The Missing Piece of the Plurilingual Puzzle:

FREPA and the Implementation of Plurilingualism

in the Secondary Core French Classroom.

An example in British Columbia

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Additional language teaching in British Columbia has undergone some essential changes in recent years. In 2011, a new draft curriculum, grounded in the principles of plurilingualism and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), was published for elementary and secondary Core French. This curriculum signified a vital shift for Core French classrooms; one which would call into question accepted goals of the program, agreed upon modes of instruction and even our identity as Canadians. Since the publication of this document, many additional language (AL) teachers have worked to implement the updated learning outcomes in their classrooms. While the plurilingual foundations of the 2011 curriculum have impacted the teaching practices of numerous BC educators, there remain gaps between the theory informing plurilingualism and plurilingual competence, and the guidelines provided to teachers through the curriculum.

In what follows, I will demonstrate how plurilingualism and plurilingual competence can be effectively applied in French language classrooms using the BC Ministry of Education's 2011 Core French draft curriculum in conjunction with the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to languages and cultures (FREPA). The FREPA is a, "set of publications (which) opens ways for implementing pluralistic approaches in classrooms in order to develop the

plurilingual and intercultural competences of learners of all subjects" (ECML, 2007, "About the framework of reference"). It offers a broad list of descriptors based on the, "Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes" (ECML, 2007, "Descriptors") deemed central to the perspective of a plurilingual and intercultural education. These descriptors are available online, in graphic form allowing teachers to determine when best to apply each descriptor and its sub-categories. In addition, this publication makes available teaching resources to enable teachers to put the resources into practice. Educators can, "select an activity from a database according to the specific resources for knowledge, skills and attitudes which s/he has identified from the framework" (ECML, 2007, "About the framework of reference").

By using these two frameworks together, teachers can successfully address the linguistic skills necessary for communication, as well as addressing the seemingly nebulous tenets of plurilingual theory in terms of plurilingual approaches and intercultural competence. It has been established that the CEFR is an effective mode of addressing plurilingualism in the AL classroom; many of the criticisms of plurilingual pedagogies are related to a need for further development in terms of the understanding and appreciation of elements of plurilingualism outside of language learning itself and the competencies set out by the CEFR. These are addressed by the FREPA and can once again be aligned with linguistic diversity, pedagogy, and identity, as discussed in my previous work.

Linguistic Diversity

The application of plurilingual pedagogies in my classes has been relatively successful up to this point. Having become very familiar with the new curriculum since its publication, I have endeavoured to fully implement it based on the parameters provided therein. This has included recognizing the plurilingual principles, "language is inextricably bound to culture; language use requires an understanding of the cultural context in which communication takes place" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p.1). Moreover, it has meant more readily accepting that, "language learning is not the accumulation of perfectly mastered elements of grammar and vocabulary; thus, learner errors are to be expected" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p.1). These elements of the curriculum touch on components of plurilingualism; however, they do not adequately address plurilingual and intercultural competence, which are pivotal factors of plurilingualism. This disconnect is not unique to BC schools, and is noted by Kalliokoski, who states that, "...a true appreciation and exploitation of individuals' linguistic and stylistic repertoire remain a neglected dimension in language education" (Kalliokoski, 2011, p.92). It is in this regard that I have been dissatisfied with my application of plurilingualism in my secondary core French classes.

I have, of course, been aware that plurilingualism ought to allow for communication in a variety of languages in class. This is addressed in the introduction to the FREPA, in which it explains, "The term *pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures* refers to didactic approaches which involve the use of several (or at least more than one) varieties of languages or cultures simultaneously during the teaching process" (ECML, 2007, "Home"). In some respects, this should have been easy to accomplish given the diverse linguistic abilities of my students. On the other hand, I lacked the guidance needed to produce an effective plurilingual environment. For

example, when allowed the opportunity to use heritage languages in class, some students exploited the privilege, denigrating classmates and teaching staff. The fact that I could not communicate in their language meant that I was not only unaware of the negative environment that was developing, but I also felt unable to assist students in making connections between the languages. In other cases, students would disclose that they occasionally, unintentionally slipped into their other additional languages when trying to speak French. When this occurred, I did not object, nor did I have a constructive response that could put this show of plurilingualism to good use. The class was in need of scaffolding to enable us to make productive use of the students' extensive linguistic abilities. I was able to provide them with this structure to some extent in terms of strategies using French and English, but I was rarely able to effectively extend this to the students' many other languages. Moreover, I often felt guilty for using English in class, believing that students should be immersed as much as possible in the target language.

