



TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

**Inequality, inequity and language in the early years.
There are no simple recipes!**

Piet Van Avermaet

- Our fundamental thinking about diversity denies diversity as the basic principle.
- We recognize diversity, however we find it hard to see it as the norm.
- We recognize diversity, however only as a condition to conform to the dominant norms. Which devaluates it to a deviation, abnormality, deficiency, problem, ...

Innovative answers to urgent language education issues

- ❑ Social inequality and unequal outcomes in education are a tenacious problem
- ❑ For the last 10-15 years in most European policies to overcome this problem, language (low proficiency in dominant language) has become more and more pivotal
- ❑ Speaking the home language seen as hindering children's development

- ❑ Based on:
 - Not always empirically underpinned assumptions
 - Normative thinking about languages, the role of language and language acquisition processes
 - Monolingual ideology

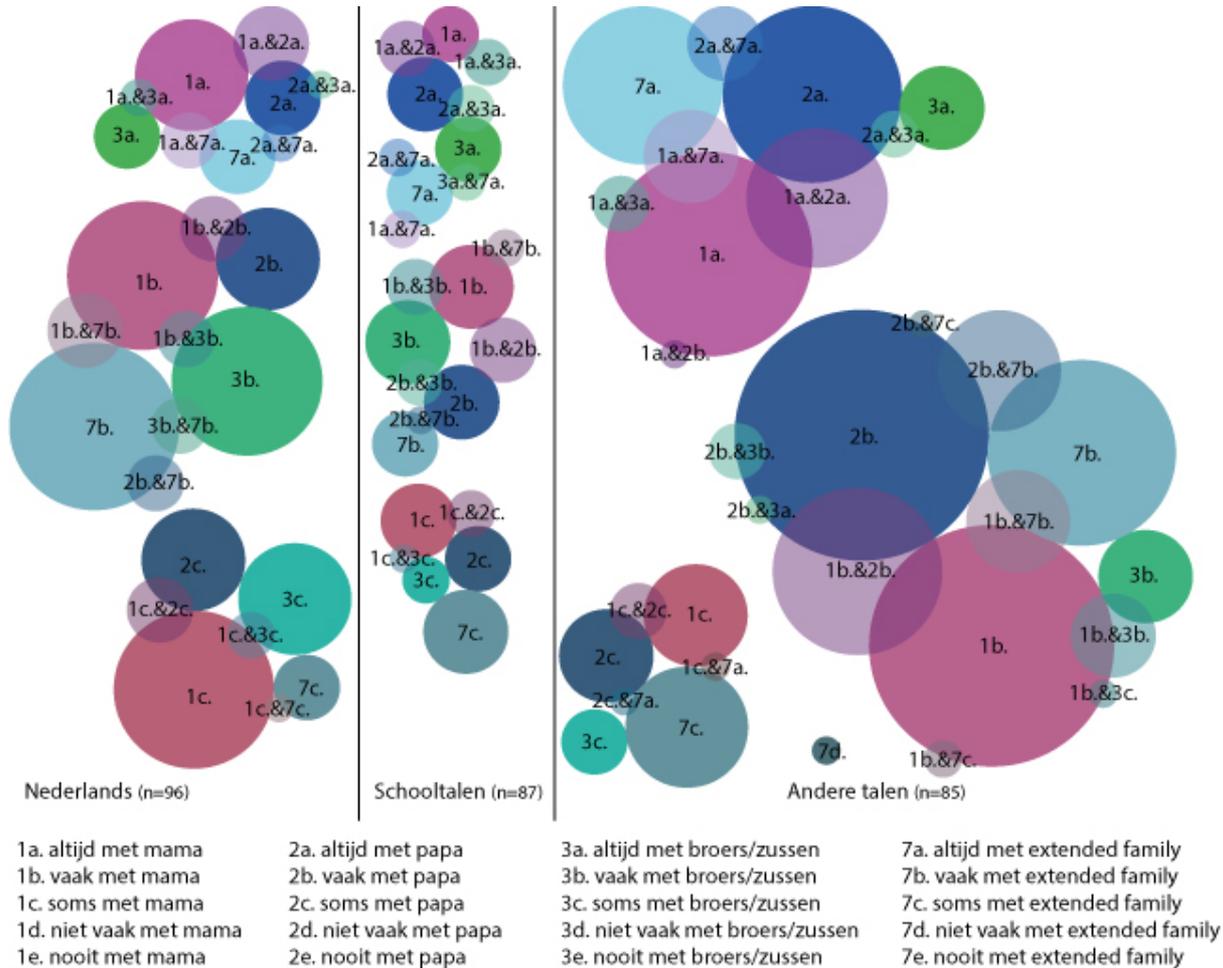
4 assumptions

1. Migrant children only or mainly speak their home language at home and outside kindergarten
2. Language spoken at home is the main explaining variable for children's cognitive development and school success
3. Knowledge of the dominant language is the condition for success
4. Children (and their parents) speaking another language than the dominant language should be submersed in the L2 and this as early as possible. So, allowing children to use their home language in child care centers and at school impacts negatively L2 learning and hence their development and school success

