POLICY IN PRACTICE:
PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS LEARNING ABOUT PLURILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

In an era in which the English language has assumed a preponderant role in education systems, particularly at primary school, there is increasing interest in what ways English can contribute to plurilingual education and intercultural communication in that particular context. But, what is the understanding of primary school teachers of English about plurilingual and intercultural education? What constraints do they face when they try to reconcile the English language syllabus with an awakening to languages and cultures approach as a step towards plurilingual and intercultural education?

This article describes the representations of a group of English language teachers in Portugal about the aims of English teaching at primary school; the development of professional knowledge regarding plurilingual and intercultural education, and the constraints and difficulties felt by these teachers as they manage the English curriculum and try to develop plurilingual and intercultural teaching. We conclude with a reflection on the implications of our findings for curriculum development and teacher education.

Key-words: plurilingual and intercultural education, awakening to languages and cultures, English, language teachers, professional development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Plurilingualism has been considered not only a means of ensuring the sustainability of linguistic and cultural diversity as a cornerstone of humanity, but also a tool which enables individuals to become more active citizens in ever more diverse and dynamic societies, both local and globally. It is believed that, as Glaser (2005, p.195) points out, "Plurilingualism is the only means to maintain linguistic diversity, which, in turn, empowers people and enhances their creativity and problem-solving skills". This standpoint is reiterated by Skutnabb-Kangas (2002), who advocates that plurilingualism enhances creativity and maximizes divergent thinking as well as cognitive flexibility, thus fostering individuals' ability to cope with several world-visions. The author claims that an education which leads to high levels of plurilingualism contributes to the development of linguistic, cultural and knowledge capital and can help individuals to deal with the challenges of contemporary societies. High-level plurilinguals are also considered likely to become high-skilled professionals.

Within political and educational discourses in favour of plurilingualism and cultural literacy as ways of promoting intercultural understanding and preserving diversity (Beacco & Byram, 2007; Council of Europe, 2008), the coexistence of English alongside other languages has been a delicate topic of discussion, with English either being deplored or addressed constructively (Breidbach, 2002).

Authors such as Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, 2002), Phillipson (2006), Macedo *et al*. (2003) are extremely critical about the spread of English, considering it a means of "linguistic imperialism", of reinforcement of linguistic hegemony and oppression, and even a drawback to a democratic way of life. In their opinion, moves towards increasing linguistic unity will marginalise languages and identities, and prevent individuals from reaching a far more profound understanding of diversity and human nature, which plurilingualism and engagement with diversity would cultivate.

Others, providing pro-English arguments, consider English an opportunity to foster international cooperation in business and economy, cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding in the context of multilingual societies (Moreira, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2003). English can also empower individuals to overcome a status of "isolation in diversity" that may persist when people remain enclosed in their mother tongues (Crystal, 1997/2003; Breidbach, 2002) and consequently unable to communicate with speakers of other languages. Breidbach (2002b, p.282) adds that "proficiency in English as a possible and reliable interlingual mediator and the equality of people's linguistic identities are interdependent factors" which require further attention in this debate.

Besides the arguments about whether English will keep its striking position in worldwide communication (Graddol, 1997), its effects on linguistic endangerment

or the fostering of monolingual ideologies, the fact is that there has been a growing social demand in favour of the English language in the school curricula. English has become the most widely taught foreign language in educational systems world-wide, particularly at Primary school level (Eurydice, 2008).

It is not our purpose to discuss in depth the language ideologies behind this trend, such as the idea that being competent or native-like proficient in English is sufficient for successful communication and professional life. Yet, social representations need to be considered in the field of language education, because they can be very influential in the way teachers and students regard the English language and its teaching (Castellotti & Moore, 2002). Particularly, concern has been displayed regarding a conception of English teaching based only on the prestige and functionality of the language, in disregard of interculturally-oriented language learning. As Moreira (2006, p.190) claims, "it appears that the more we talk about the benefits of linguistic diversity and the values of interculturality and plurilingualism, the more we are confronted with a situation in which everyone must learn English, and learn it with the most minimalist cultural and pluralist goals".

It is argued that since students spend so much time learning English in formal educational settings, this context should be used as an opportunity to foster engagement with diversity and intercultural dialogue, namely through the pedagogical acknowledgement of the complexity of English in terms of (socio)linguistic variation (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). As Beacco and Byram (2007) highlight, instead of blocking students' plurilingual and intercultural competence in the name of a monolingual ideology of language learning, the teaching of English should be channelled towards the development of plurilingualism and intercultural dialogue.

The basis for the study presented in this article is a research and language teacher education project which took place in the Portuguese primary school context. This project envisaged the English language not as a pitfall to plurilingualism in the classroom, but as a springboard to plurilingual and intercultural education, as defined by Beacco and Byram (2007): "*Plurilingual education* will refer to all activities, curricular or extra-curricular of whatever nature, which seek to enhance and develop language competence and speakers' individual linguistic repertoires, from the earliest schooldays and throughout life. [...] the goal is to develop plurilingual competence and intercultural education, as a way of living together." (p.18).

The project assumed it to be important to consider the interplay between the meso and micro dimensions of language policy and curriculum design, viewing them as interconnected faces of social and educational change. As Liddicoat (2004) points out language policies have the potential to influence teaching methodologies: yet, the relationship between the two spheres and eventual mismatches has been insufficiently studied. As Menken and García (2010) highlight, language policies are locally negotiated, and teachers are very significant policymakers and curriculum planners or interpreters. They can be sources of resistance to change or agents of innovative language education, and therefore they are key people in cur-

riculum development for plurilingual and intercultural education (Beacco et al., 2010).

Against this background, the questions guiding our study are: What is the understanding of primary school teachers of English regarding plurilingual and intercultural education? What constraints do they face when they manage the English language syllabus with a view to developing a plurilingual and intercultural education based on a pluralistic approach, particularly the awakening to languages and cultures?

