Language Education in Primary School and Language Teacher Cognition
Some Results from a Survey in Lombardy*

P A O L A   S O L E R T I**

Abstract. Italy has always been characterised by a multilingualism that, in addition to Italian and its varieties, includes a very large number of dialects and several historical minority languages. The Italian school, on the other hand, has long, with rare exceptions, been a monolingual institution. Over the last fifty years, internationalisation and globalisation, the growing demand for foreign language learning, and continental and intercontinental migrations (which have introduced an unprecedented neo-multilingualism into Italian society in terms of the number of varieties and types of languages involved), have presented schools with new and even greater challenges. At around the same time, a vision of language education as a comprehensive and unitary process unfolding across the curriculum and encompassing the teaching/learning of the mother tongue, the language of instruction, foreign languages and classical languages has been emerging in the theoretical field. The implementation of language education is, however, ultimately entrusted to teachers and is therefore strongly influenced by teachers' knowledge, beliefs, implicit theories, opinions, attitudes and, in general, by everything that falls within the definition of teacher cognition.

This contribution presents the results of a broader survey, conducted in 2018 in Lombardy through the administration of a questionnaire. The data presented allow us to explore the language teacher cognition of primary school teachers with respect to different aspects of language education.

Keywords. Language education, plurilingualism, teacher cognition, language teacher cognition, multilingualism, plurilingual activities, pluri/intercultural activities, language educators, primary school teachers, primary school.

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1. Introduction. Italy has always been characterised by a varied multilingualism, which includes, in addition to Italian and its varieties, a very large number of dialects and several historical minority languages. On the other hand, the Italian school has long been, with few exceptions, an essentially monolingual institution, in which for decades the objective of spreading and teaching Italian was usually pursued by ignoring or suppressing the use of the other languages present in Italy. Far from having the desired effect, the teaching conducted in this manner has proved inadequate and has all too often had the result of not guaranteeing an adequate level of competence in the language of instruction and of making pupils perceive the language of their origins as wrong and as a possible source of error in the use of Italian.

Over the last fifty years, Italian schools have had to face the linguistic challenges posed by internationalisation and globalisation, confronting, on the one hand, the growing demand for foreign language learning, and, on the other, continental and intercontinental migrations, which have introduced an unprecedented neo-multilingualism into Italian society, in terms of the number of varieties and type of languages involved (Bagna, Barni, Vedovelli 2007; Barni, Vedovelli 2009; Vedovelli 2014).

Around the same time, a vision of language education as a comprehensive and unitary process encompassing the teaching/learning of the mother tongue, the language of schooling, and foreign and classical languages emerged in the theoretical field. In this context, language education therefore also means welcoming and valuing pupils' languages, stimulating everyone's openness, curiosity and attention to languages other than their own, and making pupils gradually aware of the existence of different cultures. Official documents have also moved in this direction, including the *National Curriculum Guidelines for pre-school and first cycle education*[1] (2012).

The implementation of LE is, however, ultimately the responsibility of the teachers, and the day-to-day actions of each teacher are conditioned by various factors, external as well as internal, among which knowledge, ideas, opinions, attitudes, representations, beliefs, implicit theories and, in general, everything that falls within the definition of *teacher cognition* hold particular importance. Consequently, the ways in which LE is implemented are also conditioned by the teachers' knowledge, beliefs, implicit theories, opinions and attitudes.

This contribution presents some results from a broader survey, conducted in 2018 in Lombardy through the administration of a questionnaire. After elucidating the theoretical assumptions on which the survey is based and then briefly explaining the survey

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[1] *Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione* (2012).

tool, the data collection methodology and the composition of the sample, it focuses on the analysis and discussion of the data that emerged. These allow us to explore some of the language teacher cognition traits inherent to primary school teachers with respect to language education, their own role as language educators, bilingualism and plurilingualism, and plurilingual and pluri/intercultural activities.

2. Language Education and Language Teacher Cognition. In the last forty years of the last century, the concept of *educazione linguistica*, i.e. language education, as we know it today began to be defined in Italy thanks to the reflections and research of various scholars, including De Mauro, Titone and Freddi. The expression "*educazione linguistica*" (henceforth, referred to as "language education") is not new in Italian pedagogical research, but since the 1960s and, even more so, since the 1970s it has taken on a new centrality in pedagogical and linguistic research and has been enriched with new dimensions.

Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, the inadequacy of Italian language teaching, conducted according to traditional methods rather than to the real needs of pupils, provoked a broad cultural and scientific debate in Italy. In 1973, the Giscel (*Gruppo di intervento e studio nel campo dell'educazione linguistica* – Group for Intervention and Study

in the Field of Language Education) was established within the SLI[2], with Tullio De Mauro as one of its most active members. In 1975, the Giscel, with De Mauro's substantial contribution, drew up the *Ten Theses for Democratic Language Education*, a fundamental document that, by combining "language education" with the adjective "democratic", set out to bring the school back to its function of helping to remove obstacles to the substantial equality of citizens. The *Ten Theses* highlight the weaknesses of traditional language pedagogy and present the theoretical assumptions and principles of democratic language education, outlined in particular in Thesis VIII. Although the validity of the *Theses'* principles extends far beyond the teaching of Italian, the Giscel document uses the expression "language education" in reference mainly to the teaching of the Italian language and the ways in which such teaching should be conducted in order to be effective, taking into account the "personal, family, and environmental linguistic-cultural background of the pupil" (Giscel 1975).

During the same period, in the field of Italian glottodidactics, Titone and Freddi enriched the expression "language education" with a further complexity, identifying it with "that part of general education that concerns the learning/teaching of the mother tongue and/or national language, any second, foreign and classical languages, and – in an

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expanded, or integrated, version – also non-verbal languages" (Balboni 2009)[3].

In the decades that followed, the concept of LE did not completely lose its dual significance as the teaching of the Italian language and as a process concerning the learning/teaching of all the languages making up the school curriculum[4]; however, the latter meaning gradually became established, not so much in contrast to the former but as a progressive synthesis of the two visions of LE.

This meaning of the concept of LE, as the spread of foreign language teaching and the presence of non-Italian-speaking pupils in classes progressed, also made its way into schools and, starting with the 1979 New Programmes for the Single Secondary School and the 1985 New Programmes for Primary Schools, it also entered into ministerial documents[5].

Since the 1970s-1980s, moreover, the concept of LE has been further enriched by both the influence of Anglo-Saxon linguistics (and in particular the theories of Hymes and Halliday) and the emphasis placed by European language policy documents on plurilingual and pluricultural competence. LE is, therefore, also in the perspective taken by the present contribution, to be understood as a global process that does not only concern the teaching/learning of the language of schooling, but develops "as a continuum through the teaching/learning of the mother tongue, second, foreign, classical and ethnic languages" (Chini, Bosisio 2014, 25).

Understood in this way, the LE construct implies: a global view of the individual's language repertoire; a shift in the *focus of* language learning/teaching from individual languages to the integrated development of processes that foster the individual's linguistic, communicative, relational and cognitive development; a conception of language learning according to which the integrated development of languages is

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[3] Freddi (1970, 1994) believes that language education plays a key role in the pursuit of the three goals of general education, which he identifies as the culturisation, socialisation and self-realisation of the subject.

[4] In recent years, Balboni has defined language education as "the process in which a person genetically preordained to language acquisition and (perhaps) genetically endowed with a universal grammar of reference, after having spontaneously acquired the mother tongue in its oral dimension (along with any other 'quasi-mother' languages present in the environment) enters an educational system where the deepening of competence in the mother tongue begins – including written and manipulative skills and the metalinguistic dimension (thus becoming the object of analysis, classification and reflection, in this way contributing to cognitive education) – and where other languages are acquired under the guidance of adults specialised in their teaching" (Balboni 2011, 2012), considering "ancillary […] further qualifications […] such as 'mother tongue', 'second', 'foreign', 'ethnic', 'of origin', 'classical', 'lingua franca', 'international', 'natural/artificial'" (Balboni 2012).

[5] *The National Guidelines* (*Indicazioni Nazionali* 2012) and the document *National Guidelines and New Scenarios* (*Indicazioni Nazionali e nuovi scenari* 2018) devote extensive attention to language education from a pluringual perspective.

transversal to all disciplines. A consequence of the transversal nature of LE is, therefore, that all teachers, regardless of the subject or discipline taught, are "language educators" or, in other words, language teachers[6]. Primary school teachers are entrusted with a very important role in language education, and primary school – by virtue of its role in literacy and its vocation to act as a hinge between pre-disciplinary teaching and disciplinary and inter-disciplinary teaching – is the school level at which one most easily perceives that every teacher is, in effect, a language teacher.

The teaching-learning process, however, is dynamic and extremely complex, takes place in a defined social context, and takes shape in an intertwining of cognitive, social and emotional-affective dynamics between all the people involved, students and teachers. The ways in which language education is implemented are therefore influenced by the beliefs, implicit theories, knowledge, opinions and attitudes of teachers.

Studies on language teacher cognition tell us, in fact, that the knowledge, beliefs, implicit theories, opinions and attitudes of those involved in language teaching/ learning towards, for example, language learning or teaching, bilingualism or multilingualism greatly influence their teaching actions (Woods 1996; Borg 2006).

In order to understand how LE is implemented and to be able to support teachers with appropriate training, it is crucial, therefore, to explore teacher cognition [TC], i.e. what teachers "know, believe and think" (Borg 2003)[7] or, according to Borg's (2003, 2006, 2012, 2019) later and increasingly inclusive definitions proposed for TC, the complexity of teachers' mental life[8] including emotions[9].

3. Aims, instruments and methodology of the survey. The theoretical assumptions briefly discussed in the previous paragraphs led to the formulation of some general research questions: what do primary school teachers think[10] about

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[6] The transversality of language education and the role of all teachers as language teachers are highlighted by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, who – in *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale* – writes "every teacher, as an educator, in his/her special branch helps to express sincerity, i.e. is a teacher of language" (Lombardo Radice 1968[35], p. 169).