Another element of the CEFR-based curriculum that I have worked to employ over recent years is the European Language Portfolio. This portfolio includes three primary components: the Language Passport, the Language Biography, and the Dossier (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 73). I have had little success with the Language Passport or Biography, again, because I lacked the structure to use them effectively, which meant that they held little meaning for students, who in turn put little thought or effort into related activities. In contrast, I have continued to use and refine the dossier year after year and have now reached a point where it is an extremely useful tool for student self-assessment, whereby they have the opportunity to track their progress in the various communicative competencies, assess their use of language learning strategies, and set realistic goals for the future. The learning that occurs through the creation and debriefing of the dossier is extremely valuable with regard to documenting the, "objectives, etc. of certain curricula, learning experiences, and significant samples of learners' progress in terms of second-language proficiency…" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 73). In spite of this success, however, students' dossiers have not, until this point, reflected pluricultural experiences, which are intended to be a part of the process. Again, I was demoralized by my previous failed efforts to include this element, and without any new structure, have hesitated to make another attempt.

There are some elements of FREPA that I have been addressing in my class, albeit unknowingly. For instance, in terms of the 'Knowledge' competencies, I have employed K-3, "Knows some of the principles of how communication functions" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"), as well as K-5, "Has some knowledge about language diversity / multilingualism / plurilingualism" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"). Some of these competencies are extremely broad, to the point that it would be difficult not to touch on them, particularly in the largely immigrant community in which I teach. As for the 'Skills' competencies, it is almost inevitable in my school community that students, "Can interact in situations of contact between languages / cultures" (ECML, 2007, "Skills"), as recommended by S-6. Finally, because this next skill is a part of the curriculum and the program that is used in my school district, my students are quite familiar with S-7, "Can assume ownership of [learn] linguistic features or usage / cultural references or behaviours which belong to more or less familiar languages and cultures" (ECML, 2007,

"Skills"). These are only a few of the innumerable competencies outlined in this framework, some of which require significantly more consideration to apply.

In order for my classroom to evolve into a fully plurilingual educational space, I need to continue to implement the new curriculum and the CEFR, with the added benefit of the FREPA to more fully address plurilingual competences and intercultural approaches to language learning. The lists of competencies set out by FREPA are initially overwhelming; however, given further thought, it becomes evident that numerous competencies can be addressed in one activity and that many of the competencies will arise organically and frequently in a variety of contexts. In addition, there is significant overlap between the competencies to the point that some are very similar, as in the case of K-6.12, "Knows that cultural differences may be at the root of problems in verbal / non-verbal communication / interaction" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge") and K-10.3, "Knows that cultural differences may underlie verbal / non-verbal communication / interaction" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"). In other cases, the competencies may come from two different categories, but each reinforces the other. For example, the impact of K-6.1, "Knows that each language has its own system" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge",) is increased when combined with, A-4.2, "Accepting the fact that another language / culture may function differently from one's language / culture" (ECLM, 2007, "Attitudes"). The implementation of the competencies is further facilitated by a database of teaching materials intended to address pluralistic approaches to language and culture. Moreover, there are numerous FREPA descriptors associated with a variety of activities ranging broadly in level and genre.

There are several ways in which the FREPA can be applied to matters of linguistic diversity, making fruitful use of linguistic variations. When students use languages other than French or English in class, they must do so appropriately; consider K-3.3, whereby the student, "Knows that one must adapt one's own communicative repertoire to the social and cultural context within which communication is taking place" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"). The acknowledgement of this competency will help to ensure that students are using language suitable to the school environment. Further, by adopting the attitude outlined by A-13.1, students will demonstrate, "A will to adapt / to be flexible in one's own behaviour when interacting with persons who are linguistically / culturally different from oneself" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes"). These competencies similarly address the issue of acceptable behaviour and language use in class, focussing on the need for respect for classmates and staff who do not share a cultural and linguistic background.

It is also necessary for students to develop an expanded understanding of the ways in which languages function with relation to one another. Knowledge competencies K-6.1 to K-6.8 emphasize the importance of this competency. For example, K-6.6, requires that the student "Knows that there is no word for word equivalence from one language to another" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge") and according to K-6.8, the student, "Knows that the organisation of an utterance may vary from one language to another" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"). In the past, I have struggled to impart to students that direct translation is not effective; by devoting increased instructional time to this competency, students' communication should improve, along with their understanding of linguistic diversity, providing a less normative view of

linguistic and cultural phenomena (ECML, 2007).

