

**Portraits of Plurilingualism in a French International School in Toronto:
Exploring the Role of Visual Methods to Access Students'
Representations of their Linguistically Diverse Identities**

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Abstract

In an age of transnational mobility, an increasing number of students speak different languages at home, in their communities and at school. Students' plurilingual repertoires have not traditionally been affirmed in the classroom. How do students make sense of their plural identities? The aim of this article is three-fold: first, I trace the development of a cultural and linguistic self-portrait tool to engage students in reflexively representing their diverse cultural and linguistic identities; second, I present a sampling of six francophone, anglophone and allophone students' representations of their plurilingual and pluricultural identities in one French international school in Toronto; and third, I consider the value of creative visual methods in engaging culturally and linguistically diverse children and youth in language education research. I argue that using alter(n)ative tools in language research with children and youth can powerfully open up collaborative space for engagement and co-construction of knowledge and meaning.

Résumé

À l'heure des mobilités transnationales, un nombre croissant d'élèves parlent plusieurs langues à la maison, dans leurs communautés et à l'école. Toutefois, les répertoires plurilingues des élèves ne sont traditionnellement pas reconnus au sein de la classe. Comment les élèves conceptualisent-ils leurs identités plurielles ? Cet article répond à trois objectifs : tout d'abord, je présenterai un outil qui permet l'engagement des élèves dans une activité réflexive sur leurs identités plurilingues et pluriculturelles au travers de la création d'autoportraits culturels et langagiers ; ensuite, je présenterai six productions visuelles d'élèves francophones, anglophones et allophones scolarisés dans une école française internationale de Toronto ; enfin, je soulignerai la pertinence d'utiliser les pratiques créatives pour impliquer les élèves plurilingues et pluriculturels dans la recherche sur les langues en éducation. J'expliquerai ainsi qu'utiliser des outils alter(n)atifs en collaboration avec des élèves peut favoriser l'engagement et la co-construction de connaissances et de sens.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the concept of plurilingualism has been developed to describe individuals' complex repertoires of languages and linguistic competences. Whereas the concept of multilingualism has traditionally been used to describe a speaker's development of equal levels of proficiency in a number of distinct languages, the emerging plurilingual paradigm suggests that individuals develop an interrelated network of a plurality of linguistic skills and practices that they draw on for different purposes in a variety of contexts (Dagenais & Moore, 2008; Garcia, Bartlett, & Kleifgen, 2007; Moore, 2006; Zarate, Lévy, & Kramersch, 2008). Individuals may have varying degrees of competency in the languages that comprise their linguistic repertoires: the focus is not on developing equal proficiency in all languages per se, but rather, on speakers' ability to negotiate a range of communicative activities by drawing on the full range of their linguistic abilities and awareness. Although an increasing number of students speak different languages at home, in their communities, and at school, students' plurilingual repertoires have not traditionally been affirmed in the classroom (Castellotti & Moore, 2005; Cummins, 2001; Garcia, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzman, 2006; Wong-Fillmore, 2005). The consequence of ignoring the resources that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students bring to their learning is that schools more often produce monolingual graduates rather than plurilingual citizens (Cummins, 2007, 2009; Jedwab, 2004; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). Concerted efforts are being made in European contexts through the work of the Council of Europe and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), to enhance linguistic and cultural awareness. Individual monolingualism is being challenged by attempts to promote plurilinguistic citizenship with the goal of European students learning two other languages in addition to their dominant language (Ceginskas, 2010; Gogolin, 2002). Within Canada, research in French-language classrooms, in particular, has begun to explore how pedagogical orientations with a focus on building language awareness can effectively affirm students' plurilingual repertoires and expand their appreciation for linguistic diversity (Armand & Dagenais, 2008; Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre, & Armand, 2008; Dagenais, Walsh, Armand, & Maraillet, 2008). These projects, among others, have contributed to the call for further investigation of students' plurilingual practices and experiences in diverse Canadian contexts (Denos, Toohey, Neilson, & Waterstone, 2009; Duff, 2007; Marshall & Moore, 2013; Schechter & Cummins, 2003; Smythe & Toohey, 2009; Van Enk, Dagenais, & Toohey, 2005).

With respect to francophone students living in minority settings outside Quebec, there has been an increasing interest in examining individuals' plural identities, be they hybridized, bilingual, fractured and/or multiple identities (Byrd-Clark, 2007; Caron-Réaume, 2007; Farmer, 2008a, 2008b; Gérin-Lajoie, 2006, 2008; Labrie, 2007; Makropoulos, 2004). Along with these examinations of language and identity as complex, plural and evolving, Gérin-Lajoie (2011) has developed the notion of *rapport to identity* as a way of approaching not only language practices and identifications but also an individual's sense of belonging to a cultural community or ethnic group. In a similar vein, Dr. Diane Farmer, a sociologist at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, led a

SSHRC-funded study on students' mobilities in an age of transnationalism. As a member of her research team, in this article, I focus on students' relation with (*rapport*) and their sense of belonging to (*appartenance*) various language and cultural identifications. My reflection herein is based primarily on the data generated through Dr. Farmer's *Mobilités et transnationalisme* project, and it has been guided by Lahire's (2011) notion of the *plural actor*. Lahire theorized that:

we live experiences that are varied, different and sometimes contradictory. A plural actor is thus the product of an—often precocious—experience of socialization in the course of their trajectory, or simultaneously in the course of the same period of time in a number of social worlds and occupying different social positions. (p. 32)

For this overarching inquiry on students' mobilities in French schools in Ontario, our research team sought to unpack the lived experiences of plurilingual children and youth in a mobile world and to understand how they themselves make sense of their diverse experiences. Over the course of the project, students' diverse cultural and linguistic identifications emerged as a salient theme. Throughout the remainder of this article, I use the pronoun *we* to refer to the entire research team led by Dr. Farmer. As a member of the team, I was responsible for developing creative visual tools used to generate data with students; I was involved with the data collection and the data analysis.