By focusing on the micro level of policy implementation and curriculum development (Akker et al., 2008), our aim in this article is to characterise and discuss a group of English language teachers' (i) motivations and expectations for participating in the research project, (ii) representations about the aims of English teaching at primary school, (iii) development of professional knowledge regarding plurilingual and intercultural education, and curriculum management practices in the English class, and (iv) constraints and difficulties felt by these teachers as they manage the English curriculum with a view to developing plurilingual and intercultural education, and put language policy in practice. We conclude with a reflection on the implications of our findings for curriculum development in teacher education.

2. SETTING THE SCENE

2.1 Portuguese Primary school and language provision

In Portugal, formal compulsory schooling comprises: (i) Basic Education, with three cycles – 1st Cycle, also known as primary education (6 to 9/10 year-olds), 2nd Cycle (10/11 to 12 year-olds), 3rd Cycle (13 to 15 year-olds) –, and (ii) Secondary Education (16 to 18 year-olds). Considering the spread of English language provision in worldwide educational contexts, we can hardly speak of a truly English-only situation in the overall Portuguese educational system. Officially students have the possibility of learning two foreign languages during compulsory formal education, this depending on the language provision offered by each school.

Before 2001, the formal and compulsory learning of foreign languages took place only in the 2nd and 3rd Cycles of Basic Education. It was not until 2001, that the Portuguese Ministry of Education introduced the possibility of Primary schools (1st Cycle) offering an initiation to foreign language learning, with an emphasis on speaking (Decree-Law 6/2001). The introduction of foreign languages at primary school level was concurrent with the opportunity given to schools to provide extra-curricular activities on an optional basis. Foreign language provision became optional and varied across the national context, in terms of organisation and delivery. Although no reference to a specific foreign language was to be found in the official discourse, the choice of the vast majority of primary schools was English.

Four years later, in 2005, an official dispatch regulated the Generalisation of English Teaching at Primary Education, with focus on the 3rd and 4th years of school-

ing (Dispatch 14753/2005). This programme consisted in a progressive generalisation strategy for the early introduction of English learning. This trend was reinforced when, a year later, in 2006, the Ministry of Education made this programme compulsory for the 3rd and 4th years of schooling (Dispatch 12591/2006), and more recently, in 2008, expanded the compulsory learning of English to the 1st and 2nd years of Basic Education (Dispatch 144460/2008).

Following transnational tendencies, namely in Europe, English has thus become a compulsory extra-curricular subject area at primary education in Portugal (Eurydice, 2008). As stated in the website of the Portuguese General-Directorate of Innovation and Curricular Development (DGIDC) regarding this measure:

> "The status of the English language as the language of international communication justifies the high level of adhesion of schools, local authorities and families to this measure, which also gathered the consensus of the parties with representation in the Assembly of the Republic, and of civil society in general."

> (http://sitio.dgidc.min-edu.pt/linguas_estrangeiras/Paginas/LEstrang_curriculo.aspx, accessed at 20/01/2011, our translation).

Yet, despite the apparent overall acceptance, this recent educational language policy in Portugal has also fostered reflection upon uniform curricular designs or subtractive curricula versus the implementation and development of a *language-friendly curriculum* (Commission of the European Communities, 2003), based on diversified curriculum scenarios and more holistic approaches to languages.

2.2   Discourses at the macro and meso levels of curriculum development

2.2.1   Macro level: the rationale for English language provision

The main argument pointed out by the Ministry of Education for the generalisation of English language teaching at primary school referred to the desire to overcome some of the Portuguese educational system's backwardness in relation to European patterns, which demand high levels of education, both in terms of qualification and acquisition of core competences. The development of proficiency in English amongst the younger generations was considered strategic in order to foster skills and encourage interest in English learning from a life-long perspective, as a way to increase the competitiveness of the workforce and of the Portuguese economy (see Dispatch 14753/2005).

However, it is also stated in the same dispatch that:

> "English learning in the 1st cycle of Basic Education should be considered essential to the development of a plurilingual and pluricultural awareness, according to the Common European Framework of Reference [for Languages], as well as a fundamental element of citizenship, in terms of the early development of competences in the context of the growing mobility of people within the European Union" (Dispatch 14753/2005, our translation).

The arguments underlying the teaching of English in Primary schooling thus integrate both economic and humanistic perspectives of language learning and curriculum. The economic justification can be placed within the social representation of English as an economic asset, and the belief in its benefits and prestige in terms of successful business and economy. This representation can in turn be linked to the political aspiration of having a more influential national participation in a pervasive globalised economic system of Anglo-American nature (Phillipson, 2006). The pro-English arguments in the dispatch seem to be in tune with the perspective that foreign language education is at the service of the labour market and of utility in working life. This language planning initiative is strongly and primarily directed by socioeconomic rationale or "language market" demands (Bourdieu, 1991) and international mobility needs.

But in addition, a connection to plurilingual education is also established. In this sense, two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the 'the more, the better' or subtractive linguistic ideology towards strengthening the Portuguese population's performance in English seems to be a route to the fostering of plurilingualism as a competence, as narrow a perspective as this may sound. Secondly, the dispatch also places English learning within the alternative sphere of plurilingual education: education for plurilingual awareness, whose purpose is to educate for linguistic acceptance, raise awareness of linguistic diversity and educate for democratic citizenship (Byram & Beacco, 2007), i.e., to develop plurilingualism as a value. This sphere has been considered crucial in terms of developmental, cultural and intercultural benefits of language learning (Cavalli et al., 2009). In fact, the development of an early intercultural communicative competence together with the development of pluralistic world-views is seen as one of the core areas of intervention in primary education, in order to prepare children for encounters with other ethnic and speech communities (Doyé & Hurrell, 1997).