My initial examination of the FREPA components left me wondering how all of these components could possibly be added to an already full curriculum. The answer is twofold: Firstly, additional language classes BC are somewhat fortunate in that there are no provincial exams restricting the material that teachers must cover in a particular amount of time. There are general expectations of what will be taught from one grade to the next, although, the 2011 curriculum undermines the validity of that structure. As a result, more time can be spent on these metacognitive elements of language learning and less on content knowledge. Another factor to keep in mind is that plurilingual and intercultural approaches do not necessarily require the instructor to convey specific content with regard to culture and history, but rather to help students to develop the skills and interest necessary to attain pluricultural competence. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, such as through increased discussion related to the varieties of cultures and subcultures represented in our school community. In addition, a greater variety of languages will be actively used in the classroom, accompanied by dialogue surrounding the ways in which various languages function. Ideally, this will improve student understanding of language systems and consequently impact their ability to effectively communicate in French.

Pedagogy

The application of pedagogy in my classes up to this point has been in keeping with the parameters outlined in the 2011 curriculum, acknowledging that, "language learning should emulate authentic language use, to the greatest degree possible" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p.1) and also the principle that, "language learning is complex; instruction takes into account individual learning styles and rates, and also attends to teaching process strategies for successful learning" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p.1). These strategic tenets are effective and are built into the *Communi-Quête* program, which is used district-wide, foregrounding the use of cognates, familiar words, key words, re-reading, and editing, among others. These strategies do not, however, adequately address metacognition in terms of plurilingual competencies and intercultural approaches. Bono and Stratilaki (2009) explain the need for an expanded understanding of the use of strategies in the development of plurilingual competence, "plurilinguals' potential asset, defined as their strategic advantage in language learning and use, is to be found at the metalinguistic level, which includes both communicative and learning strategies and representations about languages and their speakers" (Bono & Stratilaki, 2009, p. 211; see also Moore & Gajo, 2009).

In addition to the strategies included in *Communi-Quête,* I have recently worked to include the "Language-learning Strategies" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 20) built into the 2011 curriculum. These address some principles related to metacognition, such as, "Tolerate ambiguity of meaning when unable to understand fully (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 20)", and, "Group new items into categories that are personally meaningful" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 20). Having now familiarized myself with the strategies set out by FREPA, I realize that there are several of these which I have frequently addressed in my classes. These include skills such as S-5.6, "Can identify one's own

reading strategies in the first language (L1) and apply them to the second language (L2)" (ECML, 2007, "Skills") as well as the broad category of S-2, "Can identify [recognise] linguistic elements / cultural phenomena in languages / cultures which are more or less familiar" (ECML, 2007, "Skills"). In terms of desirable attitudes for language learning, I have sought to instil in my students values like A-19.2, wherein students develop an, "Interest in learning techniques / in one's own learning style" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes"), A-14.2, "Being self-confident in a situation of communication (expression / reception / interaction / mediation)" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes") and A 4.1, " Mastery of one's resistances/ reticence towards what is linguistically / culturally different" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes"). With regard to knowledge competencies related to plurilingual and pluricultural competencies, I have touched on K-7.3, whereby the student, "Knows that one can learn better if one has a positive attitude towards linguistic differences" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"), in addition to K-11.1, in which the learner, "Knows that cultural practices / values are created by and evolve under the influence of different factors (/ history / the environment / the actions of members of the community/ …)" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"). This has occurred not necessarily with the intention of focussing on strategies, but based on the observation of a need for this kind of scaffolding.

FREPA provides a practical, thoughtful and exhaustive structure for including pertinent metacognitive resources in language courses. These also encompass crucial cultural elements, some of which are addressed in the 2011 curriculum in the form of "Cultural Connections" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 19), which I have increasingly tried to include in class, such as, "French songs and the national anthem (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 19)", "Formal and informal forms of address and appropriate body language in social situations (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 19)", and "Celebrations and customs of French speaking cultures", (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 19). Many of these, however, address culture only at a superficial level, neglecting the elements that exist below the surface, which create the conditions responsible for the aforementioned perceptible cultural components.

