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## **School inclusion, young migrants and language**

### *Success and obstacles in mainstream learning in France and New Zealand*

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Fiona Smythe is a comparative education researcher and teacher educator at the Université de Bordeaux. Her research explores issues related to linguistically and culturally diverse societies and inclusive education, with a particular interest in minority language students and their languages in learning.

#### Résumé en français :

*Des pratiques d'inclusion scolaires qui aident les élèves allophones ayant une faible maîtrise de la langue de scolarisation à participer activement à l'apprentissage dans des contextes ordinaires sont cruciales pendant la phase des nouveaux arrivants. Le concept d'intégration réciproque (Berry, 1997) et son évolution plus récente à travers le mouvement d'éducation inclusive, recadre les relations école-communauté comme négociables et repositionne les jeunes migrants comme des navigateurs habilités de nouvelles voies dans les processus d'intégration scolaire. Cette étude menée entre 2017 et 2019 examine comment quatre adolescents allophones ("arrivants tardifs" âgés de 13 à 15 ans) ont navigué dans l'apprentissage ordinaire dans deux écoles pendant la phase des nouveaux arrivants, dans deux contextes éducatifs différents — la France et la Nouvelle-Zélande. Un objectif clé est de voir où les conditions éducatives et les comportements d'apprentissage individuels se croisent, afin de mettre en évidence la façon dont les élèves réagissent aux différentes variables d'intégration au sein de ces deux systèmes scolaires. Quatre études de cas explorent les similitudes et les différences, en comparant les effets sur les expériences d'intégration des élèves. Les résultats identifient, décrivent et expliquent un ensemble de meilleures pratiques communes pour les élèves allophones nouvellement arrivés dans les classes ordinaires, avec des implications pour la formation des enseignants en approches adaptées pour ses besoins particuliers.*

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## ***School inclusion, young migrants and language***

### *Success and obstacles in mainstream learning in France and New Zealand*

Inclusive schooling practices that support immigrant students with low language-of-schooling proficiency to actively participate in learning within mainstream contexts is crucial during the newly-arrived phase. The concept of reciprocal integration (Berry, 1997) and its more recent evolution through the inclusive education movement, reframes school-community relationships as negotiable and re-positions young migrants as empowered navigators of new routes into school integration processes. This study conducted between 2017-2019 examines how four immigrant teenagers ('late arrivers' aged between 13-15) navigated mainstream learning in two schools during the newly-arrived phase, in two different educational contexts — France and New Zealand. A key aim is to see where educational conditions and individual learning behaviours intersect, as a way of highlighting how students respond to differing integration variables within these two school systems. Four case studies explore similarities and differences, comparing effects on students' experiences of integration. Findings identify, describe and explain a set of common best practices for newly-arrived immigrant teenagers in mainstream learning, with implications for teacher education in language-adapted approaches.

#### **Keywords**

Integration, immigrant students, school systems, comparative education, teacher education

### **1. Introduction**

While geographically distant, France and New Zealand share common ground in their past assimilationist attitudes towards minority language children in majority language school settings (Heggoy, 1986; Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). During the 1990s, both countries experienced a shift towards integrative policies, in response to growing global awareness of human rights and the potential benefits of more inclusive education systems in linguistically and culturally diverse societies. The outcome in 2022 is two distinct versions of 'integration' sprouted from differing national ideologies — *égalité* in the French education system, and biculturalism in the New Zealand setting (Smythe, 2020).

This study is curious about how young migrants arriving into these two contrasting educational settings can be empowered through their individual learning behaviours, and by their plurilingualism in particular. Are the terms of 'integration' being wholly determined by schools, or is it also about reciprocity in interactions that enhance learning experiences for young migrants at school? As Berry (2011) puts it :

*In such complex plural societies, there is no assumption that some groups should assimilate or become absorbed into another group. Hence, ... intercultural relations are not viewed as unidirectional, but as mutual and reciprocal... the multicultural view is that cultural pluralism is a resource, and inclusiveness should be nurtured with supportive policies and programmes. (p.3)*

This view signals complementarity in the interactions taking place between dominant group institutions (such as schools) and minority cultural groups within them. Observations of young migrants in mainstream learning support this view, and findings suggest that even within education systems grown from assimilationist roots, young migrants can be skilled at navigating and negotiating their own integration experiences.