2.2.2   Meso level: pedagogic regulation documents

The document *Generalisation of English Teaching in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education – Programme Guidelines* (Bento et al., 2005), which works as a reference tool for the production of English primary textbooks, classroom planning and teaching practice, seems to be coherent with what has been argued so far. Concerning the English language, this document brings together two arguments – one, the provision of English because of its international status and prestige; and the other, the contribution of early English language learning to the development of plurilingualism and intercultural citizenship–, as it recognises:

- The relevance of the introduction of the learning of English as an international language of communication per excellence, and as an instrument of ICT;
- The crucial role of the English language in the construction of a plurilingual and intercultural awareness;

- The benefits that the early development of a communicative competence in a universal language such as English necessarily entails in the context of the growing mobility of people within the European Union;
- Its contribution, seen as fundamental, to the construction of citizenship (p. 9, our translation).

Taking these assumptions into account, the main aims of English language teaching in primary school in Portugal as expressed in the above document are:

- To sensitise to linguistic and cultural diversity;
- To promote the development of an awareness of linguistic and cultural identity through the confrontation with the foreign language and the culture(s) it transmits;
- To foster a positive relationship with language learning;
- To enhance the value attributed to language as a vehicle of interpretation and communication of and with the surrounding world;
- To promote an education for communication, motivating for values such as respect towards others, mutual help, solidarity and citizenship;
- To contribute to the development of the child's cognitive, socio-affective, cultural and psychomotor capacities;
- To offer significant, diversified, integrating and socialising learning experiences;
- To favour attitudes of self-confidence and engagement in *savoir-faire*;
- To stimulate capacities of concentration and memorisation;
- To promote the development of learning strategies;
- To foster other learning (p. 11, our translation).

Broadly speaking, the aims for English teaching at primary school seem to be coherent with the global aims assigned to Portuguese Basic Education, as abridged: to ensure pupils' global development within a life-long learning perspective, in terms of (i) personality development, (ii) acquisition and mastery of knowledge, capacities and attitudes essential to the school and professional trajectories, and (iii) education for citizenship and intercultural dialogue (Ministry of Education, 2006). One may come to the conclusion that there is some coherence between the pedagogical and the political discourses: they both see the English teaching as a context for the development of skills for professional life and international mobility, as well as for plurilingual and pluricultural awareness-raising.

2.2.3   Synthesis

To sum up, following Arnesen (2010), we are in the presence of two rhetorical orientations in the legislation and regulation of English teaching at primary schools in Portugal: on the one hand, a strong market orientation and, on the other hand, the humane dimension of language education. As the author explains, this coexistence of educational policy orientations makes of education a complex and contradictory

field, in which the pendulum tends to swing mostly towards, we would say, a more instrumental and monolingual trend in terms of language provision. Ensuring that other languages have their place and space in primary schooling and that pupils have the opportunity to widen their identities depends on the sensitivity of decision-makers, parents, and teachers in face of the benefits of plurilingual and intercultural education (Coste et al., 2007), which an English-only perspective in primary education, as at other levels, cannot ensure.

As Cavalli et al. (2009b) stress, it is important that plurilingual and intercultural education should find expression in official policy and pedagogical instructions or recommendations, since these may strongly determine choices at local or micro levels, namely in spheres such as the schools' language policy and curriculum construction and management or implementation. It is however relevant to argue that if "it is evident that plurilingual and intercultural education can only be the outcome of a deliberate policy and of a conscious, coherent and concrete commitment by policymakers" (Cavalli et al., 2009b: 4), what conclusions are to be drawn when such language policy measures or initiatives seem to be inspired in a 'monolingual' meta-narrative, i.e., an English-only situation in primary school education, making it more difficult to find arguments for other scenarios of language provision?

Our perspective is that, in view of the Portuguese reality, it is desirable to see how education for plurilingualism and education for plurilingual awareness may be integrated in the context of the English class, in order to gain insight into how to develop alternative counter narratives.

3.   DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The basis for the research project "The English language in Primary School – from policies to practices"[1] was the compulsory introduction of English teaching at Portuguese primary schools. Political measures like this have led many scholars to speak out for a *language-friendly curriculum* at primary schooling, by advocating that early language education should privilege curricular opportunities to contact with the plurality of languages and cultures, as opposed to a monolingual perspective of language learning (Candelier, 2003).

The project adopted a constructive standpoint in view of the unavoidable prevailing position of English in the Portuguese primary school curriculum. It strategically considered English as a bridge language to an awareness of plurality and the English class as a powerful mediating setting for educating pupils on the basis of both functional/utilitarian purposes and humanistic goals, giving some privilege to the latter.

Yet, the search for synergies between the teaching of English, the pedagogical approach of awakening to languages and cultures, and the development of pupils'

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plurilingual and intercultural competence (as defined in Beacco & Byram, 2007) cannot be achieved without gatekeepers such as primary school teachers of English. These professionals have their own linguistic representations and teaching ideologies which inform and guide the curriculum management decisions and practices with consequences for pupils' language learning, repertoires and experience of diversity (Castellotti & Moore, 2002; Borg, 2003; Pinho & Andrade, 2009).

Bearing these remarks in mind, the research project's aims were: (i) to understand the role of English teaching at primary school in the development of plurilingual and intercultural education; (ii) to describe the representations of primary school teachers of English about plurilingual and intercultural education and the role of English in its development; (iii) to identify these teachers' English teaching practices towards plurilingual and intercultural education; (iii) to understand the role of collaborative communities as an education setting in these teachers' professional development.

The project developed in three phases, as briefly presented:

- Phase 1: Development of the theoretical framework and methodological research instruments. Design of the teacher education programme.
- Phase 2: Empirical study (case study). Implementation of the teacher education programme "Plurilingual and intercultural English" (during 2 school years), based on the creation of a professional learning community involving a group of primary school teachers of English and the researcher/teacher educator. Data collection.
- Phase 3: Data organisation, treatment and analysis. Design of a follow-up plan within language teacher education.

