the potential for EAL/D specialists to work in a collaborative mode. In this section, we discuss each of these practices in turn.

In translanguaging, students "draw on and mingle all elements of their linguistic repertoire" (Feez & Harper, 2021, p. 12) to decode and produce language in all modes. Translanguaging

can be both planned and spontaneous in nature (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; García et al., 2016; Kleyn & Yau, 2016). Spontaneous translanguaging (also referred to as “translanguaging shifts”) is used at a point of need to promote communication and understanding and is not necessarily part of the lesson design (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). The efficacy of spontaneous translanguaging relies on an ‘agent’ to mediate learning through the meaningful use of the students’ L1 as they interact and support learners in the classroom. In practice, this could mean, for example, that translations of key words or explanations of concepts are provided through L1 (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Kleyn & Yau, 2016).

In many studies, the teacher is often identified as the agent enabling translanguaging practices in the classroom (Kerr, 2019; Sayer, 2013; Tai & Wong, 2022). However, when the teacher does not share the students’ L1, which is often the case in the Australian setting, students themselves can facilitate translanguaging practices when the linguistic homogeneity amongst the student cohort is high (Partridge, 2023). In these situations, there are opportunities for teachers to hand over agency to the students and invite stronger students to lead micro sessions in L1, to create meaning from the classroom content (Partridge, 2023).

Skilled bilingual aides are also ideal agents for mediating learning and for negotiating the language gap between the teacher and student. Also known as bilingual school learning support officers (SLSO), SLSOs are employed for their linguistic skills and cultural knowledge to provide transition, wellbeing and in-language support to EAL/D students and their families, including students from refugee backgrounds (NSW DoE, 2023a). In the EAL/D setting they perform a range of meaningful tasks such as translating and interpreting classroom content, providing efficient concept clarification and leading micro-teaching sessions in L1 (Partridge, 2023). These moments of ‘meaning-making’ can become rich learning experiences where the bilingual aide provides students with contextualised information and facilitates linking the learning to the curriculum (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Collins & Simco, 2006). When this occurs, it supports a shift in classroom practice towards pedagogical translanguaging more broadly (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

Bilingual aides are often also the conduit between home and school, mediating communication with parents, and playing an active role in enhancing students’ access to the curriculum,

positively contributing to equality and inclusion in the school setting (Baak et al., 2021; Baker, 2014). Just as bilingual aides use students' plurilingual repertoires to enhance student learning, they also draw on students' prior knowledge and cultural capital through the exchange of knowledge systems ("transknowledging") to enhance learning (Heugh, 2021; Heugh et al., 2022). Thus, bilingual aides not only serve as brokers of language, but they also act as brokers of culture for students, communities, and school systems. In this way, they enrich our plurilingual lens of EAL/D learners and advocate for them by valuing their knowledge resources alongside their linguistic resources (Heugh et al., 2022).

EAL/D specialist teachers can also facilitate teaching practices that support their students' plurilingualism. EAL/D teachers often find themselves in a *de jure* role of working in a collaborative mode (Arkoudis, 2006), and as policy entrepreneurs and enthusiasts (Ball et al., 2011). This suggests that in principle they have the means to leverage change in school systems. However, performing this role is easier said than done. Competing priorities in schools compounded by curriculum and time pressures means that achieving a culture where EAL/D teachers can work collaboratively with other teachers is an ambitious task (Arkoudis, 1994, 2006). There may also be an institutionalised perspective that EAL/D teachers do not possess the same level of curriculum expertise as their mainstream counterparts (Arkoudis, 2006). Failure to develop collaborative structures between those who have the knowledge to support plurilingual practices (the specialist EAL/D teacher) and those who require support to do so (the mainstream teacher) can result in EAL/D learners not being adequately supported (Arkoudis, 2003).

Context for the study

The context for this study is the rural town of Armidale, NSW, with a population of 24,000. As a university town, Armidale has long had a diverse population, especially accommodating international students and their families, but was not formerly a destination of settlement for significant groups of refugees. However, in 2018, the town became a site of settlement for Ezidi (also known as Yazidi or Yezidi) refugees, mostly from the Shingal (Sinjar) region in northern Iraq (SSI, 2019). Between 2018-2022, over 650 Ezidi settled in Armidale under Australia's Humanitarian Settlement Program (Burge, 2023) and at the time of writing there are approximately 350 Ezidi students enrolled in the town's

schools. Further students are arriving weekly as refugee resettlement has resumed in the post-COVID period.

