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Article

Multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism

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Abstract

This article investigates how multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism unfolds as a dynamic phenomenon among educators in Danish and Swedish preschools and primary schools. Reflexive dialogues were produced with educators in three different action research studies. These dialogues were analysed by employing conceptual approaches of educator professionalism, equity pedagogy, and multicultural and multilingual education. The analyses show how the educators: (i) critically examine their constructions of pupils/children, (ii) develop increasingly broad views on how knowledge and learning can be productively produced in classroom interaction, and (iii) show awareness about societal language ideologies. The educators' nuanced reflections on their own pedagogical practices displayed contradictions and ambivalences. We argue that the educators' reflections point to possible renewals of pedagogical practices that place multiculturalism and multilingualism at the centre of educator professionalism.

Keywords: Educator professionalism, Multicultural professionalism, Multilingual professionalism, Reflexive

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dialogue, Equity

Introduction

This article investigates how multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism unfolds among educators in preschools and primary schools in Denmark and Sweden[1]. In these societal contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity, pupil populations span varieties of ethnicities, cultural and linguistic practices. Educators must respond pedagogically to this demographic diversity (Krulatz et al., 2024; Lundberg et al., 2023; Tkachenko et al., 2024).

Drawing on an understanding of *educator professionalism* as dynamic and changeable, the article focuses on how educators negotiate and develop their professionalism based on analyses and critiques of their pedagogical practices. Educator professionalism is a contested term that is used in various ways in discussions regarding what educators' work is or should be about (Mausethagen & Smeby, 2016; Sachs, 2016). In its current understanding, educator professionalism is an occupational discourse that is constructed in discussions among educators. It emerges from collegial and cooperative relations, pre- and in-service teacher education, workplace socialisation, educators' professional autonomy and discretionary judgement, and societal discourse (Evetts, 2011; Lefstein et al., 2020).

In continuation of this understanding of educator professionalism, we understand *multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism* as a discourse produced among educators in discussions on how to professionally respond to cultural and linguistic diversity in pupil bodies. Thus, multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism is not simply a matter of pedagogical methods; rather, it emerges from educators' reflections on dilemmas, challenges and opportunities they encounter in everyday practice and the educational responses needed to support equity in education (Anderstaf et al., 2021; Jaspers, 2022).

Situating the study

Research on multicultural and multilingual education includes various historical and contemporary approaches that aim to: (i) understand inequity in education with concepts such as majority/minority, normal/deviant, monolingualism/multilingualism, whiteness, human rights, discrimination and structural ideologies, and (ii) create more equitable schooling for all children (Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009;

[1] We use the term *educator* for teachers in preschools and primary schools, including *pedagogues* (the Danish term for preschool teachers).

Smith, 2020; Tualaulelei & Halse, 2021). Influenced by globalisation, standardisation and changing immigration patterns, this field has developed much in recent decades, and the focus has expanded beyond race, ethnicity, language and social class to gender, religion, ability, respect of differences and other aspects (Nieto, 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2019). This development can be seen as an increasing orientation towards the complexity of educational problems.

Roughly speaking, previous research on multicultural and multilingual education falls within three positions. One position understands cultural and linguistic inequity from a critical sociological approach, criticising institutions and teaching practices for maintaining monocultural and monolingual norms at the cost of pupils' multifaceted linguistic and cultural experiences (De Fina, 2017; Vildlyng, 2023). Another position focuses on how educators create productive learning environments through inclusion of pupils' entire linguistic and cultural repertoires (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Flores & García, 2013), while a third position attends to how educators respond to complexity and dilemmas related to language and culture in education (Anderstaf et al., 2021; Bregnbæk & Jørgensen, 2020; Røthing, 2019). This article is mainly situated within the third position, with a particular interest in how educators' multicultural and multilingual "courses of action" emerge from "their own thinking", critical professional capability and discretionary judgement in a broad sense (Jaspers, 2022, p. 290).

Cultural and linguistic norms of policies are never enacted in neutral or simplistic ways; rather, they are negotiated and interpreted by institutions and educators in everyday pedagogical practices. Educators orientate their pedagogical practice towards the different policies, interests and needs they encounter when cooperating with pupils, parents, colleagues, leaders and national authorities. Thus, educators daily navigate contradictory expectations and norms (Goossens, 2022). This article takes this dilemma-oriented stance to pedagogical practice. By combining concepts of educator professionalism with theoretical approaches to multicultural and multilingual education in analyses of educators' discussions of their professional practices, we investigate how educators become aware of complex pedagogical problems and develop dexterous strategies to handle these and point to possible future pathways of their work.
The article is guided by the following research questions:

- How do educators in Denmark and Sweden reflect on, negotiate and develop multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism?
- What critiques and renewals of pedagogical conditions and practices do the educators' reflections point to?

