

DEVELOPING LANGUAGES THROUGH THE iPad APP iTEO

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Luxembourg

Trilingual Luxembourg has three official languages, Luxembourgish, French and German, but many more are spoken on account of the high percentage of foreign residents in the country. In 2014, 45,3% of the residents were non-nationals with the Portuguese, French and Italian being the largest minorities (STATEC, 2014).



Languages in the education system

The teaching of languages is given priority in the “école fondamentale” and accounts for nearly 50% of the curriculum time. Luxembourgish is the language of instruction in nursery school. Children become literate in German in Year 1. They are introduced to oral French in Year 2 and become literate in French from Year 3. A monoglossic view underpins the system, which results in language skills being developed in a linear and compartmentalised manner (Gretsch, 2014).

Currently, 60.2% of the children do not speak Luxembourgish as their home language (MENFP, 2014).

Languages act as a barrier to educational success. The PISA and PIRLS studies consistently demonstrate that the non-nationals, approx. 50% of the school intake, underachieve (MENFP, 2014).

iTEO and storytelling

There is currently very little research on the processes of learning and teaching languages in the classroom. There is, by contrast, a wealth of quantitative studies on educational failure rates of ethnic minority children. Our project investigates language learning through the iPad app iTEO.

Storying is a valuable tool for the ‘interanimation of languages’ (Bakhtin, 1981, 51) in Luxembourg’s school and societal context. It binds technological features, social interests and human activities. The iTEO app enables participants to build on their unique language resources when constructing oral texts.

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) is preferred over activity theory (AT) for analysing the part played by the iTEO tool in the language production process. ANT regards agency and intentionality as symmetrically distributed among human and nonhuman actors in the iTEO team.).

Aims of the project iTEO (2013-2016)

We investigate

- how 4 teachers and 8 children use the iTEO to further the learning of languages in nursery (C1) and primary school (C2; Years 1 and 2)
- how the language practices and the children’s oral performances change over time.

The focus lies on non-native Luxembourgish-speaking children but given the collaborative nature of storying on iTEO, Luxembourgish-natives will be investigated as well.

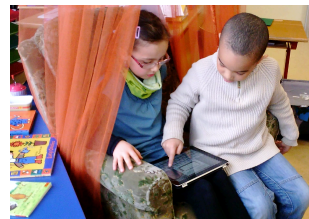
Methodology

The study is carried out in four schools in different parts of the country and spans over two academic years. The participants comprise 2 teachers in nursery and 3 in primary school (Year 1 becoming Year 2) as well as the 4- and 6-year-olds learning Luxembourgish in C1 and the 6- to 8-year-olds learning German and French in C2.

This qualitative longitudinal study with data collected over two years uses several research methods: video recording of children’s storying, observations of classroom activities involving iTEO, interviews with all participants and the collection of documents. The data analysis draws on grounded theory and Actor-Network-Theory. The former will offer insights into the learning processes and teaching practices and the latter will help analyse the roles and functions of the tool.

Findings

Findings of this educational research deepen our understanding of the ways in which children aged 4 to 7 use their entire linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire when *languageing* on iTEO. In addition, they help teachers develop sound pedagogical practices for furthering the learning of multiple languages.



The nursery children use Luxembourgish, their home language (e.g. Portuguese, French) as well as, at times, the home language of their peers when collaboratively telling stories and organizing the storytelling event. The children in C2 use Luxembourgish, German and French dynamically when they narrate, dynamically assess and revise their productions. The findings also show the range of unstructured and structured ways in which iTEO is used to further languages as well as changes of practices over time (Gretsch, 2014; Kirsch, 2014; Kirsch & Gretsch, forthcoming).

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