FREPA provides a structure for teachers to more effectively meet pedagogical goals related to the understanding of cultural elements and contexts, enabling students to become more deeply invested in French language learning. I had previously felt that the only way to effectively create this investment was through travel to French speaking areas, but was hesitant to arrange this for various reasons, including the classism inherent in such activities. In the future, a more democratic way in which I plan to create this investment is through the introduction of 'Travel Tuesdays' in which we will view travel documentaries as a class. This will give students the opportunity to address several FREPA components, including all elements of K-8, whereby students, "Possesses knowledge about what cultures are / how they work" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge") and K-9, in which the student, "Knows that cultural diversity and social diversity are closely linked" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"), among others. Likewise, there are several issues related to attitudes that I seek to impart to students through exposure to a variety of cultures, such as those laid out in the first section of the "Attitudes" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes") table, "Attention / Sensitivity / Curiosity [interest] / Positive acceptance / Openness / Respect / Valorization with respect to

languages, cultures and the diversity of languages and cultures (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes"). This could occur through the viewing, analysis and discussion of travel programs related to francophone areas and also through exposure to cultures represented by students in class. Component category A-9 represents, "An attitude of critical questioning / a critical position towards language / culture in general" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes"). This factor is central to developing pluricultural competence and intercultural approaches to language learning and again, can be manifested through the exposure to a variety of cultures and the ways in which they work.

In addition to 'Travel Tuesdays', these components can be met through the analysis of literature addressing cultural elements, the discussion of comparative cultures, and exposure to popular culture from different Francophone cultures. This exposure will support the need for students to develop an understanding of linguistic and cultural relativity (Dombrowski, Rotenberg & Beck, 2013, p. 145), which is of particular importance in the community where I teach. The area is relatively culturally homogenous, and while many students have travelled to or lived in their family's country of origin, they appear, for the most part, to have put little thought into how straddling multiple cultures has impacted them. I will expand on this subject in the following section in which I discuss issues of identity.

In considering how the organization of my classes will look in the future, I am confident that in general, my students will applaud my goal of running a French class in which multiple languages are valued and in which there is less focus on rules of grammar and more on strategies that will foster an interest and appreciation for a variety of languages and culture. There will

be less memorization of verb conjugations and more focus on the appropriate use of resources to find the information that students need. In the electronic age, where translators and other resources are readily available, I feel that I can no longer deny the redundancy of memorization. I am also acutely aware, however, of the importance that students use the aforementioned strategies and resources effectively in order for these last to produce the desired results. This, in fact, is where I become riddled with anxiety about what this new approach will look like in practice. Among my concerns is the possibility that my students will fall behind others in their ability to communicate. Will the class begin to look more like a course on comparative cultures than a French language course? Will students respond to this change in pedagogy in such a way that it is effective? If not, how long can I experiment with this before it has a negative impact on their learning? How will parents, colleagues, and administrators react to this change? I have already noted shifts in this direction among my colleagues, many of whom are implementing the CEFR and are encountering many of the challenges discussed throughout this paper. Still, the path less travelled is never easy, and so I brace myself for the possibility of criticism. To mediate this, I will proceed thoughtfully, gauging the response of those affected, as well as the impact of my evolving pedagogy on student learning.

Identity

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the 2011 draft curriculum deal only peripherally with the matter of identity in plurilingualism through the European Language Portfolio (ELP). The ELP is an assessment tool related to the CEFR, "Both a reporting and a pedagogical

tool, it can be used by learners to document proficiency in their first and all other languages learned" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 73). The three components of the ELP are a language passport, a language biography and a dossier (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 73). The biography and the dossier both have the potential to advance student understanding of their plurilingual identity; however, I have not been particularly successful in my attempts to use the ELP to this end. The biography is intended to,

> "record(s) learning progress and encourage(s) self-assessment by learners, giving them opportunity to learn and recognize personal strengths and areas to improve with respect to the tasks and strategies they are expected to perform and implement. It encourages learners to reflect on the various aspects of their language learning and use" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 73).

The difficulty that I repeatedly encountered in my efforts to implement the Language Biography was that students did not accurately assess their linguistic abilities, nor did they demonstrate an interest in reflecting on their language use or intercultural experiences.

My experience with the dossier has been significantly more positive. The purpose of the dossier is to allow students to document the accomplishment of their language-learning objectives and significant learning experiences using samples of their class work. In addition, it is to be used to record pluricultural encounters. Students are increasingly showing their capacity for self-reflection in terms of meeting their language-learning objectives and recognizing meaningful educational moments. They also demonstrate an understanding of the impact that the use of various strategies has on their learning. In spite of these accomplishments, however, I have not been successful in motivating students to record pluricultural or intercultural experiences in their dossiers. If the ELP were fully implemented as it is designed to be, it would still not adequately address identity, dealing more directly with matters of language-learning strategies and pedagogy. Ironically, though, I am convinced that students would be more invested in the processes involved in the ELP if they had an improved understanding of plurilingual identities. Such an understanding can be facilitated by the FREPA.