The article builds on data from three action research projects that all investigated the development of multicultural and multilingual professionalism among educators. Denmark and Sweden make an interesting case for investigating multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism. These countries are comparable as Nordic welfare states, yet they differ significantly in their policies on culture, language and

education, as detailed in the method section. In the following, we outline the theoretical concepts of the article. Then, research sites, methodology, data and ethics are described. This is followed by data analyses, conclusion and discussions of our results and their implications for multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism.

Theoretical approaches

Drawing on research on multiculturalism and multilingualism, we employ the conceptual lens of equity pedagogy to examine dilemmas, problems and opportunities relating to injustice in education. Equity pedagogy refers to pedagogical approaches that "facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups" (Banks, 2004, p. 5). Equity pedagogy can be viewed as a critique of the educational system that reproduces injustice and inequitable educational results. The field of multicultural and multilingual research points to some normative orientations for what might be viewed as good education. In the following, we describe three of these orientations and how they function as conceptual lenses for our analysis of empirical data: (i) deficit and resource view on pupils, (ii) learning through interaction, and (iii) language policy and ideology.

Deficit and resource views on pupils

A key orientation in research on multiculturalism and multilingualism is the distinction between resource- and deficit-oriented understandings. *Deficit-oriented* understandings build on understandings of minority pupils as lacking in (intellectual, cultural, etc.) resources because of their background. According to Smith (2020, p. 40): "Deficit theory holds that inequity is the result, not of systemic inequities in access to power, but of intellectual and ethical deficiencies in particular groups of people." Deficit theory explains educational inequity in terms of inherent traits in minority groups' culture or language, which are seen as inadequate or irrelevant. Instead, majority culture, language and knowledge are seen as "neutral, and 'common sense'" (Castagno, 2008, p. 322), constituting the invisible norm by which all pupils are evaluated. In an educational setting, such understandings lead to individualised – rather than institutional – solutions to inequity, and to compensatory approaches where education aims to remedy pupils' individual deficits.

In contrast, *resource-oriented* understandings (Ladson-Billings, 2009) build on understandings of all pupils as possessing important knowledge and experiences. These understandings aim at pedagogical and institutional approaches that recognise multiple knowledge forms, thus challenging power relations that are built into the taken-for-granted norms of education.

Learning through interaction

Pupils acquire every day and academic language through interactional practices that require them to experiment with, reflect upon and expand their linguistic repertoire. Learning through interaction is fuelled by *hypothesis testing* (Swain, 2005). Pupils generate and tests hypotheses about how they can best express what they want to say. Their language is under constant development, as they test what may or may not work as efficient communication in the situation. Based on these experiences, pupils learn and form new hypotheses. To support learning through interaction, educators must create a conversational culture through which pupils are consistently "pushed" to form, test and reflect upon hypotheses (Swain, 2005, p. 473). Similarly, Gibbons (2015) argues that educators must push pupils to actively speak, write, listen and read in classroom activities, across a continuum of increasingly abstract language use, to successfully scaffold their acquisition of academic language.

In hypothesis testing, multilingual pupils draw from various cultural and linguistic features they are familiar with from school and home. Thus, their acquisition of school language is linked with their home language and other languages they practice on everyday basis (Lundqvist & Erduyan, 2024). This perspective leads to an interest in *translanguaging* as active, dynamic processes of language practice, where pupils employ available linguistic features and repertoires, and educators utilise these repertoires pedagogically to support learning (García et al., 2017).

Language norms and ideologies

Language ideology refers to the various implicit, or articulated, thoughts and norms about language that people, institutions and societies hold. These ideologies are situated in different sociocultural contexts of interactional practices (Kroskrity, 2016). For instance, a *monolingual language ideology* is based on an understanding that the natural state is to master one main language. With this ideology, the main linguistic goal of education becomes the promotion of the majority language, building on an idea that multilingual language learners acquire language by using native speakers as role-models of correct language (Kristjánsdóttir, 2021). Monolingual ideology builds on a structural concept of language whereby languages are seen as predefined and separate.

A *multilingual language ideology* is based on the understanding that people draw from their entire linguistic repertoires, spanning a variety of everyday interactional linguistic practices. With a multilingual ideology, education prioritises the inclusion of pupils' multiple linguistic repertoires to enhance learning. The multilingual ideology builds on a processual concept of language where languages are seen as dynamic and intertwined social practices where people engage in complex negotiations about meaning, drawing on their entire linguistic repertoires (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Methodology

The analyses are based on data from three studies that aimed to enhance equity in education, focused on multiculturalism and multilingualism, and employed action research methodologies (Mertler, 2024; Thingstrup & Lind, 2025). Study 1 (Thingstrup, 2012) investigated how educators develop multicultural educator professionalism in relation to the academic subjects they taught. It involved ten primary school teachers from a large city in Denmark. Study 2 (Lundqvist & Kolstrup, 2023) investigated how educators might teach academic language in relation to the academic subjects. It involved the entire teaching personnel, and their principals, of a primary school in a large Danish city. Study 3 (Åkerblom, 2024) investigated how educators might use translanguaging pedagogy in everyday pedagogical practices. It involved 20 preschool educators, three special educators and two leaders in three different preschool settings in a large city in Sweden.