### **2. Background**

In both France and New Zealand, 'integration' is commonly stated as a national policy goal for migrants and refugees (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2012; NZ Ministry of Education, 2015), yet in both countries, translation of this into educational practice is highly variable, and evolving cautiously compared to inclusive education practices in other parts of the world (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009). Limitations arise from the fact that both France and New Zealand adhere to essentially monolingual educational environments that remain resistant to affirming the value of multilingualism in meaningful ways in schools (May, Hill & Tiakiwai, 2004; Armagnague et al (eds), 2020). Further development is needed in teacher education programmes for working with plurilingual students, in school curriculum objectives for including linguistic and cultural diversity, and in establishing multilingual learning support systems in schools for newly-arrived immigrant students (Hélot & Mejía (eds), 2008; Malet & Bian, 2020).

In France, Council of Europe recommendations (Council of Europe, 2009, 2010) and national policies on integration are incongruent with the lived experiences of young immigrants, who reject the notion of and the very term ‘*intégration*’ and its inherent connotations of intergenerational marginalisation (Schnapper, 2007). Similarly, New Zealand’s high quality work in refugee resettlement also has areas of inconsistency, as new resettlement zones are being opened up in rural areas in spite of social attitudes in those areas which risk excluding ethnic minorities (Peterson et al, 2017). These conditions underline the importance of schools adopting community-based approaches to cultivating reciprocal integration processes in which the languages and intercultural identities of immigrant children may be better included. The reciprocal model sees integration as mutually beneficial and intends that the terms of integration be consensually negotiated, rather than dictated and defined by the dominant majority (Berry, 2011; Goi & Bruggerman, 2013).

Language remains central to these mutual processes of integration, as the multiple benefits of plurilingual learning for students have consistently demonstrated (Beacco & Byram, 2007; Erling & Moore, 2021), alongside the advantages when teachers use language-of-schooling in ways adapted to facilitate learning (Mendonça Dias, Millon-Fauré & Smythe, in press).

### **3. Theoretical framework**

Integration and inclusion continue to be debated as theoretical approaches with differing sets of practices (Rodriguez & Garro-Gil, 2014) that seek to address a common question arising from education in socially diverse settings: Is the onus on education systems and schools to adapt to *include* student diversity, or is it up to young migrants as new-comers to *integrate* into systems that are oriented towards the linguistic and cultural majority?

As Thomas (1997) pointed out, integration and inclusion involve different sets of practices. Whereas inclusive practices have the role of reducing inequalities in order to offer the best chances of success for all students, integration practices demand that young people demonstrate their preparedness to accept and participate in existing school structures, despite individual differences such as linguistic and cultural diversity amongst young immigrants (pp.103-105). With this explanation in mind, this study is interested in exploring some of the middle ground between these practices of integration and inclusion, through looking at how classroom organisation and language-based interactions in two settings impact on young immigrants and their learning experiences. At the same time, how elements of both education systems — the more inclusive approaches seen in the NZ system, as well as the more integrative attitudes evident in the French system — create intersections where students can be seen interacting with their school environment in ways that empower their learning.

#### **3.1 Integration as “mutual accommodation”**

An evolution in thinking about integration can be traced through behaviourist theories of the 1960s to more complex notions since the 1970s. Its re-conceptualisation by Berry (1997) marks a turning-point, and there are now concurring theories about the nature of integration as an interactive two-way process enacted between immigrant communities and individuals, and their host societies (Berry, 2011; OECD, 2018). Berry describes the way a social dynamic of integration could take place in culturally plural societies, that touches on the notion of inclusive societies in the following way:

*“Integration can only be chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity. Thus a mutual accommodation is required for integration to be attained ...”* (1997, pp.10-11)

In this conception of integration, what is taking place is a complex reciprocal process over time, in which both immigrants and host societies are building intercultural relations and ultimately social cohesion. It captures a dynamic interplay between political and personal factors, implying a trickle-down effect on the lived experiences of integration for young migrants in schools, stemming from national ideologies that translate into immigration policies and refugee resettlement policies, that in turn are evident in how education systems treat immigrant students and their languages, and the ways in which children participate in learning in response. This definition therefore provides one theoretical reference point for this study, in that it captures the duality between dominant and non-dominant groups and the dynamic processes of integration.

### 3.2 *Inclusive education*

The term inclusion originated in special education in the 1990s (UNESCO Salamanca Statement, 1994), and shifted in the early 2000s to encompass principles of Education For All (UNESCO, 2000) and the rights of all children to access quality education that meets their needs. A more systems-oriented take on school integration is found in the *inclusive education* literature, where the responsibility of schools and education systems to engage in practices of inclusion is central, and terms such as “the process of resilience” (Hamilton et al, 2000) and “inclusive values and beliefs” (Powell, 2012) signal the complexity of inclusion as a long-term process that is both individual and collective. The literature seeks to address both sides of the issue taking place in many countries, including France and New Zealand as diverse societies: racism and rejection of “otherness” as an embedded social problem (Humpage, 2009; Schnapper, 2007), and the potential of inclusive educational policies and practices as part of the solution (Johnstone et al, 2018; Flavell, 2019; Kohout-Diaz, 2021).