3.1 The education programme "Plurilingual and intercultural English"

The development of the research project was based on an accredited teacher education programme entitled "*Plurilingual and intercultural English: paths through awakening to languages/cultures*". In operational terms, it consisted in the creation of a professional learning community. It was understood as a space of education and research, i.e., an environment of encounter and reflection, discussion and sharing of perspectives, practices, resources and learning regarding language education in the early years of schooling. The community comprised five primary school teachers of English and the researcher who was simultaneously teacher educator and peer in the activities to be carried out. The dynamics of this community was based on the development of a common action-research project guided by the rationale of one of the pluralistic approaches (Candelier et al., 2007) – the awakening to languages and cultures approach.

The purposes of the education programme and professional learning community were:

1) to reflect upon the role of language education in primary schooling;

2) to develop theoretical, practical and contextual knowledge about plurilingual and intercultural education, pluralistic approaches in relation to the teaching of English at primary school;
3) to develop teachers' didactic repertoire/knowledge and professional autonomy;
4) to reflect upon and reconstruct teaching conceptions and practices, both individually and collaboratively;
5) to collaboratively construct and evaluate intervention projects in line with a plurilingual and intercultural education (in an action-research perspective).

The education programme lasted two school years and consisted of several phases (see table 1)

Table 1 – Phases of the education programme

Phase 1 (February 2009/June 2009) – 1st school year	Scheduling of working sessions and identification of existing teaching practices which promote the development of plurilingual and intercultural education; negotiation of the education programme's main stages; joint reflection promoting knowledge of self, others and contexts of action; readings (development of theoretical knowledge about plurilingual and intercultural education); contact with and analysis of didactic projects and materials; analysis of pedagogical and curriculum guiding instruments; first outline of the didactic intervention project of the community and planning of 7 thematic units dedicated to the awakening to languages/cultures in the English class.
Phase 2 (September 2009/July 2010) – 2nd school year	Follow-up of the thematic unit planning (based on a trans/interdisciplinary perspective between the English syllabus and those of the other subject areas); didactic experimentation: enactment of plurilingual and intercultural education practices through intervention projects at schools (cycles of action-reflection); post-action reflection and planning review.
Phase 3 (September/October 2010)	Global appreciation (overview of the educational process, professional knowledge development and community building, as well as evaluation of the intervention project)

All the work developed within the community intended to help teachers identify and put into practice points of articulation between the *Programme Guidelines* (Bento et al., 2005) for the teaching of English in Portuguese primary education and other school subjects (curricular and extra-curricular), following a trans- and interdisciplinary perspective and the guidelines for an intercultural management of the curriculum (Cardoso, 1998). Ultimately, the purpose was to foster teachers' perceptions of "plurilingual and intercultural education as an open process of con-

structing appropriate curricula" (Cavalli et al., 2009b, p.8), as well as to contribute to their empowerment for such a mission.

3.2 The participants

After a presentation of the research project and its educational programme to the vast majority of the English teachers working for a Portuguese municipality in the delivery of English language provision, five teachers volunteered to get involved in the project (henceforth, AL, EL, MA, SA, SO)[2]. Although they worked for the same municipality and had a common pedagogical coordinator, they had never had the chance to work together as a group.

They were all female, between 26 and 33 years old, and all of them were native speakers of Portuguese and non-native speakers of English. Their English teaching experience in primary schooling varied between 3 to 4 years. Some of them were teaching at urban primary schools and others at rural schools. It is important to mention that their degrees, concluded between 2001 and 2007, did not prepare them directly for this school level, a reality they considered to be a drawback and one of their major concerns.

Over the two school years of the education programme, these teachers had different levels of involvement, mostly due to their professional mobility. SA was the only one that attended all the phases of the education programme and developed the major steps of the intervention project at school. Yet, she was unable to implement all the planned units, mainly because of contextual demands and constraints, which will be referred to in this study's findings. EL and MA also attended the programme till the end, but since EL was placed in a Secondary school and MA decided to enrol in a new language teaching degree course, they participated in the working sessions of phase 2 and 3 without developing the intervention project. At this time, they worked as critical friends/peers in the post-action reflective moments, contributing to the discussion and search for pedagogical strategies to the emerging problems, as well as to the review of the planned units and activities after the experimentation. SO initiated the intervention project, but due to personal and professional reasons she decided not to carry it further, and dropped out of the education programme in the middle of phase 2. AL also began to implement the project, but during phase 2, she was placed in a 3rd cycle Basic school located at a great distance. Consequently, she was unable to attend the working sessions and to continue the development of the intervention project at her former primary school. But she was constantly in touch with the group on the Moodle platform,

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[2] *At the beginning, the community included another two teachers, but due to professional demands and mobility some of them decided to leave the group and drop out of the teacher education programme at a very initial stage. Many other teachers were interested in the project, but mainly due to lack of time, schedule incompatibility and/or multiple jobs, they could not participate.*

sharing her enthusiasm and helping in the review of the planned units and activities.

4. THE STUDY: METHODOLOGICAL DETAILS

The study presented in this article reports mainly on two of the broader aims of the research project outlined above, particularly: (i) to describe the representations of primary school teachers of English about the development of plurilingual and intercultural education and the role of English in that development, and (ii) to identify these teachers' English teaching practices regarding plurilingual and intercultural education. The case studied is the group of five teachers involved in the teacher education programme already described (Stake, 2000), and the specific objectives for this partial study are then to analyse the teachers':

1)   motivations for taking part in the education programme;
2)   representations of the aims of English language teaching at primary school;
3)   understanding of/knowledge about plurilingual and intercultural education;
4)   difficulties and constraints experienced in the implementation of such an education, as they reconstructed the English curriculum and tried to develop practices of awakening to languages and cultures in the English class.

