



TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Multilingualism, Identity and Diversity in the Early Years

Sixth meeting: Washington DC, July 8 – 10, 2015

Synthesis report

1. There is no fast track recipe: current paradigms

Over the past century, societies in Europe have been changing from rather monocultural entities, with a clear range of (presumed) agreed values and norms, into multidiverse societies, in which people from several different cultures, religions, languages need to find ways to co-exist, to work and live together. Ideally, this should happen in a sphere of mutual respect and a willingness to engage in open dialogue, but this is far from the current reality. The challenging part of this reality is that this superdiversity will not disappear and can no longer be ignored, but also that, instead of considering this to be a problem, all these diversities can be considered to bring new strengths and richness.

In the context of ECEC, this complex issue has not yet led to clear cut answers.

ECEC should be about offering safe places where children have their first encounters with the society they live in and where they are seen and respected for who they are. The ultimate pedagogical question then is how to balance colour blindness, denying the many disadvantages of children from vulnerable backgrounds, and reductionism, where children are reduced to the background of their parents and to develop educational policies that embrace diversity and stimulate social cohesion. ([MichelVandenbroeck](#)) ECEC settings seem to be the ideal place for this, but some concepts require more clarification. Language is part of one's identity. But what are we talking about? Minority languages, dual language learners...or multilingual children in multilingual classrooms? Language policies need to deal with not only the individual level - what language does a child need to learn? How and why? - but also the group level, the social level - what place can different languages have in a superdiverse society?

In the US ([CarolScheffnerHammer](#)) the increasing number of bilingual children (Spanish-English) continue to have less optimal academic outcomes, such as low reading proficiency and higher dropout rates. The challenges are multiple and linked to their minority status, a higher poverty rate, discrimination and the mainstream English educational culture. Alongside the remaining English-only policies in several states, new approaches seem to bring positive results. In these practices, the focus is not only on high quality language instruction (oral language abilities, open-ended questions, more conversational engagement...) but also on bringing in the home language, the child's cultural and linguistic background, as a basis for further learning. Allowing the home language to be spoken or used in teaching does not hinder the acquisition of another language





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

and enforces teacher-child relationships as well as the child's socio-emotional development. Children's knowledge in their home language helps them to better understand a second language. It is also important to give time to bilingual children and not compare them with monolingual children from day one. There is still a lack of good models for multilingual classrooms, especially in preschool, but immersion ('sink or swim') or taking children into separate classrooms have not been shown to be successful.

Simple recipes are not found on the European side either, where several strong assumptions on diversity and language continue to dominate the debate ([PietVanAvermaet](#)). While diversity is recognised as a main trait of current society, it is still not seen as a basic principle: all that deviates from the dominant norm remains a problem, an abnormality, a deficiency. In a monolingual ideology, different languages are considered to be a problem for the child's development and educational success. As mastering the dominant language is still seen as the ultimate condition for success, other home languages can only be an obstacle that has to be overcome. However, there is no real evidence to support this assumption. The true situation is far more complicated, multilayered and dynamic. If anything, the socio-economic background of children is the strongest explaining variable in cognitive development and academic success. Still, home language is often banned in ECEC and school and the use of the dominant language at home is still strongly encouraged, regardless of the possible negative impact of parents becoming less certain, leading to less interaction between parents and children (see also [ChristineHelot](#)). It also denies potential high literacy in home language to build on. Although the belief in the superiority of monolingualism remains quite strong, we do know that interaction is key in language learning. If we continue to force people into the dominant language, undesirable results are likely to follow.

Shouldn't we wonder why we still hang on to believing in immersion education (in the dominant language) while there has been little to no evidence that it works? Why not build on the increasing empirical evidence for bi- and multilingual education? There is a need to recognize that there are different repertoires (e.g. at home vs in school) and to use these to connect to what is relevant to children as well as build on existing literacy in the home language which contributes to the learning of another language, instead of hindering this process.