[7] "I use the term 'teacher cognition' here to refer to the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching - what teachers know, believe, and think" (Borg 2003, 81).

[8] "Throughout this book, therefore, I use the term 'teacher cognition' as an inclusive term to embrace the complexity of teachers' mental lives" (Borg 2006, 54).

[9] Recently, Borg (2019) proposed a definition for the teacher cognition research field that, albeit indirectly, renders the multidimensional character of teacher cognition even more explicit: "Inquiry which seeks, with reference to their personal, professional, social, cultural and historical context, to understand teachers' minds and emotions and the role these play in the process of becoming, being and developing as a teacher".

[10] In formulating the general research questions, the generic term 'think' is to be understood as referring

language education? What idea do they have? And what do they think about plurilingual education? Do they feel like language educators? To try to find an initial answer to these questions, a questionnaire was developed, the structure of which is briefly described in this section.

The instrument consists of 130 questions divided into four sections. The first three sections consist of 111 questions aimed at all teachers, while the fourth, comprising 19 questions, is aimed exclusively at those who teach or have taught English in primary school.

The first section collects biographical data and data on education and training, professional experience and the working environment in which teachers operate. Given that the instrument was not designed to be administered to teachers from a single context known beforehand, the biographical data section was structured in such a way as to collect both the indispensable data (such as gender, age and educational qualification) as well as other information useful for describing the teachers' past experience. In addition, a number of questions related to the teaching context were included.

The second section of the questionnaire consists of five sets of items, to which respondents have to express their degree of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert-type scale. The five sets of

items that make up this section are devoted, respectively, to attitudes towards language education, the teacher's role as a language educator, plurilingualism, and the inclusion of plurilingual and pluri/intercultural activities in the school environment.

To formulate the items, the constructs of language education and plurilingual education were broken down to identify some essential aspects. In addition, insights were drawn from the review of some existing instruments and documents, in particular the BALLI (Horwitz 1981), the LEA (Council of Europe ECML 2004) and the CARAP (Council of Europe ECML 2007). A number of questions were taken from the BALLI (Horwitz 1981) and the LEA (Council of Europe ECML 2004), having first been partially modified. In particular, the items dedicated to plurilingual and pluri/intercultural activities, can be partially traced back to the LEA (Council of Europe ECML 2004), but have undergone certain modifications, including the separation of the scales dedicated to plurilingual and pluri/intercultural activities, so allowing teachers to express themselves separately – and, therefore, possibly differently – with respect to the two types of activities. In order to limit the occurrence of response set phenomena – or, at least, to be able to verify their occurrence – each battery has a certain number of items with inverted polarity. At the end of each scale, a space was

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to the complexity of the TC construct as defined by Borg (2003, 2006, 2012, 2019).

provided for free observations and comments.

The third section is actually divided into two subsections. The first consists mainly of a series of open questions on plurilingual and pluri/intercultural activities and some key concepts of language education. The second subsection includes a series of questions devoted to the mono-, bi- or plurilingualism of the interviewed teachers and the languages they speak outside the school context; this was formulated to investigate the relationships between the answers given and the linguistic biography of the respondents.

The last short section is dedicated, as we said, to English teachers.

In order to mitigate the quantitative approach of the tool, in addition to including a number of open questions, it was considered appropriate to include in each section, and with a certain frequency, the opportunity to express opinions and enter comments.

The questionnaire was administered online, via the Forms application provided by Google, in June 2018. The access link to the form to be filled out online was disseminated via e-mail by sending an e-mail message to the institutional address of all state-run *Istituti Comprensivi*[11] in the provinces of Lombardy and to the e-mail addresses of the private primary schools whose contact details could be found. In

the accompanying message, after a brief presentation of the reasons and aims of the survey, the school heads and secretariats of the contacted institutions were asked to forward the link to the questionnaire to all primary school teachers in their institution.

Although this mode of administration is the most practically feasible, it is not without influence on the composition of the sample of teachers who took part in the survey. In fact, not only was participation on a voluntary basis, but in order to answer the questionnaire, one not only had to be willing to do so – and thus, presumably, interested in the topic 'language education' – but also had to be employed at a school where the institutional e-mail inbox was regularly checked and whose headmaster was himself interested in the topic and thus willing to forward (or have forwarded) the message. Alternatively, one had to be in contact with colleagues who, probably by virtue of a special interest in LE, would disseminate the link to the questionnaire.

A total of 320 replies were received; however, one of the completed questionnaires had evidently been scanned twice by the system and another had been sent in blank. The valid questionnaires were therefore 318.

The analysis of the questionnaires received was developed both on

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[11] In the Italian education system, an *Istituto Comprensivo* is a school institution comprising pre-schools, primary schools and lower secondary schools.
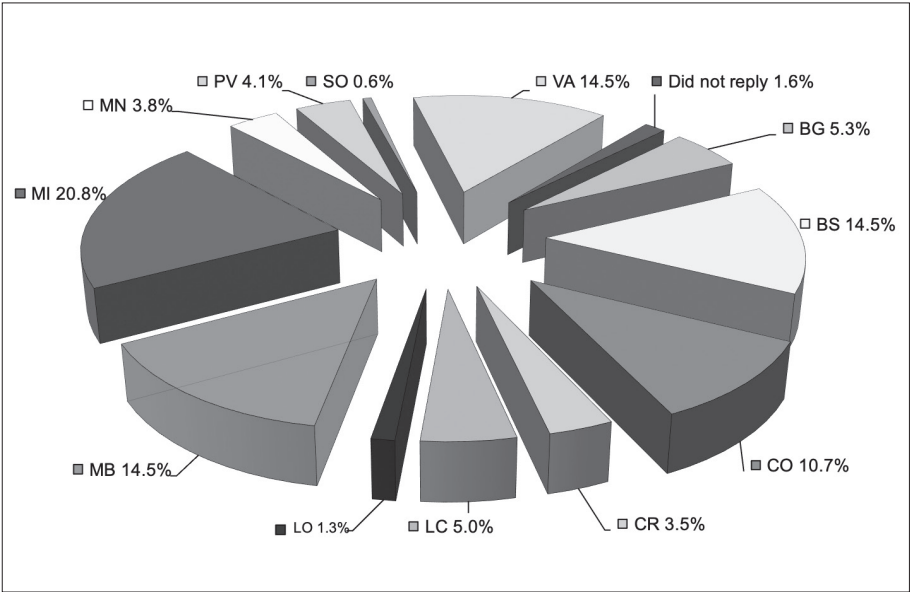
Figure 1. Origin of the completed questionnaires, broken down by provinces in Lombardy.
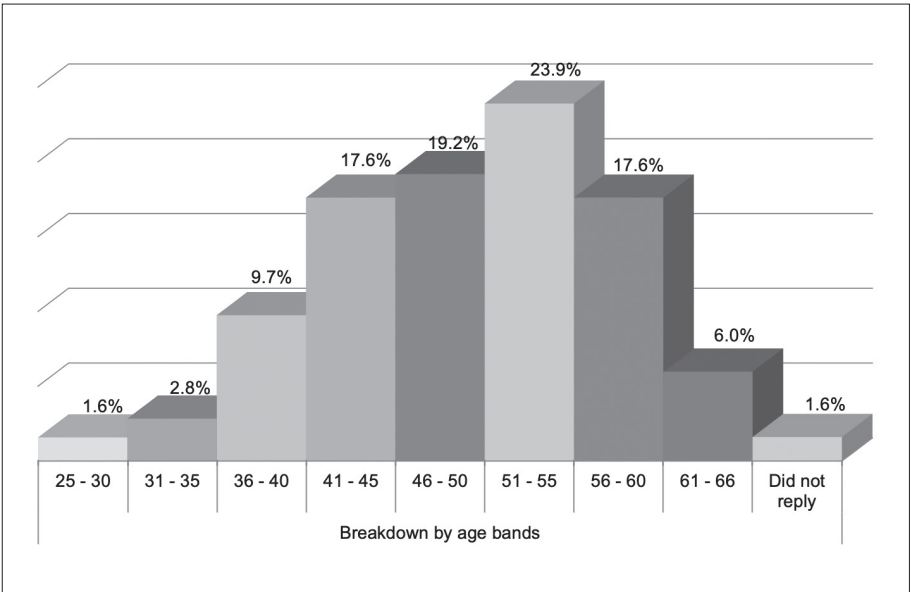

Figure 2. Age of the teachers who participated in the survey. Breakdown by bands.

a quantitative and qualitative level. Answers to closed questions were counted and translated into percentages while answers to open questions were analysed by identifying recurring key words, expressions and concepts.

4. Composition and characteristics of the sample. The teachers who completed the questionnaire work in schools located in all provinces of Lombardy (Fig. 1), 91.8% of those who took part in the survey were teachers working on a permanent basis, 6.9% were teachers on a fixed-term contract with an annual substitute assignment, and only 0.9% were working on a fixed-term contract with a temporary substitute assignment, 0.3% did not reply. Of the questionnaires received, 90.9 per cent

were completed by teachers teaching in public educational institutions, 9.1 per cent by teachers working in private educational institutions.

The demographic composition of the sample of teachers who participated in the survey reflects fairly closely the composition of the teaching staff of primary schools in Lombardy, both in terms of the female (95%) versus male (5%) distribution[12] and the distribution by age group (Fig. 2). One of the characteristics of the Italian teaching body is, indeed, its elevated age[13]; this is due to the fact that, between the 1970s and early 1990s, a combination of factors led to a strong expansion of the Italian teaching staff[14], followed, in more recent times, by a contraction[15], resulting in a very modest generational turnover (Argentin 2018).