Although the studies were situated in different national and institutional settings, had different research designs and research questions, and empirically spanned a period of more than a decade (Study 1: 2008–2010, Study 2: 2017–2022, Study 3: 2022–2024), we found that the studies' findings were remarkably comparable. This was an exciting insight, and we decided to explore whether our data might be understood in new ways if analysed as a unified whole, rather than focusing primarily on the specificities of the individual studies and their contexts. Reading across the data from the three studies, we aimed to create an epistemic distance, exploring how our data might "be used to speak beyond the contexts of their generation" (Hughes et al., 2022, pp. 378–379). Reading the data across the specific (national and project) contexts enabled us to produce knowledge about more general characteristics of multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism in Denmark and Sweden.

The research sites

Denmark and Sweden are small welfare states. In both countries, education plays a key role in nation building, and they share ideological self-understandings of equality, cultural unity and Nordic exceptionalism (Clarke & Vertelyté, 2023; Larsen et al., 2022). Although linguistic and cultural diversity has always posed an ideological challenge to the nation-state orientation of the educational systems of Denmark and Sweden, this has intensified in recent decades (Bohme Shomary, 2022; Millei et al., 2024). Despite these similarities, Denmark and Sweden differ significantly in their policies regarding culture, language and education.

In Denmark, educational policies have become increasingly monocultural and monolingual since 2001 (Jacobsen & Piekut, 2022; Kristjánsdóttir, 2021; Mouritsen & Olsen, 2013). The present regulatory framework for preschool education does not mention rights related to linguistic or cultural background. It

states that municipalities and institutions must assess children's language and provide language-stimulating activities, if needed (Dagtilbudsloven, 2024, § 11–12). The legislation regarding primary school education unfolds along comparable lines, stating that schools accommodating more than 30% pupils from exposed residential areas must ensure that these pupils pass a Danish language test upon commencing first grade. Pupils who do not pass must participate in (Danish) language-stimulating activities (Folkeskoleloven, 2024, § 11 a).

In contrast, educational policies in Sweden promote multilingualism and multiculturalism. The curricula for preschool (Skolverket, 2019) and primary school (Skolverket, 2022) emphasise children's right to the official minority languages and cultures for children belonging to these minorities. This focus on multiculturalism and multilingualism is also reflected in the national Swedish Language Act (Språklag, 2009, § 14). However, the appreciation of language diversity is currently undergoing a change towards more monolingual ideas. Recent studies (Lindgren & Puskás, 2024; Straszer & Wedin, 2020; Åkerblom & Harju, 2019) show that the multicultural and multilingual norms of the curricula might be accompanied by un-reflected monocultural and monolingual norms in pedagogical practice or by dual attitudes towards diversity, as problematic and positive at the same time. Thus, educators may find it challenging to mediate the dominant language and culture, while also promoting multiculturalism and multilingualism (Bohme Shomary, 2022).

Action research, data and ethics

The three studies in this article are inspired by action research, meaning:

> research that is theoretically, empirically, epistemologically and practically interested in the relations between practical changes and knowledge production, and that applies methods that place change processes at the centre in the production of new research knowledge. (Thingstrup & Lind, 2025, p. 251)

The studies employed methods that engaged educators in the exploration and development of their work with multicultural and multilingual pedagogy. Through researcher-initiated reflexive dialogues (Thingstrup, 2015), educators discussed experiences, knowledge, critiques and ambitions related to their work. The aim of the reflexive dialogues was to enhance analyses of pedagogical practice among educators. The dialogues were structured around an engaged researcher position (Gunnarsson et al., 2016; Nielsen & Jørgensen, 2018), where researchers and educators contributed with different forms of expertise, and where analyses and knowledge production were carried out collectively, thereby ensuring a large degree of transparency about and reciprocity in the research process. The focus was on facilitating knowledge and change through shared exploration and analysis, rather than on the researchers formulating recommendations for the educators.

The data consists of excerpts of transcribed audio-recorded group interviews, field notes from reflexive

dialogues with groups of educators, and posters with notes that were co-produced by participants during dialogues. Epistemologically, the data reflects the projects' change-orientation as well as the processual nature of educational practice and educator professionalism. Thus, when this article investigates changes that took place during the project period, we understand these changes as not simply a reflection of the efficiency of the interventions of the research project but also as a reflection of educator professionalism as an evolving phenomenon, where educators' continuous and critical analyses of their own pedagogical practice play a key role. Through reflexive dialogues, educators contributed to the creation of imaginations (Gleerup & Egmose, 2022; Nielsen & Jørgensen, 2018) relating to their pedagogical practice and critical reflections on these.