Developing multilingual educational settings requires new approaches, more involvement of (bilingual) teachers and of parents. A step beyond the divide between the mono- and multilingual thinking could be 'functional multilingual learning' in multilingual and L2-dominant learning environments. In this model, all home languages have a place in ECEC and school settings. The gains here could be multiple: build on home language knowledge and understanding, raise multilingual awareness, create positive attitude towards linguistic diversity, better contribute to a child's identity, wellbeing and status, increase children's self-esteem, expression and opportunities to really participate. It could move current school systems from a language learning model towards a 'multilingual social interaction model for learning'. (see also the Ghent experience). Multilingual learning settings can transfer learning from one language into the other, bridge the language gaps between the school and the home (teachers and





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

parents), while making them all co-constructors and partners in education. This will require well trained and coached teachers, some preferably with bilingual backgrounds themselves, a change in mindset of all people involved: promotion of multilingual interaction in schools, learning materials in home languages, and the combination several repertoires in several settings so that multilingualism can become an asset for the holistic development of young children. There are no easy shortcuts to accomplish this, but continuing to deny the reality of multilingualism is equal to agreeing that yet another generation will fall behind.

2. Moving from theory to real life settings and policies

Rethinking and changing strong monolingual beliefs and practices cannot be done by practitioners and teachers alone. Policymakers need to be audacious and accept the challenge to move towards more multilingual approaches as well. Both the state of Illinois and the city of Ghent (Belgium) presented inspiring initiatives.

The state of Illinois already valued native language instruction (meaning instruction IN the home language not OF the home language) and developed Bilingual Education Rules in 2010 in all preschools administered by a school district ([ReynaHernandez](#)). The number of ELL's in preschool increased quite dramatically since then.

The cultural shift is critical here: the language issue is also a civil rights issue and serving children with different linguistic (and often different socio-economic) backgrounds is an essential part of educational quality in itself, not a formal addition to check at the end of the line. Up until now however, bilingual education at a young age has still been aimed at education in English later on, rather than being the start of a coherent bilingual education. Currently, the Illinois State Board of Education is making efforts to integrate needs and considerations of Dual Language Learners and other diverse young children into all aspects of their early learning system to ensure that the very definition of "high quality" is responsive to the needs of all children and families, and not only the dominant cultural and linguistic majority.

For example, based on a screening of home language, children are identified according to their English and home language proficiency. These screenings need to be age- and developmentally appropriate, as well as culturally and linguistically sensitive. Multiple measures and methods are used and staff as well as parents are involved. This information can then be used to implement different programmes, such as transitional bilingual education, transitional program of instruction or language support systems. All teachers must meet certain certification requirements related to working with linguistically diverse learners. The Head Start principles were adapted to the state context and contain e.g. the rule that 'Effective programs for children with limited English speaking ability require continued development of the first language while acquisition of English is facilitated'. Other quality systems such as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) were also reviewed with a focus on addressing diversity and the principle that addressing children's linguistic needs is part of high quality ECEC programming.





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

In the city of Ghent, a home language project was set up in an overall monolingual education policy context, involving 4 to 8 year olds in four primary schools and two out-of-school services. ([Elke Decruyenaere](#)) In a city with some 160 nationalities and a 20% school dropout rate, a new approach was deemed necessary. The project aimed at developing school skills via the use of the home language (mainly Turkish) in teaching, focussing on literacy in the first language with involvement of native speakers. Both quantitative and qualitative instruments were used. The project resulted in recognition of the interdependence between home and (second) school language in the sense that a well-developed home language indeed leads to high scores in the second language in school. As described by Piet Van Avermaet, there were no negative effects of using the home language.. On the contrary, other positive results were observed: a higher self-confidence and wellbeing of the children, children supported each other more, teachers gained awareness of linguistic diversity, the use of more native language materials in class, an increased dialogue between teachers and children and more parental involvement. There was a higher involvement in learning Dutch as well as an increased tolerance among the children. All in all a more powerful learning environment was created. This was quite a change, especially given that in one of the participating schools, the use of the home language was still sanctioned before the start of the project. It is a clear success when the teachers involved do not want to return to the former system. Within the policy margin of a local authority, the city of Ghent wants to continue to focus on multilingual learning and will keep investing in pedagogical guidance, needed to support the teaching staff. Moreover when the project has proven to be financially feasible (2 pedagogical coaches); the major change seems to have been made in people's minds.