Alter(n)ative Approaches to Language Education and Identity Research

While extant research regarding cultural and linguistic diversity in schools in Canada has often focused on teachers', administrators' and parents' perspectives, this research places the lived experiences of CLD children and youth at the forefront of its analysis. Through this inquiry, the research team sought to engage *with* children and youth in research about their own experiences rather than to engage *in* research *about* children and youth (Albanese, 2009; Bélanger & Farmer, 2004; Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Children and youth engage in a process of meaning-making in their lives as they grow up in increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse and ever mobile worlds. This shift towards working with students as coresearchers rather than conducting research about students necessitates an epistemological rethinking of data collection as a creative process through which children and youth may be empowered to share their emic perspectives of what it means to them to be *plural actors* (Lahire, 2011) in a mobile world. From the outset of the project design, we endeavoured not simply to collect data from students via traditional adult-driven ethnographic methods such as observation and interviews, but, more deeply, to engage students in the process of data generation. This article reflects on one phase of data generation, that of self-portrait creation, within the first case study conducted at one French international school in Toronto. This case study was part of a SSHRC-funded multisite research project that involved four classes from two school cases, entitled *Mobilités et transnationalisme : histoires des jeunes et enfants dans les écoles de langue française en Ontario* and led by principal investigator, Dr. Farmer.

For this case study, we asked 26 elementary and secondary students to create cultural and linguistic self-portraits, to document individually and in groups their daily experiences in and out of school via digital photography, as well as to participate in a series of co-facilitated group interviews in which they used their visual productions to scaffold the

sharing of their narratives. Each of these phases of data generation was designed to bring students into the inquiry as coresearchers. Over the course of the project, the university-based research team was present to scaffold the research process. Teachers, administrators and parents were also interviewed to complement students' perspectives and artefacts. I focus herein specifically on the development and use of a creative visual methodology to engage students as coresearchers. The cultural and linguistic self-portraits were conceptualized as an arts-informed tool to provide insight into students' mobilities and life trajectories. While the overarching aim of the broader research project is to understand how students' *diverse mobilities* (Sheller & Urry, 2006) are redefining school space across French-language schools in Ontario, in this article, I focus on six Grade 11 students' self-portraits and how the process of creating them allowed both students and researchers to gain deeper understanding of students' evolving culturally and linguistically diverse plurilingual identities. Although this study involved Grade 4 students and Grade 11 students, in this article, I compare a selection of Grade 11 participants' self-portraits and language narratives because high school participants had more time to create their self-portraits and engaged in more extended interviews. Consequently, these portraits and narratives showcase the potentialities of the self-portrait tool to facilitate detailed representations of plurilingualism (Moore, 2001) and participant reflexivity (Molinié, 2009). The objective of this paper is three-fold: first, to trace my development of the cultural and linguistic self-portrait tool and our research team's use of this creative visual tool with student participants as a way of expanding language biographical methods; second, to analyze a selection of students' self-representations of their cultural and linguistic identities in order to demonstrate the contribution of visual self-portraits in deepening our understanding of how plurilingual and pluricultural competence is conceptualized at an individual level by youth themselves; and third, to reflect on the use of the visual arts-informed methodologies, particularly in qualitative language education research, as a means of engaging youth in alter(n)ative inquiry and gaining deeper insight into youth plurilingualism in schools. I use the construct *alter(n)ative inquiry* to describe research practices that engage participants in *alternative* (versus traditional) modes of expression and representation, as well as in *alter-ative*, empowering interactions that promote participants' reflexive co-construction of knowledge and meaning through the research process (Prasad, 2013).

I purposefully construct the term alter(n)ative inquiry to make explicit the ways in which words or signs can be read differently. I seek to draw out the multiple meanings embedded in the construct of alter(n)ative inquiry: first, the understanding of alternative as different, but legitimate, ways of building knowledge (epistemology); and second, the evocation of the sense of the potential alter-ative change that can be produced by including non-traditional methodologies in research. Alter(n)ative, non-traditional approaches invite greater participation and representation of the views of CLD participants in research (Bochner, 2000). I draw on the poetic function of language by placing the *n* within parentheses, both to signify and to highlight visually the transformative nature of Bhabha's (1994) in-between notion of *third space*. What happens to our reading of multimodal research texts and, in the Freirian sense, of the world, when we invite alter(n)ative practices, representations and interpretations? By putting the letter *n* of the word alternative in-between parentheses, I suggest that the effect of adopting alternative methods can in fact be alter-ative for the researcher, the participants and the research itself. As researchers, we expand our understanding of diverse perspectives; and, diverse research participants

express their voices in empowering ways that enable us to co-construct knowledge and meaning.

Background: *École Internationale*¹

École internationale is a private French international school in Toronto for students from pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12. The school attracts an upper middle class clientele who can afford private tuition ranging from \$13,000 to \$15,000 per year and desire an internationally recognized education. The school prepares students for the French Baccalauréat at the completion of Grade 12 as established by the national Ministry of Education in France. The school was originally founded to meet the educational needs of children of French diplomats and expatriate executives; the French government covers the tuition for such students while they are abroad. The school hosts over 400 francophone, anglophone and CLD allophone students and it boasts that excellence in language instruction is at the heart of its mandate. Thus, while the medium of instruction for core subjects is French, students take English classes beginning from pre-Kindergarten through to Grade 12. Subsequently, students begin Spanish as a second language and Latin from Grade 6; as well, they have the option to add German and/or Mandarin as a third language in Grade 9. While many students at *École internationale* are francophone or anglophone Canadian citizens, a large portion of students, particularly at the secondary level, are also studying abroad from France for a year or for a short term because of their parents' employment. Because mobility characterizes both the students and the staff at *École internationale*, the school has evolved as one of the principal interaction sites in which the multiple trajectories of students and staff from diverse backgrounds coalesce (Anderson-Levitt, 2005; Ceginskas, 2010; Faist & Ozveren, 2004; Ramirez, 2003).

