Promoting and Supporting Language Development in Multilingual and Multicultural Early Childhood Settings

Guidelines for instructors

Language in a Multicultural Context (age 0-3) Over the past years pre-schools have become increasingly multilingual and multicultural in many parts of the world, including Europe. Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) are aware of this fact and deal with different nationalities during their everyday work. Thus, they want to learn how to help children with a migration background to develop additional languages and simultaneously hold on to the first language (L1) and their cultural background. The EYPs are mostly not bilingual themselves. In order to face this challenge, EYPs want to learn about different strategies for activities and forms of interaction in preschool settings to support and promote the development of the L1 as well as additional languages in the young learners. This provides the same chances for each child for its future life.

The Importance of the L1

According to Cummins (1984), the importance of the first language is crucial in order to learn the L2. This theory emphasizes that the first language acquired appropriately in the early years is to be seen as a basic model for future language learning. “Current research indicates that it is critically important that children have the opportunity to continue developing the home language as it has been shown that strong foundation in the first language provides the basis for later learning of the second language” (Siraj-Blatchford 2000, p.30 zit. n. Clarke 1996). All in all, EYPs should encourage families with a migration background to foster the mother tongue. “For young children entering a new language environment, the continued use of the home language is important for social and personal development. [...]Within the circle of the family, the continued use of the first language is important for strengthening the bond between parents and children, and for developing the growth of trust and affection in the home.”(Siraj-Blatchford 2000, p. 31).

EYPs’ Role

Especially for toddlers “early childhood staff need to be patient, caring, tolerant, flexible and need to be able to communicate effectively with parents and other staff about their work” (Siraj-Blatchford 2000, p.26). Many caring interactions with adults are essential for learning in a new environment and the early childhood staff should give their fostering and the parents the feeling of acceptance and belonging. “Children who do not have a positive feeling about the use of their home language and  

1 a language learned by a person after his or her native language, esp. as a resident of an area where it is in general use.
who are not supported by staff may lose the ability to speak in their home language and will become ‘receiving bilinguals’ (able only to understand but not to speak or reply)” (Siraj-Blatchford 2000, p.29f). As pointed out by Maagero & Simonse, (2012:77-88), “all children are able to meet several languages if the kindergarten teachers organise daily life in a way which makes the meeting and sharing of several languages possible. Here, knowledge about the importance of linguistic diversity is crucial but also the pedagogical creativity of finding daily life situations where several languages can be used.” (Maagerø. E. & Simonsen, B., 2012: 77-88).

Promoting the Development of First Languages and Additional Languages

The literature discusses different forms of bilingual and multilingual education. Immersion, for instance, is a form of bilingual education that derives from a Canadian educational experiment in the 1960s. In this methodological concept language majority children learn much or part of the curriculum through a second language (e.g. English speaking children learning through the medium of French in Canadian schools). The Catalan immersion programmes are also worth mentioning (e.g. English as an additional language in Catalunya) (Corcoll & Flores, 2009; Flores & Corcoll, 2011).

Another approach that is becoming increasingly popular in European schools is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), which is a methodological concept that integrates the acquisition of a foreign language into the regular learning process of a content subject. In short, it means that subjects such as geography, history or science are taught in a language that is not the learner’s mother tongue (Massler & Burmeister, 2010). As the findings of the ELIAS project (Kersten et al., 2010) have shown, the principles of immersion and CLIL can be adopted in early childhood settings to promote the development of first and additional languages.

This course aspires to make a contribution to the field. It is aimed for EYPs who face the situations described above and who wish to develop new competencies to stimulate language acquisition and create an effective language learning environment in multilingual and multicultural early childhood settings.

1. GOALS

- Participants become familiar with a) theories that emphasize the key role played by EYPs in supporting bilingual language development in early childhood settings and b) findings of earlier research on language use in early childhood settings.

- Participants gain an awareness (through the description of case studies) of the multilingual and multicultural situation of toddlers in Europe in general as well as of their own specific situations.

- Participants develop reflective skills to critically analyse the findings presented through the case studies.
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- Participants get familiar with “observation tools” which can be used by student teachers/practitioners to develop increased awareness of the importance of high quality interaction for creating an effective language learning environment.

- Participants learn how theory and practice work together and enrich each other by having the opportunity to use the “observation tools”, which were tested and revised in the framework of the project, to gather and analyse data on language interaction in their own contexts.

- Participants get to know best practice examples on dealing with multilingualism and multiculturalism in pre-school settings and learn criteria to analyze them.

2. ACTIVITIES

Initial Reflection Based on Observation Checklist
Type of activity: Group Work and Whole Class Discussion
In the first part of the course the students are going to be introduced to the “Observation Checklists for Analysis of Language Interaction”. In this phase they will use guiding questions (which are part of the teaching material) to examine this observation tool and reflect on a) their own practice as EYPs in multilingual and multicultural contexts and b) on the importance of specific interactive strategies for supporting additional language development. Their ideas will then be shared with the rest of the group in a whole class discussion.

After this initial introduction to the topic, the participants will become familiar with the theory that underlay the design of the observation checklist.