3. Inspiring approaches and philosophies that work

An inspiring example of “Functional Multilingual learning” was presented by [David Little and Deirdre Kirwan](#), on the experience in a primary school (4,5 – 12 year olds) in Dublin. The most remarkable thing being that this school is in no other way remarkable or unusual, nor more expensive or with higher subsidies. It uses the mainstream curriculum and educational goals as any other school and it doesn't have a terribly multilingual or specifically trained staff. What makes this school so special, is the determined will to find a solution to the reality of linguistic (and other) diversity. The multilingual practices in this school have led to a high pupil engagement and effective learning across all subjects. As a result of former involvement of the school in inclusive education projects, the commitment grew to move further towards an integrated approach in language policy. The school's vision is based on the recognition of a person's basic need for autonomy, self-awareness and identity and the role of language in supporting these needs. Language is seen as the “soil in which autonomy grows and the medium through which we exercise it”.

80% of the pupils knew little or no English or Irish when they started school and around 50 home languages are spoken. The school adheres to 4 main principles:





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

- Inclusive ethos: diversity is welcomed and every child can contribute to their own education
- Open language policy: all home languages can be used, in and out of the classroom
- Strong emphasis on developing language awareness: home language being a resource for all
- Strong emphasis on development of literacy skills in English and all home languages: writing and speaking and supporting each other in many different ways, involving parents.

Important helplines are e.g. regular staff meetings, ongoing support by the principal, regular reviews of the language policy and explicit discussion of how it works, continuously looking for new ways to support the multilingual educational setting and involving the parents. English, Irish, French (with a separate time slot in the school's curriculum) and home languages are also used throughout the various subjects, with children explaining things to each other, reaffirming each other's language development, and becoming agents in the learning process.

More specifically for the young children, a secure, nurturing class environment is created in which they can express themselves in any language. Everyday life stories and topics are expressed in different languages and the teacher gradually introduces all present languages in displays and learning activities (e.g. learning to count). As the children move on, more English and Irish is introduced in class but the home languages still remain an important vehicle for communication and (peer) learning.

Working with the children's own knowledge, skills and interests while respecting their different backgrounds stimulates their engagement. The development of literacy in English as the main language of schooling feeds into but also depends on the child's literacy in the home language (and additional languages they pick up in school).

This example showed how a multilingual educational environment can work: on obligatory standardised English and math tests for 1st class pupils, every year in May, this school's children scored above the national average for the past 2 years.

In the US, the Head Start and Early Head start programs have been promoting cultural and linguistic responsiveness ([Sharon Yandian](#)) as well, as many Head Start programs serve families and children who are not native English speakers. As the country's only national early learning program, moreover, Head Start's practices and policies have been greatly influential in promoting more responsive and research-based practices for Dual Language Learners in other programs across the US.

The recently reviewed program standards, which are being updated for the first time in decades, reflect both the evidence from ECEC research and experience and include regulations on the needs of dual language learners, while recognising the strengths of learning more than one language. Services need to provide appropriate materials, curriculum, assessment, instruction, staffing, supervision and partnerships in order to achieve set program performance goals. Staff e.g. must be familiar with the ethnic backgrounds and heritage of families served and be able to communicate with all of them; or, when a certain home language is spoken by a majority of children, a staff member must speak that language as well. For infants, home language development is recognized as being crucial; in preschool, teaching practices are focused on both





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

acquisition of English and the continued development of the home language, where possible. Regular screenings assess both developments and should be culture and language sensitive. While service delivery and the implementation of these guidelines will likely vary across Head Start grantees, depending on their demographic contexts, the national office provides information, training, and other resources to help promote culturally and linguistically responsive practices.

One example of a Head Start grantee putting these guidelines into practice is the Washington-based Campagna Center ([TammyMann](#)) which provides several types of ECEC services in which home languages are fostered and supported. One of the strategies employed is to have staff members who speak the home languages of the children and families served. Materials (songs, books...) in different languages are used to add home language experiences in the classroom. Staff members receive professional support through e.g. initial and continued training on cultural competences and understanding language acquisition, by coaching, by teacher meetings in which they can monitor progress made. Parents are considered as active partners in the service, in the classrooms and program activities, strengthening the home-school connections and giving them the opportunity to meet and support each other. Some parents volunteer in the centre and start working at the centre as they get an opportunity to follow a bachelor programme in early years education. This is also a strategy to get children's home languages represented amongst the child care personnel.