École internationale provides a rich setting in which to investigate how students conceptualize their cultural and linguistic identities because the culture of the school supports plurilingualism as a norm. I subscribe here to Eisner's (2002) two-fold view of schools as cultures in both the social and biological sense: "[schools] make possible a shared way of life, a sense of belonging and community[;] and, they are a medium for growing things, in this case [students'] minds" (p. 3). Irrespective of their cultural and linguistic background, all students at *École internationale* partake of a curriculum that scaffolds the development of students' plurilingual repertoires through multiple language course offerings and aims to cultivate a convivial worldview that values diversity. Gilroy (2004) described conviviality as the processes of interaction that make "multi-culture an ordinary feature of social life" (p. xi). While *École internationale* clearly supports plurilingualism through its course offerings, it is noted that unofficial minority languages such as students' home languages are less visible in the school. As Garcia et al. (2006) have highlighted, the school tends to preserve dominant language hierarchies that place higher value on certain languages. At the same time, Ceginskas (2010) has found that international schools in particular,

serve as meeting points for different backgrounds and simultaneously provide evidence that various combinations of linguistic, cultural and ethnic background exist. This is a positive feedback for multilingual individuals outside of their home

¹ The school and participants have all been given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

environment.... The greater awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity as offered by international schools provides the possibility of reconfiguration and opens up boundaries to enable moving from the periphery to inclusion. (pp. 9-10)

École internationale provides a dynamic site of interaction for plurilingual youth that valorizes language learning and diverse mobilities. The cultural and linguistic self-portraits and language narratives of participants presented in this paper illustrate how *École internationale*'s pedagogical orientation supports a space of conviviality in which students negotiate their complex culturally and linguistically diverse plurilingual identities.

Methods: Developing and Creating Cultural and Linguistic Self-Portraits

One of the primary data generation tools for this study engaged students in the creation of cultural and linguistic self-portraits as a means of exploring their mobilities and life trajectories. Busch and her colleagues (Busch, Jardine & Tjoutuku, 2006) originally developed the language portrait tool when working with teachers in South Africa through the *Project for Alternative Education in South Africa*, or PRAESA. As a way of unpacking their language biographies, Busch (Busch et al., 2006) asked teachers to map their language experiences onto a body silhouette using a different colour for each language. Participants made an association between their relationship to a language and a part of their body and the body-language metaphors facilitated the sharing of rich language biographies. As Busch (2010) explained,

processes that influence language use tend to operate unconsciously and cannot easily be verbalized. The switch in mode of representation from word to image helps deconstruct internalized categories, to reflect upon embodied practices and to generate narratives that are less bound by genre expectations. (p. 286)

Similarly, from the field of visual sociology, Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) elaborated that visual creative methods challenge the traditional notion that the social world can be explored fully through language. Visual creative methods such as creating self-portraits function as

an *enabling* [emphasis added] methodology—it assumes that people have something interesting to communicate and that they can so do creatively...by inviting participants to create things as part of the research process, it's a *different way into* [emphasis added] a research question...and engages the brain in a different way. (p. 84)

A variety of language biographical approaches have been used in recent years in the context of language awareness inquiry and since the adoption of the European Language Portfolio (Armand & Dagenais, 2008; Brohy, 2002; Krumm, 2008; Perregaux, 2002). In a previous inquiry in Burkina Faso, West Africa, I adapted Busch's (Busch et al., 2006) language portrait tool to use with elementary teachers and Grade 4 and 5 students as a language awareness exercise, in order to gain deeper understanding of their language learning experiences and practices. My use of language portraits with Burkinabe teachers and students underscored how engaging participants in representing their thoughts and feelings

through colourful drawings also helped to mediate language and cultural differences between the researcher and participants (Prasad, 2011). Upon reflection, however, I found that using one standard formatted body silhouette as the base for all teachers' and students' creations of self-portraits limited participants' affective connection with the process of self-representation. Students, in particular, seemed to seek ways to personalize the body silhouette to make it a closer self-reflection by drawing in features such as eyes, hair, and clothes, in addition to mapping their languages and cultures (see sample portraits in Figure 1). Thus, in moving forward, I sought a medium that would engage participants more personally.



Figure 1. Sample student language portraits on template body silhouette. From *Bridging Literacies Project* (Prasad, 2008), Burkina Faso, West Africa.

For our broader inquiry, the research team sought to extend Busch's (Busch, 2010; Busch et al., 2006) body template language portrayals by developing an arts-informed self-portrait form that would allow students to express more creatively their individuality and in situ to represent their own perspectives and beliefs in expressive media. Knowles and Cole (2008) explained that arts-informed research is influenced by the arts while not being based in the arts. That is, arts-informed methodologies draw on processes and forms of literary, visual and performing arts to deepen academic inquiry and advance knowledge (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2009). Accordingly, for this inquiry, our research team sought to engage students in representing their identities through visual creative practice (Hall, 1997). In his examination of how the arts affect consciousness, Eisner (2002) advised that the "decision to use a particular form of representation influences not only what can be represented, but also what will be experienced... We represent not only what we aim at but also what we discover in the course of expressive action" (p. 23). To this end, our research team has drawn on French scholarship regarding social representation of languages (Dagenais & Jacquet, 2008; Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Jodelet, 1989) and the role of drawing (Molinié, 2009; Moore, 2001) and the arts (Auger, 2010) in accessing students' representations of plurilingualism. Castellotti and Moore

(2002), who have worked extensively on language representation in French, have explained that:

Representations play a crucial role in constructing identity, relationships with others and knowledge. They are neither right nor wrong, and nor are they permanent; rather, they enable individuals and groups to categorise themselves and to decide which features they consider relevant in constructing their identity in relation to others. Representations should therefore be seen as an inherent part of learning, which needs to be incorporated into linguistic policies and teaching methods. (p. 20)

Thus, our design for more individualized arts-informed linguistic self-portraits in this inquiry was to engage participants reflexively in creating *identity texts* that would express their beliefs and lived experiences as plurilingual, pluricultural youth. Cummins (2006) has defined identity texts as creative works carried out within the pedagogical space of the classroom that, when held up, function as mirrors that reflect back students' identities in a positive light. While Mondada (2006) has effectively used videography to both capture and analyze individuals' plurilingual social interactions, we purposefully chose to develop our self-portrait tool as a two-dimensional tool that could be implemented practically within the classroom as both a pedagogical language awareness activity, as well as for the purposes of generating representational artefacts. As a biographical tool, we can examine students' self-portraits as visual texts or representations of their *sedimented identities* (Pahl & Rowsell, 2007). Like Hall (1997), we acknowledge that students' identities are ever in the process of changing and even their representational choices are ever changing. Nonetheless, a two-dimensional self-portrait allows us—both the students and the research team—to capture the layers of students' cultural and linguistic identities at a specific point in time.