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[12]   According to official MI data (2020), in the 2017/2018 school year, 95.5% of state primary school teachers in Lombardy were female and 4.5% male. In the same school year, the male presence among state primary school teachers throughout Italy was even lower: in fact, 96.1% of primary school teachers in Italy were female and 3.9% male.

[13]   In the 2017/18 school year, the teaching staff of state primary schools in Italy showed the following breakdown by age group: up to 34 years 8.8% in Lombardy and 5.8% in Italy; 35 to 44 years 32% in Lombardy and 25.9% in Italy; 45 to 54 years 32.8% in Lombardy and 36.5% in Italy; over 54 years 26.4% in Lombardy and 31.8% in Italy (MI 2020). It should be pointed out that the MI data only refer to state primary school teachers, whereas teachers from private schools also participated in our survey.

[14]   As far as primary schools are concerned, the increase in the number of staff is determined by the fact that in the 1970s the so-called full-time experimentation in state primary schools started (following Law 820/1971), with the allocation of two teachers for each full-time class. Full-time education was confirmed, with a school day of 40 hours per week, by Law 148/90. The same law provided for an increase from 24 to 30 hours per week of school time in standard-time classes and established the so-called teaching module, i.e. the assignment of three teachers for every two classes or three teachers for every four classes; each of the teachers assigned to the teaching module normally teaches one subject area.

[15]   The 2004 reform established the first cycle of education, integrating primary and secondary schools within a single cycle; it also heavily influenced the balance of primary school teaching teams through the establishment of the figure of the prevailing class tutor. The 2008 reform reintroduced the figure of the so-called "single teacher" (who, however, remains a prevailing teacher). Both reforms reshaped the school time of normal-time classes. A certain margin of autonomy in the choice of organisational model to be proposed to families was, however, left to educational institutions, with the sole (but not irrelevant) constraint of respecting the allocated teaching staff.

Moreover, the sample is mostly made up of teachers who can boast a long length of service: 69.5% of the teachers have between 16 and over 40 years of service and, of these, as many as 42.1% have between 26 and over 40 years of experience, i.e. they started teaching at the latest in the early 1990s. Thus, the vast majority are teachers who have acquired considerable teaching experience, this in a profession where – even taking into account the difference between experience and expertise (Borg 2006) – experience is of great importance. Moreover, just under half of our respondents are teachers who have experienced all the changes that have profoundly altered the composition of primary school classes over the past three decades.

Primary school teachers can teach all subjects that are part of the curriculum, with the sole exception of English (the teaching of which requires a specific qualification), and, indeed, most of the teachers in the sample have taught almost all school subjects during their careers. Only 12.3% have never taught language subjects, in most cases because they are learning support teachers or because they are engaged in specialised teaching such as PE or IRC[16].

A fairly obvious consequence of the demographic characteristics of our sample is a rather small presence of teachers who entered the profession with a degree in *Scienze della formazione primaria* (primary teacher education). In fact, 87.7% of the teachers who participated in the survey had access to the primary school teaching profession thanks to their secondary school diploma in primary school teaching.

As far as educational qualifications are concerned, however, our teachers also confirm another characteristic of the Italian primary school teaching staff: the extreme heterogeneity (and often richness) of educational experiences. As many as 40.1% of the teachers who participated in the survey are university graduates. The most common degrees are those in the area of pedagogy and educational sciences, followed by degrees in literature or literary subjects, degrees in foreign languages and literature or similar courses and degrees in psychology or psychological sciences, but the range of qualifications held by the teachers who participated in the survey is really quite broad. These include degrees in philosophy, theology, law, musicology, political science, history, communication sciences, DAMS and ISEF diplomas.

A large proportion of the teachers who took part in the survey are also evidently driven by a constant desire for training and professional improvement: many, in fact, have attended a large number of postgraduate or refresher courses, covering various fields, but largely

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[16] IRC is the acronym used in schools to indicate the Teaching of the Catholic Religion (*Insegnamento della Religione Cattolica*).

relating to the areas of pedagogy, didactics, and special pedagogy and didactics. Many, moreover, have specialised in learning support, so much so that, as we have said, 35.8 of the teachers in our sample have taught in a support post for part of their professional career.

The context in which the teachers who participated in our survey work also fairly closely mirrors the context in which primary school teachers generally operate. Although there are cases of teachers working in eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve or even fifteen classes, 75.5% teach in between one and three classes; to be exact, 37.4% teach one class, 30.2% teach two classes and 7.9% teach three classes. 64.8% of our respondents work in classes composed of between 20 and 25 pupils (of these, 36.5% work with between 23 and 25 pupils per class), 4.7% and 1.9% work in classes composed of 26 and 27 pupils respectively, while 25% work in classes composed of between 7 and 19 pupils. The linguistic composition of classes is rather varied: 89.3% of teachers work in classes including pupils who also speak languages other than Italian, ranging in number from one to six pupils in most cases, although there are sporadic cases of classes in which 14, 15 or 16 pupils speak languages other than Italian[17]. Finally, 19.2% of teachers teach in classes where there are pupils who speak dialects other than Italian.

5. Analysis of data from responses to Likert scales. As we anticipated in the section describing the survey instrument, the second section of the questionnaire consists of five sets of items devoted, respectively, to attitudes towards language education, towards the teacher's role as a language educator, towards plurilingualism and, finally, towards the inclusion of plurilingual and pluri/intercultural activities in the school environment. Respondents were asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with each of the items using a five-point Likert-type scale.

When analysing the answers given to the statements constituting the items in the questionnaire's second section, it was decided to examine the answers given to each item separately, counting the distribution of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, with respect to the total number of respondents; furthermore, the answers "3" (representing an explicit statement of uncertainty of the subject with respect to the proposed item) and the "non-answers" were counted separately in order to keep the two different choices made by the respondents distinct. In presenting and commenting below on the results of the analysis of respondents' answers

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[17] With the reservation that, of course, speaking a language other than Italian does not necessarily imply being of non-Italian citizenship and vice versa, it is worth recalling that, according to official MIUR data (2020), in the 2017/2018 school year, 17.4% of Lombardy primary school pupils (equal to 82,332 children) were of non-Italian citizenship.

to the proposed items, we will choose in some cases to group the two degrees of agreement ("slightly agree" and "completely agree") or disagreement ("slightly disagree" and "completely disagree"), as this operation, while obscuring the nuances of the degrees of agreement or disagreement, allows us to grasp the general orientation of the teachers interviewed. Tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, present the proposed items and the percentages of the responses recorded with respect to each item.

5.1. Analysis of the responses to items concerning language education. 70.4% of the teachers agreed slightly (39.6%) or completely (30.8%) with the statement "*Language education must start from the learner's linguistic background and repertoire*". The statement "*It is important for language education to focus above all on written production in Italian*" elicited less polarised responses: 32.4% disagreed slightly with the statement and 18.6% disagreed completely, while 18.2% agreed slightly and 4.7% agreed completely. However, the percentage of those uncertain is also growing, at 26.1%. A large majority of the teachers who participated in the survey attach importance to the development of receptive skills; in fact, regarding the item "*It is important that language education aims at developing not only written and oral production skills, but also written and oral comprehension skills*", respondents' answers were almost totally polarised towards complete agreement (79.9% of

respondents) with 17.0% agreeing slightly. At the same time, the majority of the teachers interviewed display a positive attitude towards error: 93.1% agree to a varying degree with the statement '*It is important for children to learn to experiment with grammar and words, even at the risk of making mistakes*'. 77.7% of the sample fully or slightly agreed with the statement "*The teacher must give the child clear-cut language rules to practise on*", with respect to which, however, there were also 15.7% who were uncertain. The majority of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire consider it important to know the linguistic background of the children and to share their discovery with the class: indeed, 79% of the teachers agreed to varying degrees with the statement "*It is important to discover together with the pupils the individual linguistic background and repertoire of each of the children in the class*", 16.7% said they were uncertain and, at the same time, 84% of the respondents disagreed, to varying degrees, with the statement "*Knowing the pupil's linguistic background and repertoire is not important*"; with regard to the latter item, 8.5% said they were uncertain and 6.6% agreed to varying degrees. The answers to the item "*Pupils' attention should not be focused too much on the linguistic diversity in the class*" are more evenly distributed between degrees of agreement and disagreement: 24.8% of the teachers interviewed disagreed completely, 20.1% disagreed slightly, 29.2% are uncertain, while 17.6%

Table 1. Items concerning language education.

Language education must start from the learner's linguistic background and repertoire					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
1.9%	7.9%	19.5%	39.6%	30.8%	0.3%

It is important for language education to focus above all on written production in Italian					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
18.6%	32.4%	26.1%	18.2%	4.7%	0.0%

It is important that language education aims at developing not only written and oral production skills. but also written and oral comprehension skills					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.9%	0.3%	1.9%	17.0%	79.9%	0.0%

It is important that children learn to experiment with grammar and words. even risking making mistakes					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.0%	0.6%	6.0%	22.0%	71.1%	0.3%

The teacher must give the child clear-cut language rules to practise on					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.3%	6.0%	15.7%	30.2%	47.5%	0.3%

It is important to discover together with the pupils the individual linguistic background and repertoire of each of the children in the class					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.6%	3.1%	16.7%	38.4%	40.6%	0.6%

It is important to help children discover language rules and structures from the linguistic world around them					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.3%	0.3%	5.7%	35.5%	57.5%	0.6%

Knowing the learner's linguistic background and repertoire is not important					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
67.0%	17.0%	8.5%	5.0%	1.6%	0.9%

Pupils' attention should not be focused too much on the linguistic diversity in the class					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
24.8%	20.1%	29.2%	17.6%	7.2%	0.9%

Doing language education means focusing above all on the grammar of the language					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
37.1%	34.0%	17.9%	8.2%	2.8%	0.0%

agreed slightly and 7.2% agreed completely. 97% of the respondents agreed to varying degrees with the statement "*It is important to help children discover language rules and structures from the linguistic world around them*", while 5.7% described themselves as uncertain. Finally, 81.1% agreed or strongly disagreed with the last item of this first battery: "*Doing language education means focusing above all on the grammar of the language*", while 17.9% said they were uncertain.