The analysis follows a hermeneutic perspective, since it tries to provide an interpretative account of the English teachers' thinking and practices, seeking to unveil these individuals' meanings regarding plurilingual and intercultural education, and placing those same meanings in an evolving and complex personal and professional context (Dufays, 2010). Content analysis (Bardin, 2000) was used to examine the following data sources: written reflections, reflective questionnaires and interactions in discussion corresponding to phases 1 and 2 of the education programme.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Motivations

In a previous moment of the teacher education project, while trying to identify teaching practices regarding plurilingual and intercultural education, teachers realised these were inexistent. So their motivations to participate in the programme about plurilingual and intercultural education were principally related to a willingness to learn and develop themselves professionally, based on their awareness of the need to expand their professional repertoire, particularly in the field of language teaching at primary level and plurilingual and intercultural education. One of the teachers, SA, added her previous academic education trajectory as a factor in her involvement by referring to an assignment she had to do on the theme of intra-linguistic diversity of the English language. This was understood as a scaffold for her predisposition to develop professional knowledge about plurilingual and intercul-

tural education. Moreover, the teachers' recognition of the project's socio-educative relevance was a major reason. As one of them discloses,

> "'Languages and language learning are understood today as important mediating factors in the development of citizens capable of participating in a society ever more characterised by linguistic and cultural diversity, since languages can promote positive attitudes and competences for intercultural encounters.' This quotation from LALE is to me a synthesis not only of this project, but also of its importance in view of a society marked by plurality and difference" (P5, WR1)[3].

Yet, such motivations for the development of new professional knowledge about plurilingual and intercultural education must also be read in the light of their representations about the English language and its teaching.

5.2 Representations of the aims of English teaching

As already mentioned, teachers' thinking has a crucial role in educational change and innovation. In fact, teachers' representations about languages, and language teaching and learning must be considered when designing in-service teacher education programmes, since the latter can be influential in the way teachers manage the curriculum and value particular aims and classroom practices, as well as in their engagement with and commitment to specific professional learning opportunities.

When analysing the teachers' discourse about the aims of English teaching, one of the first conclusions is that these are very much influenced by their social representations of the English language. In other words, the teachers' perception of the place of English in society influences their views of the aims of language education and of English teaching in general.

A prevailing perspective is that the English language is an object of power, mainly in the economic, professional and socio-cultural spheres. Related to this representation is an instrumental perspective of English, which values the language's utility. As two of them clarify,

> "As teacher, my intention is to show the importance of assimilating linguistic and cultural knowledge about the English language, as well as to reveal the predominance of this language in the financial, labour and intellectual markets" (P1, Q1);

> "Being English somehow everywhere, and having a relevant role at an economic level, I try to start from here. That is, I try to make them aware of the importance of this language in the World" (P2, Q1).

The teachers also consider another dimension of the English language: its intercultural value, regarding it as an instrument of construction of interpersonal and intergroup relationships. As pointed out, as "a 'global language', it enhances or promotes the contact between the several peoples of the world" (P3, Q1). Yet, the teachers' discourse does not reveal clearly if this is meant in a narrow instrumental perspective (the effective exchange of information) or in a more dynamic, interpre-

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[3] All quotations were translated as faithful as possible to the teachers' original words.

tative and mediating one, which would be subjacent to the term "intercultural speaker" and the purpose of the establishment and maintenance of human relationships (Byram, 1997).

Broadly speaking, these teachers represent languages in general as factors of self-construction, in terms of personal identity and the individual's overall development.

Concerning the educational aims, in these teachers' opinion, English teaching should educate young learners: (i) to become aware of the roles English plays in society; (ii) to know how to communicate, by referring to the development of the learners' communicative competence. As they say, English teaching should "promote an education for communication" (P5, Q1) and "foster a more effective communication between people with different languages and cultures" (P4, Q1); (iii) to know the language, i.e., to develop the pupils' linguistic competence, and (iv) to know the culture (socio-cultural competence).

Besides these goals, the teachers also signal other dimensions of English teaching, all of which can be placed in a more humanistic perspective of language learning. In other words, they refer to aspects that may contribute to the individual's lifelong learning of languages, such as: (i) to know how to learn (learning competence), when they mention the imperative to "make pupils aware of the strategies used in language learning" (P3, Q1), "to stimulate the imagination, autonomy and creativity" (P4, Q1) or "to teach the pupils methods and tools, so that, with this scaffolding, they can develop their own educational path in a more autonomous way as possible" (P4, Q1); (ii) to motivate learners for the English language and languages in general, in a clear reference to the affective dimension of language learning when they intend "to motivate the pupils for the learning of foreign languages" (P3, Q1) or mention the need "to develop a positive and motivated relationship towards and with the language and the culture in question" (P5, Q1); (iii) to know to be (existential competence); one of them explains how crucial it is "to foster [...] the respect towards the other, and the knowledge of how s/he thinks and acts, on the basis of ethical principles", since the goal she intends to attain is "an education for values and citizenship" (P4, Q1). Finally, the development of knowledge of the world, or of the cognitive and referential competence, is also briefly mentioned.

When reflecting upon issues of linguistic and cultural diversity in articulation with the English class, there seems to emerge a dilemma. To be more specific, these teachers value (cultural) diversity, and find it extremely pressing to develop learners' plurilingual and intercultural competence, although they are aware of their lack of professional knowledge to put such teaching into practice. This is evident when they mention that "As teacher, I try to awaken my pupils to linguistic and cultural diversity" and "promote an education for communication and for diversity" (P5, Q1). The topic of diversity is also tenuously associated with the ever more pulsating intra-linguistic diversity of English and the doubts about how to conciliate this reality with the linguistic norm, or Standard English, and the "native-

speaker" learner profile in the classroom. This is highlighted by one teacher, who writes:

> "Over time, priority has been given to our development as 'native speakers' and to teach our pupils 'standard English', so that they can become native speakers as well. [...] I always try to show them that there are varieties and variations inside the same language and all over the world, [...] namely because languages are in constant evolution" (P4, Q1).