In an earlier pilot study (2009-2010) for this multi-site project, the collaborating classroom teacher, Nancy Dykstra, and I introduced the concept of cultural and linguistic identities to elementary students through reading aloud a series of picture books concerning the inclusion of CLD children in mainstream schools, as well as stories that introduced concepts of how a variety of colours could be used to represent different emotions and feelings (e.g., Choi, 2003; Frame, 2008; Godwin, 2000; Recorvits, 2004). Instead of using a standard body silhouette as the base for students' individual self-portraits, the classroom teacher took a digital picture of each student and generated a colouring book image using a specific option with her camera software. Students were given their individual black and white outlines to use as a base on which to map their cultural and linguistic associations (Prasad & Dykstra, 2011). Upon reflecting about the in-class creation of self-portraits, the teacher commented:

the kids were delighted to see themselves on paper...where they could complete the picture. I think they loved that...It gave them a sense of “this is personal, this is really about me, this is not just any old body.” (N. Dykstra, interview transcript)

To facilitate students' affective connection with the process of creating their own cultural and linguistic self-portraits in this study at *École internationale*, we also began by taking a digital photo of each individual student participant. Students chose their poses, as well as where to have their photos taken. These choices were critical to having students consciously take ownership of the research process: their choice of place within their

school and positioning were all a purposeful part of their individual processes of self-representation. As Gibson (2005) noted, “how persons present themselves for the research camera is in itself data that provide a resource for analysis” (p. 36). All of the high school students chose to have their photographs taken outside of the classroom, either in hallways or in their student lounge. In addition, they adopted a range of poses to express their individuality.

In this study, members of the research team used artistic filters in *Photoshop* (photo editing software), to generate a black and white print of the individual photos that were subsequently used by students as a body map on which they represented their linguistic and cultural experiences. Students were directed to “make a list of all of the languages and cultures that are a part of you and connect you to the world.” Then, students were asked to “associate a different colour with each language and/or culture in your list.” Finally, in order to map their languages and cultures on their black and white body outlines, students were asked to “think about the different ways we use different parts of our bodies and make a connection between the role of each of the languages and cultures in your life and the parts of your body.” Due to time constraints in class for this case study, the Grade 11 participants were asked to work individually at home to finish their self-portraits. In retrospect, this “constraint” afforded students extended time to reflect on their creative choices and self-representations. One of the benefits of creative visual methodologies is precisely that participants are given more time to reflect on their responses and to engage in creative production than they would naturally have taken within a traditional interview (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006; Weber, 2008).

Numerous researchers have also argued that it is critically important for visual data to be interpreted by their creator in order to assure validity (Busch, 2010; Castellotti & Moore, 2009; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006; Leavy, 2009). Berger, art critic, and Mohr, photographer, theorized:

In the relation between a photograph and words, the photograph begs for an interpretation, and the words usually supply it. The photograph, irrefutable as evidence but weak in meaning, is given meaning by the words. And the words, which by themselves remain at the level of generalisation, are given specific authority by the irrefutability of the photograph. Together the two become very powerful; an open question appears to have been fully answered. (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 92)

Our research team was very concerned with not imposing outsider interpretations of students’ self-portraits but, rather, with allowing students to speak for themselves and direct the analysis process. Consequently, students co-facilitated group interviews during which they presented their self-portraits to one another and members of the research team. The motivation behind having students present self-portraits in pairs with a peer of their choice was to mediate relations of power between research team members (adults) and students (youth), as well as to allow youth themselves to collaborate in posing questions to one another (Lather, 1986). Through their active engagement in each step of this inquiry, students were able to position themselves as legitimate actors and contributors throughout the research process from data generation to its analysis (Mayall, 2002). Students also chose the language in which to discuss their self-portraits; often the conversations switched back and forth freely between French and English depending on which aspect of the self-

portrait or experience that was being recounted. Although we were obliged to limit language choice to French and English because everyone in the discussion had to be able to understand and participate in the discussion, offering the choice between French and English allowed students to demonstrate their plurilingual and pluricultural flexibility both in their visual self-portrait representation, as well as in the process of describing their relationship with various languages and cultures. Interviews with students provided our university research team with students' initial self-analysis and interpretation of their self-portraits. Subsequently, the university-based research team intends to perform a secondary meta-analysis through thematic coding of students' and teachers' self-portraits and interviews, alongside other visual data including student participants' digital photos of their in-school and out-of-school mobilities.

Results: Six Students' Representations of their Culturally and Linguistically Rich Identities

In the following section, I present self-portraits created by six of 15 Grade 11 students during the case study of *École internationale*. In order to highlight how students conceptualize plurilingual and pluricultural competence versus bilingualism, the selection of students' self-portraits and narratives was narrowed for this article based on the following two criteria: first, students had to have used at least three different colours in their self-portraits; and second, they had to have identified, through their interviews, at least three different linguistic and cultural influences in their lives. The final sample of six self-portraits and narratives was then selected to illustrate how students meeting the criteria above position themselves differently as belonging to one or more of the following three groups: francophone, anglophone or CLD allophone. Although students variously identify themselves according to the previously mentioned categories, these singular language categories are challenged as students represent their plural identities through their self-portraits and narratives. Whereas the first two students clearly identify themselves as French, the subsequent four students identify themselves as English to varying degrees. Cultural backgrounds, mixed parentage and a host of language learning experiences blur boundaries between singular categories of language and culture. These self-portraits, in particular, highlight visually how these students are engaged in an evolving process of constructing plurilingual and pluricultural identities.

The students' self-portraits are accompanied by interpretive narratives based on their group and individual interviews. Following narrative inquiry tradition (Butler-Kisber, 2010), narratives were (re)composed in the language in which students chose to participate in interview sessions. Every effort has been made to reproduce students' direct speech verbatim from interviews. In the following section, students' individual self-portraits have been analyzed through a content analysis of their interviews and accompanying narratives.