4. Reframing diversity and identity: from problem to richness

Demographic changes and socio-economic trends have significantly changed the picture of diversity in Europe ([MauriceCruel](#)). We can no longer speak of clear majority and minority groups as we have witnessed the influx of many different, smaller ethnic groups from many countries as well as a growing diversification within certain ethnic groups. Diversity has become super-diversity, in most European cities especially, making it difficult, if not impossible, to speak about one majority. This has several consequences: as there is no majority group anymore, integration of newcomers into such a majority becomes obsolete, and the development of targeted systems for specific groups is no longer feasible. If we see that in an Amsterdam high school class only a minority of young people have Dutch parents, in a group of 15 different ethnic backgrounds and 18 different home languages spoken, we can presume that the diversity level in ECEC is or will become even higher. This reality challenges traditional instruments and programs, which no longer provide valid answers in this context of super-diversity. As contexts can differ from country to country, not all policies and measures are easily transferable. In the case of the Netherlands, the choice for targeted ECEC services with less preschool accessibility and attendance has increased the language gap, which in turn has led to an overrepresentation of non-Dutch native speakers in vocational schools, as language is a major component in standardized tests. This gap cannot be closed solely through functional multilingual learning.





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Additional measures are needed, such as: desegregating ECEC, expansion of preschool hours for vulnerable groups and improvement of second language programs.

In the US as well, the population is becoming more diverse than ever. Still, the majority-minority language paradigm is the leading one. ECEC in general is not adjusted to the different needs of the many different groups of children. The school readiness gap between groups of children is growing, while the educational success of children with a different cultural and linguistic background is critical for the overall success of the education system and economic future. This growing diversity is a reality, calling for new approaches that move away from monocultural and monolingual educational systems. A variety of factors (country of origin, history of migration, SES, parent's education level...) result in children having different proficiencies in different domains, which all need to be addressed in a strength-based perspective. Bilingualism affects all developmental domains, and early experiences and exposure to multiple languages indeed changes the structure of the brain, so the language factor needs to be taken into account very explicitly. Moreover, also important to consider are apparently negative effects of acculturation for minority ethnic groups—in some cases, research has shown that the longer immigrant children stay in the US, the worse their developmental outcomes become. All of these factors point to the fact that high quality instruction alone is largely insufficient to support equal academic success for language minority students, and that additional considerations and supports need to be added to current strategies in order to change prevailing inequities through a holistic and interdisciplinary approach.

5. Working on inclusion and embracing diversity in multicultural settings

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RECONCILIATION

While embracing tolerance for differences is a moral and realistic imperative in our world today, this issue has even higher stakes in specific settings of historic conflict, as shown in presentations from Israel and Northern Ireland.

In trying to find educational programs as opportunities for reconciliation, top-down policies, often driven by economic and political ideology, do not seem to work as well as the more local, bottom-up approach, in which schools e.g. create their own language education policies, based on the very local unique nature and features ([ElanaShohamy](#)). These policies are to be generated by principals, teachers, parents, school boards, neighbourhood leaders and students themselves and reflect the local context and actual needs. Shohamy talks about 'engaged language policy', grown out of dialogue and reflection instead of imposed policies. School principals have a strong position here: while also being tied to government agencies, national policies and legislation, they can make a bridge between the top-down policies and the reality around and within the school. This is shown by the example of the Bialik-Rozogin school in Tel Aviv (see trailer of the 'Strangers No more' documentary on [youtube.com](#)) with children from extremely different backgrounds and 48 home languages. Within a Hebrew only policy, oblivious to diverse needs,





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

some universal values and a broad view on what 'language' is (arts, science, sports...) a transformative dialogue is developing in the school, creating a new sort of language policy that respects diversity and creates opportunities for the students' future. Different languages are used: Hebrew as a second language for many children, English as a safety net for the future and the home languages, focussing on the advantages of multilingualism. (other mentioned examples are the Hand in Hand schools where Arab and Jewish children attend school together in a multilingual setting. See [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))

Within the political context, this is hardly evident and much depends on the commitment of the principal. The Tel Aviv University has developed a course for future principals to learn how to work in a multilinguistic context. The goal is to familiarize principals, most of them with a strong Hebrew only ideology, with the multilingual reality in Israel and to encourage and support them in enhancing the visibility of diversity rather than to hide or deny it.