One important question concerns how “inclusion” can be practiced in schools, and comes from Booth & Ainscow’s *Index for Inclusion* (2002) described in the following way:

*“The Index is...not an alternative to raising achievement but about doing this in a way that builds collaborative relationships and improvements in the learning and teaching environment... It encourages a view of learning in which children and young people are actively involved, integrating what they are taught with their own experience.”(p.1)*

Here, inclusion is characterised as a process not an outcome, in which students’ are equally involved. It is a move away from one-way practices of integration towards two-way ‘interactions of inclusion’. It suggests that inclusive practices are characterised by social flexibility and receptivity instead of rigidity. It may also suggest that societies that conceive of inclusion as a long-term process may experience greater capacity to expand to incorporate change, and view societal networks as growth structures that are nourished and renewed by migratory flows, rather than threatened.

From an education perspective, inclusion goes deeper than policy or practice. It is a long-term social contract honoured through interactions, in which first and heritage languages have a role to play, as well as the national language. At an individual level, the inclusion of the child’s language(s) in schooling enables participation in the two worlds occupied socially and cognitively, and authorises her to make use of existing linguistic and cultural knowledge as part of new learning. Socially, host societies also benefit, as attitudes and practices may become increasingly inclusive over time, and the systemic violence inherent in historical practices of assimilation may be gradually replaced by mutual respect for differences.

## 4. **The main research question**

*Where do educational conditions and individual learning behaviours intersect to enhance academic and social integration, leading to more inclusive learning processes at school?*

The case studies outlined here are drawn from my PhD research that compares the ways that policies in immigration, education and languages are creating particular types of educational environments in the two countries studied (Smythe, 2021). Policies directly inform the ways that schools are organising education for immigrant students. Students themselves are also responding with individual learning behaviours, and it is this intersection between educational conditions and the individual that is scrutinised in these case studies.

## 5. **Materials and Methods**

### 5.1 *Setting and aim*

Two schools participated in the study carried out between 2017-2019 — a *collège* (middle school) in Bordeaux, France and a high school in Wellington, New Zealand. The schools are similarly representative of an ethnically and linguistically diverse student population that reflects the urban demographic in Bordeaux and Wellington. Both schools are public state schools that receive migrant and refugee-background students every year, and offer specialised classes in the language-of-schooling for these students (French in UPE2A classes or English in EL classes respectively).

The study aims to understand the ‘reciprocity’ of school inclusion by observing the child and the learning environment, and where the two intersect in the following ways:

- (a) how the child copes with new learning in the mainstream, and responds to two different learning environments, and
- (b) how two different learning environments support the child’s particular learning needs in terms of inclusion of/through languages.

## 5.2 Participants

Four students were selected as case studies in consultation with their UPE2A and EL teachers<sup>1</sup>, to represent a diversity of cultural backgrounds and languages of origin within the target age range of 13-15 years old. This age range was chosen because immigrant teenagers arriving after the age of 12 are particularly vulnerable to performance penalties in schooling, as well as the obvious language barrier, as indicated by international PISA results:

“... age at arrival has its own effect on reading proficiency: learning a second (or third) language is more difficult for older children, and the school curriculum tends to be freighted with many more competing demands.” (OECD, 2015, p.10)

At the time of the study, all students were in their first year of schooling in either the French or NZ school and had an A1-A2 proficiency level in the language-of-schooling. Family situations were also representative of the diversity of backgrounds amongst the 42 students participating in the larger study: 1 regular migrant, 1 asylum-seeker/*sans papiers*, and 2 refugee-background students. Table 1 below gives a brief profile of each student as at the time of the study.