The article adheres to ethical research principles regarding anonymity (by disguising participants' name, gender, age, language use, etc.) and consent (initial, formal consent as well as informal, continuous consent (Klykken, 2022)). The analyses aim for respectful and loyal representations of educators' self-critical and potentially vulnerable utterances (Thingstrup, 2012). The ethical considerations regarding privacy were conscientiously balanced against ethical reflections regarding the importance of acknowledging the educators' knowledge contributions (BERA, 2011).

Data analysis

In the process of data analysis, we (the authors) initially shared the data, theoretical and methodological inspirations and findings of our original studies. We experimented with new, shared analyses of the material, exploiting the fact that we collectively spanned insider perspectives (the intimate knowledge of the researcher behind the original study) as well as outsider perspectives (the fresh perspectives of researchers who were not involved in the study). In this process, we aimed to develop an analytical perspective that was sensitive to the individual studies and could relevantly capture important, recurrent themes.

An important theme that developed from these initial analyses was the complexity of multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism, and the chronic dilemmas it involves for educators. We explored how educators in our data engaged with majority discourses regarding language and culture in reproducing ways, as well as in critical ways. Through this analysis, the theme professionalism as changeable, collective and critical emerged. In the next step, we re-analysed our data with concepts from theories of multicultural and multilingual education (equity pedagogy, translanguaging, deficit/resource, learning through interaction and language norms and ideologies), drawing our attention to three recurrent themes.

In the following results section, we present the analysis in the following subsections: (i) how educators discursively construct pupils in multicultural and multilingual settings, (ii) how pedagogical practices elicit

pupil interaction, and (iii) how educators formulate linguistic and cultural norms and ideologies of education. Although each subsection builds on data from different projects, they serve to illustrate themes from across all three studies.

Results

"Something is missing from that story": Deficit and resource perspectives on pupils

This section analyses data from Study 1 (Thingstrup, 2012), consisting of field notes from reflexive dialogues with a group of educators who taught different academic subjects and grades in a Danish school. This analysis shows how educators negotiate, reflect upon and nuance their construction of ethnic minority pupils as a key element of their professionalism. The participating educators in the following analysis were Helen, Rikke and Sally.

At the first project meeting between the educators and the researcher Signe Hvid Thingstrup, Signe organised a reflexive dialogue (Gleerup & Egmose, 2022) about issues and questions related to the teaching of minority pupils. This was an attempt to engage educators in defining the project's focus and aim. Signe noted the educators' reflections in a condensed form as keywords on a poster for the group to see and comment on. At the second meeting, from which the following field notes originate, Signe organised reflexive dialogues, inviting educators to analyse the keywords from the previous meeting. The focus was on exploring the discursive constructions of ethnic minority pupils that the keywords reflected.

Signe introduced an exercise that she termed 'Storytelling', arguing that the world is complex and contradictory, and that we make sense of it through stories: all stories are partial, highlighting some dimensions of phenomena while leaving others out. Often, certain stories dominate in specific contexts, while others are invisibilised. She presented the aim of the exercise as exploring the stories contained in their keywords and whether there might be other – competing or contrasting – stories about teaching minority pupils.

The group returned to the keywords from the previous meeting. The keywords were:

> Vocabulary; Cultural differences, Basic knowledge, Little conceptual knowledge; Identity problems; Implicit expectations; General knowledge (e.g., fairy tales and history); Parenting culture – relation between freedom and control; Parents' ways of life – inherited isolation; Pupils' and parents' lack of participation in social relations; Difference in norms – understanding of the teacher role; Different understandings of the role of the school; Parent–teacher-cooperation – linguistic problems; Children don't share a language with their parents; Teachers' lack of knowledge about children's and parents' culture; Insecurity about communication – siblings as translators. (Field notes)

Looking at the keywords, Signe said that if she were to construct a story from these keywords, it might be:

"A difficult pupil group with wrong backgrounds, communication difficulties and cultural differences". She deliberately paused to give the educators time to react and think about whether this analysis resonated with them. The reactions were mixed. Some educators accepted that such a story could be constructed from the keywords, but they thought it was important to include other aspects, for, as Helen said, "if it were only like this, she wouldn't be an educator anymore". Sally protested and said that it WAS like that. But Helen insisted that "it wasn't ONLY like that". In her field notes, Signe wrote:

> I got the impression that the story made an impression and gave them something to think about but that it also provoked [in a constructive way]. (Field notes)