In Northern Ireland, an ECEC initiative works on peace building and fostering positive attitudes from the start ([Siobhán Fitzpatrick](#)). Research shows that prejudice and awareness of differences are developing at a young age. Today, the Northern Irish context is still heavily influenced by the former conflict and attitudes of 'ready for peace, prepared for war' are still present. The initiative combined several tools such as cartoons, a 'respecting difference' curriculum, resource packs and training programmes for staff, and parents and other actors of change and supporting ECEC specialists as critical partners during the implementation. Children's attitudes on exclusion (how it feels, how you recognise it) and accepting differences (willingness to play with others) were measured before and after the pilot program. Even after a short implementation period, attitudes had already changed: increased awareness of exclusion and how that must feel and increased willingness to play with other children that are different from oneself. The pilot was enlarged with a full blown media campaign and the full development of the Respecting Differences programme. Teachers, parents, communities and children themselves are all key partners. Reflecting on prejudice and encouraging dialogue on culture, identity symbols and issues of conflict are important elements of the programme. Research on the initiative in 2010, both randomized control trial and qualitative case study, have shown clear positive changes among the teachers, parents and children in their attitude and awareness of diversity, as well as in addressing diversity. Starting at the preschool level, the programme is now being continued in primary schools and the consolidation process is ongoing. The programme developed into more than just an ECEC initiative and fosters a community development approach, working towards social justice, participation and self-determination in a context of agreed identity and culture and mutual respect.

ACTING IN CONTEXTS OF DIVERSITY AND MULTILINGUALISM

Introducing multilingual policies and practices in ECEC seems to be quite a complex and difficult challenge, as discussed in presentations on the French (Strasbourg) and the German contexts. The search to find how we can support multilingual language acquisition and socialisation is only





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

just beginning. This in a reality where hardly any ECEC service is limited to serving a monolingual group anymore.

Research has shown the negative effects on young children of the pressure to learn a dominant language without making links and continuing to support the home language ([Christine Helot](#)). Ignoring children's home languages in educational structures has negative consequences for identity development because it can cause a loss of self-worth, values, traditions and beliefs; it can lead to breakdown in family relationships and socialisation and it prevents opportunities for cognitive development which are well known in bilingual learning contexts (see also Van Avermaet). Language is linked to social status and not being allowed to use one's own language is perceived today as a form of discrimination.

In France, a growing number of ECEC provisions have become bi- and multilingual because they are attended by multilingual children. But examples in Strasbourg show some of the shortcomings in relation to language development. All children are indeed welcome in such structures, but they are welcomed in French. When other languages are used, the working languages (French, German, English) are not always the home languages of the children attending. While the openness to different languages is growing, this doesn't result in home languages being used or supported on the work floor. However, practices are changing here and there. In one Strasbourg bilingual child care structure, where 13 languages are spoken by parents and staff, parents are encouraged to engage in activities where they can use their home language with all the children present. In another centre, both the children and the staff use their first language and discover the multiplicity of languages spoken, simply by living together. But these practices show that it is difficult to implement multilingualism in ECEC structures, more difficult than developing bilingual practices where only two languages are used. In bilingual structures, it is common to use the 'one person one language' policy to support two languages and to keep them separate in order to prevent language mixing. The fear of translanguaging is still rather prevalent, but managing multilingualism in ECEC is rather complex if one wishes to support the language development of all children. Yet, while dominant languages are entering ECEC structures, minority migrant languages on the whole are still very rarely used as working languages with the young children who speak such languages at home.