At the end of the first set of items, some teachers added comments. In their comments, the respondents emphasised, for example, the need for a balance between "giving" rules and having them discovered "within the language contexts", or the idea that the presence of foreign children constitutes an opportunity to conduct language education by fostering an approach to other cultures. Other comments pointed out that experiencing the language in concrete contexts helps one to learn it or emphasised that a good knowledge of the language helps one to be fully free and aware of choices.

Concerning the item "*Pupils' attention should not be focused too much on the linguistic diversity in the class*", in the open comments, one teacher wrote: "very often children who feel different from the large group do not like to feel that they are the centre of attention precisely because of their differences; instead they tend (in my experience) to want to conform, they want to feel and be considered part of the group.

So, in my opinion, it is good to try to value everyone's peculiarities, but in ways that are not "blatant", not too "labelling". In other words, in a way that is as natural as possible, presenting the peculiarity (in this case cultural and linguistic…) as a richness, a possibility, an addition, when the opportunity arises, but also publicly acknowledging any additional difficulties, thus recognising, and having peers recognise, the possible reasons for any mistakes, misunderstandings, different needs…".

There are also those who point out that the majority of foreign pupils do well orally, but in writing they encounter difficulties that are often not resolved even in the later school grades. Finally, one teacher drew attention to the need to also consider the time factor (i.e. the number of hours devoted to Italian during the school week) and the number of pupils per class.

The answers to the first battery of items, dedicated to LE, give us a snapshot of a sample of teachers who, in the vast majority, are very clear about the relevance of their pupils' linguistic background and repertoire, the need for teachers to know and be aware of it, and the need for language education to foster the development of both receptive and productive oral as well as written skills. As we have seen, however, a number of critical points also emerge: among these, of particular significance is the difficulty in promoting the achievement of a good level in written production even in the presence of a good level of oral

Table 2. Items concerning the language educator role of teachers.

Language education only concerns teachers who teach Italian or foreign language					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
78.9%	16.7%	1.6%	1.3%	1.6%	0.0%

All teachers are responsible for the language education of their pupils. even if they do not teach Italian or a foreign language					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
1.3%	0.9%	1.9%	8.5%	87.4%	0.0%

Every teacher is a 'language educator' even when not aware of it					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.6%	0.0%	1.3%	11.3%	86.5%	0.3%

Language education coincides with the teaching of the Italian language					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
50.0%	23.9%	11.9%	9.4%	4.4%	0.3%

Those who teach subjects other than languages should not enter the field of language education					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
77.4%	16.4%	3.5%	1.6%	0.9%	0.3%

Those who teach subjects other than Italian and foreign language should pay particular attention to language during their lessons					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
2.8%	3.5%	17.0%	34.0%	42.5%	0.3%

reception and production, a difficulty which, our respondents pointed out, often persists even in the school grades following primary school.

5.2. Analysis of the responses to items concerning the teachers' role as language educators. The second set of items consists of statements relating to the role of teachers in language education, i.e. the role of language educator that every teacher plays whether he or she teaches language subjects or non-language subjects (see Tab. 2). The statement "*Language education only concerns teachers who teach Italian or foreign languages*" elicited, to varying degrees, disagreement among 95.6% of respondents; at the same time, 95.9% of the teachers agreed, to varying degrees and in a reverse way, with the item "*All teachers are responsible for the language education of their pupils, even if they do not teach Italian or a foreign language*". 97.8% of the respondents agreed to varying

degrees with the statement "*Every teacher is a 'language educator' even when not aware of it*". The answers to the statement "*Language education coincides with the teaching of the Italian language*" are less polarised: 50.0% of respondents disagreed completely, 23.9% disagreed slightly, 11.9% were uncertain, 9.4% agreed slightly and 4.4% agreed completely. 93.8% of the respondents disagreed to varying degrees with the item "*Those who teach subjects other than languages should not enter the field of language education*". Although to varying degrees, the majority of the respondents (76.5%) also agreed with the last item of this battery, "*Those who teach subjects other than Italian and foreign language should devote particular attention to language during their lessons*"; it should be noted, however, that the uncertain teachers here reached 17.0%. Although this last statement also met with broad agreement among the teachers interviewed, it is interesting to note that, while on the one hand, the majority of teachers believe that all teachers are responsible for the language education of their pupils, on the other hand, when the respondents were asked to express their opinion on a statement that concretely calls for all teachers to devote particular attention to language during their lessons, the percentage of respondents expressing some degree of agreement drops by almost twenty percentage points, while, at the same time, the percentage of uncertain respondents rises to 17.0%.

Some teachers used the comments space to share some comments. In particular, one teacher emphasised the transversal nature of language teaching with respect to all subjects, since, he/she states, language is a tool for communication and an aid in structuring thought. Another observed that linguistic accuracy affects the teaching of all disciplines, while a third specified that, in he/she opinion, attention to language on the part of those who teach non-language subjects should mainly concern subject-specific languages. Finally, another teacher once again drew attention to the time factor, stating that the limited number of hours devoted to the discipline (in this case, mathematics) does not allow much attention to be paid to language.

5.3. Analysis of the answers given to the items concerning bilingualism, plurilingualism and language learning. The third set of items consists of statements on bilingualism, plurilingualism and language learning (Tab. 3). The first statement "*Before learning a second language, it is important to have consolidated the learning of one's mother tongue*" divides the respondents: in fact, 19.8% did not agree at all, 23.9% disagreed slightly, 28.3% were uncertain, 16.7% agreed slightly and 11.3% agreed completely. The statement, "*Anyone can learn more than one language*", however, pushes the majority of respondents towards the pole of agreement, with 88.7% of respondents agreeing to some degree. The answers to the next statement, "*It would be good for children to speak Italian at home and outside*

of school and not another language or dialect", deserve particular attention, as this item divides the respondents to a greater extent than others: specifically, 22.3% disagreed completely, 25.2% disagreed slightly, 23.9% were uncertain, 19.2% agreed slightly, and 9.1% agreed completely. Although 57.5% of the teachers disagreed, it is also true that 28.3% of those interviewed believe, albeit with varying degrees of conviction, that children should always speak Italian, even in the family or in their free time, and just under a quarter of our sample declared themselves uncertain. The same trend emerges from the answers given to another item: in fact, although 52.2% of the respondents disagreed to varying degrees with the statement "*Speaking another language outside the school context interferes with learning Italian*", 22.6% agreed to varying degrees while 24.2% were uncertain. Curiously, the answers to the item "*Having the opportunity to speak other languages or dialects outside the school context has positive effects on the overall language education of children*" showed a different distribution of agreement: in fact, 74.5% of the respondents agreed, to varying degrees, with the statement, 21.1% of the respondents were uncertain and 4.4% disagreed, to varying degrees. 18.2% of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire agreed to varying degrees with the statement "*Speaking also another language, different from Italian, causes children to make more spelling mistakes*", while 25.2% completely disagreed, 29.2% slightly disagreed

and 26.7% were uncertain. With respect to the statement "*Speaking also another language, different from Italian, helps children to reflect on the linguistic structures of Italian*", 63.6% of the sample agreed to varying degrees, 24.5% were uncertain, while 10.4% said they disagreed either slightly or completely. Fairly similar percentages of agreement and disagreement were recorded for the statement "*Knowing several languages makes children spontaneously compare different languages*", with 68.9% slightly or completely agreeing, 21.7% uncertain and 8.8% slightly or completely disagreeing. 70.1% of the teachers who participated in the survey slightly or completely agreed with the item "*Knowing more than one language helps to learn new ones better*", while 23.3% were uncertain and 5.3% disagreed. The statement "*It is good to learn several languages from a very early age*" garners polarised responses towards complete or partial agreement: 81.8% of the respondents agreed completely or slightly. 62.3% of the teachers surveyed disagreed to varying degrees with the statement "*Learning more than one language requires a special aptitude for languages*", while 18.2% agreed to some extent and 18.9% were uncertain.

With respect to the statement "*Speaking many languages in many cases means knowing none of them well*", 49.1% of the respondents disagreed completely, 30.8% disagreed slightly, 15.1% were uncertain, 3.1% slightly agreed, and 1.3% completely agreed. The item

Table 3. Items concerning bilingualism and plurilingualism.