The Ezidi are an ethno-religious minority who have traditionally lived in areas of northern Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran (Kaplan, 2022) and who were targeted by the Islamic State in a series of systematic and genocidal attacks in August 2014 (Minwalla, et al., 2022; SSI, 2019). The Ezidi language (Kurmanji) is closely linked with Kurdish Kurmanji (UNHCR, 2008), but many Ezidi in Armidale prefer to refer to their language as the Ezidi language, maintaining a sense of unique cultural identity (Tillman, 2023). The primary mode of communication in the Ezidi language is oral. There are very few social contexts in which writing is used (Kaplan, 2022) and traditionally Ezidi people have had minimal engagement with written language systems.

The long, intergenerational history of segregation and persecution of Ezidi people has impacted their access to education and Ezidi are underrepresented in the Iraqi schooling system (Wendt et al., 2019). Access to education was further restricted by the refugee experience, where make-shift schools in camps were overcrowded, under resourced and often financially inaccessible. Further, most available schooling was in Arabic, rather than the students' L1 (UNHCR, 2019). Ezidi students in Armidale have experienced various levels of trauma, and most have spent upwards of four years in refugee camps.

Hence, although they represent a homogenous cultural group, Ezidi students in Armidale arrive with varied linguistic and literacy skills dependent on their refugee experience, with few students having had prior language or literacy experiences that have prepared them for the demands of western schooling. Therefore, most Ezidi students, arriving with limited experience of literacy, need very high levels of support in learning both English as an additional language and in learning the literate, often unfamiliar ways of using language (Schleppegrell, 2004). Developing appropriate strategies for inducting Ezidi students into the language and literacy of the mainstream curriculum has been a major challenge for teachers in Armidale.

The study

We conducted a small qualitative study to elicit how EAL/D teaching practices drew on Ezidi students' plurilingualism in order to support their learning. The research focused on how the students' L1 was used in teaching and learning and the conditions

under which L1 was used. Participants for the study were recruited through an EAL/D teachers' book club, with five book club members agreeing to participate. All held tertiary TESOL qualifications and were working, or had recently worked, as EAL/D teachers in local schools. As a group, they represented a broad range of teaching experiences in domestic and international settings, in primary and secondary schools, and in the government and private sectors. The pseudonyms of the five participants are Raylene, Sally, Cameron, Elaine, and Ginny.

The participants answered a questionnaire and took part in a semi-structured interview in which they were asked to describe how students used L1 in their classes and how they used L1 as a teaching and learning resource. By using these data collection tools, we sought to create a clear picture of enablers and barriers to the support of the students' plurilingualism.

Enablers of plurilingual practices

Through the participants' descriptions of their EAL/D setting, we have generalised a number of conditions favourable to supporting students' plurilingualism. These conditions were a) the presence of a largely homogenous student cohort, b) the pared back time and curriculum pressures of the EAL/D setting and c) the strategic use of students' L1 and bilingual aides.

Homogenous student group

As noted above, the study participants were working with a largely homogenous cultural group, who shared the same L1 and whose lived experience included disrupted, or even no formal schooling prior to their arrival in Australia. The students were also mostly in the beginning phases of English language learning.

All participants reported that they leveraged this relative homogeneity to draw on students' L1. They did so in various contexts and for different purposes, particularly with the students at the beginning phases of English learning. For example, Ginny and Sally reported that when their classes were composed of EAL/D learners from the same language group, L1 was frequently used. Sally further remarked that students used their L1 as their primary mode of communication. Elaine compared the Ezidi students to other international students and noted that students with more limited schooling relied on their L1 more heavily and required more explicit teaching of 'schooling'.

Favourable curriculum and time pressures

Participants reported that within the EAL/D setting there were more opportunities to slow their teaching down and to place emphasis on language learning and skill development, rather than powering through syllabus documents. These favourable conditions afforded EAL/D learners with disrupted schooling histories more time and support to adjust to the Australian schooling system. Cameron remarked that:

[As an EAL/D teacher you] get to slow down and focus on a few things, the way that you can't when you are a [mainstream] teacher. That's what I think the main difference is. It's the intensity in the time between the two roles.

Drawing on plurilingual resources

Having knowledge of their students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds enabled participants to design learning that was accessible and inclusive of students' cultural capital. This knowledge was used by participants to facilitate meaningful curriculum connections and allowed them to identify entry points for supporting student learning. Ginny remarked that knowledge of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds informed her teaching decisions and was key to helping students access curriculum. Raylene similarly remarked:

I found myself actually drawing really heavily on their world views and their perspectives actually to support them in that English course. And I chose texts specifically that would allow them to tap into that. ... I found that tapping into their personal experiences as people who've been kind of, you know, in between cultures and who ... have been taken out of one place and plopped into another for whatever reason - that actually really supported their conceptual understanding and their interpretations of the text.

In lessons, L1 was primarily used by students and bilingual aides in the form of spontaneous translanguaging to increase student understanding and provide students with clarification. Participants reported using L1 in classroom tasks such as translating new vocabulary, discussing new ideas and concepts, and as a back-up for when English was not successful. Positive attitudes towards using L1 were reported, with Cameron referring to the use of L1 as being "one more step in that chain to ultimately

accessing knowledge”.