Alice

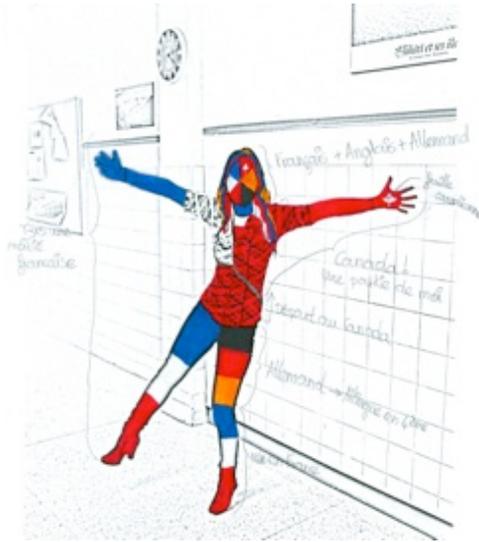


Figure 2. Alice's self-portrait.

J'ai trois couleurs qui sont dans mon portrait linguistique : la langue anglaise, le français et l'allemand. Je l'ai caractérisé par des drapeaux. J'ai commencé sur la jambe gauche. Il y a au début un petit drapeau de la France donc c'est pour montrer que je suis née en France que c'est vraiment ma langue maternelle...après si on remarque sur toute la moitié du portrait, c'est seulement pareil le drapeau français parce que je suis ici [au Canada] depuis un an et demi. C'est vraiment la plus grosse partie de moi la France et la langue française. Ensuite, j'ai une partie de ma jambe qui est l'allemand parce que je faisais allemand depuis la sixième. J'étais presque bilingue en quatrième—maintenant j'ai un peu perdu mais bon. Il y a un moment où ça fait une grande partie de ma vie. Ensuite, si on regarde au niveau buste, il y a le Canada qui prend en plus en plus de place parce que je suis arrivée. C'est maintenant une partie de moi. Voilà la feuille canadienne sur ma main. Je suis maintenant Canadienne jusqu'au bout des doigts. Au niveau de la figure, c'est le mélange de tout les pays qui sont à moi.

From the leg up: The body as a timeline of language learning.

Alice explicitly identifies the place of French, German and Canadian culture in her life. She draws on national flags to represent each linguistic and cultural influence. Whereas she associates one country with one national language (France—French; Germany—German; Canada—English), she incorporates the three flags in different ways to cover her entire silhouette to reflect her simultaneous sense of belonging—*appartenance*—to all three cultural and linguistic groups. Indeed, she illustrates through her visual representation and through her discourse that she herself is not limited to being a member of only one nation, one linguistic community or one culture; she can leave France, and take German classes (in a French school in Canada) and remain attached at some level to those communities. She uses her body as a timeline for her language learning: she begins with her leg and moves up through her chest and arms; she ultimately concludes with

reference to her face where she explains that she mixes “*tout les pays qui sont à moi.*” Alice’s evolving process of identity negotiation becomes clear as she describes her past tense birth in France and her present tense affirmation that “[*le français*] *c’est vraiment ma langue maternelle.... C’est vraiment la plus grosse partie de moi la France et la langue française,*” followed by German that once played a big part in her life and still remains part of her, and finally her recent arrival to Canada and her declaration that “*je suis maintenant Canadienne jusqu’au bout des doigts.*” Alice is clearly continually in the process of incorporating the cultural and linguistic influences in her life as she grows, moves and settles in new places.

Véronique



Figure 3. Véronique’s self-portrait.

Alors tout d’abord j’ai représenté le sud de la France parce ce que c’est où je suis née. Je suis née à Marseille. C’est pour ça que je l’ai mis au cœur et aux pieds—mes racines. J’ai mis le vert parce que pour moi le sud de la France est représenté avec la nature. J’ai utilisé le bleu pour le français, ma langue d’origine. Ça vient après mes racines et c’est aussi dans ma tête parce que dans mon cerveau je raisonne en français. Après une langue que j’aime beaucoup, c’est l’anglais. C’est pour ça que je suis venue à Toronto. Petit à petit l’anglais est une partie de moi. C’est pourquoi ça commence de venir sur mes jambes et puis je l’ai fait sur mes mains aussi parce que tous ce que je touche actuellement, c’est en anglais puisque je suis au Canada. C’est pour ça que j’ai représenté en rouge. C’est la couleur de la feuille sur le drapeau du Canada. J’ai laissé blanc l’autre parti de mon corps parce que j’espère qu’y ait d’autres cultures qui viennent un jour vers moi ou que j’aille vers d’autres cultures. Petit à petit ça pourra me constituer en entier.

White space of possibility.

Véronique makes a clear distinction between culture and language through her use of different colours. Green represents the cultural influence of her birth place, Marseille, and blue, the linguistic influence of French, her first language. By contrast, Véronique represents English and Canadian culture uniformly with the colour red. She has only recently arrived in Toronto and despite attending a French international school, she expresses her belief that everything she touches “*c’est en anglais puisque je suis au Canada.*” Véronique’s description of her self-portrait reveals a nuanced attachment to regional manifestations of French culture and language in France, and a more generalized impression of Canadian culture and the place of English within it. Her bi-placement of each colour on her self-portrait also highlights her view that there are multiple ways that linguistic and cultural influences shape her life and multiple ways to represent such influences: Véronique represents her roots in Marseille in her feet and in her heart; her knowledge and use of French is closely tied to her roots and is represented on her lower legs, as well as her head because she associates French with thinking; English is placed on her upper legs because she is becoming rooted in Canada, as well as on her hands because she associates them with touching everything in her new life in Toronto. In addition to her use of the colours green, blue and red to represent cultural and linguistic influences, Véronique draws attention to her purposeful use of white space in her body silhouette. She leaves the core of her body white to represent her desire to learn and be filled up with other languages and cultures. Véronique’s openness to other languages illustrates that her plurilingual and pluricultural competence is continually expanding.

Jamie



Figure 4. Jamie’s self-portrait.