Before learning a second language, it is important to have consolidated the learning of one's mother tongue

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
19.8%	23.9%	28.3%	16.7%	11.3%	0.0%

Anyone can learn more than one language

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.0%	2.8%	8.2%	30.2%	58.5%	0.3%

It would be good for children to speak Italian at home and outside of school and not another language or dialect

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
22.3%	25.2%	23.9%	19.2%	9.1%	0.3%

It is good to learn several languages from a very early age

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.6%	3.5%	13.8%	30.2%	51.6%	0.3%

Learning more than one language requires a special aptitude for languages

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
34.3%	28.0%	18.9%	15.1%	3.1%	0.6%

Speaking another language. other than Italian. helps children to reflect on the linguistic structures of Italian

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
2.2%	8.2%	24.5%	36.2%	27.4%	1.6%

Knowing more than one language helps to learn new ones better

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.6%	4.7%	23.3%	34.9%	35.2%	1.3%

Speaking another language outside the school context interferes with learning Italian

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
27.4%	25.5%	24.2%	18.2%	4.4%	0.3%

The majority of people are bilingual or plurilingual

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
17.6%	28.9%	29.9%	17.3%	4.7%	1.6%

Speaking another language other than Italian causes children to make spelling mistakes

completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
25.2%	29.2%	26.7%	15.4%	2.8%	0.6%

Knowing several languages makes children spontaneously compare different languages					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
1.6%	7.2%	21.7%	42.8%	26.1%	0.6%

Bilingual or plurilingual people are rare					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
28.3%	34.0%	22.3%	11.6%	2.5%	1.3%

Speaking many languages in many cases means knowing none of them well					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
49.1%	30.8%	15.1%	3.1%	1.3%	0.6%

Having the opportunity to speak other languages or dialects outside the school context has positive effects on the overall language education of children					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.6%	3.8%	21.1%	42.1%	32.4%	0.0%

"*Bilingual or plurilingual people are rare*" recorded complete or partial disagreement among 62.3% of the respondents, while 22.3% were uncertain and 14.1% agreed to varying degrees. Only 22% of respondents believed, to varying degrees, that "*the majority of people are bilingual or plurilingual*", while 46.5% disagreed slightly or completely with this statement and 29.9% were uncertain. As far as this last item is concerned, the answers given by teachers lead us to hypothesise that they are the manifestation of a rather traditional (but still very much present in common opinion) idea of bilingualism or plurilingualism, according to which only the one who speaks two or more languages and knows them in a perfectly balanced or at least almost perfectly balanced way, preferably from childhood, can be defined as bilingual or plurilingual.

Also at the end of the third battery of items, teachers had the opportunity to note down their observations. The comments of respondents can be divided into three categories: a first set of comments expressing positive attitudes; a second set of comments expressing critical attitudes; and, finally, a third set of comments expressing some perplexities about bilingualism and plurilingualism. Among the positive comments, respondents stated that "mother tongues and dialects are an asset"; they reported having had direct experience of children who speak several languages correctly or stated that they believe bilingualism is less widespread in Italy than in other European countries. Among the critical comments and those expressing perplexities, one of the respondents emphasised, for example, the difference that (in his/her opinion) exists between language

and dialect, and writes "I do not think you can equate second language and dialect. Knowledge of a second language increases communication possibilities. On the other hand, the use of dialect in some families is due to the lack of knowledge of Italian and is therefore not an enrichment but a communicative limitation". Another teacher observed that "the mixing of different languages also emerges in the syntax". A third respondent mentioned the possible interference between languages, implying that "slowdowns in learning may occur: in vocabulary knowledge for example" and emphasising the role of the socio-familiar context. Others highlighted the individuality of learning paths, emphasising the fact that "every child has their own way of approaching language learning". Finally, one teacher claimed that "one must distinguish between subtractive and additive bilingualism, which depends on the socio-economic status of the family, and the stimulation and use of the mother tongue; if this is poor, it will also subtract from the second language"[18].

The answers to the third battery of items give us a more nuanced picture than the previous batteries. First of all, the high percentage of teachers declaring themselves uncertain with respect to almost all items in this battery should be noted. Moreover, while it is very true that the majority of respondents show a positive attitude towards bilingualism and plurilingualism, it is also true that some distinctions between different types of plurilingualism, to which, more or less explicitly, positive or negative values are attributed, emerge from some remarks and comments. In addition, a not insignificant number of respondents expressed a certain concern about interference and, in general, about the effects that the bilingualism or plurilingualism of pupils may have on the learning of Italian.

5.4. Analysis of the answers given to items concerning plurilingual activities. The majority of the teachers interviewed (78.3%) agreed, to varying degrees, with the statement "*Plurilingual activities help children become more aware of the existence of similarities and differences between language structures of different languages*" (Tab. 4).

68.8% also agreed, to varying degrees, that "*Introducing plurilingual*

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[18] Additive bilingualism (Lambert 1978; Lambert, Taylor 1981) occurs when the learner learns an L2 without losing fluency in the L1 and indeed "benefiting immensely from the experience, cognitively, socially and even economically" (Lambert, Taylor 1981); subtractive bilingualism (Lambert 1978; Lambert, Taylor 1981), on the other hand, is a condition that occurs when L2 learning takes place at the expense of the L1. Subtractive bilingualism occurs, for example, when the L2 enjoys greater prestige, is the dominant language in the social context and the only language of instruction in the school, while the L1 is an undervalued language. In a school context, it is the condition in which many immigrant pupils find themselves, but it is also the condition in which pupils from dialect-speaking families or from families in which a minority language is spoken used to be (and sometimes still are).

activities can help all pupils (including Italian-speaking children) to develop their skills in the language of schooling, i.e. in Italian", although 23.3% of the respondents were uncertain about this last item. 78.3% of the teachers also believed that primary school pupils are not too young for plurilingual activities to be conducted with them, with 73.9% agreeing that "*Plurilingual activities improve children's confidence in their ability to learn new languages*"; however, 22.6% of the respondents were uncertain about this.

Of particular interest is the comparison of agreement to disagreement expressed towards certain statements. With respect to the statement "*Plurilingual activities should only be introduced in classes where there are foreign pupils*", as many as 83.6 per cent of the respondents disagreed, albeit to varying degrees, 9.7 per cent were uncertain and only 6.3 per cent expressed some degree of agreement. However, with respect to the statement "*All teachers should introduce comparisons between different languages in their lessons*", the levels of agreement or disagreement proved less polarised, with 54.1% of respondents agreeing to varying degrees, 17.3% disagreeing to varying degrees and 28% uncertain. A high level of uncertainty was also aroused by the statement "*Plurilingual activities should be integrated into the school curriculum of all classes*", with 16.7% of respondents disagreeing to varying degrees, 32.4% being uncertain, and 50% agreeing to varying degrees.

With respect to the statement "*Only Italian and the languages learnt at school should be used in class work*", 24.5% of respondents agreed to varying degrees, while 24.8% said they were uncertain and 49.2% disagreed.

Our respondents, therefore, agree – at least in principle – that plurilingual activities should not only be reserved for classes with foreign pupils; however, the hypothesis that plurilingual activities be integrated into the work of all classes or even into every teacher's lessons does not meet with the same consensus.

Furthermore, although the majority of respondents disagreed with the statement that "*Introducing activities involving several languages into class work takes time away from school subjects*", it is of some significance that 11.9% of the respondents agreed, to varying degrees, with this statement, especially considering that a further 21.7% were uncertain.

Finally, with respect to the statement "*Plurilingual activities negatively affect the learning of Italian*", 14.5% of the respondents were uncertain and 8.2% agreed to varying degrees.

In their comments, some felt that – especially in the first years of school – care should be taken not to disorient the child with too many linguistic stimuli at a delicate stage of learning. Another comment explained that the indecision shown in the answers just given stemmed from the fact that much depends on the type of plurilingual activities and who should propose them. There also

Table 4. Items concerning plurilingual activities.

Plurilingual activities help children become more aware of the existence of similarities and differences between language structures of different languages					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.3%	2.2%	18.6%	43.7%	34.6%	0.6%

Plurilingual activities should only be introduced in classes with foreign pupils					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
57.5%	26.1%	9.7%	4.1%	2.2%	0.3%

Conducting plurilingual activities can help all pupils (including Italian-speaking children) develop their skills in the language of instruction. i.e. in Italian					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.9%	5.7%	23.3%	41.8%	27.0%	1.3%

Primary school pupils are still too young for plurilingual activities to be conducted with them					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
51.9%	26.4%	13.8%	4.7%	2.5%	0.6%

Plurilingual activities improve children's confidence in their ability to learn new languages					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.6%	1.9%	22.6%	37.1%	36.8%	0.9%

All teachers should introduce comparisons between different languages in their lessons					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
4.1%	13.2%	28.0%	30.5%	23.6%	0.6%

Plurilingual activities help children develop the ability to listen attentively					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
1.3%	5.0%	24.5%	39.6%	28.3%	1.3%

Only Italian and the languages learned at school should be used in class work					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
23.6%	25.8%	24.8%	15.4%	9.1%	1.3%

Plurilingual activities should be integrated into the curriculum of all classes					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
5.7%	11.0%	32.4%	27.7%	22.3%	0.9%

Plurilingual activities can create language confusion in children					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
26.7%	33.3%	25.2%	10.7%	2.8%	1.3%

Introducing activities involving several languages into class work takes time away from school subjects					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
34.3%	31.4%	21.7%	9.4%	2.5%	0.6%

Plurilingual activities improve children's communicative competence					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
1.9%	4.1%	21.4%	37.4%	34.3%	0.9%

Plurilingual activities emphasise language differences between children too much					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
43.4%	30.5%	19.2%	5.3%	0.6%	0.9%

Plurilingual activities negatively affect the learning of Italian					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
46.9%	29.9%	14.5%	6.6%	1.6%	0.6%

emerged among the comments, the idea – expressed more or less directly – that the school day is already "too full". As we have already observed, the feeling of a lack of time and the urgent need to carry out the activities of teaching Italian or other disciplines in a limited number of hours per week meanders through the answers given to the entire questionnaire, albeit expressed by a very small number of respondents. One teacher noted that expressing an opinion would require prior study or knowledge. Another teacher used the space available to clarify that his/her negative or uncertain answers were not an expression of doubt regarding the usefulness of plurilingual activities or the children's ability to learn, but rather doubts about the competence of current teachers in conducting such activities. Finally, another teacher remarked on the normality, in his/her class, of

singing in many different languages and dialects without any difficulty.

The analysis of the answers must, in this case, take into account the fact that not all teachers were familiar with the inclusion of plurilingual activities in schools, which are certainly less common than pluri/intercultural activities. Confirming this, a number of the respondents' comments explicitly expressed the need for specific training on plurilingual activities.

5.5. Analysis of the answers given to items concerning pluri/intercultural activities. Turning to the analysis of the data on the battery of items concerning pluri/intercultural activities (Tab. 5), it is interesting to note that 91.2% of the teachers in the sample agreed to varying degrees with the statement that pluri/intercultural activities promote positive attitudes towards other cultures. 87.1% disagreed to

Table 5. Items concerning pluri/intercultural activities.