Participants also reported that L1 use in the classroom increased students’ confidence in their learning, supported an inclusive learning environment and allowed students to function as plurilinguists.

Bilingual aides

Bilingual aides played a pivotal role in supporting students’ plurilingualism and were the lynchpin for supporting the use of L1. Participants described bilingual aides as linguistic and cultural brokers. In Raylene’s terms, they functioned as advisors for EAL/D teachers, by providing a cultural lens and offering deeper cultural and linguistic insights into their preparation for teaching. Elaine remarked, “I include bilingual aides when I’m preparing a unit of work. Make sure, one, it’s culturally appropriate and, two, where are the language difficulties here?”. Participants noted that bilingual aides also acted as cultural brokers more broadly in school through broader cultural advice to teaching staff to ensure that their practice was more culturally responsive. Ginny commented:

[Bilingual aides] can inform us a little bit more about cultural differences and maybe, you know, cultural festivals and explain things in a bit more detail for us that we understand the culture a little bit better as well.

All participants reported that bilingual aides were essential in the delivery of curricula and allowed ease of communication and engagement with their culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community. Bilingual aides as essential staff members performed several tasks aptly summarised by Raylene:

These tasks could involve translation/interpreting for students, clarifying concepts, helping students communicate with the subject teacher, engaging with parents/community, supporting small groups of students requiring further support.

Bilingual aides also offered interpreting and translation services to schools and facilitated teaching through L1 in the classroom. They assisted the teacher, ensuring that students understood the lesson by translating key vocabulary and clarifying new concepts in L1. Elaine commented:

[Bilingual aides] also helped to clarify instructions. So,

there could be an instruction that you've given that you thought was quite clear ... and the kids just completely missed it or misunderstood and so clarification and that fine tuning of a lesson really works well through the bilingual aides.

Cameron further remarked, "I guess in many ways, they're, well, they're absolutely indispensable for helping communicate an idea and ... a new concept to an EAL/D student".

Bilingual aides were reported to play an essential role in engaging with a school's CALD community, which was particularly important for family members who had low literacy in L1, as well as low English language proficiency. Sally remarked, "our bilingual non-teaching staff play quite a massive role in administrative [tasks] as well as student support. We use our [bilingual aides] for translating notes and stuff that go home. Also, for any parent interviews that need to occur or enrolments". Bilingual aides were also reported to have played a major innovating role, turning to the creation of audio-visual materials and social media to engage with the community in L1 in lieu of traditional home-school communication that was not accessible for the CALD community. For example, audio-visual messages can be consistently created by familiar people, and QR coding allows messages to be viewed through a YouTube channel, allowing parents to feel more engaged with the school.

Barriers to plurilingual practices

Participants developed many insights through their access to the mainstream teaching setting, where they were able to take on the students' perspective to a considerable extent, and to contrast the observed teaching practices with those they were accustomed to in their EAL/D setting.

A key theme that emerged from the study was the participants' perceptions of how the needs of EAL/D learners were being addressed in mainstream classes, and where pedagogic shifts were required to support their learning. Generally, the participants perceived that mainstream setting did not support the students as plurilinguals. Our participants gave three key reasons for this: a) the time and curriculum pressures of mainstream secondary school; b) teachers' capability; and c) the absence of collaborative structures.

Time and curriculum pressures

From the perspective of the research participants, the curriculum and time demands in the mainstream setting drives the pace of teaching. Participants described the pressure felt by mainstream teachers to push through the curriculum, despite this pace not accommodating the learning needs of EAL/D learners. Raylene noted, “there might be a lot of dot points in the syllabus, especially with stage six courses, that [teachers] feel like they have to tick every single one of these things off, and so they just power, power, power through”.

Participants also noted that some students were still processing the impacts of trauma and required greater time to learn a new language together with subject content: “I think mainstream teachers go too fast for their mainstream students. Sometimes they’re so busy focusing on getting through a curriculum, rather than really ensuring that their students do understand the concepts and what’s happening” (Elaine).

Lack of teacher capability

In mainstream classes, the focus on content delivery at the expense of language was compounded by a reported lack of experience and confidence of mainstream teachers to cater for EAL/D learners. This perception was expressed multiple times by the participants throughout the study. Sally reported that holistically “there’s a lack of confidence in mainstream teachers in teaching EAL/D students”. Teacher inexperience was reported to be a possible reason that EAL/D learners are not fully catered for in the mainstream setting. Raylene commented that with teacher experience comes the deep specialist curriculum knowledge that allows the teacher to know when they can go deeper and where the curriculum can be rationalised. Raylene suggested that this ability, developed over time, is a way to accommodate the needs of EAL/D learners.