Rikke said she thought something was missing from the story. She added new keywords, and the other educators joined in. As the educators added new keywords, the group discussed whether these were part of the existing story or constituted a new one that deserved its own headline. Signe underscored the importance of holding on to the contradictions by isolating different perspectives and also of telling non-dominant stories. The result was four stories, captured by the following keywords:

> Problem story: Difficult pupil group; Wrong background; Communication difficulties; Cultural differences.
>
> Competence story: Pupils have their own knowledge/understanding; Need to link to the Danish world; Smart pupils with a will to learn.
>
> Cultural encounter story: Children have identity problems where the adults/professionals are insecure about the encounter; Children need safe and professional adults; Minorities are not met on their own terms.
>
> Policy story: Primary school is a garbage bin[2] for lack of integration policies; Teachers lack knowledge about minorities; Teachers are alone with the problems and the development task; Assimilation vs. integration?; Culture is seen as the universal explanation. (Keywords on posters)

In this example, the educators' initial brainstorming constitutes a story that builds on a discursive construction of minority pupils as problematic. It reproduces deficit discourses (Castagno, 2008; Smith, 2020) that place the reason for minority pupils' academic challenges or underperformance in pupils (or their families) themselves and formulate individualistic or culturalistic explanations that leave dominant, monocultural and monolingual norms of school (Kristjánsdóttir, 2021) unquestioned. Working with the keywords as stories opened for the educators' meta-reflections about the perspective that the keywords contained, and for an exploration of nuances and complexities that the first story did not contain. From this exploration, the educators engaged in the formulation of alternative perspectives. The alternative stories not only expressed resource views of pupils and teaching but can also be seen as expressions of self-critique and of critique of a schooling that does not meet the needs of minorities.

These examples illustrate how educators engaged with discussions about deficit and resource orientations

[2] A (crude) metaphor for politicians' ignoring their political responsibility, leaving the task to the educators.

and policy and ideology. Working with stories and separating different logics to be able to investigate them in new ways, the educators began a process of making the familiar strange (Hastrup et al., 2011), thereby establishing an analytical distance to these discourses. This opened for critical reflections on the structural conditions that shaped their work and discursive constructions of minority pupils (Thingstrup, 2015).

This analysis illustrates how the educators critically examined key elements of their professionalism – namely, their construction of pupils – and engaged in nuanced reflections about dilemmas and complexities in their work (Anderstaf et al., 2021), thereby opening for new perspectives on inequity as institutional and relational.

"I'm not the one who knows all the answers": Learning through interaction

This section analyses data from Study 2 (Lundqvist & Kolstrup, 2023), consisting of field notes from reflexive dialogues with a fourth-grade team of educators who taught various academic subjects in a Danish school. The analysis illustrates how the educators' experiments with new multicultural and multilingual teaching practices open for new perspectives on student learning and the educator role, pointing to educational practices that are more reciprocal and equitable. The participating educators were Adem, Anna, Frederik, Jette, Line and Mathilde, talking about pupils Harry and Tobias.

A year into the project, the researcher Ulla Lundqvist organised a reflexive dialogue to elicit the educators' analysis of an action cycle (Kildedal, 2012) in Danish lessons focusing on neighbour languages. The action aimed to develop pupils' emergent understanding of Swedish[3] and develop awareness of similarities and differences between Danish, Swedish and other languages. As preparation for the class, the educators asked pupils to talk with their parents about an illustration from the textbook and to cooperatively write words in self-selected languages to describe the illustration. Afterwards, pupils presented this conversational homework (Lundqvist & Kolstrup, 2023) to the whole class.

Subsequently, pupils cooperated in groups to do a *dictogloss* for the Swedish text that accompanied the textbook illustration. A dictogloss (Gibbons, 2015, pp. 192–193) is an activity based on a short text that is read aloud two to three times to pupils. The pupils listen to the first reading, and then take notes during the subsequent reading(s). Pupils then recreate the text in groups. Before the reflexive dialogue exemplified in the following, the educators had conducted the action in different classrooms.

The dialogue began with educators describing their impressions from the action. Adem appeared to be

[3] Danish and Swedish are distinct but closely related languages.

ambivalent, as he said that he felt it “was chaotic”. However, “there was room for both small and large voices” in class and the pupils were “very active”. Mathilde felt the action “failed” as there was “much noise” and pupils “talked too much” during class.

