

Translanguaging pedagogy and creative activism for preschool teachers, parents, and children

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Today's education is impacted by the fast changes that can be very challenging for teachers, parents, and students. The need of pedagogies that will support them to navigate through these changes and challenges, becomes evident, especially in highly linguistically and culturally diverse countries such as the small trilingual Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. One of such pedagogies is translanguaging pedagogy.

While translanguaging refers to the natural use of entire linguistic repertoire of bi/multilingual people, translanguaging pedagogy helps teachers to use bi/multilingual students' unique linguistic repertoires to foster learning, comprehension, and academic achievement (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). In Luxembourg, there are 64 % of four-year old children who not speak Luxembourgish at home (MENJE, 2018). Therefore, in 2017, multilingual early education has become mandatory obliging teachers to help students to develop Luxembourgish, familiarize them with French, and value their home languages. Thus, in order to support teachers' work, there were three objectives of the present project¹: (1) to administer an 18-hours professional development (PD) course in translanguaging pedagogy to 40 preschool teachers, (2) to actively include students' families in order to straighten home-school collaboration, and (3) to support children's linguistic, socio-emotional, and cognitive development and engagement in the classroom. The PD course was divided into seven sessions on multilingual ecology, home-school collaboration, multilingual brain, and multilingual oracy and literacy, over 6 months. To evaluate the success of these aims, before and after the course, we employed teacher questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews with the teachers, parent questionnaires and interviews with the parents, and early literacy and numeracy tests in the school and home languages as well as video observations of classroom interactions with the students.

Regarding the teachers, the results from the teacher questionnaire before and after the course, showed that there was a significant positive change in attitudes towards children's multilingualism and their home languages. However, in the focus groups and the interviews, we identified that most of the teachers were open to the use children's home languages only to develop the school language, Luxembourgish. In the analysis of the video observations of teacher/child interactions, we observed that when the home language of children was used, this immediately contributed to their well-being.

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However, we also observed that in some classrooms the use of children's home languages was artificial; the teachers insisted on naming home languages instead of giving the children the opportunity to use the school language and be proud of it.

Regarding the parents, the analysis of 65 questionnaires on children's home literacy environment and the interviews showed that parental involvement is crucial for children's linguistic and socio-emotional development. The interviewed parents shared that they would like to be more involved in the home-school collaboration but they did not know how. Although they were open for more collaboration, most of the parents thought that this should be initiated from the teachers.

Finally, regarding the children, we observed the linguistic and socio-emotional development of 23 children (age 4) over one year. The children were tested in early literacy and numeracy, three times over the course of one year. When plotting the results, we identified that all children performed better in their home languages than in the school language and that there was a progress in both home and school language over one year. Furthermore, the video observations showed that when translanguaging pedagogy was used and children's home languages were valued, children were more responsive and eager to learn and interact with others.

Following these results and in order to connect teachers, parents, and children, I developed a website for teachers with the summary of important theories in multilingualism supported by many practical activities in the domain of multilingual classroom, home-school collaboration, and multilingual oracy and literacy. The website is in English, French, and German, and teachers can find a solid support for their work. Furthermore, I wrote two illustrated books for parents and children. In the illustrated book for parents the main character is a woman called Sumak who moved from another country as a refugee and is forced to learn a new language in a society she does not fit in. A storytelling workshop will allow teachers and parents to share their experience and connect on a deeper level. In the book for children, the main character is a girl called Mara who moved to a new country and does not understand the school language. She is sad and angry and tries to find solutions, for example, in music. The book contains a CD with in which the character Mara sings the song in Mara's language, allowing teachers and children to hear that it is ok to speak in a language they do not understand. The illustrated books exist in English, French, Serbian, Portuguese, and German.

These creations are an act of creative activism, which are "transformative interventions in order to change society for the better by communicating conflicts and/or solutions where no one else can or will in order to provoke reflection (and consequent behavioral changes)" (Harrebye, 2016, p. 25). Finally, this is an act of going beyond the horizons and the project results, and reimagining everything, especially playing with new ideas and applying those through specific creative acts that bring teachers,

parents, and children together. The Conference will allow me to showcase these creative interventions, discuss their impact on the schools, and offer them to international researchers who work in education and beyond.

References

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