On the other hand, the idea that linguistic and cultural diversity in general can be part of the English class is still difficult to envisage, since these teachers tend to focus on the English language, and on its British and/or American varieties. Before their participation in this project, no other language besides English had "entered" their classroom.

To conclude, we would say that in theory, these teachers' representations of English teaching seem to be in consonance with the official recommendations, which in turn strongly point towards communicative purposes. But the relevance attributed to each of the aims pointed out by the teachers and how these are methodologically translated into practices seems to be considerably unbalanced. The difficulty seems to be how to reach equilibrium between the two dimensions of plurilingual education at primary school: that of educating for plurilingualism (English learning) and that of plurilingual awareness (awakening to languages and cultures). This articulation was one of the major "battles" of phases 1 and 2 of the teacher education programme. Finally, it is important to underline the fact that the teachers' representations didn't work as epistemological obstacles for new learning. On the contrary, they were mindful scaffolds for taking action.

5.3 Plurilingual and intercultural education

In this section, before signalling the teachers' major transitions in terms of professional learning in the field of plurilingual and intercultural education, we reveal some of the main difficulties and constraints (in terms of design, implementation and evaluation) they faced when developing a plurilingual and intercultural project for the English class.

5.3.1   Difficulties and constraints

The difficulties encountered in developing a curriculum for plurilingual and intercultural education in the English classroom can be situated in two dimensions of the professional sphere: personal and contextual.

Regarding the *personal dimension* or themselves as language teachers, we can point out two major reasons. One of them is the lack of professional knowledge about plurilingual and intercultural education, or professional learning within a Didactics of Plurilingualism. In this particular scope, they needed to expand their

theoretical knowledge about the topic (the main question was 'what is plurilingual education?' or 'what is meant by plurilingualism?'). As one of the teachers shares,

> "I confess that when I first contacted some of these concepts, mainly that of plurilingual competence, I was apprehensive. It was a concept I didn't know much about. But as something new, it ended up being simultaneously stimulating and intimidating, above all because it was a key-concept of the education programme, as well as in the development of the class project and its implementation. We cannot teach something we don't know or have little knowledge about. It was therefore a challenge and a difficulty, although the latter took place only at an initial stage" (P4, WR1).

Although the teachers made reference to many of the aims and values of language education, namely in the context of a broader perspective of education for citizenship, the fact was that no use of terms such as plurilingual education or competence was noticed. Therefore, some work had to be done to broaden the teachers' *knowledge of the curriculum*, both in terms of educational aims (in order to gain a deeper understanding of some of them) and mainly of familiarity with European and Portuguese reference and guiding educational documents (such as the *European Framework of Reference for Languages*, the *Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (FREPA)*, the syllabi of other curricular subject areas...). This would help teachers develop a more transversal, articulated and interconnected view of the primary education curriculum.

This was the basis for fostering another dimension: the teachers' *practical knowledge*. As mentioned before, the implementation of a plurilingual and intercultural education was a major challenge. In the *planning process*, these teachers felt the need to develop know-how about the stages of an awakening to languages and cultures approach (the pluralistic approach chosen to enact a plurilingual and intercultural education), the typology of activities (to which the analysis of existing didactic materials contributed), as well as about the management of the English syllabus or guidelines required to integrate such activities. As one of the teachers comments,

> "Having the theoretical concepts and practical examples as a basis, we began our own work of planning and development of didactic resources to each unit or thematic bloc. It wasn't always easy to create the activities as had been previously discussed, following the stages of the approach [awakening to languages and cultures] and its conceptual framework. But with the support of the theory and the guidance of the teacher educator, and in a try and error perspective, we evolved and the progression and articulation of the activities became clearer to us" (P2, WR1).

One of the teachers' main difficulties resulted from the burden of fulfilling the programme, a tension they felt from the very beginning (planning) until the end (implementation of the project). Although our education programme tried to show them the opposite, somehow these teachers felt that a plurilingual and intercultural education was something extra they had to do, and not a reconfiguration of what they were already doing. One teacher says, "In order to complete the programme which we are all obliged to complete, we will have to be very systematic if we are to put in practice all planned activities and units" (P5, WR1).

Considering *classroom interaction*, things were more complex. The teachers' main insecurities or fragilities were felt at the level of:

- setting in motion their strategic and interactive repertoire (e.g. strategic competence to manage the accomplishment of the activities);
- dealing pedagogically with unexpected situations related with representations of diversity (xenophobic comments made by pupils, for instance);
- the mastery of a pedagogical meta-language related with a didactics of plurilingualism (such as providing scaffolding for pupils in the solving of language tasks, helping them to capitalise on their language repertoire, establishing links between languages, and using comparing and contrasting strategies);
- the multifarious nature of content knowledge. Besides knowledge of and about the English language, teachers had to answer pupils' queries about languages and cultures other than English that were part of the activities, and this made them feel uneasy;
- dealing with pupils' competences and motivation to solve the activities. Despite the teachers' encouragement and support, some pupils were reluctant when dealing with some of the activities and tasks, whose typology they were unfamiliar with. Teachers considered that one of the reasons for this was pupils' lack of linguistic culture, and meta-linguistic awareness and reflexive competences (e.g. they were not used to analysing linguistic data and transferring knowledge and skills developed in a specific language to other languages). Teachers concluded that this dimension would require more attention in the future organisation of lessons;
- making use of (unexpected) potential learning situations, by using pupils' utterances as an opportunity to expand their linguistic culture, for instance.

Another reason for the teachers' insecurity in the sphere of their personal dimension is their *lack of training in pedagogy of primary education and didactics of language learning at a young age*. These teachers' degree courses prepared them to work with older pupils and this fact somehow aggravated the above-mentioned difficulties. Two of the teachers explain,

> "All this process becomes even harder and more arduous because my initial teacher education didn't prepare me to deal with pupils of such a young age" (P1, WR1);

> "The education programme had a huge importance for me, because my academic training was directed to the 3rd cycle of Basic education and secondary level, and so I feel I don't have a sufficiently solid 'background' to teach in the 1st cycle. Thus, I had the opportunity to know, learn, deepen and expand a series of approaches and methodologies, both with the teacher educator and with other colleagues, some of them with more experience in primary education than me" (P3, WR1).