After listening to the educators, Ulla presented the following excerpt from her field notes from Adem’s class:

> Tobias’ presents his illustration: “Pojke [Swedish for boy], it is a boy.” Adem responds: “So you have already explored differences and similarities between Danish and Swedish. What else have you got?”. Tobias continues to explain that “gräs” is almost the same in Danish and Swedish, but the letter “æ” is different in the two languages, as Swedish has little dots over the letter “a”, etc. Many pupils smile, listen and ask each other questions. When Adem says, “Now it’s time for a break”, they excitedly yell, “Can we do this again?”, “I want to do it in Spanish/Arabic/Somali, etc.”.
>
> During the dictogloss activity, one pupil asks, “Is it okay if what I write is wrong?”. Adem: “Yes! You don’t have to think about how you spell. It shouldn’t hold you back. It’s perfectly okay to write it as you hear it.” Some pupils discuss the sentence, “Jag ska dit och äta tårta.” One suggests, “I’m going to take the train.” Another adds: “He’s going to his birthday, and the cake sounds like a train.” They laugh. Finally, Harry says, “äta torta”, I think it means “eat cake’’. Adem: “Yes, it does. How did you guess?”. Harry, who speaks Polish and Danish explains that “cake” is called “tort” in Polish. Adem: “Yes, you used Polish and Danish to understand Swedish. It’s a good strategy when you learn a new language.” (Field notes)

Ulla presented her initial analysis of her observations, remarking that the conversational homework enabled pupil participation through the inclusion of home language practices, as the pupils utilised insights from the homework to acquire an emergent understanding of the text. Ulla recapitulated the educator–pupil interaction from her field notes to argue that Adem’s open questions scaffolded Tobias’ and other pupils’ learning, as they were pushed to make hypotheses (Swain, 2005) to develop their understanding of the text. In the subsequent dictogloss, the pupils were challenged to further develop their understandings, in listening, talking and writing to recreate the text on a more academic level (Gibbons, 2015). Author 1 argued that these pupil–pupil interactions and educator–pupil interactions exemplify an exploring interactional culture that supports pupils’ hypothesis-testing.

The educators recognised Ulla’s analysis of the action:

> Mathilde says the pupils were also “guessing the meaning of the text” in her class. She provides some examples from her teaching and concludes, “maybe it was meaningful after all”. Adem adds that Tobias and other pupils participated more actively than usual. This is interesting news for the team, who talk about Tobias as an “academically and socially weak pupil”. Author 1 asks what “academically and socially weak pupil” means, and the educators explain that Tobias doesn’t like to play in peer groups, and it’s hard for him to concentrate during classes. They continue to discuss how explorative classroom interaction can support learning for Tobias and other pupils. (Field notes)

The example shows how the educators display awareness of how inclusion of pupils’ linguistic resources can affect their status and learning in class; Tobias changed from being viewed as “weak” to becoming an “active” pupil. The educators were excited about this insight and at the end of the meeting, they photographed Ulla’s field notes.

Shortly after, Ulla and the educators met again:

> Adem says that "Tobias was particularly motivated by the conversational homework." Unsolicited, he has "made a list of Swedish words he has translated into Danish, with the help of his parents". Adem shows the list. His colleagues respond with engagement. Anna, who teaches mathematics, comes into the room. She has not heard the first part of the conversation but joins the table and unsolicited says that Tobias "worked tirelessly in mathematics" and "didn't allow irrelevant disturbance from peers". Anna's utterance causes excitement among her colleagues. They link the events of Adem conducting the action in Danish classes, Tobias getting the chance to shine academically through his comparison of Swedish and Danish and his renewed engagement in mathematics classes. (Field notes)

The educators discussed how the action had provided pupils with opportunities to take on more attractive roles than usual. They decided to work systematically with conversational homework and to write to parents and tell them how this school–home cooperation had productively motivated the pupils.

Line had tried out dictogloss in mathematics:

> She says, "I thought it would be too difficult for them to concentrate. But they did understand a lot." Frederik asks, "Why did they manage to concentrate?". Line states that she "was clear about the goal and what they were supposed to do. They talked with each other. They really engaged in the activity, and they were very active. They thought it was fun." Jette adds: "I've started letting pupils talk together to achieve results together. It has become a routine that they talk with their learning peer about assignments before they do them. I had to let go of control, let go of the role where I'm the one who helps them identify the right answers. I try to create a trustful and exploring culture where we investigate together and I'm not the one who knows all the answers." (Field notes)

Initially, Adem and Mathilde expressed insecurity about the success of the action. They both said that it was "chaotic". Mathilde viewed pupils who "talked too much" and "noise" in class as "chaotic". A likely explanation for these utterances is that educators must take responsibility for pupil learning by explaining the academic content to pupils and noise disturbs the learning environment. At the same time, Adem highlighted the benefits of inviting pupils to engage more actively in classroom interaction. His highlighting of the active pupil participation indicates that he is aware of the learning potential that lies in encouraging active participation among pupils. Our analysis of the action emphasises this aspect of Adem's teaching by pointing to his systematic asking of open questions in activities that scaffold pupils' language acquisition and academic learning (Gibbons, 2015).

Inspired by Adem's teaching, his colleagues became aware of the resources of translanguaging approaches. Mathilde re-interpreted her initial analysis of the action: "maybe it was meaningful after all". Mathilde's observation that the pupils were "guessing the meaning of the text" can be analysed as a sign of her increasing awareness of the benefits of pushing pupils into hypothesis testing to scaffold their learning through interaction (Swain, 2005).