In Germany (Drorit Lengyel) the legal entitlement to a place in ECEC made attendance rates grow extensively, although this growth is slower for children with a migration background. This changes the questions on (home) language acquisition. How is this affected by enrolling in ECEC and how does it change identity formation and social education processes? It is important to look for ways in which both home and second language acquisition can be facilitated and promoted in ECEC. In this context, pedagogical work in multilingual settings is about co-construction within socio-cultural frameworks, giving children opportunities to construct cultural and linguistic knowledge that is also compatible with social education goals. In their play and peer interaction, they engage in meaning-making in the specific context and use language to understand and cope with social reality, and engage with each other. Focusing on language as a cognitive tool is about





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

framing and creating stimulating surroundings and social interactions where children engage in negotiating meaning toward self-regulation and higher forms of language use. Taking up the children's languages is crucial to paving the way to participation and building plurilingual identities in the community of practice.

An inclusive approach to multilingualism means encouraging activities and interactions in all languages children bring with them, including and mixing different repertoires and symbols. Valuing these languages and encouraging their use in social interaction supports the formation of multilingual identities.

ENGAGING MIGRANT FAMILIES IN EARLY YEARS CENTRES

(See [Harrop Heimgaertner Calado Milagre](#))

While Portugal, compared to many other EU countries, has a lower percentage of immigrants as a share of its total population, the number of immigrants, in particular of young refugees (70% of all immigrants in Portugal in 2014 were below the age of 30), has been growing in recent years, creating a unique challenge. The country's reception centers are full of children, and many unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria have sought a home in Portugal. Until recent years, most of the immigrants living in Portugal arrived with a fluent knowledge of Portuguese (arriving from e.g. Brazil and Cape Verde), again making the current demographic change a new challenge to be addressed.

One response to the growth of young immigrants in Portugal has been the creation of the ESCOLHAS program, set up by the High Commissioner for Migration, to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities for children in vulnerable contexts. A complete program was designed to develop intercultural schools, including certificates, training activities on intercultural and integration issues, intercultural mediation...all with the goal of promoting the understanding of cultural diversity, raising awareness of integration issues as well as developing intercultural skills and knowledge.

Similarly, the Aga Khan Foundation places social inclusion and gender equity at the heart of their work in the Madrasa Early Childhood program. In this model, the communities being served by the program are truly in charge of every aspect of the program, in terms of its direction as well as its content. Community members sit on the governance boards of the initiative, and through their guidance, a focus on quality and relevance is achieved.

A project in Germany adds the voice of migrant parents and ECEC practitioners to the language debate. Many parents confirm that learning the new country's main language is important (as a vehicle for school success and a symbol of belonging) but at the same time they are concerned about the family language disappearing. The home language is a symbol of belonging to a culture and they worry about possible communication problems, alienation within the family and identity problems when their children are pressured to learn German. In German ECEC, the German only approach is still predominant. Strategies to handle linguistic diversity or understand the perspective of parents is still lacking. ECEC practitioners feel that they should explain to parents the goals and concept of ECEC, but they are not accustomed to doing so, and they





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

encounter communication problems, partly because of language barriers. Parents feel that the practitioners do not understand or respect their cultural background, while this could help them in working with their children. While there is a willingness among practitioners to work on addressing diversity, the skills, knowledge and approaches to do so are still limited. With a shared common goal – the best possible education for children – more meaningful partnerships need to be developed between parents and practitioners. Both in-service training and sustained dialogue with parents can improve approaches to diversity in ECEC.

7. System level responses to linguistic and cultural diversity

The WIDA Early Years project, in partnership with Massachusetts' state Department of Education, ([Amaya-Thompson Arango-Escalante](#)) developed a comprehensive approach to support Dual Language Learners between 2,5 and 5,5 y old (35% of all children under 8y in Massachusetts), with an intentional focus on comprehensive and authentic assessment of young children's language development to support teaching, learning and development in two, or more, languages simultaneously or sequentially. It is a cross sectoral project, including e.g. Head Start, childcare, preschool and home visits and working closely with parents, and also seeks to improve alignment between early learning and K-12 curricula, particularly in light of the implementation of the Common Core standards across many states in the US. The WIDA language standards are extracted directly from existing state early learning standards (in this case from Massachusetts' standards but the same can be done in all states), including social and emotional, physical development, early literacy, and cognitive development, and creates a crosswalk to identify language standards and expectations across all levels and sectors to support teachers and other professionals. As in many other practices discussed already, multilingualism is considered to be an asset instead of a problem and home language is considered to be important. The programme combines resources and tools on language standards, professional learning, assessment and family engagement. The language standards for example need to monitor whether children meet the social and academic language development in order to meet existing state early learning standards. The professional learning tools support teachers in supporting instructing and assessing DLL's. Teachers and providers also get the necessary resources, tools and training to improve and maintain relations with the families involved. As of now, the standards have been fully developed in both English and Spanish, with plans to expand to other languages in the future.