4 assumptions

1. Migrant children only or mainly speak their home language at home and outside kindergarten or school
 - ❑ No empirical evidence, on the contrary
 - ❑ Is more multilayered, dynamic and complex than assumed

4 assumptions



4 assumptions

mama (mestel)
 papa (vader)
 " broers (meestal)

TURKS = turkije +++
 met mama altijd = thuis 1
 " thuis als we problemen hebben of als het een vloeg is

Anders + vrienden + op school (in de gang)
 Broers 2 3 2 + speelplaats
 Geheim denken
 Boos rekenen
 Dieren

met mama als het over huiswerk of over een probleem gaat.

waken die nederlands kan
 Denken geheim
 Dromen
 " thuis + op school + buiten
 " " moeder (mestel) / vader (vader)
 " " papa (vader) / broers (meestal)

NEPERLANDS = België 2 1 1 1
 Rekenen
 Dieren

Wiltrecht
 broers
 Frans

mama (mestel)
 papa (vader)
 " broers (meestal)

FRANS
 " met " ou (vader)
 " als ik met mama
 " in het bos
 3 2 Frans
 3

4 4 4 4
 ik sprekt geen
 arabisch alleen lezen
 moskee
 imam " imam (vader)
 " mama (moeder)
 " papa (vader)

ARABISCHE
 " moskee + thuis
 " als ik leer

4 assumptions

2. Language spoken at home is the main explaining variable for children's cognitive development and school success:
 - Most research shows no significant correlation for language spoken at home when controlled for other variables;
 - If significant, the effect size is extremely low;
 - Socio-economic background strongest explaining variable;
 - Causal reading of correlation

4 assumptions

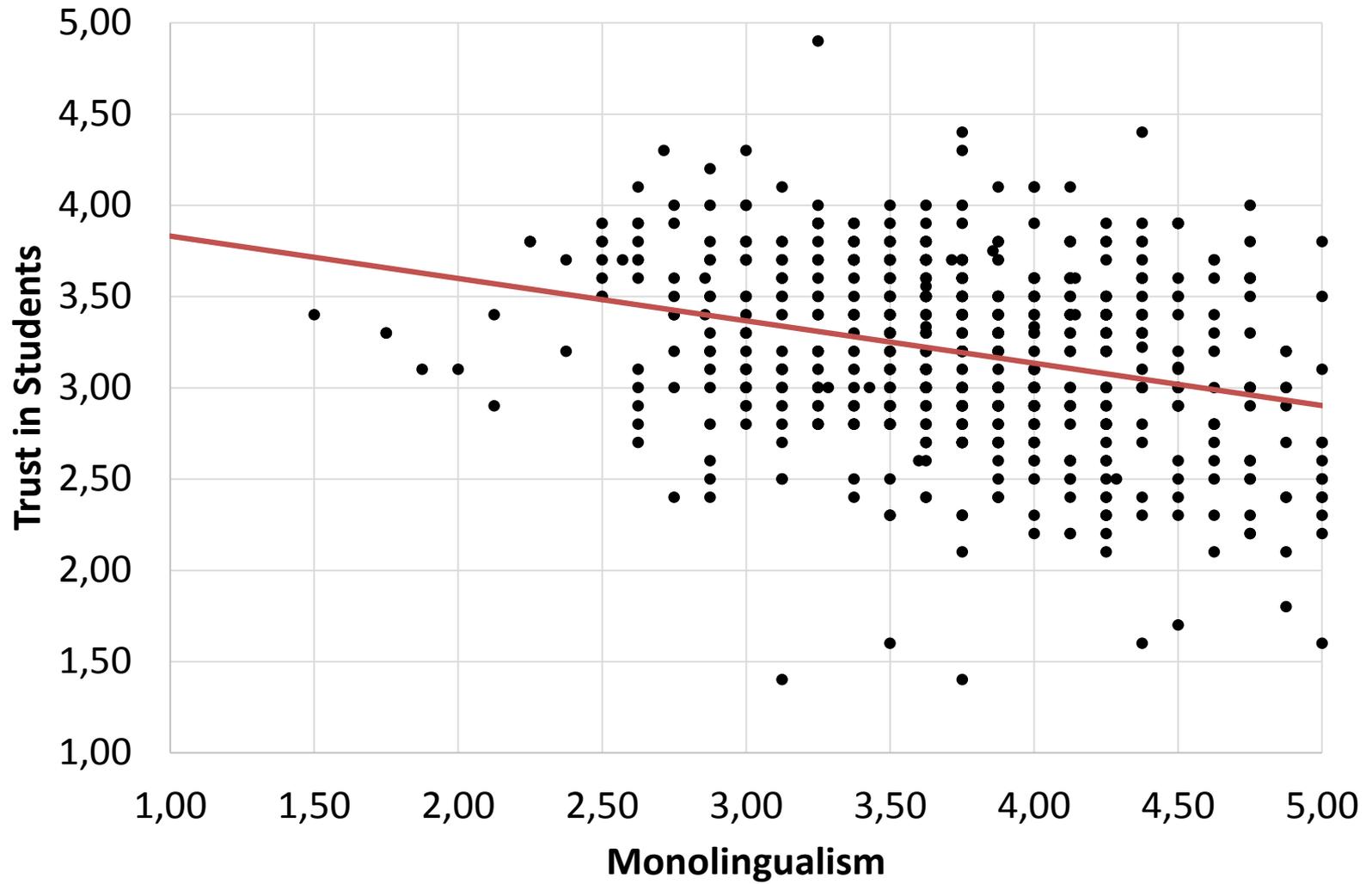
Impacts beliefs, policies and practices:

- ❑ Danger of 'outsourcing' the 'problem' from kindergarten or school;
- ❑ Parents and children encouraged (sometimes put under pressure) to speak the dominant language at home: research often shows negative effects when L2 proficiency is low, parents become uncertain, leads to less interaction;
- ❑ Teachers or professionals in child care centers who refuse (or are forced to) to speak with parents in another language than the dominant one;
- ❑ Children punished when speaking home language at school;
- ❑ Strengthens monolingual beliefs

'BET YOU' project (Pulinx, Agirdag & Van Avermaet, 2013)

Assertion	% (compl) agree.
1. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should not be allowed to speak their home language at school.	77.3%
2. The most important cause of academic failure of non-Dutch speaking pupils is their insufficient proficiency in Dutch.	78.2%
3. The school library (classroom library, media library) should also include books in the different home languages of the pupils.	12.8%
4. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language at school.	6.8%
5. By speaking their home language at school, non-Dutch speaking pupils do not learn Dutch sufficiently.	72.1%
6. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered regular subjects in their home language.	3.2%
7. It is more important that non-Dutch speaking pupils obtain a high level of proficiency in Dutch than in their home language.	44.7%
8. It is in the interest of the pupils when they are punished for speaking their home language at school.	29.1%

'BET YOU' project (Pulinx, Agirdag & Van Avermaet, 2013)



4 assumptions

3. Knowledge of the dominant language is the condition for school success:
 - Early acquisition of L2 is necessary for children's development and school success;
 - However, research indicates that high literacy in home language contributes to L2 literacy development;
 - Language consist of different repertoires. We acquire a repertoire in the context where it is relevant and used. The 'language of schooling' should be acquired in school, not prior to. Proficiency in the language of schooling is the outcome of good didactics, not the condition.
 - Math skills aren't a condition for entering the school either.

4 assumptions

4. Children (and their parents) speaking another language than the dominant language should be submersed in the L2 and this as early as possible. So, allowing children to use their home language in child care centers and at school impacts negatively L2 learning and hence their cognitive development and school success
 - ❑ There is hardly any empirical evidence for an exclusive L2 submersion model;
 - ❑ L2 submersion policies often not acknowledge and ban children's ML
 - ❑ There is no empirical evidence that allowing children to use their home language at school has a negative impact on their L2 literacy and school success

Search for the best language education model

- Binary thinking of language education, in which one side is seen as the legitimate (non negotiable) norm and the other as the deviant one:
 - Learning in the dominant language is seen as the legitimate norm: an L2 submersion model;
 - Independent of empirical evidence and widespread advocacy for bi-/multilingual education: deviant and counter productive

Bi/multilingual education: critical reflections and limits?