I'm going to start with my two feet. One foot is my Spanish culture. I did my languages and cultures because I find that there actually is a difference. My dad is Spanish so I made my left foot Spanish. My mom is American and I feel a bit more American because I grew up in Canada. I'm right footed and right handed so I put American culture on my right side. Then, both my legs are with the French and English language. My left leg is English and there is a little bit of French around it; my right leg is French with a little bit of English around it. I switched them because I speak English with my mother and French with my father. I wanted to show that it's a little bit more of a mix and not one or the other entirely. It's a mix of both. On my face, I have half English and half French. I think the left side is more creative and I tend to think more in English so I put it on the left side. In my neck, it's both the American and Spanish culture; my neck is like a base for my head. My arms are Canadian culture because I wasn't born here. I was born in France and moved here at the age of one. I've lived here for 14 years so I feel more Canadian than anything else. I feel more at home and more comfortable with Canadian culture so it's on my arms which I use a lot. Actually, my whole body is a little bit surrounded by Canadian culture. My body is actually a mix of everything. Everything is included. Nothing is forgotten.

A foot in more than one place: Multiple origins and more than one first language.

Jamie distinguishes between linguistic and cultural influences in his life as he describes his self-portrait. His father is Spanish and his mother is American. Jamie speaks English and French with his parents. Although he identifies with his parents' different cultural backgrounds, he feels that he is more Canadian as he has lived in Canada for the majority of his life. At the same time, he uses various colours on his silhouette to represent his whole body as "a mix of everything." Jamie's intentional mixing of languages and cultures throughout his self-portrait highlights his view of the limitations of singular categories such as anglophone, francophone, and hispanophone to represent his whole self and calls into question the traditional definition of a singular mother tongue (Dabène, 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990). For Jamie, his sense of belonging and the interplay of a plurality of languages and cultures in his life are critical to his sense of self and identity; he emphasizes that "everything is included. Nothing is forgotten." Consequently, his self-portrait vividly depicts how his plurilingual and pluricultural competence is built upon a continual mixing of different linguistic and cultural practices. He insists on surrounding himself by Canadian culture and emphasizes that even though he has associated his various languages and cultures with specific parts of his body, he is in fact a "mix of everything." The placement of various languages and cultures on his body allows him to visually represent his rapport to each language and culture and scaffolds his narrative retelling of his cultural and linguistic biography.

Hugh



Figure 5. Hugh's self-portrait.

English is my base so I made it my legs because that's pretty much what I stand on. The main part of my sweater is dark blue for French. It's like I can wear it or I can pose like I'm French if I want to. Then, my arms are German and Spanish because those are the two other languages that I take [as courses at school]. They're not necessarily as big as French obviously but I can manoeuvre with them, so I put it on my arms. Then, my shirt underneath my sweater is bright blue for my Jewish culture. You can't really see it. It's underneath, the less visible aspect. It's always present and sometimes it'll peak out. I can read Hebrew because I had my Bar Mitzvah and I understand Yiddish—like German and Hebrew mixed together so that actually helps me a lot in German class.

All dressed up: Language and culture as tools for self-(re)presentation.

Although Hugh identifies himself from the outset as “English,” he describes the cultural and linguistic influences in his life as layers of clothing in his self-portrait. Whereas he represents English on his legs as the base upon which he stands, as he unpacks his self-portrait, he reveals that his Jewish culture functions as a base layer of clothing: “always present and sometimes it will peak out.” Hugh's clothing metaphor suggests that he views languages and cultures as tools with which he fashions his identity and can resourcefully present himself according to specific contexts (Ruiz, 2010). His plurilingual and pluricultural competence is demonstrated through his facility in switching between languages just as he changes his clothes to suit specific occasions. He also clearly recognizes how the various layers of clothing/languages/cultures assist him in expanding his plurilingual and pluricultural competence as he notes how his knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish support his language learning in German class.

Roger

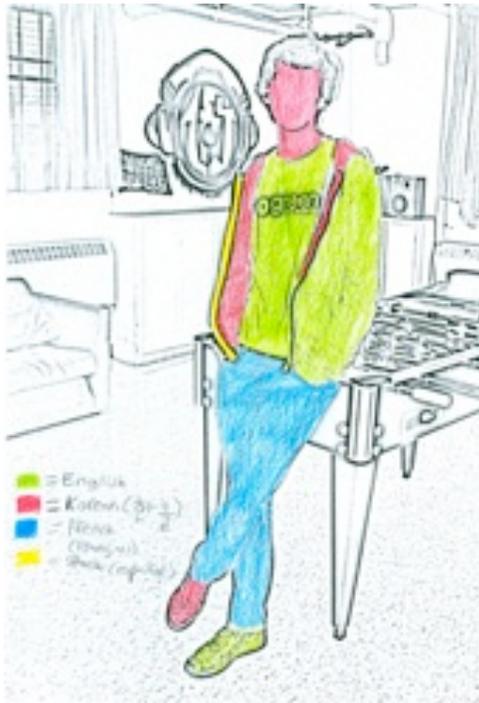


Figure 6. Roger's self-portrait.

Pour l'anglais, j'ai pris la couleur verte et je l'ai dessinée ma poitrine et ma chemise. C'est la voie principale du corps et pour moi l'anglais est ma première langue donc c'est le plus important. Pour le français, j'ai pris le bleu et j'ai dessiné sur mes jambes en bleu parce que je suis à l'École internationale donc la langue française et la culture sont une grande partie de ma vie maintenant. J'ai choisi une couleur froide parce que je ne suis pas français moi-même. J'ai pris le rouge pour le coréen. En fait, c'est une des couleurs du drapeau coréen. L'espace que le rouge couvre est moins vaste que l'anglais ou le français parce que je le parle moins à la maison. La culture et la langue coréenne est une partie de moi mais ce n'est pas aussi présente dans ma vie de tous les jours que le français et l'anglais. Finalement j'ai dessiné un petit bout de jaune pour l'espagnol parce qu'on est tout forcé à apprendre l'espagnol [à l'école].

Plurilingual and pluricultural flexibility and disequilibrium.