Regarding the *contextual dimension*, teachers mentioned the following constraints. Over time teachers understood the importance of developing a trans- and interdisciplinary management of the curriculum with a view to supporting an integrated and articulated learning on the part of pupils. They also realised that this would be better achieved if collaborative work with the primary class teachers (non-

specialists in languages) were developed, as well as with other content teachers who were responsible for extra-curricular subjects (such as sports, arts and expressions,...). At the beginning of phase 2, AL, SA and SO were the only teachers who could develop the project in their schools, as explained in section 2.2 of this article. Both the teacher educator and each of the English teachers presented the plurilingual and intercultural project, which was still at an initial stage, to their school communities. Different reactions took place at the time. In SO and AL's schools, the primary school teachers were receptive towards the project, acknowledging its educational pertinence, and displayed a willingness to collaborate. On the contrary, in SA's school, the other colleagues were not very interested in the project and were not available to participate. Referring to this situation, one of the teachers says,

> "Due to its unique character, this project is not easy to implement not only because of the lack of information and the existing reluctance in the school communities, but also because of the lack of adequate materials and resources" (P5, WR1).

Our reading of the situation is that one of the causes for this lack of interest might be related to the fact that the design of the project did not involve those other teachers from the beginning, and this could have led to a lack of identification with it. Moreover, the difficulty to find resources (dictionaries or grammars, for instance) and to access credible information about languages other than those of the school curriculum was pointed out by the teachers. They also mentioned the difficult availability of didactic resources supporting a plurilingual and intercultural education as one of the constraints.

Another constraint had to do with the pupils, and once again different reactions occurred. SO complained about the pupils' low receptivity in relation to the activities, while AL referred to her pupils' enthusiasm and engagement:

> "In my case, my pupils were very interested in the activities and they all wanted to participate and at the same time. I think that from now on the development of the activities will be easier" (P1, DP2, 19/10/2009).

Finally, the teachers considered that the institutional requirements they had to accomplish were difficult to reconcile with the implementation of the plurilingual and intercultural project. They were working for a very dynamic municipality, which had, as they see it, a very demanding plan of educational extra-curricular activities in which they were involved. As such, they felt that many of the tasks were competing with each other in terms of the management of the time allocated to them in their classes.

Yet, to conclude, social-professional factors were the most relevant. In particular and as already referred to, the teachers' professional mobility and the need to have complementary jobs were the main constraints, which led to their withdrawal from the project in crucial phases.

5.3.2   Transitions

Taking the story so far into account, we can draw some preliminary conclusions about these teachers' professional learning in the field of plurilingual and intercultural education. At this stage of the analysis, it is still premature to identify significant changes in the teachers' representations of English teaching, which would require the triangulation with other data sources and comparative discourse analysis. Also, this was a situated and discrete teacher education programme and it would be difficult to argue for the existence of considerable changes in representations and practices. Nevertheless, our main interest is to identify some transitions in these teachers' understandings or in their professional knowledge construction regarding plurilingual and intercultural education.

The analysis reveals the transition from a lack of knowledge to a growing acquaintance with plurilingual and intercultural education. This evolving process is visible in teachers':

- Awareness of the personal and contextual possibilities and constraints;
- Developing critical educational awareness (namely of the organisation of the language curriculum at primary level, being able to spot setbacks and openings of guiding documents to a plurilingual and intercultural education) and reflectivity about the planned and implemented teaching units, as well as about their performance in classroom interaction;
- Broadening understanding of the official English teaching guidelines for primary level. They developed know-how about other possible ways to plan classroom activities in order to integrate linguistic and cultural diversity in their approach to English teaching, thus enriching their didactic repertoire;
- Acknowledgement of the subsidiary nature of curricular scenarios (*early teaching of foreign language* and *awakening to languages/cultures approach*), visible in the thematic units that tried to reconcile the teaching of the English language with sensitisation to linguistic and cultural diversity;
- Expansion of linguistic culture (as a result of the research into languages or cultural traits carried out when planning the didactic units);
- Awareness of self-limitations, allied to a 'shy' sense of self-empowerment to develop a plurilingual and intercultural education.

The data indicate that the capacity to implement plurilingual and intercultural education in the classroom and in their overall teaching activities requires a continuing professional learning process. Still, these teachers seem now to be in a better position to envisage curricular scenarios in which their ideologies about English and English teaching can be articulated and balanced with the development of other *savoirs* and transversal competences with a view to building a more plural linguistic and cultural repertoire by pupils (Beacco et al., 2010).

In addition, although being unable to work collaboratively with teachers from other subjects was felt as a setback, these teachers realised the significance of being acquainted with the syllabi of other content areas, in order to reinvent the Eng-

lish teaching guidelines in accordance with an interdisciplinary perspective (breaking boundaries between languages and between these and other subject areas).

To conclude, we can say that the teachers developed a more realistic view of plurilingual and intercultural education in a direct connection with their contexts of action, and in articulation with the construction of self-knowledge as teachers. Their initial high expectations developed into a less romanticised view of plurilingual and intercultural teaching, and they became aware of the need to get involved in further education programmes.

Up to this point we have tried to depict primary school teachers of English learning about plurilingual and intercultural education. In the final section, we reflect upon the implications of the findings for curriculum development at the level of language teacher education.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The title of this paper begins with *Policy in practice*, trying to highlight that "curriculum sits within context" (Luke, 2008: 145) and therefore language education can take many forms according to the contexts where it takes place and how language teachers interpret political recommendations, (re)create them and put them into practice. It also tries to reveal the importance of experience, practice and context in the teachers' professional learning in the scope of a plurilingual and intercultural education. A highlight is also given to the relational and collaborative nature of knowledge construction. Consequently, *Policy in practice* intends to consider these same aspects in the curriculum development of in-service language teacher education.