Table 1: profiles of 4 case studies<sup>2</sup>

| Two students in French school   | Two students in New Zealand school  |
|---|---|
| <p><u>Erlblin, 14 years old, Albania</u><br/>Erlblin has been in France for 6 months with his family. The family’s claim for asylum was recently refused, and they are now “<i>sans papiers</i>”. Erlblin is the only Albanian student in the class and the school does not have teacher aides, so he works independently in mainstream classes as well. He travels an hour each way by bus to school.</p> <p><u>Observations:</u> Maths, Music, Italian, English</p> | <p><u>Abdul, 13 years old, Syria</u><br/>Abdul has been in NZ for one year and arrived as a UNHCR refugee. He has low proficiency in English and trouble concentrating in class, also lacking basic literacy skills such as map-reading. Abdul is supported in mainstream classes by Rania (bilingual Arabic-English teacher aide employed for 15 hours per week).</p> <p><u>Observations:</u> Maths</p>                                |
| <p><u>Matilde, 13 years old, Portugal</u><br/>Matilde has been in France for 5 months with her family as regular migrants from Portugal, where she was regularly schooled. There are 3 other Portuguese students in the same class, including her older sister, and they often interact in Portuguese. Matilde has a lot of positive learning behaviours, is highly sociable and engaged in her learning.</p> <p><u>Observations:</u> Maths</p>                       | <p><u>Maahi, 15 years old, Karen hill tribe, Thailand</u><br/>Maahi has been in NZ for 5 months as a UNHCR refugee, but started school only 5 weeks ago. He speaks Karen as L1 and Thai as L2 and works closely with the 3 other Karen-speaking students. Maahi is supported by Krista (English-speaking teacher aide) in Maths. He is good at Maths, but has gaps in prior schooling.</p> <p><u>Observations:</u> Maths, Computing</p> |

## 5.3 Methodology

An ethnographical methodology combined a range of quantitative and qualitative research tools, including detailed notes from 18 hours of observations in mainstream classes, a student survey given to students in

<sup>1</sup> UPE2A (Unités pédagogiques pour élèves allophones nouvellement arrivés) are classes in which newly-arrived immigrant students in French schools can be enrolled to learn French during the first year after arrival, or longer depending on the school. EL (English Language) are classes in NZ schools which offer English language learning to immigrant students for the duration of their schooling, depending on students’ varying language proficiency and academic requirements.

<sup>2</sup> The names of all participants have been changed to protect anonymity.

simplified language-of-schooling (French or English), and exchanges with each group of students and their UPE2A/EL teacher about their experiences of learning in mainstream classes<sup>3</sup>.

## 5.4 Procedure

### 5.4.1 Observations in classes d'inclusion (French school) and mainstream classes (NZ school)<sup>4</sup>

In the French school, case studies of two students were carried out over 3 weeks — a total of 12 hours observation in mainstream classes (plus 16 hours observation in UPE2A over 12 weeks). In the New Zealand school, two students were observed over a 2-week period, yielding a total of 6 hours observation (plus 20 hours observation in EL over 10 weeks).

A profile of each student's learning behaviours was built up through an ethnographic approach that focused on the child's responses to systemic and environmental variables, in order to see how their learning was impacted, whether they were active participants or passive observers in the mainstream classroom context, how they managed interactions in each context in order to access learning activities, and what their general experience of learning was in mainstream classes.

### 5.4.2 Surveys and interviews

Classroom observations were supported by surveys and interviews in both schools, as follows:

- (a) An identical survey (in French/English) of UPE2A (12 students) and EL (11 students) groups was completed within the whole class context. Questions in the survey asked about students' home-school languages, how often students work in L1 at school and for what purposes, what teachers do that helps them learn, and what learning strategies students themselves employ in mainstream learning.
- (b) A survey asking 10 questions was given to mainstream class teachers of participating students. Questions asked about teacher training, pedagogical strategies, difficulties observed for the student in mainstream learning, comments on integration, and how well the student is achieving in the subject area.

Information gathered from surveys was used to understand the experiences of both students and teachers in mainstream learning, as well as for cross-correlation of data quantitatively and qualitatively between the two schools. For example, all students from the French class responded "*très souvent [very often]*" to the question "*Copier les notes du tableau [Copy notes off the board]*" as a learning strategy, whereas only 5 students (out of 11 surveyed) from the NZ group responded "*often*" to the same question, instead favouring "*Ask my desk partner when I don't understand*" as a learning strategy. This may indicate differing organisation of learning activities — students were encouraged to work individually in the French classroom rather than interactively, as in the NZ context.

## 6. Results

Observations of the four case study students learning in mainstream classes looked at two areas: classroom organisation (seating, teaching and learning style, classroom culture); and language use by students and teachers (language-of-schooling, first languages).

### 6.1 Classroom organisation: teacher-directed vs. student-centred classrooms

In the French school, teachers mostly 'teach from the front', and Matilde and Erlblin found it very challenging to interact with the teacher in the whole class context, preferring to stay silent. Other UPE2A students reported a similar lack of participation in mainstream classes, saying that this was partly due to affective factors — not liking (or not feeling part of) the class, or fear of speaking in front of the group. In Erlblin's case, he sometimes asked questions before or after class, as he was unable to get the help he needed during class time. Furthermore, teacher-directed learning seemed to restrict interactions between local and immigrant students, with the effect that Matilde and Erlblin had minimal (to no) interaction with

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<sup>3</sup> Further data on students' plurilingual interactions in UPE2A and EL classes was collected during 10-12 week periods of school visits in both countries, which is not treated in this article (see Smythe 2021 for full description).

