Multilingual Education for Migrant Children in Europe: New Approaches

Report of the Rutu Roundtable Meeting
6 November 2015
hosted by Utrecht University

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**Introduction**

On 6 November 2015, the Rutu Foundation organized a Roundtable on Multilingual Education for Migrant Children in Europe which was hosted by the University of Utrecht. The aim was to bring together policy-makers, researchers, practitioners, donor agencies and other stakeholders from around Europe to share new approaches and discuss the opportunities and barriers to introducing mother tongue based multilingual education for migrant children in Europe.

Despite the many social economic benefits, multilingualism continues to be associated with problems and disadvantage, particularly in education. The project “Fostering the Multilingual Talents of Migrant Children in the Netherlands and Suriname” was initiated by the Rutu Foundation as part of a larger effort to increase awareness about the many benefits of supporting and strengthening the multilingual skills of migrant children in schools. We believe that an exchange of experiences between the global North and South has much to offer to education policy makers, teacher training institutes and teachers. We also want to make linkages with the international donor community and the private sector: what are the language skills expected from future employees, what role does the private sector have in supporting the linguistic needs of future workers? And how can we engage the (international) donor community in these efforts?

We do this by organizing a series of meetings, bringing together policy makers, teachers, parents, donors, local businesses and other stakeholders to discuss what is needed to stimulate the multilingual talents of young learners with a migrant background through an education which is linguistically and culturally responsive to their needs. Our partner abroad is the Christelijk Pedagogisch Instituut Paramaribo (CPI). Together with the CPI and the University of Utrecht, the Rutu Foundation is taking part in a teacher training project funded by the **Twinning Facility**.

The current project builds on the Twinning initiative but widens the scope of the target audience, namely to include the donor community and the private sector (local businesses).

**An Urgent Topic**

In his welcome address, Frank Wijnen, director of the Utrecht Institute of Linguistics, Utrecht University, underlined the urgency of addressing the issue of multilingual education in the current European context. With the current influx from migrants from all over the world the Netherlands are rapidly becoming multicultural and multilingual. And this is not a temporary status. “Our classrooms are multilingual and this will be the standard, the new normal”, he said. Wijnen also highlighted that the Roundtable serves as the starting point of a new collaboration between the Rutu Foundation, Utrecht University and the Christian Pedagogical Institute of Paramaribo (CPI), in Suriname. The aim of this Twinning project between Suriname and The Netherlands is to strengthen teacher competences in cultural diversity and multilingual education (read more [here](#)). Wijnen stressed that postcolonial countries such as Suriname, with their multicultural multilingual societies, can act as a mirror for Europe where educators are faced with the same challenges.
Rutu Roadmap: making mother tongue education the norm

The Rutu Foundation launched its new strategy aimed at making mother tongue education the norm worldwide, called the Rutu Roadmap. The strategy was presented by Ellen-Rose Kambel (director Rutu Foundation) and Rahzeb Choudhury from Lifelong Inspiration and starts from the definition of mother tongue education as an inclusive form of schooling that utilizes the language(s) that children are most familiar with and which includes learning the dominant language of the school, region or state. Because of the many benefits offered by mother tongue education, overcoming the barriers is essential if we hope to create equal opportunities for all children. By creating a global platform for mother tongue education, we can bring together organizations and stakeholders, increase possibilities for networking, building capacity and for more effective communication and lobby, ultimately leading to more mother tongue education for more children worldwide.

An important step towards this goal is to bridge the gap between academia and practice. Too much valuable research is currently hidden in expensive scientific journals, couched in academic jargon and generally out-of-reach for teachers, policy makers and parents. Rutu seeks to bridge this gap by publishing best practice guidelines, case studies and other how-to-guides for education practitioners and parents; by creating an accessible free database of the research results and by organizing events (both live and online) such as this Roundtable.

View the powerpoint presentation.

Watch the video.

Multilingual Classrooms: a new report from the European Commission

Ana-Maria Stan of the European Commission presented a recent report commissioned by the European Commission to assess ‘what works’ for migrant children who speak a different language at home than the language of instruction, enabling them to achieve results that match their potential. One of the report’s key conclusions is that schools need to take into account the mother tongue of every child. Conclusive data shows that supporting children’s individual multilingualism improves their competence in the main language of instruction as well as other cognitive skills. The report provides recommendations aimed at policy makers, parents, teachers and the European Commission and can be downloaded here.

View the powerpoint presentation.
Translanguaging: a powerful tool

The fact is that multilingual classrooms are the reality today, especially in urban areas. New approaches have emerged across Europe which demonstrate that it is entirely feasible to overcome the practical challenges to mother tongue-based multilingual. In her presentation, Emmanuelle LePichon, researcher at Utrecht University and advisory board member of the Rutu Foundation, discussed translanguaging as one of the ways to build on the diversity of languages and literacy practices that children bring to school. Translanguaging practices have emerged in Europe in the last few years. Translanguaging comes from the idea that children may be able to transfer the skills they have acquired in one language to another language, more or less on their own; they only need to be encouraged to do so. Instead of avoiding children’s mother tongues, teachers should welcome the mother tongue and value children’s multilingual resources within the classroom. By enabling children to use their own languages in the classroom, translanguaging practices allow children to participate more, causing them to be less anxious and less frustrated. For example if the teacher does not speak the language of the pupils, the children may be invited to discuss a problem among themselves in their mother tongue. An added benefit is that it welcomes the parents and caregivers into the schools, increasing their involvement in the school career of their children.