Although Roger chose to discuss his self-portrait in French, he identifies himself as English. While this linguistic choice may have been motivated by the fact that this interview was conducted in a classroom at *École internationale*, it also demonstrates his flexibility to move between languages and comfort with presenting himself in French or English. Although his cultural background is Korean, he describes English as his first language, French as a dominant language and culture at school, as well as Spanish as a “forced” third language. His use of Korean is limited to his home life and he acknowledges that even then, the influence of the Korean language and culture is not as present in his

daily life as English and French. As Roger describes his self-portrait, he is less concerned with his positioning of each language and culture on his body silhouette and more concerned with the amount of space allocated to represent each language. His proportional representation of each language suggests that Roger does not conceptualize all of his languages to be equal in value or in function, but rather that he draws on them according to context and need. His daily life does not require him to possess or to develop equal levels of proficiency in each language but rather to navigate effectively among all of the languages and cultures in his repertoire. Roger ascribes the most space to English, then French, then Korean, and finally a small part to Spanish. Although Roger clearly feels forced to learn Spanish at school, he nonetheless incorporates it into his self-portrait; it is a part of how he sees himself as a student at *École internationale*.

Ellie



Figure 7. Ellie's self-portrait.

I only have three languages on my portrait. I should have probably put more but I started with making a Canadian flag for English. I was born and raised here but in my heart I'm Romanian. So, I put Rumanian in my heart. On my hands, I put French because at school when I write or anything else, it's in French. I could have also put Hungarian because my mom is half Hungarian and all of our family friends are Hungarian. I hear Hungarian and I guess I sort of understand it as well. I didn't think to put it on my portrait but I am taking Spanish and I love it!

The self-portrait creative process: Moving from creating a reflection of one's self towards greater self-reflection.

Ellie provides a brief description of her self-portrait and highlights that while she only put three languages on her self-portrait, she could have put more. She begins with her present location in Canada and her dominant use of English. The image that first comes to her mind in terms of mapping her languages and cultures on her body is that of the Canadian flag, a highly recognizable symbol of Canadian identity. Yet even though she

starts by reproducing the Canadian flag on the sides of her body, she replaces the central maple leaf with her heart, coloured according to the Romanian flag. She underscores that despite being born in Canada, she feels a deep connection to Romania. She strategically appropriates the Canadian symbol of the flag to more authentically represent her sense of being both Canadian and Romanian. Her association with French is largely academic: she places it on her hands to represent the work she does, and her interactions at school are largely in French. It is in the process of creating the self-portrait and reflecting back on the activity during her interview that she recognizes the role of Hungarian in her life and also of Spanish at school. The process of creating a self-portrait initiates a process of reflection that becomes more critically reflexive as she describes her artefact. The creative process affords her time to reflect and her visual representation allows her to see herself reflected back and subsequently to think further about other possible languages and cultures she could have included. The activity helped Ellie to conceptualize more holistically her plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

Discussion

Plurilingualism in Action

All participants from *École internationale* used different colours and different body metaphors in their self-portraits to express their diverse cultural and linguistic identities. Colour, patterns, and body placement all function as signifiers with particular values and meanings (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). With the accompanying narratives we can access individuals' lived experiences and the relationship they attach to each language and culture. Although, at first glance, viewers may be wary that students uncritically drew on nationalistic and even stereotypical symbols such as country flags to represent various languages and cultures, or that such activities might lead students to see their bodies (and by extension their languages and cultures) as segmented, an attentive listening and close reading of their visual self-portraits and narratives reveals a much more integrated meaning-making process on their part. As students unpack the meanings embedded in their self-portraits, we gain deeper insight into how they individually negotiate their plural identities and internalize language hierarchies within their school and wider society. Students' representations illustrate how their linguistic and cultural identities are evolving in complex ways in an age of increasing transnational patterns of migration. As a research team, we encouraged students to reflect on both their linguistic and cultural backgrounds in their self-representations, because linguistic practices are heavily tied to cultural practice and vice versa (Purcell-Gates, 2007). Although students in this study repeatedly referenced national flags in their choice of colours to symbolize languages and cultures, they often subverted the traditional monolingual *one nation-one language* ideology by mixing multiple flags on their bodies to represent the diverse cultures and languages that play a role in their identity construction. Our objective as a research team was not to control students' representational choices but rather to release tools into their hands as co-researchers, so that they could generate visual texts that would tell their stories through their own eyes and with their own words. That some researchers might critique students' reproduction of stereotypical symbols in their representations raises questions concerning the extent to which we censor students' discourse—whether it be oral, textual or visual. In the context of an interview, what are our ethical responsibilities to censor, or not, the

words, languages or images shared? How do these responsibilities change when researching with children and youth, or, when engaging in classroom-based research? Such questions warrant further examination and consideration as we endeavour to scaffold CLD children and youth's collaboration in the research process.

These students' cultural and linguistic self-portraits, along with their interpretive narratives, provide powerful "insider" representations of plurilingualism in action and students' individual plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Moore and Gajo (2009) highlighted that individual plurilingual and pluricultural competence develops a

wholistic rather than a segmented vision of language skills; it insists on disequilibrium and partial competence rather than on a balance of skills; it insists on potential linkages rather than on separateness of its various components; it develops a vision of competence which includes situated mobilisation of the linguistic and cultural components of the repertoire, and its potential evolution and reconfiguration over time and circumstances; it includes mediation abilities, related to circulations and passages *between languages...and between cultures...*[emphasis added]; and, it considers plurilingual and pluricultural competence as highly individualised and dependent on singular trajectories and personal history, and as such always subject to evolution and change. (pp. 143-144)

Students' self-portraits visually illustrate this theoretical description of plurilingualism: they holistically portray students' networked use of their diverse cultural and linguistic skills through multiple layers of colour and symbol. At a glance, it becomes clear that students attach different values to different languages and cultures; students associate various languages and cultures with different roles and functions in their lives.