<sup>4</sup> *Classes d'inclusion* (French school) and mainstream classes (NZ school) are the terms used for classes where immigrant students follow the national curriculum learning with their local peers.

their local peers. They were actively engaged, but relied heavily on their receptive language skills, rather than on interactive participation. Their integration into mainstream classes under these conditions was characterised by passive learning behaviours — silent observation, listening, minimal hand-raising to ask or answer a question, very little (or no) asking classmates for help with understanding the work, and little direct interaction with the teacher — which contrasted with their more collaborative, active style of working in the UPE2A classes.

The classroom culture in the New Zealand school has an “open plan”, student-centred feel. Students were seated at tables in small groups and worked interactively. Teachers managed students in a variety of less teacher-centred ways — teachers moved around the room helping students in their groups, students were kept busy and expected to self-manage, to interact with each other in learning, and to complete work within the time-frame. Teachers had more time to spend with each group and were more accessible for one-on-one interactions. In this setting, Maahi and Abdul were supported by one-on-one help from bilingual or English-speaking teacher aides. However while they had high levels of interaction about their work with teacher aides and in this way were active within the mainstream learning context, they did not reap the potential language and inclusion benefits of peer interaction with local students.

## 6.2 Language

### 6.2.1 Teachers make language-of-schooling easier

Surveys revealed that newly-arrived students in mainstream classes in both schools find it helpful when teachers simplify language-of-schooling, verbally and on worksheets. To the question “*What do teachers do that helps you to learn in mainstream classes? / Qu’est ce que font les enseignants pour t’aider à apprendre?*”, students responded:

- “*Ecrire sur le tableau [Write on the board]/ écrire les mots [write the words].*
- *Les profs parlent avec moi [The teachers talk with me] / Ils me donnent plus attention [They pay more attention to me] / Talk to me slow.”*
- *Ils m’expliquent les mots [They explain the words to me] / Charte pour les verbes [A verbs chart] / They describe words, they give examples.*
- *Ils me donnent des fiches plus facile à comprendre [They give me handouts that are easier to understand] / Mme X donne le travail pour demain [Mrs. X gives me the work for tomorrow].*
- *On me explique le travaille à faire [They explain the work to do] / The teacher explain for me.”*

These similar responses highlight a common experience for students regardless of other factors such as whether language-of schooling is English or French, or whether classrooms are organised as teacher-centred or student-centred. Both groups of students reported that their learning is more effective when teachers work with vocabulary, simplify the language of worksheets, speak slowly and simply, communicate directly with them to explain the work, and give homework related to the next lesson so that they have time to prepare before class.

### 6.2.2 Teachers interacting with students

A further point observed about teachers and language use, was that when teachers interacted one-on-one with newly-arrived students about their learning, it seemed to enable the student to participate more actively or to advance more easily on a task.

As a first example, Maahi’s Computing teacher checked work one-on-one and gave corrective feedback directly to each student, rather than in the whole class context or through the teacher aide. I observed Maahi in a Year 10 class (one year below his age cohort) where he was assisted by Krista, an English-speaking teacher aide. At the beginning of the class, the teacher gave a short presentation on how to solve a computer-data-language problem, then the class worked on computers for 50 minutes on their choice from several proposed activities, while the teacher circulated. The following extract illustrates a simple yet meaningful interaction (23/05/2019):

T = Teacher, M = Maahi

Teacher comes over to Maahi.

T: Did you get that working?

Krista replies in M's place. T replies but focuses on working directly with M. T checks the rows that M has been working on, and finds an error.

T to M : Where do you think the arrow is? Click that one.

M clicks.

M is listening to T's instructions, and replies: That one. (affirming his understanding)

T checks M's work saying: That's ok, that's ok. Did you agree?

M nods.

T: That's good, fantastic.

Although the exchange is brief, the teacher's interaction with Maahi allows him to interact meaningfully in the mainstream class context, to show the teacher that he is engaged with the activity and can receive feedback and correct errors, and the teacher in turn praises Maahi's understanding of new learning.