Pluri/intercultural activities promote positive attitudes towards other cultures					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.9%	0.3%	6.3%	29.6%	61.6%	1.3%

Pluri/intercultural activities should only be introduced in classes with foreign pupils					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
67.3%	19.8%	5.7%	3.8%	1.9%	1.6%

Pluri/intercultural activities increase children's awareness of the existence of similarities and differences between different cultures					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.3%	1.6%	6.9%	29.6%	60.7%	0.9%

Pluri/intercultural activities take time away from other subjects. e.g. Italian and mathematics					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
49.1%	25.2%	14.8%	7.5%	1.9%	1.6%

Pluri/intercultural activities improve children's communicative competence					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
0.6%	1.9%	14.2%	36.8%	45.3%	1.3%

Pluri/intercultural activities should be integrated into the school curriculum of all classes					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
2.5%	3.8%	26.7%	28.0%	37.1%	1.9%

Pluri/intercultural activities emphasise cultural differences between children too much					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
52.8%	28.3%	12.9%	3.8%	0.9%	1.3%

Pluri/intercultural activities can be confusing for children					
completely disagree	slightly disagree	uncertain	slightly agree	completely agree	did not reply
47.2%	28.0%	16.0%	6.0%	1.6%	1.3%

varying degrees with the statement "*Pluri/intercultural activities should only be introduced in classes with foreign pupils*". 90.3% of respondents agreed to varying degrees that pluri/intercultural activities increase children's awareness of the existence of similarities and differences between different cultures.

Again, it is interesting to compare the answers given to certain statements. If, in fact, as we have
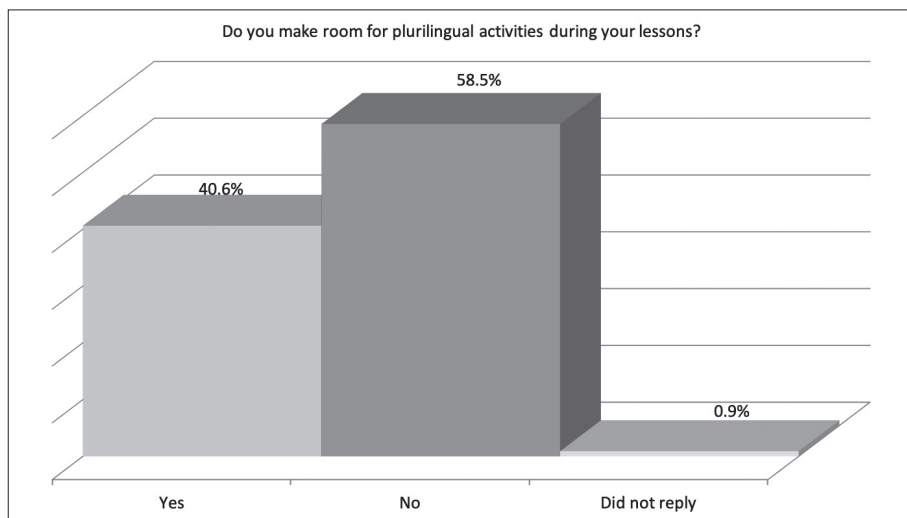
Do you make room for plurilingual activities during your lessons?

58.5%

40.6%

0.9%

Yes   No   Did not reply

Figure 3. Percentage answers to the question "*Do you make room for plurilingual activities during your lessons?*".

just seen, 87.1% of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire do not agree that pluri/intercultural activities should only be introduced in classes where there are foreign pupils, it must be said that only 65.1% of the respondents agreed with the statement "*Pluri/intercultural activities should be integrated into the school curriculum of all classes*".

Thus, a similar situation (although not exactly overlapping in terms of numerical consistency) arises for pluri/intercultural activities to the one already observed in the corresponding questions for plurilingual activities.

Also with the statement "*Pluri/intercultural activities take time away from other subjects, such as, for example, Italian and mathematics*" there is a similar situation to the parallel statement for plurilingual

activities, albeit numerically less pronounced: 14.8% of the teachers claimed to be uncertain, while 9.4% agreed to varying degrees.

As with the previous sets of items, a space was provided at the end of this set of statements for respondents to leave their comments and remarks. Some teachers used this space to post comments in favour of pluri/ intercultural activities, writing, for example, that "they should not only concern classes with children of foreign origin" and that "every child must become aware of the diversity in his or her living environment".

6. Analysis of answers to direct questions. The first part of the third section of the questionnaire enters into a direct dialogue with the respondents, proposing a series

of closed and open-ended questions to explore the relationship between what emerged from the compilation of the scales and teaching practice and to further explore teachers' views on language education. Reviewing the answers provided by the sample, allows us to better understand certain aspects of the teachers' TC regarding the concepts investigated through the items proposed in the scales of the second section of the questionnaire.

6.1. The dissemination of plurilingual and pluri/intercultural activities in teaching practice. The first question delves into how plurilingual activities are implemented in teaching practice. To the question "*Do you make room for plurilingual activities during your lessons?*", 40.6% of the teachers answered *Yes*, 58.5% *No*, while 0.9% did not answer (Fig. 3).

Several respondents gave examples of the plurilingual activities carried out during their work in the classroom. Some referred to comparisons between Italian and English; others to mentions of dialect or different Italian dialects due to the different regions of origin of the pupils in their class; still others reported that, in their lessons, the use of more than one language or dialect is done through songs, tongue twisters, nursery rhymes, stories or poems in both other languages and various dialects. Many told of often making references to Latin or Greek to explain the etymology of words or to Latin, Greek and French to help children understand the similarities

between neo-Latin languages. Some told of having created an alphabet book made up of words from all the languages in the class; some read books written in different languages in class, with the text opposite in Italian; some build glossaries in the languages of the foreign children in the class; some make pupils learn a basic vocabulary or the names of certain objects in the languages of the class members. Others resort to the flipped classroom, asking foreign children to lecture their peers on their own language. There are those who use drama in several languages in the classroom and those who introduce children's names in Hebrew. Finally, there are those who like to explore with their pupils the variability of language in time and space.

Those who do not devote time to plurilingual activities during lessons emphasised above all a lack of time, a lack of opportunities to carry out such activities, or a lack of linguistic competence or preparation to carry out plurilingual activities adequately. A number of respondents highlighted the lack of time, pointing out that there are insufficient hours in Italian while much time needs to be devoted to teaching Italian. Other respondents stated that plurilingual activities are not included in the programme or that there is no specific project for them, or simply wrote that, in their opinion, they are not important activities, that the children find it confusing or that primary school children are too young. One teacher specified that foreign pupils understand the language of origin, but do not speak
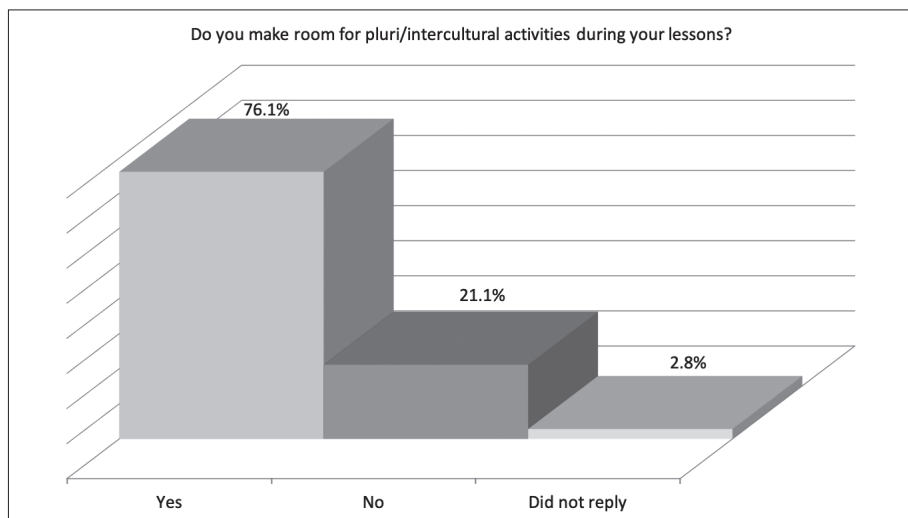
Figure 4. Percentage answers to the question "*Do you make room for pluri/intercultural activities during your lessons?*".

it. Others specified that they currently teach mathematics and have no way of conducting plurilingual activities.

Even among those who claimed to make room for plurilingual activities in their lessons, some pointed out a number of critical issues, stressing that these are not always easy activities, especially when they involve foreign children in the classroom, because sometimes the children do not remember the words or, more simply, are ashamed.

In contrast to plurilingual activities, pluri/intercultural activities find a more frequent place in the teachers' lessons; in fact, when asked "*Do you make room for pluri/ intercultural activities during your lessons?*" 76.1% of the teachers answered *Yes*, 21.1% *No*, while 2.8% did not answer (Fig. 4).

Some of the teachers wrote that pluri/intercultural activities are introduced through the periodic planning and implementation of specific pathways, while others told of activities that revolve around the presence of pupils from other countries and focus especially on customs, food and culinary traditions, words, stories, dances, and songs of the pupils' countries of origin. Other respondents refer to intercultural activities related to English lessons, to the exploration of different religions, or to activities implemented during history and geography lessons that include references to ancient languages and cultures or to those of different countries. Operationally, activities are conducted by reading books, inviting the parents of foreign children to school, or directly

asking the children to talk about the traditions or stories of their countries of origin. There were those who emphasised that giving space to pluri/intercultural activities is, in their case, a daily activity that involves readings, discussions, comparisons, but also those who emphasised a certain reticence on the part of foreign children towards this kind of activity.