As outlined in the previous two sections, there are some elements of FREPA that I have inadvertently conveyed to my students. This is also the case with relation to identity. For example, in the community in which I teach there is a strong affiliation with the attitude competency A-16.2, which encourages, "Accepting a social identity in which the language(s) one speaks / the culture(s) one ascribes to occupy an (important) position" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes"). Students also generally possess skill S-4, whereby students, "Can talk about / explain certain aspects of one's own language / one's culture / other languages / other cultures" (ECML, 2007, "Skills"). In terms of knowledge competencies, most students demonstrate an understanding of K-2.5 which states that the student, "Knows some of the characteristics of one's own linguistic situation / environment" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"). Many of these elements of identity are fostered by the family and community, but aren't mediated by any other perspectives due to the cultural homogeneity of the area. In fact, some observers posit that students in the community are *too* situated in their cultural background, possessing little

knowledge or interest in the other cultures around them or worldwide. For this reason, I am very interested in exploring ways in which I can help students to develop an expanded understanding of identity as it relates to plurilingualism and pluriculturalism.

In order for me to support my students in the mediation of their plurilingual identities, I must stop being intimidated by my perception of the complexity of notions of plural identities and accept that my students can comprehend such ideas. The FREPA website offers examples of related teaching resources, providing much needed guidance in terms of how to present these difficult and abstract ideas to adolescents in appropriate and meaningful ways. One of these lessons uses stories from around the world to help students to develop critical distance from their own culture, and in so doing, addressing the attitude competency A-11.1, "Being disposed to distance oneself from one's own language / culture // look at one's own language from the outside" (ECML, 2007, "Attitudes"). Another lesson provides four short video clips, each depicting a different communicative gesture used by the French. It is recommended that students first view this video without sound and try to ascertain the meaning of the gestures, after which they can watch again with sound. This is followed by questions related to how these communicative gestures compare with gestures from students' own cultures. This lesson effectively addresses the knowledge competency, K-3.4, in which the learner, "Knows that culture and identity influence communicative interactions" (ECML, 2007, "Knowledge"). As stated earlier in this section, one of the areas of particular concern for me is imparting to students the plurality of identity; this competency is addressed by K-14.3, whereby the student, "Knows that one can have a multiple / plural / composite identity" (ECML, 2007,

"Knowledge"). One activity recommended to support this is essentially a class discussion regarding students cultural heritage and the ways in which it is manifested in their lives, with thought being given to the elements of culture that have been retained, and those that have not. This is a simple lesson that engages students in dialogue that effectively explicates the multiple nature of identity.

With the help of the FREPA and the teaching resources provided in support of it, I hope in the future to enable my students to develop an understanding of the ways in which identity is constructed and how this impacts their ways of being. This in turn will help them to appreciate that there are multiple ways of interpreting the world in which we live. I hope to see students interacting in a variety of languages and viewing their own cultures through a critical lens, which will in turn help to break down cultural barriers and allow students to interact with a variety of classmates, moving beyond their habitual peer, cultural, and linguistic groups. Students will have the opportunity to develop a better understanding of a variety of cultures and how one's cultural background impacts identity. This ideal is reminiscent of Coste and Simon's argument in favour of plurilingualism as a means of, "creating harmonious conditions for living together and exercising democracy in contemporary societies" (Coste & Simon, 2009, p.169). There are, however, some downsides to this prospect. The first is that the level of French used in the activities provided by FREPA is quite high, which would provide a challenge to all of my students. In most cases, I would have to either spend significant time working through these documents with the class, or spend that time in advance of the class to adapt the materials to my students' level. Another concern is one that was raised earlier in this paper; that if students

are communicating in a multitude of languages, it is inevitable that less French is being spoken in class, and as such, I have some apprehension about the impact that this will have on students' ability to communicate in the target language.

Conclusion

The continued production of supporting documents published to reinforce the CEFR increasingly enables teachers to effectively implement plurilingualism and pluricultural competence in the secondary Core French classroom. The Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to languages and cultures (FREPA) is an invaluable resource; this framework is the missing piece of the plurilingual puzzle. With it, teachers can more effectively scaffold the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for plurilingualism to be fruitfully taught. Three essential elements of plurilingualism – linguistic diversity, the use of plurilingual pedagogy, and an appreciation for plural identities– are exhaustively represented and supported by the numerous FREPA competencies. In addition, a robust database of classroom activities provides a practical means for teachers to implement plurilingualism and pluriculturalism in their classrooms. Combined with the CEFR and the BC 2011 draft curriculum, FREPA makes it possible for plurilingualism and plurilingual competence to be effectively applied in Core French classrooms. This will not occur, however, without continued, significant changes to the ways in which students, educators, and parents envision language learning.

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