Similarly, Jette's reference to relinquishing responsibility for identifying the desired answers, and creating an exploring and trustful interactional culture, reflects her changing view of her professional role from

being responsible for producing relevant knowledge for pupils to becoming a facilitator inviting pupils to learn in diverse interactional formats (peer-talk, whole-class-talk, etc.). Inspired by the joint analysis of their pedagogical practice, the educators became aware of how these changes in their professional role enhance pupil learning. This was also extended to the parents, as the educators decided to invite them to systematically support their children's learning through home language practices (Lundqvist & Kolstrup, 2023).

These examples illustrate how multicultural and multilingual teacher professionalism unfolded through teachers' experiments with and reflections upon their teaching over a couple of days. The educators changed from expressing uncertainty about their teaching to analysing it as a productive springboard for rethinking their pedagogical practices. Displays of linguistic and cultural professionalism merged across the reflexive dialogues. The conversational homework action can be analysed as an example of multicultural equity pedagogy (Banks, 2004) that enabled pupils from diverse backgrounds to actualise pre-understanding of the content of the Swedish text through available home language practices. Similarly, the inclusion of home language practices illustrates a translanguaging pedagogy (García et al., 2017) that elicited parents' scaffolding of their children's learning. Thus, the analysis shows how educators increasingly displayed a broader view of who possesses knowledge and how knowledge can be productively produced in class, thereby leading to more equitable pedagogical practices.

"Talking apart those hierarchies of language": Language policy and ideology

Drawing from Study 3 (Åkerblom, 2024), this section analyses transcribed excerpts from group interviews with four educators from a Swedish preschool. The analysis illustrates how the educators addressed the political and ideological framings of language in their educational practice, critiqued the societal norms of monolingualism and pointed to alternatives.

In an interview that took place one year into the project, the educators reflected upon their experiences with the action circles together with the researcher Annika Åkerblom. The educators were Anna, Maja, Mariam, Sanna and Sara. Maja commented on what happened when she invited a child with Turkish as a home language to practice his linguistic resources:

> I know he speaks Turkish, and I can count in Turkish, so when he sat there, I joined him and said "bir, iki" [one, two in Turkish] and so on. He just started "bir, iki", his face lit up and he started counting with me. After that it was like me and him, and nothing more was needed. I didn't need to be fluent in Turkish. We had something in common. (Excerpt)

Here, Maja actualised a multilingual stance (García et al., 2017), as she spoke the few Turkish words, she commanded to invite the child to practice his entire linguistic resources. Maja pointed out that the situation created a shift (García et al., 2017) in the relationship between herself and the boy, creating a

sense of commonality and constructing him as linguistically capable.

Later at the same meeting, Mariam commented on what happened when her colleague, Sara, who is fluent in Arabic, spoke Arabic with a girl who is a beginner learner of Swedish:

> In your activity, Sara, you made it possible for the children to use Arabic. You made yourself a resource for that girl. You used your multilingualism to make something visible, both for the children and the adults. (Excerpt)

Mariam reflected that Sara's decision to employ Arabic marked a shift that led to the creation of new linguistic opportunities for the children. The girl discovered that she could use her Arabic language resources and participate with the help of Sara, who became a bridge between Arabic and Swedish. Sara took a multilingual stance, and the shift created a new awareness among children and educators. These experiences led the educators to reflect on the ideologically anchored power relations that multilingual educational practices produced for children and themselves.

This can be viewed as a change in the multilingual educators' role from being translators (on the terms outlined by the majority language) to becoming professional resources for multilingual pedagogical practice. Anna reflected on the results of this change:

> The educators who have a different mother tongue have grown [during the study]. It's obvious that when we put extra effort into something, it affects the children. Quite quickly, they think this is exciting, and then they flourish, and it becomes more and more and more. Pride, that's what we see. That they are so happy to show all their linguistic capabilities. They play and talk about different words, and how they are comparable. They become aware of each other's language. (Excerpt)

Anna described changing power relations, as the changed pedagogical practice offered multilingual educators increased professional status. The new practices also expanded the children's opportunities for participation, leading to new feelings of pride as they developed language awareness.

Sanna addressed these power relations even more explicitly:

> It's about making yourself aware as an educator and becoming capable of "talking apart" this hierarchy of language. Something happens in the institution. (Excerpt)

Sanna reflected that the multilingual practice made her aware of language norms and ideologies in education, and she reflected that she had the power to challenge and critique societally dominant norms and hierarchies. The educators reflected that they had developed pedagogical practices where multiple languages were employed and ascribed equal value.