Those who claimed not to give space to pluri/intercultural activities in their lessons, referred to the lack of opportunities, knowledge and – above all – time, given the insufficient number of hours dedicated to teaching Italian and the need to plan personalised work so that the pupils can achieve the expected objectives. Others stated that the teaching of mathematics does not lend itself to pluri/intercultural activities; still others pointed out that these are either unplanned activities or that no such project exists. One teacher pointed out that, in his/her case, pupils who have foreign parents do not speak their mother tongue and have an Italian cultural background.

The consistently higher number of teachers who make room for pluri/intercultural activities in their lessons compared to the number who introduce plurilingual activities into their teaching practice should not come as a surprise, as pluri/intercultural activities have been widespread in schools for some time now. They are often included in specific teaching paths and projects, and encouraged and supported not only by individual educational institutions, but also by provincial and regional school offices, regions, provinces, municipalities and private cultural associations.

6.2. The focus on language in the teaching of so-called non-linguistic subjects. Since language education is cross-curricular, the next question shifts the focus to the attention devoted to language in the teaching of so-called non-language subjects, asking: *Do you devote specific attention to language when teaching non-language subjects?.* 78.9% of the respondents answered Yes, 12.6% No, while 8.5% did not answer (Fig. 5).

Several teachers briefly explained how they devote specific attention to language even when teaching non-language subjects. Some explained that they devote special attention to correctness in the children's oral presentations and to terminological and lexical enrichment; others reported that during lessons they give support to structuring oral production, sentence construction, and reflection on the Greek or Latin origin of terms; this is seen as an opportunity to encourage children to decipher the meaning of other specific terms themselves. There were also those who claimed to habitually reflect with their pupils on the communicative aspects of not just language but of languages in general, and those who mentioned reflecting with their pupils "on the communicative function" and "pragmatic" use of language.

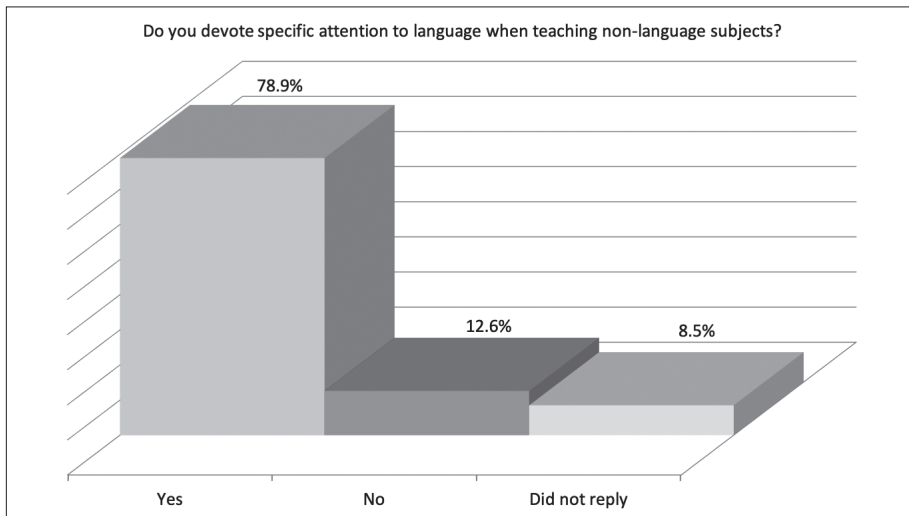Several respondents emphasised how important it is for the teacher to

Figure 5. Graph of the percentage breakdown of answers to the question "*Do you devote specific attention to language when teaching non-language subjects?*".

set an example of correct, precise and appropriate use of language and to pay special attention to the language and terms specific to each discipline in order to foster lexical enrichment. Other teachers sought in their lessons to balance the need for clarity with the use of appropriate terminology, making as much possible use of concrete terms, linear sentences and non-verbal language to support linguistic understanding. Those who emphasised the importance of careful language use to facilitate comprehension, however, were a small minority.

The answers of several respondents reveal a concern for control of the pupils' modes of expression ("I check that they express themselves in correct Italian", "you expect pupils to express themselves in a fully structured manner,

using specific terms"). Undoubtedly, such control has a raison d'être and is an integral part of the teaching-learning process; but the reading of the answers shows that, while some teachers place more emphasis on helping their pupils achieve the ability to express themselves (and, therefore, to expound) clearly and correctly, others seem to focus on the language, controlling whether or not the pupils' speech conforms to a standard of correctness.

The next question, which was open-ended, explores the respondents' views on the relationship between language and the teaching of non-language subjects: *In your opinion, what role does language play in the teaching of non-linguistic subjects (history, geography, mathematics, science, technology,...)?*.

Most respondents described the role of language as "important" or "fundamental". Many emphasised the centrality, transversality and vehicular role of language with respect to the disciplines, explaining that, for this reason, language education must be placed at the centre of every educational project. Several teachers emphasised that language – which they defined as indispensable for storytelling, confrontation, and the formulation of thought – is one of the main vehicles of communication (though not the only one); others believe that the degree to which pupils learn depends on the teacher's methods of communication and linguistic communication.

All in all, a large majority of the respondents believe that helping pupils to reach an adequate level of listening and writing comprehension and having them acquire a sufficiently broad vocabulary is crucial to their educational success.

There are, however, some observations that language plays a secondary role, one that is important but not unique or of primary importance.

6.3. Language education and the role of teachers as language educators. The next question (*What is language education for you?*) asks the respondents to give their own definition of language education, with the intention of exploring what the participating teachers think of this concept.

The answers can basically be divided into four categories. For some respondents, LE is fundamental and essentially coincides with Italian as the national language: among them, there are those who define LE as "that part of education that includes the teaching of Italian as the national language, with a descriptive and applicative function", or as "constant care of the oral and written language, intended to transmit a passion for knowledge and in-depth study of the Italian language in order to help pupils express themselves to the best of their abilities". For others, LE means, above all, education for linguistic correctness: an example of this conception of LE is the definition that coincides with "educating children in the correct use of their language". Other respondents see LE as communication education and point out that language skills are relevant to any other competence: "is not only the ability to learn the mother tongue and other languages, continuously adding new vocabulary and reorganising knowledge, but also the ability to understand various registers and to communicate adequately both orally and in writing". A fourth group sees LE encompassing Italian, dialects, classical languages and foreign languages or, as one respondent put it, "taking care of the languages of the participants in the class group (pupils and teachers)". Across these four categories of responses, the focus, which some teachers place on teaching while others on the process of language development in the child, varies.

The next question investigates whether respondents perceive themselves as language educators: "*In your teaching profession, whether you teach Italian or a foreign language or*

In your teaching profession, do you feel yourself to be a "language educator"?

84.6%

11.9%

1.6%

1.9%

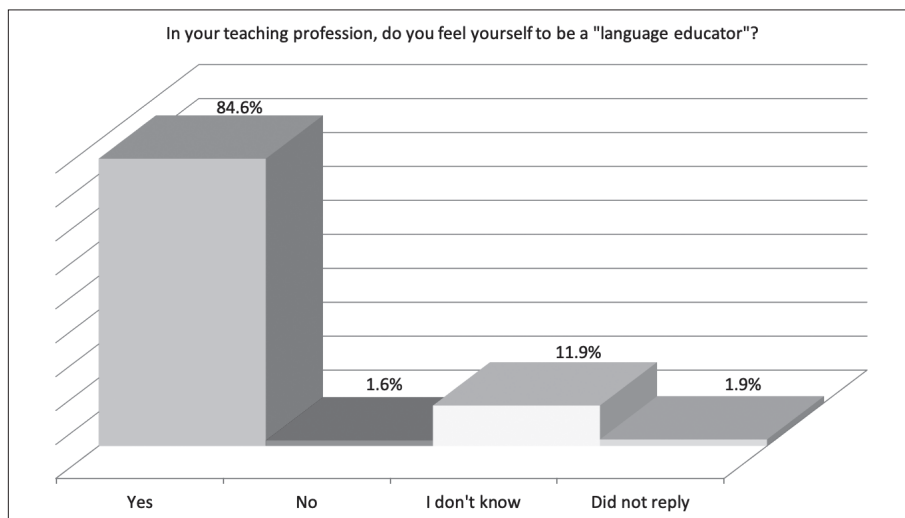Yes   No   I don't know   Did not reply

Figure 6. Graph of the breakdown, in percentages, of the answers to the question "*In your teaching profession, whether you teach Italian or a foreign language or another subject, do you feel yourself to be a "language educator"?*".

another subject, do you feel yourself to be a "language educator"?". A very large majority of the teachers – 84.6% – answered *Yes*, 1.6% *No*, 11.9% *Don't know*, while 1.9% did not answer (Fig. 6).

Those who answered *Yes* to feeling themselves language educators, emphasised that language is the prime communicative tool used; as such, teachers are always a reference model for children, as the way they express themselves also implicitly educates, rendering every teacher a teacher of Italian and a language educator the very moment he or she speaks. Some of the respondents focused especially on the importance of the correct use of language by the teacher. Others pointed out that they feel like language educators because they try to educate children in the conscious

use of language and try to stimulate pupils to discover etymology, to play with words, to use synonyms, to invent new words. One teacher described himself/herself as "a communicator who inhabits a reality of learning and sharing experiences with other little communicators". Those who answered *No* or *Don't know*, attributed their answer mainly to a lack of skills.

