Enrica Piccardo (2013, this issue) makes a cogent case for the post-structural redesign of language teaching and learning within a paradigm of plurilingualism, in concert with the linguistic landscape of the global village. She conceptualizes the individual’s communicative competence as a plurilingual facility that encompasses knowledge of language varieties in addition to different languages. This fluid notion of plurilingualism is a radical proposition for language education, moving pedagogical designs beyond language, structurally defined, as the basis of second language, foreign language, and bilingual education towards models accommodating customized, plural, and hybridized language learning. In its wake, historically grounded norms of language education, such as standard language and monolingualism are called into question.

This article introduces a third space approach to plurilingual education, conceived as linguistic inclusion in the culturally diverse classroom. In describing our research, I address political barriers to conscripting plurilingualism as a base for pedagogical development, as well as digital possibilities in the linguistic landscape of the global village.

CREATING THIRD SPACES FOR PLURILINGUALISM

Translating plurilingualism into pedagogical design brings teachers face to face with political recognition and regulation of languages, language acquisition, and language use. Languages are not social equals. Official, commercially viable, and civically responsive languages are prioritized in the classroom. In the context of this article, in Toronto, English and French are mandated in the curriculum in keeping
with Canada’s Official Languages Act of 1969 (Canadian Heritage, 2008). However, classrooms in the greater Toronto area embody Canada’s multiculturalism policy (1971) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012): they are cultural amalgams where children speak languages from around the world. There is, thus, a significant gulf between children’s linguistic capital and the language priorities of formal education. It is left to teachers to reconcile this mismatch.

To navigate language teaching in urban classes characterized by linguistic diversity, we utilized a third space perspective. Third space is a late 20th century polycentric concept denoting sites of postcoloniality in both spatial and textual spheres that interrupt cultural essentialism, and create possibilities for meaningful hybridization (Bhabha, 1990; Soja, 1989, 1996). In second language education, Gutiérrez (2008; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999) conceptualized third space as a constructive sociocritical literacy perspective, building on Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development, and Bakhtin’s (1975/1981) dialogic learning. Moje et al. (2004) constructed third space in the literacy classroom as a merging of home, community and school funds of knowledge, and discourses (following Gee, 1996). Kramsch’s (2009) overview of third culture/thirdness questioned uncritical binaries in second language education, such as native and nonnative speaker, first language (L1) and second language (L2), identifying a space where learners could negotiate the slippery terrain of conventional and idiosyncratic expression.

**ACCESSING THE VIRTUAL LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE**

We created spaces for language learning and awareness by welcoming multiple languages into classroom learning and text creation as part of a collaborative action research project directed to multiliteracies pedagogies development (Lotherington, 2011). Support for children’s developing language knowledge came from the community, accessed in the school, the neighbourhood, and online.

A critical aspect of the linguistic landscape in the global village that Piccardo does not take up is the digital universe, which opens up a virtual linguistic landscape of vast plurilingual possibility (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). The Internet exists primarily in a dimension of time, lifting interlocutors from the spatial boundaries of national politics with their associated language standards, and contributing to language hybridity.

With the increasing portability of powerful digital devices, human communication is being transformed in digitally created communities of cultural and communicational connectivity and convergence (Jenkins, 2004). New communications interrupt dichotomized notions of language use (e.g., spoken–written, oral–print), by utilizing multiple
semiotic resources that extend and transcend the alphabet (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kress, 2003, 2010), creating spaces for multimodal expression that accommodate multiple languages in juxtaposition, hybrid formations, and multimodal ensembles.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Although Piccardo states that there is no single route to successful plurilingual education, she presents two facilitative tools from the Council of Europe: the European Language Portfolio (ELP; Council of Europe, 2012a), and the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE; Council of Europe, 2012b). These tools are sophisticated and helpful, and the AIE is adapted for younger as well as adult learners. However, neither is designed for the linguistically heterogenous classroom where immigrant children are in social flux, caught between cultures that parents understand as distinct whether scholars do or not, and who are reliant on education in the new country. The pressing question for North Americans is not simply how to overcome what Gogolin (1994, cited in Piccardo, p. 609) terms the “monolingual disposition,” which is deeply embedded in public policy, social attitudes, and the larger geographical sphere, but how to teach and support all learners in the classroom.