System level responses to linguistic and cultural diversity can also be learnt from southern experiences and research ([KathleenHeugh](#)). European and US approaches and experiences with multilingual education settings may have only scratched the surface in comparison with the context in African countries, where multilingual education has been a reality for over 100 years, especially in non-formal education areas. At the same time recommendations for teaching





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

children in their home or community language have been a recurrent theme of educational reports regarding formal education for at least 120 years. However, while communities are usually multilingual and engage in multilingual practices in their daily lives, for the most part, governments of Africa have ignored research reports and tried to implement formal education systems based on European models of education since the late 19th century. For the first five decades after independence (in the mid-20th century) this has meant a forced transition from the local language towards one of the international languages of wider communication as the default language of formal education. The result has been that children have been expected to move too abruptly to a language that they do not understand, particularly in regard to reading materials and assessments. Retention of children in education systems in which they have not understood either the language of learning or the epistemological foundations of the system, has been disastrous.

From a vast body of research, several conclusions have been confirmed (but not always translated into policies). As indicated earlier, having children bring their home language, knowledge and expertise into educational settings does build confidence and a stronger sense of identity. It also strengthens the links between home, community and school and stimulates mutual respect and understanding between children and teachers of different linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds. The research data from several countries indicate that the longer the use of home language, the higher will be student retention and achievement. Eight years of home language medium appears to offer the best chances for students to finish secondary schooling and with success. Children do not seem to have a problem in learning and three languages, even if this involves two orthographies. Children learn as much, or maybe even more, outside classrooms than they do in schools. They pick up languages in addition to their home language/s in the immediate surroundings (local language/s, new urban or hybrid languages) and they develop several repertoires that they can build upon. There is a particularly strong correlation between local community participation and student achievement. The more opportunities there are for parent and community engagement with the school (e.g. community plantations generating funds for school resources) the higher the student achievement. Decentralisation of educational responsibility appears to be linked to the degree to which communities participate, the greater the degree of decentralisation, the greater the likelihood of parent and community participation. Increasing centralisation appears to close off opportunities for parents and communities to believe that they can participate and make contributions. Alternatively, greater centralisation appears to increase a sense of alienation of parents and community from the school.

There is considerable evidence to show the relationship between achievement and the medium through which assessment is conducted in both the South African and Ethiopian cases. Student achievement is higher when both teaching and assessment occur in the home / local language. When the new South African multilingual education policy was introduced after apartheid, assessment nevertheless continued in English and Afrikaans only. It therefore did not match the new policy. Worse than this, most African language speaking students found themselves in





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

situations where they had no choice in regard to the language of assessment, because they were only offered English as the language of assessment from the fourth grade to the end of secondary school. The result has been catastrophic student achievement since 1997, on a scale that has exceeded the worst failures of apartheid education. A trilingual assessment design, introduced by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC) in 2006 only, was able to demonstrate a better correspondence between community language practices and language/s of assessment. This design offers greater opportunity for linguistic and epistemic equity for students. Respect for different learning processes and epistemologies, and making effective use of the home language in education, does require their inclusion in assessment. The HSRC study demonstrates that there is no valid reason why assessment does not permit students to make use of their entire linguistic and epistemic repertoires so that a more holistic understanding of student achievement can be captured in assessment.