- ❑ Bilingualism has positive impact on meta-linguistic awareness, executive functioning, cognitive flexibility, information processing, ...
- ❑ Traditional bilingual education
 - Separation arrangement:
 - Spatial: separate, homogeneous classes/schools
 - Temporal: separate lessons/moments
 - Segregated groups of learners
 - Compartmentalized languages
 - Multilingualism = parallel monolingualisms
 - Translanguaging as discursive norm
 - Educational challenges and consequences:
 - Multitude of languages in schools
 - Needs instruction by bilingual teachers
 - Low involvement of mainstream teachers overall
 - Low or no involvement of parents

Beyond binaries

- Given:
 - Social context: extremely diverse spaces (child care centers, schools and classrooms)
 - Practicalities: feasibility of traditional bilingual education in urban heterogeneous classrooms?
 - Theoretical insights: new sociolinguistic conceptions of multilingual communication in today's complex and dynamic world, in which people more and more flexibly use their full linguistic repertoire
 - The counter productive and highly ideologized binary discussions in society at large and education in particular
- Move beyond the binaries towards a new approach to learning at school that integrates ML education and L2 learning

Functional multilingual learning

- ❑ Exploiting multilingual repertoires as didactical capital for learning: functional use of home languages in multilingual, L2-dominant learning environments;
- ❑ Exploiting multilingual repertoires to raise multilingual awareness, create positive attitudes towards ML, contribute to identity and status, to wellbeing, self confidence, self-esteem, to express ideas, opinions and feelings, ...
- ❑ A ‘multilingual social interaction model for learning’ as alternative for a ‘language learning model’

Conclusions from 'the home language in education' project

Longitudinal study funded by the city of Ghent

Aim: Contesting and reconstructing monolingual policy

- ❑ FMT/L has no negative effects on L2 literacy and has positive effects on socio-affective outcomes of children.
- ❑ FMT/L has a positive impact on teachers' classroom practices and on their beliefs and perceptions
- ❑ The translanguaging reality of children is taken as an asset, a resource for learning
- ❑ More involvement of teacher; of children; more interaction taking place in the classroom

Recommendations

- ❑ Shift from monolingual policies and practices to functional multilingual teaching/learning
- ❑ Invite political and social arena's to voice more strongly the dynamics of ML realities/practices
- ❑ Contesting monolingual policies and reconstructing monolingual beliefs and practices from below

Recommendations

- Has to go hand in hand with a shift from an instructivist pedagogy to a more social constructivist paradigm of learning
 - When exploiting children's ML repertoires, more powerful learning environments can be observed:
 - Which gives status to different languages;
 - Acknowledges ML as identity markers;
 - Makes children and teachers aware of the power of ML for cognitive, literacy and socio-emotional development
 - The literacy development takes place in different languages
 - Shift toward co-teaching and co-learning

Recommendations

- ❑ Principals and teachers as active agents in processes of the reconstruction of old 'recipes':
 - Teachers using their ML repertoires and learning and using the home languages of children
 - Presence of materials (e.g. books) in home languages
 - Encourage multilingual interaction
 - Exploit ML to transfer learning from one language to the other
 - ...
- ❑ Principals, teachers and academics as co-researchers in the school/classroom
- ❑ Professionalization of principals and teachers: Training, coaching, feedback, co-reflection, co-construction
- ❑ Professionalization of teacher trainers and future teachers

Recommendations

- ❑ Bridge the culture and language gaps between school and parents:
 - The cognitive and socio-emotional power of fostering, acknowledging and exploiting children's and their parents socio-cultural values, community ties, ...
 - Empowerment and increased positive awareness of parents
 - Increase parental involvement
 - Parents as ML experts (self-confidence, self-esteem, ...)
 - co-construction with parents
 - parents as active stakeholders (immigrant parents telling/reading stories in home languages)
- ❑ Change parents beliefs on role of their L1 as good practice at home and in classrooms
 - Which repertoire is less important, but the fact that children receive rich exposure at home in whatever repertoire is key

In conclusion

- ❑ Diversity is the norm. Dealing with it and exploiting it the challenge.
 - In our thinking; awareness; discourse; attitudes; policies; actions
 - Change our mental structures
- ❑ From the periphery to the heart of education
- ❑ For more than 40 years we denied migration to be a permanent phenomenon

In conclusion

- ❑ Shall we deny for another 40 years the multilingual reality and do we want to maintain the simple recipes of monolingual policies and practices:
 - More segregation will be the outcome
 - We will keep losing children or even a whole generation
- ❑ Or do we accept that there are no simple recipes or monolingual 'shortcuts'
- ❑ Accept the multilingual and multicultural dynamics as a given, as an asset for the cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children



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THANK YOU

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6th meeting
Washington DC
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