OUR EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE: CREATING THIRD SPACES IN THE LINGUISTICALLY HETEROGENEOUS CLASSROOM

How does the teacher approach a kindergarten class of 23 children who speak 16 different languages? This linguistic diversity is characteristic of public education in Toronto, where over half of all schoolchildren speak a language other than English (or French) (Toronto District School Board, 2012). At Joyce Public School in northwestern Toronto, we developed an exploratory project-based approach to multiliteracies education over the course of a decade that created discursive and textual third spaces for community languages.

Our explorations began in 2003, when the principal of the school and I worked with teachers to rewrite a traditional children’s story through the children’s eyes, using digital media (Lotherington, 2011). We discovered that children were receptive to the agentive, exploratory learning that resulted from our initial explorations, and the

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1 Consent has been attained to use the real names of the school and the teachers.
A project was repeated, eventually working into a formalized collaborative school–university action research project to develop multiliteracies pedagogies. Our modus operandi was the formation of an in-house learning community based on community of practice principles (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Classroom teachers and university researchers met at the school for regular monthly workshops to plan, develop, conduct, and share annual collaborative educational projects (see Lotherington, 2011).

Each year, a dozen or so teachers participated in one of 2–5 team projects focused on agreed curricular learning aims, a narrative structure, a commitment to the principles of play in digital literacy learning (de Castell & Jenson, 2003), and the inclusion of children’s home languages. I will provide a brief overview of two examples of these projects.

Kindergarten teacher Michelle and Grade 2 teacher Sonia created a cross-age anti-bullying project based on The Three Billy Goats Gruff (Lotherington, Paige, & Holland-Spencer, 2013). They paired early readers with children just learning to read, matching language backgrounds. Paced over the course of a year, children analyzed the social problems manifest in the story, wrote letters to the story characters suggesting that they be more polite by using please and thank you, rewrote the narrative as a polite interchange, created finger puppets for playacting their prosocial dialogues, and then built a playscape for acting their rewritten Respectful Billy Goats stories. The revised storybooks they collaboratively wrote were open-ended, and, with the help of community members, tailored to each child’s plurilingual repertoire. Story endings were cocreated at a celebratory parents’ night, where families gathered in the school gym to learn about their children’s projects, share their children’s books in the language of comfort, and collaboratively create story endings.

In Michelle and Sonia’s team-taught project, children tackled a thorny social problem via storybook characters. Their language learning, focused on English politeness mechanisms, opened spaces for children’s home language inclusion in three ways: by pairing children according to home language backgrounds; by soliciting strategic community support for translations of the children’s work; and by encoding community languages in children’s rewritten stories.

Whoever You Are involved a collaborative team of 6 teachers working with children in Grades 4 and 5 on a cross-curricular project promoting antiracism and antihomophobia. The project culminated in a beautiful talking book entitled Imagine a World that featured students’ multimodal collages framed around the concept of respect (Joyce Public School Multiliteracies Project, 2011). Each page focused on one or two human similarities, illustrated in corrugated cardboard prints following a procedure the children had learned visiting an art studio downtown, and handwritten in a variety of languages (see Figure 1).
Imagine a World celebrated linguistic diversity in the explication of common humanity, exploiting two faces of plurilingual third spaces. Running alongside the common language of English on each page and in the spoken book is an eclectic assortment of languages, as individual as the art on the page. The multilingual page frame, designed by Grade 5 teacher Andrew, merged plurilingualism and art, using online resources.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Plurilingualism is a slippery benchmark in language education, which is subject to political pressures as well as social needs. Our solution was to customize an education system dedicated to a politically limited bilingual disposition, by instituting project-based learning, rather than attempting systemic language reform. We focused on how (rather than what) to teach, inviting into project spaces all languages, particularly those excluded from direct curricular study. Using collaborative projects as a fulcrum for revising the scope of language and literacy education, teachers guided children to explore cross-curricular questions, build complex multimedia texts, and utilize customizable textual and discursive spaces to support plurilingual development.

FIGURE 1. Imagine a world, p. 11: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zabcX_zoP0
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for two standard grants and one small grant in support of this research.

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Plurilingualism as Multimodal Practice

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doi: 10.1002/tesq.118

- Enrica Piccardo’s article (2013, this issue) on the concept of plurilingualism and its potential contribution to English language teaching is a meaningful addition to ongoing discussions in countries such as