8. Policy debate and takeaways

The policymakers in the panel (Kristina Cunningham, European Commission, Roberto Rodriguez, US, Claude Sevenig, Luxembourg Michael Hempel, Germany) all agreed on the importance of ECEC, especially for children with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the policymakers agreed that the link with the superdiversity and multilingual reality in our society needs to be made and strengthened if we do not want to lose large groups of children in the education process. Superdiverse realities need to be reflected in education and care, as is described in for example the European Framework on Quality in ECEC (see [ecec-quality-framework](#)). The concept of quality should include the need to make the most of every child's linguistic knowledge and competences. Making reference to what is happening in the world (IS, Charlie Hebdo, intolerance towards refugees...) a warm appeal is made to start as young as possible with educating people in an environment of openness, mutual comprehension and respect.

Links also need to be made between different sectors (see also the TFIEY on Integrated services, [TFIEY5](#)) that have historically worked in parallel of each other for too long. In Luxembourg for example, school, childcare, out of school care and ECEC services have now been integrated within one ministry of Education. This illustrates a shift in paradigm: ECEC is now a pedagogical issue rather than an economic one. Luxembourg is building on its experience of multilingualism (3 official languages) with French and German being the languages of instruction even though most children speak Luxembourgish and recent policies aim to have all children from the age of 1 to have access to linguistic development in a multilingual context.

The US focus on the early years is largely motivated by huge gaps in achievement among different groups of children. Increased investments and resources have been allocated to improve the quality of ECEC services (the main precondition for successful outcomes), to expand home visiting programs and to move towards public ECEC for all. Valuing bilingualism and considering the home language as an asset is a rather new trend in the US, but important to





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

further develop. New standards are implemented in the federal preK-programme of Head Start and set new benchmarks in promoting dual language development.

With all that we already know (e.g. OECD reports), there is surely a consensus on what should be done to offer high quality ECEC to every child. Learning to work with bi- and multilingual children, families, and communities is part of this broader picture. The holistic approach toward child development should always remain at the centre of policies and practices. In this view, we should be careful with the apparent need to assess the possible outcomes as fast and often as we can; we know that outcomes cannot be so easily predicted and that it takes more than 2 weeks to fully assess one child. We should not base assessments on just one element such as language proficiency. Many other factors – poverty, disability, living context, family support or other vulnerabilities – have such an impact on a child’s development and wellbeing, that singling out just one feature simply doesn’t make sense. Keeping the child-centered focus of ECEC in mind, too many assessments and indicator schemes may as well “put everything at risk that is important in Early Childhood Education and Care”. We should measure what matters (Hempel). ECEC is also featured on the UN post- 2015 agenda: access to high quality ECEC should be guaranteed for all, boys and girls alike by 2030. A relevant indicator, in a holistic perspective, would be the number of under 5y olds being on the right track in health, learning and psycho-social wellbeing.

As the issue of multilingualism, diversity and identity form a complex puzzle, it is not easy to draw general conclusions or look for a ‘one size fits all’ solution. However, there are some clear directions to keep in mind, such as:

- Separation of groups/languages does not work very well. On the contrary, including the multilingual reality in pedagogical practice is positive for the socio-affective development of children and creates no disadvantages in learning the main language(s) of the respective country.
- Contexts are different, and need to be taken into account
- Functional multilingual learning can support and develop both the home language and the common (dominant) language. It respects the child’s background, eases transitions and uses the home language as a basis to learn other languages
- It takes time for children to develop: give them that time, be careful and patient and don’t rush into assessments too quickly
- Adapt assessment methods to the diverse and multilingual backgrounds of children
- Besides carefully designed programmes, committed, open minded and well trained professionals are needed to actually deliver them
- Teachers do not have to be multilingual, but they need to be tolerant and respectful towards multilingualism. Sustained and long term coaching and support can help them.





TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

- Invest in teachers and good leadership: the cost of implementing multilingual policies may be relatively limited; the greater challenges lie in changing the mindsets (and training) of childcare & education professionals.
- Parents need to be included as well: Investing in strong, safe, warm relationships between staff-children-parents results in higher well-being and better outcomes
- Make better use of good practices, spread successful experiences and scale them up to higher decision-making levels
- Be aware of the risk of schoolification of ECEC



The LEGO Foundation



FOUNDATIONFORCHILDDEVELOPMENT

The ATLANTIC
Philanthropies

ONEAMERICA
With Justice for All

ThrivebyFive
WASHINGTON

fondazione
cariplo

BertelsmannStiftung