A further question asked respondents to indicate *which aspects, in their view, make a teacher a language educator*. The answers can, again, be divided into categories. A first group emphasised a good command of the Italian language (or of several languages) and an ability to use the language correctly, applying constant care and attention to using the appropriate terminology, and
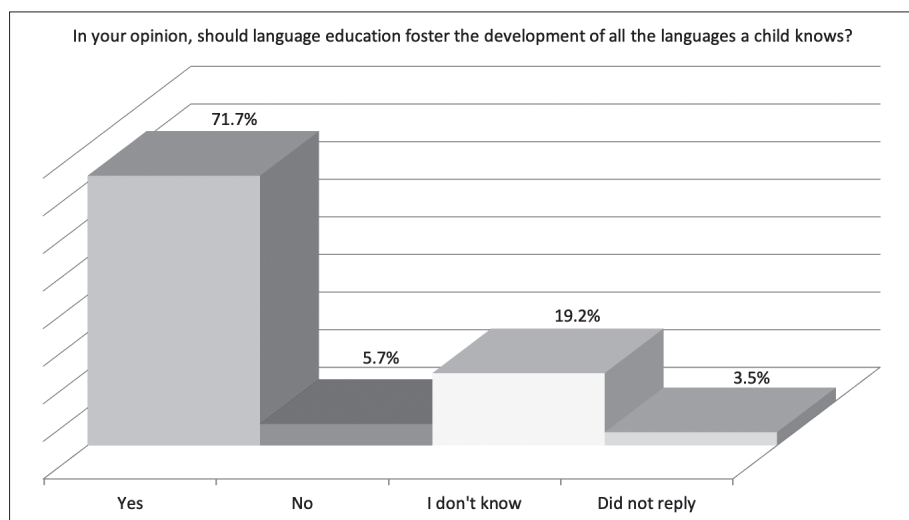
Figure 7. Graph of the breakdown, in percentages, of the answers to the question "*In your opinion, should language education foster the development of all the languages a child knows?*".

constantly curating the expressions used by one's pupils. A second group emphasised the communicative skills of the teacher while a third group highlighted a knowledge of several languages. A fourth group considered it important to focus on language(s), on the ability to create connections between languages, offer stimuli for the use of language, and convey a love of language; to encourage discovery through reflection and guided observation rather than applying pre-packaged rules. A fifth group comprised teachers who believe that a teacher is a language educator when he or she is aware of being one. A final sixth group comprised teachers who believe that a teacher is always, and in all cases, a language educator, but that the awareness of being one is the element that makes the difference.

6.4. The pupil's language repertoire and language education. The questionnaire went on to ask the respondents *In your opinion, should language education foster the development of all the languages a child knows?*. 71.7% of the teachers answered *Yes*, 5.7% *No*, 19.2% *Don't know*, while 3.5% did not answer (Fig. 7).

Although a large majority of the teachers were convinced that language education should foster the development of all the languages that a child knows, it should be noted that, among those who answered in the affirmative, those who commented on their answers did so mainly to express some perplexities. These concerned, for example, the fact that the activities proposed in class depend very much on the number of pupils and the possible presence of foreign

children or children with SEN[19], ADHD[20], SLD[21]. Other respondents commented on the difficulties of not always having the means and time to create opportunities for comparisons between languages, on teachers perhaps not knowing the languages spoken by their pupils of non-Italian origin, or on the teacher's need for expert support in promoting the plurilingual development of children. At the same time, those who answered *No* or *I don't know*, did not express a total opposition to the idea that language education should foster the development of all the languages a child knows; however, they also expressed concerns. One teacher wrote "For the time being, I think it is an unrealistic goal even if desirable", while others expressed doubts about the existence of time and skills in the school, or stated that "the primary school must open knowledge up to the acceptance of other cultures and their languages; however, if one does not have the specific skills, it is better not to confuse children's language".

At this point, respondents were asked to answer the question *How would you define, in your own words, the pupil's "individual language repertoire"?*. This question was also aimed at understanding what the definition of a pupil's "individual language repertoire" evokes in teachers' minds.

Again, the answers can be divided into groups. Some teachers interpreted the question as an input for making a quality judgement on the children's current language repertoire, rather than as an input for defining it. In this case, the judgments expressed were largely negative: the repertoire is, in fact, rated at best good, otherwise fair, medium-poor, lacking, limited, very poor, deficient, arid, dispersive, too standardised, not very polished, or "a big hodgepodge dominated by media language".

Another group of teachers associated the individual language repertoire of the pupil with the set of known words and structures: "the words he knows", the "set of vocabulary and language structures he possesses", "how many words he uses", the "knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical rules". Other respondents identified individual linguistic repertoire as the set of languages and language varieties known to the pupil, and thus defined

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[19] SEN (in Italian school system "*BES*") is the acronym for Special Educational Needs, which, in the school context, is also often used to refer to pupils with special educational needs ("a SEN pupil"). Indeed, as the very definition of "special educational needs" states, it is a macro-category comprising three major sub-categories: disability, specific learning and/or developmental disorders and socio-economic, linguistic or cultural disadvantage.

[20] ADHD is the English acronym (also used in Italy) for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; again, in the school environment, the acronym is often used to refer to pupils suffering from this disorder.

[21] SLD (in Italian school system "*DSA*") is the acronym used to refer to Specific Learning Disabilities, which mainly include dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dysorthography, dyspraxia, specific spelling disorder and, as an associated disorder, specific language disorder.

it as "the language or languages that the pupil knows how to speak, depending also on the contexts", "all the languages the pupil knows, whether he or she speaks them more or less fluently or understands them but is unable to speak them", "the variety of the pupil's communicative codes", "the set of one or more languages or dialects spoken by the pupil", "his or her ability to communicate with the outside world and to create relationships", "the set of linguistic knowledge possessed". One of the respondents described it as 'a shelf where different containers can be placed, which can increase in size and fill up differently with respect to their daily experiences'. Some teachers, on the other hand, emphasised the fact that the language repertoire is constantly changing, describing it as "plurilingual and constantly evolving". Others, finally, equated the pupil's individual linguistic repertoire with the basic linguistic competence (in one or more languages) with which the child entered school and which is to be enriched in the course of the school experience.

7. Conclusions. In the first part of this contribution, we briefly illustrated the theoretical assumptions that led to the formulation of the questionnaire, highlighting the key role that Teacher Cognition plays in the daily actions of teachers and, thus, in the ways language education is concretely implemented.

The snapshot that we took with our survey provides a picture of teachers who are, for the most part, aware of their role as language educators – convinced that language education must start from the linguistic background of the pupil and attentive to the plurilingual reality of the classrooms in which they work – and bearers of a positive attitude towards bilingualism and plurilingualism, albeit with a rather traditional idea of bi/plurilingualism.

However, the snapshot also produces some grey areas. As we have seen, some teachers hold the belief that plurilingualism is more of an obstacle to learning Italian than a positive factor. Against the backdrop of our image, we therefore see the re-emergence of a tendency, historically present in Italian schools, to believe that languages other than Italian should also be banned from children's family and personal lives: a significant percentage of our sample believes, in fact, that even in the family or in free time it would be good if children did not speak languages other than Italian. This trend is in apparent contradiction to the generally positive value attributed to bilingualism or plurilingualism by the majority of respondents.

Although expressed by a rather limited number of respondents, the reference to the lack of time and the feeling of urgency of having to carry out activities related to the teaching of Italian or disciplines in a limited number of hours per week runs through the entire questionnaire.

We can certainly consider it positive that more than a third of the respondents say that they give space in their lessons to plurilingual activities

(although, as we have seen, such plurilingual activities do not always involve the pupils' languages) and that three quarters of them say that they give space to pluri/intercultural activities. It is equally positive that a high percentage of respondents believe that this type of activity should not only be introduced in classes where there are foreign pupils. Nevertheless, the data also show us a minority, but not insignificant, percentage of teachers who have reservations about the general introduction of this type of activity and the use of languages that are not strictly "scholastic" in the school environment. At the same time, several teachers declare themselves unable to conduct these activities themselves.

The fact that some items polarised respondents' answers almost entirely in terms of agreement/disagreement probably indicates that these statements are widely shared and have now become part of the teachers' vision of school. It is necessary, however, to bear in mind the possibility that, alongside the answers given out of conviction, there may be some answers conditioned by social desirability. While it is true that administering the survey via an online form filled in anonymously and independently would have reduced the social desirability factor, it is also true that it is a factor very difficult to zero in on.

There were also a number of items on which a relatively high percentage of respondents expressed uncertainty. Considering that the respondents all belonged to a sector very likely to be familiar with the topics covered, the high number of teachers expressing uncertainty around certain statements could indicate that some respondents perceived those items as sensitive and therefore preferred to maintain an attitude of neutrality. These are, in any case, two phenomena that could be deserving of more in-depth investigation.

The analysis of the data we have presented and discussed confirms the appropriateness of investigating teachers' Teacher Cognition in relation to various aspects of Language Education, not only to gain an in-depth understanding of their points of view, but also to be better able to calibrate possible support and training interventions, from which valid and shared teaching paths emerge. In this sense, it could be useful, for example, to repeat the survey in other geographical areas, integrating the administration of the questionnaire with a number of interviews and the direct observation of classroom activities; this would help us understand the teaching methods and strategies used, for example, in the conduction of plurilingual activities, but also the concrete ways and strategies with which teachers devote specific attention to language when teaching non-linguistic subjects. It would also be useful to conduct a similar survey among students of Primary Teacher Education, perhaps setting up a panel for a longitudinal survey that would follow the evolution of their Teacher Cognition.

Concerning the impact on teacher training, it seems to us that it may

be useful, firstly, to promote greater awareness of the advantages of plurilingualism; secondly, to foster greater knowledge of the methods and teaching strategies with which one can support pupils in the transition from BICS competence to CALP competence (Cummins 1979, 1999); and thirdly, to disseminate knowledge of pluralistic approaches.

The way to pursue these goals may be not so much (or not only) the promotion of training courses, but rather (or also) experimentation and discussion among teachers with the support of trainers and experts. With regard, in particular, to pluralistic approaches, an initial technique adopting the role of 'students' could be useful, followed by the design of plurilingual and pluri/intercultural pathways linked to the disciplines taught, so that these practices gradually and naturally become part of everyday teaching and discussion between colleagues.

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