Both LePichon and Stan showed video material taped by Prof. Natalie Auger from France as an example of what translanguaging practices may look like in a multilingual classroom. The videos can be viewed here.

View the powerpoint presentation.

Watch the video.

Mother tongue education in Sweden

A different example of successful mother tongue education practices was presented by Amor Segerhammar & Ann-Charlotte Karnermo from Sweden, where mother tongue education is embedded in the national legislation and organized by the municipalities. The Language Center at Gothenburg for example serves more than 11.000 students and employs 300 mother tongue teachers representing 70 languages. Research has shown that students who regularly receive mother tongue education have higher marks in Swedish, English and mathematics, have better command of Swedish than other multilingual students and are more confident and enjoy school better than other multilingual students. Despite these positive results, mother tongue teaching in Sweden faces challenges such as teaching taking place outside school hours, insufficient cooperation with the other teachers and the challenge of recruiting trained teachers.

View the powerpoint presentation.
Making the case for mother tongue education with practical tools

In his presentation, Orhan Agirdag (University of Leuven) discussed the enormous barriers facing mother tongue education in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. One study found a large majority of teachers who agreed that non-dutch speaking pupils should not be allowed to speak their home language at school. Of the almost 700 teachers interviewed, less than 7% agreed that children should be offered the opportunity to study their mother tongue at school. It comes as welcome news then, that it is possible to change the negative mind sets by providing them with tools on multilingualism. Agirdag demonstrated two of these tools: E-validiv (digital lesson materials in multiple languages) and Metrotaal, a tool which supports schools who want to create an open language policy.

View the powerpoint presentation.

Watch the video.

Profiting from multilingualism: the LUCIDE project

Jacomine Nortier (researcher University Utrecht) presented results of the LUCIDE project, a network project which stands for Languages in Urban Communities Integration and Diversity for Europe. Research collected data on the multilingual realities and practices in 18 cities, including Utrecht. This resulted in 18 city reports and 6 toolkits on multilingualism. The toolkits contain practical information for policy makers but also employers on how to achieve the maximum benefit from their multilingual citizens. A particularly relevant toolkit for our participants was of course the toolkit on education. The Toolkit provides useful background information about the benefits of multilingual education and is filled with concrete ideas and suggestions for teachers, school leaders, parents and teacher trainers on how they might encourage the different languages spoken by pupils at home. These ideas and suggestions all came from real practices in these 18 cities and are a valuable resource for policy makers and teachers. Nortier concluded her talk by emphasizing the importance of building a network so we know what is already there.

View the powerpoint presentation.

Watch the video.

Photo: Mimi from MAD Mothers
A missed opportunity: experience of a Dutch/Turkish corporate lawyer

Akin Alan, a corporate lawyer from Utrecht, shared his personal experience as the son of Turkish immigrants who was born in the Netherlands. To his advantage, his parents sent both him and his siblings to Turkish reading and writing lessons from a young age. After finishing high school, Alan graduated from law school and discovered the benefits of being able to provide legal assistance to Turkish companies who wish to do business in the Netherlands. His Turkish corporate clients are able to communicate in English or French, but they prefer to have a Turkish speaking lawyer who understands not only Turkish culture but also the underlying and unspoken emotions that go with speaking a language as your mother tongue. Unfortunately, Alan has difficulty finding Dutch/Turkish bilingual law graduates who have the Turkish reading and writing skills in that are required to practice law. As a result he is forced to hire lawyers from Turkey to assist his office in the Netherlands. So instead of investing in the Dutch economy, Alan said, we are investing in the Turkish economy. Clearly a missed opportunity: “We should have invested in this”.

Watch the video.

Mother tongue mastery as prerequisite for the growing importance of translation

Co-founder and director of AVB translations, one of the largest translation companies in the Netherlands, Joël Sigling discussed the growing business of translation. With ever increasing multilingualism and with the advent of Google Translate, translation has become even more
important: everybody expects to have everything translated now. The industry is currently worth 38 billion a year, and expected to reach 47 billion by 2018. For the translation industry, mother tongue speakers are crucial and teaching children perfect command of their mother language essential.

View the powerpoint presentation.

Watch the video.

Break out Sessions

During the smaller sessions in the afternoon, participants discussed different topics, ranging from defining best practices for mother tongue education, to drafting recommendations to the Dutch government in response to a new policy framework called Education 2032.

Conclusions

Marco Ligtvoet, director of the Christelijk Pedagogisch Instituut Paramaribo (CPI), a teacher trainer college from Suriname and one of the organizing partners of this Roundtable, wrapped up the session together with Paul Wolvekamp, chair of the Board of the Rutu Foundation.