### 6.2.3 Reducing 'the learning burden' of language-of-schooling

A further type of teacher language use, reducing 'the learning burden' of language-of-schooling (Lucas, Villegas & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008), was observed more consistently in the NZ mainstream class context than in the French *classes d'inclusion*. The NZ school had a number of systemic and pedagogical strategies in place for simplifying language so that immigrant students could focus on content, such as:

- Maahi was able to work from a Maths booklets in simplified language and content at a level of the curriculum appropriate to his prior schooling, rather than the curriculum level of his age group (a Maths department initiative).
- Abdul was supported in Maths classes by a bilingual teacher aide funded by the NZ government's *Refugee Flexible Funding Pool* (Ministry of Education website), and Maahi worked with an English-speaking teacher aide (on a student internship programme).

In the French school, the learning burden of language was comparatively higher in *classes d'inclusion*, as without teacher aides or group learning structures, students were immersed in a dense, monolingual context. Teachers in the French school were generally in favour of this 'sink or swim' approach to learning in *classes d'inclusion*, as reflected in the teacher survey. In answer to the survey question "*Pour vous, qu'est ce qu'est important dans l'apprentissage des EANA en classes d'inclusion? (What do you think is important for immigrant students in their mainstream learning?)*" teachers responded that their view was not to differentiate to accommodate language as 'a special learning need' but rather to treat newly-arrived immigrants like all other students:

- "*Pas de difference avec les autres élèves: la volonté, la persévérance et la curiosité.*"  
[No different from the other students: willingness, perseverance and curiosity.]
- "*C'est selon son investissement personnel (participation orale et travail personnel).*"  
[It's about his/her personal investment (verbal participation and individual work).]
- "*Mêmes supports et mêmes exigences.*"  
[The same support and the same rigour]
- "*La maîtrise du français.*"  
[Mastery of the French language]

(Teacher survey in French school, Jan 2019)

Despite these 'pro-non-differentiation' responses, some teachers in the French school used language very skilfully to reduce the learning burden, and interestingly these were teachers who were themselves plurilingual (a Maths teacher of migrant background, the foreign languages teachers). This indicates the

human resource that bi-plurilingual teachers represent in schools, as they can bring a wealth of linguistic and cultural knowledge to the profession. Furthermore, where teacher education programmes are able to reinforce this with practices for working plurilingually and interculturally in the classroom, the potential to capitalise on teachers' existing skills and experiences is heightened (Garcia & Kleyn, 2013).

#### 6.2.4 Students' strategies when language-of-schooling proficiency is low

Further student survey responses to questions about students' own learning strategies in mainstream classes revealed that in both schools, the lower the student's proficiency in the language-of-schooling, the less active they were in seeking help for learning. Most students surveyed were at a beginner level in the language-of-schooling and showed more tendency to rely on passive learning behaviours, staying silent in class rather than asking for help, as results in Table 2 reflect.

**Question:** "What do you do to help your learning in mainstream classes? / *Qu'est ce que tu fais en classes d'inclusion pour apprendre?*"

Table 2: student survey results — passive and active learning strategies<sup>5</sup> in mainstream classes

| Learning strategies  | French school       | NZ school    |
|--|---------------------|--------------|
| <b>PASSIVE</b>   |                     |              |
|  | <i>Très souvent</i> | <i>Often</i> |
| Listen to my teachers / <i>Écouter mes enseignants</i>   | 12                  | 8            |
| Copy notes off the whiteboard / <i>Copier les notes du tableau</i>                                 | 11                  | 5            |
| <b>ACTIVE</b>  |                     |              |
|  | <i>Très souvent</i> | <i>Often</i> |
| Raise my hand when I don't understand / <i>Lever ma main quand je ne comprends pas</i>             | 7                   | 4            |
| Ask my neighbour when I don't understand / <i>Demander à ma camarade quand je ne comprends pas</i> | 3                   | 4            |
| Speak with the teacher before/after class / <i>Parler avec le prof avant/après le cours</i>        | 1                   | 0            |

This tendency to be silent and passive in mainstream classes is not surprising. They are after all newcomers with little proficiency in the language-of-schooling, and are building receptive skills in the language through listening in class, and copying down notes. However it was surprising that more students did not "often" seek out the teacher's help before or after class (9 students in the French school responded "*parfois*" and 2 "*jamais*", while 8 students in the NZ school responded "sometimes" and 1 "never"). It therefore also seems important for immigrant students to gain access to a little one-on-one time with their subject teachers, and that they be encouraged to check in with their teachers after class to clarify understanding. Students in the NZ school have an exceptional learning situation, where they are often being supported with one-on-one help from a (bilingual) teacher aide, and therefore this kind of extra input from subject teachers may be less crucial. However in the 'sink-or-swim' mainstream experience in the French education system, students are more reliant on teacher input to support their understanding, learning processes, and eventual success in integrating academically.