Given these observations, it was not unexpected that students’ L1 was not used by teachers as a learning resource in mainstream classrooms. Our participants unanimously reported that mainstream teachers do not use students’ L1, and they suggested that this was due to a lack of experience and confidence in teaching EAL/D learners. Elaine observed that mainstream teachers experience a sense of alienation and lack of control when students use their L1, stating, “it’s a very closed space for them be in. They are confused and they’re not quite sure what’s going on”.

This was also commented on by Cameron: “They don’t feel confident in being able to, I guess, in being creative enough to use it or they wouldn’t quite know where to start”.

Lack of collaboration

Our study revealed that a lack of collaboration between EAL/D specialist teachers and their mainstream counterparts was a key factor for the plurilingual needs of students not being supported in mainstream classrooms. Although collaborative practices were a part of their official role descriptions, participants reported that this was the aspect of their role that they engaged in the least. They also experienced a change of status and agency when they shifted from teaching their own classes to working in a support mode. That is, they shifted from feeling like active agents who were able to support students’ plurilingualism, to feeling like passive agents in a support role. Sally made insightful comments in this regard:

When I am teaching my class, it is direct structured teaching where I have the control of the lessons and the direction they’re going, how I design them and what needs to be followed up with the students is all my decision. When I’m supporting in a class, I take from what the teacher is actually doing and may translate or simplify some of the language or simplify some of the work down as it’s happening in the class. But it’s work ... I haven’t seen beforehand. ...I don’t have any control over what’s happening in those classes, I just support and follow what’s happening by the main teacher.

When Sally was asked if she had any insight into why this might be the case, she noted the challenge collaborating with mainstream teachers who have limited time, and may also have limited interest:

It’s been hard to engage some of the mainstream teachers into doing some co-planning, and whether it’s been because of time constraints or in some a lack of interest in co-planning. So, the support’s being given to the student that needs it rather than supporting the teacher developing lessons suitable to EAL/D students.

Discussion

This study adds to our understanding of how plurilingualism may be supported in Australian rural school settings, and particularly,

the conditions under which students' L1 is most effectively used. Our study suggests that we have much to learn from specialist EAL/D settings about how best to support plurilingual practices for EAL/D learners, in ways that benefit their learning. We believe it would be useful to repeat this study in other settings in order to develop a wider data set that would enable us to make broader generalisations about the enabling and constraining factors that influence plurilingual practices in schools.

Our participants identified conditions that were favourable to plurilingualism for the refugee student group. One such condition was the relative homogeneity of the student group, which allowed students to draw on L1 in a collaborative way. Another condition was the reduced pressure of mandated curriculum, which allowed teachers the time to focus on the development of language and skills, whilst drawing on students' plurilingual resources as a rich teaching and learning tool

EAL/D settings are transitional in nature, as their purpose is to prepare students for mainstream schooling. However, it is important that students have enough time in the specialist setting. Our study suggests that movement from the EAL/D setting into mainstream classes based on time rather than need is unlikely to benefit students with significantly interrupted education histories who are in the initial phases of learning English. Further, moving students to the mainstream too early can mean that students who have not acquired sufficient language and schooling skills to independently engage with the curriculum are taught by teachers who in turn are reported to lack the knowledge and skill needed to cater for EAL/D learners (ATESOL, 2022; Watkins et al., 2013). This is especially relevant for students such as those described in this study: who are recently arrived refugees with little experience of literacy and who are new to learning English. For such students, it is suggested that more time in specialist EAL/D settings would be beneficial.

While it is not possible to replicate the conditions of an EAL/D setting in mainstream classrooms, this study suggests that mainstream conditions could be enhanced by creating opportunities for plurilingual practices in a number of ways. First, we should recognise the role of bilingual aides as brokers of language and culture outside of the EAL/D setting. Our participants noted that bilingual aides bring value to the planning process, notably in light of their ability to check that content is culturally appropriate, and to monitor potential language difficulties. Bilingual aides also

serve as an important conduit between home and school and can facilitate relationships between teachers and parents.

Second, authentic collaboration between EAL/D specialist staff and their mainstream counterparts may mitigate the challenges faced by mainstream teachers in catering for EAL/D learners and to support the learner's plurilingualism. Such collaboration requires the establishment of mutual goals and recognition of parity among participants. Shared responsibility and decision making are also needed (Friend & Cook, 2010). Our study highlighted that misconceptions of the role of EAL/D teachers was one reason for a lack of collaboration. This revealed an imbalance, where EAL/D teachers who possess specialist knowledge and qualifications often have lower professional status than their mainstream counterparts and thus have little agency to influence curriculum planning and delivery (Arkoudis, 2006).

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