In many ways the political discourses and pedagogical guidelines regarding English in primary schooling in Portugal, which were briefly outlined in the theoretical part of this article, can be portals to the development of a plurilingual and intercultural education, since they direct teachers to the development of teaching practices that promote learners' linguistic-communicative competence in English and simultaneously to values within a democratic citizenship (Beacco & Byram, 2007). But, as our findings indicate, stakeholders such as primary school teachers of English have a significant importance in this development, particularly because curricular integration of plurilingual and intercultural education is deeply intertwined with their professional knowledge about the topic and their representations about their teaching.

Following Cavalli et al. (2009), it is particularly relevant that teachers understand plurilingual and intercultural education not as a new methodology for the teaching of languages, but rather as a change in perspective. One must not overlook the interplay between the development of a plurilingual and intercultural education and teachers' representations, which may see it either as an extra burden or a priority. Consequently, it is important when teachers become aware of their representations about the aims of language education and of the particular languages

they teach; of how these personal epistemologies can be influential on the choices in their classroom practices or on the motivations to enrol in continuing teacher education within a plurilingual and intercultural paradigm (Castellotti & Moore, 2002; Cavalli et al., 2009b).

Moreover, as the results point out, in-service teachers need to expand their curriculum management practices, by getting involved in new professional learning opportunities based on their daily dynamics in the educational settings. In order to foster a plurilingual and intercultural education, language teachers need to develop their intercontextual knowledge and become aware of the variability of contexts, i.e. of the possibilities, support factors and constraints underlying plurilingual and intercultural curriculum management.

In fact, teacher education contexts and curricula should provide opportunities for in-service teachers to get socialised into a new discourse about language education, but this should be in pace with the enactment in context of that same discourse and awareness of the practicality of plurilingual and intercultural education. As the findings clarify, teachers' learning based on their teaching experience is foundational to a more sustainable professional knowledge construction. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers familiarise themselves with the rationale, the principles and the aims of plurilingual intercultural education in a dialogue with their own professional trajectories and the characteristics of their working contexts. It is believed that this may be a way for them to make meaning of plurilingual and intercultural education, to try to find identifications with that rationale and create their own curriculum realities (Akker et al., 2008). In fact, as a first step of the education programme, the phase dedicated to the analysis of the curriculum, the syllabus and the yearly activity plan was extremely relevant for the English language teachers of our study. This task helped them to foresee the possibilities and boundaries for the curriculum integration of a plurilingual and intercultural education in their English teaching. This also legitimised their new planning of the didactic units and gave them greater certainty about the validity of what they were putting into practice and experiencing.

This strengthens the need to get away from ready-made models in teacher education, and the relevance of adopting curriculum practices that foster the emergence of personal and professional projects in language education. In this sense, the teachers of this study benefited from being involved in a collaborative action-research project, in which they experienced the joint design of an intervention project, collectively analysed the curriculum, shared their teaching practices, and got involved in post-action reflection about themselves as teachers, their pupils, and the curricular alternatives they created. By following a collaborative practitioner approach, this contributed to a shared repertoire of practices and experiences.

This collaborative dimension in the teacher education curriculum design was also helpful to the management of tensions and to finding alternative ways to resolve the constraints they came up with. Working collaboratively with peers, namely in communities of practice, can be a scaffold for the engagement in new experi-

ences and innovative practices (Day, 1998). In this context, it is important to look critically at the fact that the teacher education programme did not contemplate from the very beginning the involvement of the other teachers of the classes in which the didactic projects took place. These class teachers are responsible for the classes and teach Mathematics, Social Studies and the Portuguese Language, which are the curricular disciplines in primary school in Portugal.

Although our intention was not to design a compartmentalised education scenario and a disconnected work dynamic between the English language teachers and their colleagues, the class teachers, in the development of teaching practices in the scope of plurilingual and intercultural education, a major constraint emerged right at the beginning. The difficulty was to reconcile different timetables and find times to meet and work together in the spirit of a professional learning community, since the English teachers usually work in more than one primary school in the region. In view of this problem, the decision was taken to begin working directly with the English language teachers by creating the education scenario depicted in this study.

Yet, other teacher education scenarios in the scope of professional learning communities and collaborative practices would need to be considered in the future. One of them would be to work with the whole group of teachers (of English, Portuguese, Mathematics, Sports, Arts, etc.) working in primary school, so that more interdisciplinary and cross-curricular perspectives and practices can be developed in plurilingual and intercultural education. This would also permit the development of a simultaneously more shared and situated understanding of the possibilities of the context in which the teachers work in this area. It could also foster other relationships between teachers of different subjects, such as reflective dialogue and observation of teaching practices, which could lead to the fostering of a common vision and mission for the whole school.

On the other hand, a more interconnected approach between the language teachers would be crucial to achieving a more integrated development of the pupils' plurilingual repertoire. Such an approach would foster the development of teaching practices founded on the idea of finding synergies and interrelationships between the languages that are part of the pupils' repertoires (namely Portuguese and English), thus overcoming a compartmentalised view of these languages and moving towards more holistic language teaching practices (Beacco & Byram, 2007).

Ultimately, the dialogue between teachers and other stakeholders (teacher educators, researchers…) is also vital. Consequently, one of the challenges to teacher education is the fostering of partnerships between higher education institutions and schools, in order to develop cooperation in language teacher education processes and in the contextual implementation of plurilingual and intercultural education.

To conclude, the passage from policy to practice is a demanding and complex process, which ultimately depends on teachers considering plurilingual and inter-

cultural education not only important for society and for pupils, but above all an indispensable part of their professional identity as language educators.

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