#### 6.2.5 Non-language based methods of learning

Unsurprisingly, teachers reported higher levels of student success in subjects that rely less on language to access content. For example, the French Sports teacher reported that a teaching strategy he uses is "*verbal explanation (without translation) and demonstration*". The teacher further states that this type of

<sup>5</sup> For these categories, I simply define passive strategies are situations where the learner is listening, reading, or silent; and active strategies involve the learner seeking help.

teaching is “*easier in Sports, as the body can be used*”, according to his teacher survey response as follows:

*“Explication orale (pas de traduction) et démonstration. C’est plus facile en EPS, où le corps entre en jeu”* (Teacher survey, Jan 2019)

Similarly in the NZ school, teachers reported that immigrant students did “*very well in practical, hands-on work*” and when teachers use “*non-language based instruction — diagrams and demonstration*” (Teacher survey, April 2019). This suggests that teachers of some subjects are more aware of strategies to support academic integration for newly-arrived immigrant students, and certain subjects lend themselves to non-language based methods of learning.

## **7. Discussion**

These results illustrate how two variables — classroom organisation and language — can significantly impact on students’ academic and social integration into mainstream learning during the newly-arrived phase. So what can we observe about best practices from an inclusive perspective?

### **7.1 Classroom organisation: teacher-directed vs. student-centred classrooms**

The two schools who participated in this study organised mainstream classrooms differently, with consequent effects on student inclusion. The teacher-directed and student-centred cultures have evolved out of differing views of the role of teachers and students, summed up from a New Zealand perspective in the following way:

*“What we’re looking at is a teacher creating a community of learning — the relationships within that community hold the power, whereas in the French system the teacher holds the power and the knowledge. In the New Zealand system, the teacher doesn’t have to hold all the knowledge — this will impact on how teachers see the immigrant students, as they [the students] have knowledge that can be brought to the situation. The skill of the teacher is how they craft the situation so that those funds of knowledge can be tapped.”* (interview with NZ teacher educator, 11/4/2019)

This helps to explain two different cultural perspectives that impact on teaching style and consequently academic integration.

Social integration is another key area affected by classroom organisation. In both mainstream learning contexts, immigrant students were equally isolated both academically and socially from their local peers. How can schools include newly-arrived immigrant students, so that friendships are fostered with local students, with a view to cultivating intercultural understanding, language acquisition, and social cohesion within the school community? One way is through classroom interactions (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.41). Within both these types of classroom organisation, teachers could build in short, regular amounts of interactive learning between students, so that newly-arrived students have some contact with their local peers. For example, during the last 5-7 minutes of the lesson, discussing key points from the lesson in groups and writing a summary in bullet points. For immigrant students, this type of activity is learning-rich in both language and content, as well as providing a moment of interaction with local peers that begins the mutual integration process.

In both contexts therefore, it seems important to adapt teaching and learning approaches so that newly-arrived immigrant students are more easily included in their cohort (for social integration) through opportunities for interaction with native-speaker peers (Gass & Mackey 2015); at the same time supporting curriculum learning and language-of-schooling acquisition (for academic integration) (Baker, 2001).

### **7.2 Language use (language-of-schooling, first languages)**

The case studies in both school contexts highlight two common areas of language use that affect students’ integration into school learning: teachers’ language use, and how students use language differently in mainstream classes and UPE2A/EL classes.

**7.2.1 Teachers’ language use** in both schools had a significant impact on how accessible learning was for newly-arrived immigrant students. In Matilde’s case, the Maths teacher in the French school reduced the language-of-schooling barrier by consistently combining language and content through use of a

range of simple linguistic strategies: simple sentences, repetition, having local students write answers on the board, correcting grammatical and spelling errors even though Maths is not a language class, raising student awareness that each subject has its own particular ‘language’, developing from oral to written through student input, and defining specialist vocabulary. This is one example of a teacher applying the principle that “*every subject teacher is also a language teacher*” (Fan, 2013) — an approach that made new mathematical learning more accessible for Matilde, as well as for local students.

In the NZ case studies, teacher aides often scaffolded learning for students by asking simple questions that helped to break the task down into manageable steps. As students responded to these simple questions, they understood how to approach the task and were quickly able to work independently. In this way, teacher aides effectively responded to students’ initial non-comprehension (a form of passive question in itself) by modelling language strategies for reducing the task’s complexity, that students could eventually adopt and internalise. It’s a kind of ‘teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime’ approach!

Both of these cases show that even in settings where barriers to academic integration are high — monolingual settings or teacher-directed classrooms — teachers can use language in ways that help immigrant students to access content more easily.