Ligtvoet underlined the need to grow, to learn from the past and to move forward. Among others, we should keep the majority speakers on board. They benefit from multilingual education too and we need to emphasize this. Also, role models are
important, such as Akin Alan. He expressed his hope for the future, namely to keep the momentum of today going.

Paul Wolvekamp (chair of the Supervisory Board of the Rutu Foundation) underscored the importance that this is a joint journey and that we need each other. He also mentioned that we should not forget the gender dimension, pointing out that the majority here today are women. Wolvekamp raised the Dutch EU chairmanship as of January 2016 and suggested to send a joint letter. He urged the participants to do more, there is all the reason to do more. And to bring in the children, their sense of humor, but also their experiences with homesickness. Even children who are born here feel the nostalgia from their parents but majority speakers may not be aware of this. It is all a matter of communication: “So many people made the effort to come here, this is a start to grow this community, in a systematic way, sharing information, sharing tools and building advocacy”.

A few reactions from the participants

Afterwards, we asked the participants their reactions which were collected anonymously.

Take-home message or what the participants learned:

- Good to know that a lot of people have the same goals
- More collaboration is needed, we have to unite to bring out a firm voice
- There remains a lot to be done, how to change the mindset?
- New ideas and approaches for mother tongue teaching
- There is much need for wise conversation and empowerment at the local level

What did they miss:

- More school practice examples
- More policy makers
- More diversity (people of color)
- Nothing! Perhaps more participatory methods to allow for interaction

Other remarks:

- Let’s continue!
- Educational, useful, helpful, empowering
- To be repeated!

The overall organization was rated ‘excellent’ by 72% of the respondents and ‘good’ by the remaining 23%.
Follow-up

In response to the suggestions from the participants, we organized two follow-up events: a panel discussion in Amsterdam and a webinar on translinguaging.

Panel discussion with multilingual migrant youth on language discrimination and multilingualism

The panel discussion was held on 25 February 2016 in the Lloyd Hotel Amsterdam and featured four speakers with multilingual and migration backgrounds. The goal was to hear the voices of the migrant youth themselves: what are their experiences in school? How does it feel when your mother languages are not part of the regular school day and are sometimes even expressly forbidden? A short film was produced which can be viewed [here](#).

Webinar on translinguaging

The webinar was originally planned for December 2015, but due to various circumstances it had to be postponed until March 17. During this webinar, Emmanuelle LePichon will discuss the pedagogic concept of translinguaging which she introduced at the Roundtable meeting. The webinar will be held in Dutch and will be open for teachers and school directors in the Netherlands, Suriname and the Dutch Antilles.
Programme Roundtable Meeting Utrecht

08.30 / REGISTRATION

09.15 / WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
Frank Wijnen, director, Utrecht Institute of Linguistics

09:45 / THE RUTU ROADMAP
Ellen-Rose Kambel, Rutu Foundation
Rahzeb Choudhury, Lifelong Inspiration

10.15 / LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS
An-Maria Stan, European Commission

10.30 / QUESTION AND ANSWER

10.50 / REFRESHMENT BREAK

11.20 / PRACTITIONER TALKS
A series of pointed talks about the experiences of multilingual classrooms and teacher training.

11.20 / REINVENTING THE CLASSROOM: THE CHALLENGE OF A GLOBALIZED EUROPE
Emmanuelle Le Pichon, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

11.35 / DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR MULTILINGUAL CLASSES IN BELGIUM
Orhan Agirdag, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

11.50 / LANGUAGE POLICY FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN IN SWEDEN
Amor Segerhammar and Ann-Charlotte Karnermo, Language Center, Gothenburg, Sweden

12.05 / QUESTION AND ANSWER

12.30 / LUNCH

14.00 / POLICY MAKERS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR
Talks on research findings on the effects of current education policy on migrant youth, the required changes in policy, and some of the economic benefits of mother tongue education.

14.15 / HOW CAN WE PROFIT FROM MULTILINGUALISM? GOOD PRACTICES FROM THE EU-LUCIDE PROJECT
Jacomine Nortier, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

14.30 / MULTILINGUALISM IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR
Akin Alan, Manz Legal, Utrecht, The Netherlands
Joël Sigling, AVB Translations, The Netherlands

14.50-15.10 / QUESTION AND ANSWER

15.10 / REFRESHMENT BREAK

15.40 / BREAKOUT SESSIONS
Four concurrent breakout discussions to review and improve specific recommendations on how to advance mother tongue education.

16:40 / CLOSING STATEMENT: Paul Wolvekamp, Chair Rutu Foundation Supervisory Board, and, Marco Ligtvoet, Director Teacher Trainer Institute CPI, Paramaribo, Suriname.
# List of Participants

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<td>Karijn</td>
<td>Teachers College Windesheim</td>
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<td>Ellen-Rose</td>
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<td>Nik-Nak multilingual books</td>
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<td>Beppie</td>
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