Maja and Mariam's utterances can be seen as examples of how educators elicit multilingual language practices to enable children to investigate and acquire language. Although Maja did not have command of Turkish, she responded to the child's use of his home language. We interpreted Mariam's utterance, "used

your multilingualism to make something visible, both for the children and the adults", as a reference to the linguistic resources that become visible in everyday pedagogical practices. By engaging with children's multiple languages, educators become aware of potentials for changing children's participation possibilities, their position in the group and their relations to educators and other children.

These renewed professional insights led the educators to critically reflect upon the monolingual norms and ideologies (Kroskrity, 2016), underlying their previous practice. Sanna's utterance can be analysed as a critique of monolingual ideologies and the hierarchies they instigate. The statements by Maja, Mariam and Anna reflect an understanding that multilingual children get better possibilities for participating actively in everyday talk, take more desirable positions as knowledgeable and develop meta-awareness about language (by comparing words in different languages) if education is based on multilingual norms and ideologies (Bohme Shomary, 2022). In the same vein, Sanna's reference to "talking apart this hierarchy of language" pointed to an awareness of the importance of language norms and the need to replace monolingual ideologies with multilingual ones.

The critique of monolingual ideologies was also reflected in Mariam and Anna's reflections on how language norms and ideologies contribute to constructing educator roles. The educators observed that their changed practices enabled multilingual children to experience pride in their multiple languages, engaging in more playful and curious approaches to language, comparing how the same object is expressed in different languages, or asking peers about languages.

Summing up, these examples show how the educators developed multicultural and multilingual professionalism by becoming aware, reflecting upon and criticising societal language ideologies. They formulated new visions of more equitable pedagogies (Banks, 2004) that recognise children's entire linguistic repertoires and work with diversity as a resource for all.

Conclusion and discussion

This article has investigated how educators in Denmark and Sweden reflect on, negotiate and develop multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism, and what renewals of pedagogical conditions and practices their critique points to. Our analyses show how educators, engaging in discussions with researchers and each other, engage with key themes of multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism. During the reflexive dialogues, the educators critically examined their construction of pupils/children, developed broader views of who possesses knowledge and of how knowledge and learning can be productively produced in classroom interaction, and formulated awareness about societal language ideologies.

The educators' exploration of these themes displayed contradictions, ambivalences and nuanced reflections. They formulated both resource and deficit views of children, expressed ambivalence about the desirability of active pupil participation and the success of their action cycle practice, and formulated both mono- and multilingual views of children and education. How can these contradictions and ambivalences be understood in a larger societal perspective? We see them as reflections of the tensions between the societally predominant ideologies of monoculturalism and monolingualism and the key orientations in multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism related to equity, participation, respect of difference, etc., that play out in complex classroom realities (Goossens, 2022).

We have highlighted important changes in the educators' reflections, which point towards a renewal of their pedagogical practices and understandings of educator professionalism. Such development of educator professionalism (Evetts, 2011) does not merely emerge from researchers' input in reflexive dialogues; rather, it can be viewed as a result of the specific reflexive context, where educators are offered the opportunity of exploring experiences, knowledge, critiques and ambitions in new ways. Thus, the changes reflect that educator professionalism is an emergent and contextualised phenomenon, and that discretionary judgement is qualified and developed through collective collegial reflexions (Thingstrup, 2015).

What implications do our findings have for understandings of multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism? As mentioned, the data spans 16 years, two types of educational institutions, two countries, and different and changing policies on language, culture and education. Despite these differences, we discovered that the findings from the studies were so comparable that it became meaningful to analyse the data as a unified whole. This comparability was an exciting empirical finding: it showed us that differences in policy, institutional setting and national context do not determine educator professionalism in any simple way. Rather, educator professionalism is shaped by local logics and ambitions related to equitable and engaging learning processes. We have shown that educators' professionalism and experiences with complexities and contradictions in everyday pedagogical practices contain potentials for development that transgress existing practices, norms, ideologies and understandings of the educator role.

How does this article contribute to the research field of multicultural and multilingual education? As previously argued, much of the existing research falls within either a critical sociological position (De Fina, 2017) or a pedagogical position that focuses on how educators can create productive learning environments (Flores & García, 2013). This article has mainly positioned itself in line with a third position that focuses on educators' response to dilemmas related to culture and language in education (Anderstaf et al., 2021; Bregnbæk & Jørgensen, 2020; Jaspers, 2022). We have illustrated what multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism might look like when educators' experiences, normative orientations

and discretionary judgement play a key role. We have argued that educator professionalism contains the potential for raising critical reflections about normative, ideological foundations for practice, and about hierarchies and distributions of power that these lead to, for challenging majority discourses on culture and language, and for renewing pathways for future school development. Educators' knowledge, critiques and ambitions should, therefore, play a key role in qualifying pedagogical and societal debates about multicultural and multilingual education.

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