Self-Portraits as Portals to Personal Insight: Visual Representations Prompt Embodied Sharing

In this study, students represented their languages and cultures in varying proportions on their self-portraits and their visual representations scaffold their detailed, metaphoric sharing of life stories. A number of French researchers, in particular, have begun to turn to more reflexive tools such as drawing and colouring to access students' representations of plurilingualism (Castellotti & Moore, 2011; Molinié, 2009). These investigations have often focused on students' representations of plurilingual competence through drawings of the brain or head (Castellotti & Moore, 2009; Leconte, 2009). By having students map their cultural and linguistic competencies on their whole bodies in this study, we sought a more embodied sharing of participants' experience and knowledge (Weber, 2008).

The processes of creating their self-portrait and then of sharing it in a group deepened students' own awareness of their relationship with various languages and cultures. Through their choices regarding which languages to represent and which to omit or keep hidden, students illustrated the operation of language hierarchies within their school and social worlds.

On the Creative Process of Creating Dynamic, Reflexive Space

The self-portrait creative process enabled students to think about their relationships in metaphor and, as such, opened up new ways of seeing themselves and opportunities to consider both their positive and negative experiences. Gilroy (2005) has argued that culture is ever-evolving: “to seek to fix culture is a problem because if we arrest its unruly motion, we ossify it. Culture then becomes a dead specimen behind glass, to be contemplated rather than engaged” (para. 5). The motivation behind the creation of self-portraits was not to suggest that identities are fixed but rather to create reflexive space in which students could express who they see themselves be(com)ing. Students’ representations serve as visual snapshots at specific moments in time and in a particular place of their evolving identities. Like many of her peers whose self-portraits could not be included here, Véronique emphasized her belief that her identity is not complete or finished by intentionally leaving white space on her self-portrait to visually represent that “*j’espère qu’y ait d’autres cultures qui viennent un jour vers moi ou que j’aie vers d’autres cultures. Petit à petit ça pourra me constituer en entier.*” Véronique represented herself as being in the process of developing a plurilingual, pluricultural repertoire that is a central part of her identity. Later in her interview, Ellie, too, explained that she left white space in her self-portrait as “space for other cultures and languages to grow.” While other students represented this potential in different ways, the process of becoming, growing or evolving by learning languages and gaining different cultural experiences was a recurrent theme. As another student described,

je n’ai que 16 ans....Je compte de voyager le reste de ma vie donc, c’est pour ça que j’ai mis des flèches. En cartographie, ça invoque la mobilité aussi. Donc, j’ai mis toutes les flèches qui invoquent que j’ai encore beaucoup de choses à découvrir et pas tout est rempli.

Students’ self-representations individually reflected their beliefs, feelings and relationship with languages and cultures through which they form their identities at school. The exercise promoted greater self-awareness, as well as a new way of seeing how their linguistic and cultural experiences are interdependent. In the words of Véronique, “*j’ai remarqué comment toutes les cultures pouvaient se mélanger—aboutir dans une même personne et se compléter les unes avec les autres.*”

Conclusion: Alter(n)ative Praxis—The Role of Visual Arts-Informed Methodologies in Language Education Research

The creation of visual arts-informed self-portraits can play a powerful role in helping students represent their diverse cultural and linguistic identities. From a classroom perspective, such an activity makes visible, to teachers and students’ alike, students’ plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires and offers the opportunity to reflect on how they can draw on their linguistic and cultural skills. From a research perspective, arts-informed, creative visual methodologies provide a way of accessing and understanding the voices and experiences of participants without limiting them to communicating in a given language (Bagnoli, 2009; Butler-Kisber, 2010; Diaz Soto & Swadener, 2005; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Leavy, 2009). Arts-informed research methodologies draw on researchers’ and

participants' alter(n)ative ways of knowing and being and offer insights that may not be revealed through traditional approaches to inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Prasad, 2012).

In this ongoing inquiry, our goal as researchers was not to critique or interpret each individual self-portrait, as such analysis is clearly better performed by each creator himself or herself. Rather, we have sought to listen deeply and to engage meaningfully with participants in order to develop meta-conclusions and theory based on the whole of what students create and recount. Students' visual self-portraits are holistic representations, simultaneously incorporating multiple layers and synthesizing their knowledge and experience in a highly efficient and evocative way (Weber, 2008). As an example of an arts-informed, creative visual tool, cultural and linguistic self-portraits powerfully carry theory of plurilingual and pluricultural competence through metaphor and symbol and allow us to see how plurilingual and pluricultural competence develops and is operationalized differently in a variety of individuals through their life trajectories. Indeed, Castellotti and Moore (2009) have argued that engaging students in expressing their beliefs about plurilingualism through drawing offers a powerful way for them to engage in research:

il leur permet de s'exprimer sur un mode qu'ils maîtrisent au moins aussi bien (souvent mieux, même) que leurs interlocuteurs et qui leur attribue d'emblée une voix d'autorité et un statut légitime. Ils sont, en effet, en position d'auteurs, qui se réapproprient leur dessin et vont proposer des clés pour en construire, en interaction, une interprétation. (pp. 45-46)

In an age of transnational mobility and growing cultural and linguistic diversity among student populations in schools, it is critical to find new, alter(n)ative ways to engage CLD children and youth in research that supports building inclusive policy and practice. In this article, I have traced the development of an arts-informed, creative and visual self-portrait tool as a means to engage children and youth in an inquiry on students' mobilities in an age of transnationalism. Furthermore, I have analyzed six students' representations of their culturally and linguistically rich identities through their self-portraits and accompanying narratives generated through interviews. Rather than seeing their cultural and linguistic differences as a problem, these students conceptualize diversity as a resource, and their plurilingual and pluricultural competence as an evolving strength for their futures. Students' nuanced sharing of their life histories and diverse experiences with a variety of languages and cultures was clearly scaffolded through their reflexive engagement in an arts-informed visual exercise. The experience of refining and working with arts-informed self-portraits discussed herein leads me to question how research can move beyond more traditional approaches to studying children and youth's language use and identity construction from the perspective of adults (teachers, administrators, policy makers, parents, etc.). How might language education researchers move toward alter(n)ative, more collaborative approaches to researching with youth in order to understand young people's perspectives on their personal experiences and meaning-making processes? While language researchers have traditionally tended to privilege language-based methods in their investigations, arts-informed and creative visual methodologies offer new ways of engaging CLD speakers, and of hearing and seeing their voices represented in research.

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