7.2.2 *The second common area of language use* in both schools that seemed to have an impact on students’ integration into learning, was how students themselves used language. There was a marked difference between how students used their plurilingualism actively as a learning tool in the UPE2A/EL class contexts where all students are learners of the language-of-schooling, and how they preferred passive learning strategies in the monolingual mainstream class contexts. This point is highly interesting, as it strongly suggests that in learning spaces where students can work plurilingually they become interactive learners, showing adept use of their linguistic repertoire for a variety of learning purposes (see Smythe 2021 for findings on plurilingualism in this study).

In contrast to the active plurilingual learning approaches that students initiated in their UPE2A/EL classes, the same students were often passive learners in mainstream classes, where they tended to learn monolingually. This finding was similar in both schools, however more pronounced in the French school. In both schools, monolingualism was normalised in mainstream classes, and in this context the four young migrants observed as case studies were generally passive in the whole class context (interacting only within a working bubble with the teacher aide in the NZ school; and silent in their isolated bubble in the French school).

A key difference between the two school systems is that in the French school, newly-arrived immigrant students are treated like every other student in their mainstream learning — they are immersed in the language-of-schooling and expected to access content with little extra language support; whereas in the NZ school system, it is recognised that immigrant students need extra support through bilingual or individual support. A philosophical difference between countries may partly explain this: the French notion of “*égalité — pas de différence entre élèves*” and the NZ approach of differentiating for diversity.

In summary, these collated findings from four case studies in mainstream classes, correlated with observations of the same students and their cohort in UPE2A/EL classes, show that in learning spaces where students can work plurilingually they become interactive learners, whereas in monolingual spaces they tend to rely on passive learning. In teachers’ views in both contexts, students can participate more actively and succeed under monolingual conditions if non-language based methods of learning are available to them. Students themselves identify a number of language-based strategies that subject teachers can use that are helpful for them, and these are affirmed by observations of students participating more actively in mainstream classes when teachers adapt their language, and interact directly with the student.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, these four case studies have explored similarities and differences in how integration into mainstream classes / *classes d’inclusion* during the early phase after arrival is managed differently in a New Zealand school and a French school, and goes further to compare the effects of classroom organisation and language use on students’ experiences. Students in both schools have similar profiles (age, diversity of

countries of origin, levels of proficiency in language-of-schooling, existing plurilingual skills), however their learning was observed within two different educational contexts. The ways in which student learning was impacted within these two settings show that students participate more and learn more effectively when they can activate their plurilingual repertoires for learning purposes (when working with a bilingual teacher aide, for example), or when the learning burden of language-of-schooling is reduced through a range of systemic or teacher-initiated supports (simplified Maths booklets or adapted teacher language, for example). As a result, this study has been able to identify, describe and explain a set of inclusive language-based practices to support newly-arrived immigrant students in mainstream learning.

In response to the research question “*Where do educational conditions and individual learning behaviours intersect to enhance academic and social integration, leading to more inclusive learning processes at school?*” findings highlight that conditions in educational environments that are conducive to successful student learning are those that perceive integration as ‘a reciprocal process’, and act accordingly. That is, where schools are open and receptive to the languages of immigrant students, and show this through finding ways for newly-arrived students to participate in a variety of ways that include their home languages, as well as learning about (and in) the language-of-schooling through diverse approaches that treat language as a skill area to develop for both teachers and students. Where this may become reciprocal can be seen in how students responded to the survey and class discussion with the researcher and UPE2A/EL teachers. Students were able to identify their individual learning strategies and highlight language-based teaching approaches that they find helpful in mainstream learning. Responses were similar in both the French and NZ schools — the central element being interactions with the teacher (in both oral and written forms) in language adapted to the student’s level of proficiency.

Throughout this study, it has become clear that language(s) plays a crucial role in school inclusion and classroom learning processes in many ways: the barrier inherent for immigrant students arriving into monolingual education systems, how language can be adapted to support academic and social integration, whether students are active or passive learners in response to language(s) in their learning environment, how teachers use language-of-schooling in the classroom to make content more accessible, how teachers and teacher aides can reduce the learning burden of language-based tasks, how aware teachers are of non-language-based teaching strategies, the key role of bilingual staff in schools, and the various ways that students’ own plurilingualism finds its place at school. Some of the ways in which language use and plurilingual approaches to learning provide avenues for successful schooling are evidenced in this study, and concur with other research supporting the benefits of plurilingual education (Castellotti & Moore, 2010; Zarate, Lévy & Kramsch (eds), 2008, for example). These findings should be tested in further studies with newly-arrived immigrant teenagers in other educational environments.

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