

## A multilingual preschooler's school belonging: The role of translanguaging pedagogy

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### **Abstract** (178 words)

Students must feel a sense of belonging to engage in learning. They need to feel accepted, respected, and supported by peers and teachers. A well-cultivated sense of belonging has positive impacts on children's well-being and school success. However, migrant children often go to schools where language practices are different from those of their homes and where they often feel alienated. In this study, we closely examine how the teacher's translanguaging pedagogical practices influence one multilingual young child's sense of belonging in a Luxembourgish preschool. Our focused video analysis shows the relationship of seven significant moments of translanguaging pedagogical interactions between the teacher and the child, and the child's deepening relationship with the teacher, his peers, and the classroom space. The teacher's use of translanguaging pedagogical practices was related to the child's increased sense of belonging in this preschool classroom, as well as all the children's sense of belonging as multilingual Luxembourgers. The findings are supported by the interviews with the child's mother and the preschool teacher. This study holds important lessons for early childhood education of multilingual children.

*Keywords:* belonging, translanguaging pedagogy, preschool, Luxembourg

### **Extended abstract** (991 words)

#### *Aim*

To belong is to feel a deep connection with physical places and social groups (Allen et al., 2021). For students, belonging to school is to feel accepted, included, respected, and supported by others, especially peers and teachers (Allen et al., 2021). It is a precondition for their learning and school success, but also well-being and coping with stress (Allen et al., 2021). This is particularly important for migrant children who attend schools where their home languages are not spoken. Because language is the medium of interactions with peers and teachers, it can critically influence their sense of belonging (e.g., de Jong et al., 2020).

When it comes to preschool children, Wastell and Degotardi (2017) have identified two important components of belonging, which is *relationship to people*, that is peers and educators, and attachment to the preschool as *place*. To help migrant children feel familiar with the classroom and to feel accepted and included in school activities, teachers should use inclusive pedagogies such as translanguaging (e.g., de Jong et al., 2020). Translanguaging pedagogy helps children to communicate and make meaning by using their whole linguistic and nonlinguistic repertoires (García et al., 2017). By having positive attitudes towards children's languages (*stance*), designing activities accordingly (*design*) and being flexible and responsive to children's translanguaging (*shifts*), teachers support children's language development,

ability to communicate with others, but also their identities (García et al., 2017) and school belonging (SB), all important for their well-being and learning (e.g., Allen et al., 2021).

### *Method*

In this case study we show how the implementation of the teacher's translanguaging practices increased the sense of belonging of a multilingual boy in a Luxembourgish preschool, a highly diverse place.

The focal child for the analysis is Milan, a 5-year-old boy whose mother speaks Czech, and his father Estonian. Milan attended a French day care, so he prefers to speak French in preschool. His knowledge of Luxembourgish was very low, which was confirmed by the language tests. This has negatively influenced his well-being, which was the main worry of his mother as expressed in the interview and in the teacher's questionnaire on Milan's socio-emotional development. Milan's preschool teacher is Cynthia, who speaks Luxembourgish, German and French, as well as English. She implements translanguaging pedagogy in her classroom.

We focus on one classroom activity which we video analyzed guided by *moment analysis* that emphasizes the "spontaneous, impromptu, and momentary actions and performances of the individual" (Li, 2011, p. 1225). In this activity, Cynthia helps Milan to explain his drawing of a robot and a rocket to his peers by translanguaging. In this way, she also creates an opportunity where Milan can be accepted and respected by his peers, which deepens his relationships with them as well as with the teacher (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017). The video transcript is divided into seven significant moments.

### *Results*

The video analysis shows clearly how the teacher's translanguaging practices in a literacy lesson accomplished the following: helped Milan develop a voice as a creator/teller of stories (Moment 1), raised the class's consciousness of multilingualism (Moment 2), acknowledged the class's multilingualism as a resource (Moment 3), engaged with children's wonderings (Moment 4), elaborated children's wonderings (Moment 5), created a sense of being a collaborative ensemble (Moment 6), and developed a sense that Luxembourgish was done by all (Moment 7) (Aleksić & García, 2024).

These moments of translanguaging action by the teacher are corresponded by the stages which Milan goes through as he deepens his relationship with his teacher, with his peers, and with the preschool classroom (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017). Each of these relational moves show Milan's increased belonging as he is engaged in an activity where he: smiles for the teacher (Moment 1), smiles for peers (Moment 2), voicing for the teacher (Moment 3), recognizing peers through bodily language (Moment 4), voicing for peers (Moment 5), collaboratively voicing as equals (Moment 6), and belonging as multilingual Luxembourgishers (Moment 7). Milan slowly develops a sense of belonging first by building a relationship to the teacher through smiles, and tentative voicing. He then slowly builds a relationship with his classmates through smiles, gestures and finally voicing (Aleksić & García, 2024).

Milan is seen, heard, and respected for his translanguaging actions both by the teacher and the peers. Through his actions he is seen as a multilingual speaker who tells his own story and not simply as a non-Luxembourgish speaker. His increased SB was confirmed in the interviews with the mother and the preschool teacher while the language tests showed a progress in Luxembourgish over one year (Aleksić & García, 2024).

### *Discussion*

This study offers an example on how teachers can use translanguaging practices and support preschool children's sense of school belonging. It also shows the use of moment analysis of the videorecorded classroom activity that revealed how the focal child was given permission to communicate with his entire repertoire as well as how the teacher created an opportunity for Milan's participation and experience of belonging.

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