Theoretical Input
Type of Activity: Short Interactive Lecture
The teaching materials for this module will include PPT presentations on theories and research findings in the area of early language learning. These slides will include theoretical input and “questions for reflection”. This way, the participants will not simply consume knowledge, but also be encouraged to reflect critically on the theory and on the research findings.

After having gained theoretical knowledge and reflected on it, the participants will examine 8 case studies from different European countries.

Analysis of Case Studies and Development of Criteria for Evaluation of “Best Practice”
Type of Activity: Group Work and Group Presentation, Whole Class Discussion (a model of analysis is provided to teachers as part of the teaching material)
The participants are going to be divided into small groups. Each group will be responsible for the presentation of one of the case studies. The presentations should include a summary of the main findings and an analysis based on the theoretical knowledge acquired in the previous phase. All groups will receive guiding questions for the analysis and a clear framework for their presentations.
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(teaching/learning material). After all presentations the students are going to work again in groups to discuss possible criteria for the evaluation of “best practice” in early language learning. There will be a whole class discussion on the main criteria suggested by the group, which will be summarized by the trainer. This list of criteria will then be refined and expanded in the next phase.

Use of Criteria for the Evaluation of “Best Practice” Examples
Type of Activity: Group Work
The criteria that have been developed by the group will be used to critically analyse the so called “best practice” examples (teaching and learning material), which have been provided by partners from different EU countries. Participants will first work in small groups and then share their ideas with the whole group. In this phase, the participants are going to use their theoretical and practical knowledge to refine and expand the list of criteria developed in the previous phase. It is important to bear in mind that these evaluation criteria may vary according to the social, political and educational contexts in which the practitioners work. For this reason it becomes even more important to develop these criteria together with the group. The course module will, however, provide some examples of criteria, which can be used by the course convenors.

Preparation for Final Tasks
Type of Activity: Whole Class Teacher Guided Work
As part of their assessment for this course module, the participants will be asked to choose between two options:

a) Using the observation checklist to analyse language interaction in a pre-school setting and report on their findings during a colloquium.

b) Designing the concept of a project addressing the key issues (Multilingualism and Multiculturalism). Here it is important that the participants do not ‘copy’ the best practice examples shown to them, but do refer to the theory input and to their individual contexts.

These tasks can be carried out individually or in small groups. Preparation activities for task A include: a) examination of the observation checklist and guidelines for observation documents in detail to clarify terminology and concepts, b) “piloting” the observation checklist with the use of a video featuring child-practitioner interaction in a pre-school setting and c) developing a framework for the presentations and criteria for assessment. Preparation activities for task B include: a) a revision of the main criteria for the evaluation of best practice, b) brainstorming possible ideas together with the whole group, and c) analysing the presentation structure of one best practice example, which the students should use as a model (e.g. general introduction, implementation, reflection, etc..)

Final Task: Presentation of Observation Findings or Project Idea
Type of Activity: Colloquium
Participants will be asked to use the observation checklist to analyse language interaction in a pre-school setting and report on their findings during the colloquium. Criteria for Assessment: their
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Presentations should involve the analysis of the quality of interaction and language support in those settings, with clear links to the theoretical knowledge acquired during the course.

Alternatively they will develop the concept for a project initiative aiming at promoting language development in pre-school settings and present their idea to the group. **Criteria for Assessment:** During their presentations they should show understanding of the theory and of the criteria for the evaluation of best practice (which were developed by the group during the course).

**Participants’ Reflection on their Learning During the Course**

Type of Activity: Individual Work and Whole Class Discussion

As already pointed out earlier, one of our main aims of this course module is to support the development of the “Reflective Practitioner”. Therefore, in the final phase of the course the students will be asked to compare their points of view and understandings of the topic before and after the course. They will use their notes produced in the first phase (analysis of observation checklist) and compare these with their (possible) new understandings acquired on the course. This final activity can be either implemented as a final oral “reflection task” without the aim of assessing the students or it could be used for a written evaluation task (paper).

### 3. TEACHING MATERIALS

- The teacher can use the observation checklist and guidelines for observation documents, which were tested and revised in the framework of the TODDLER project to support students’ initial reflections on the topic.

- The teacher can use a Power Point presentation containing theoretical input. It includes: a) theories that emphasize the key role played by EYPs in supporting bilingual language development in early childhood settings and b) summary of findings of earlier research on language use in early childhood settings.

- The teacher can use summaries of eight case studies and guiding questions for critical examination to guide students into developing criteria for the evaluation of best practice.

- The teacher can use descriptions of “best practice” examples from various EU countries and examples of criteria for evaluation to help students refine the criteria developed in the previous phase.

- The teacher can use a short video clip featuring child-practitioner interaction in a pre-school setting (developed in the “parental involvement” component of the project) to prepare the students for their final task.

- The teacher provides a list of references and links to web-resources.
4. STUDENT MATERIALS

- Participants should use the observation checklist as a starting point for reflection on “language use” in the pre-school context.
- Participants should use the content of the PPT presentation, especially ‘research results and key theory’, to deepen their understanding of the course’s objectives.
- Participants should use the case studies to learn about different approaches in dealing with multilingualism and multiculturalism in pre-school settings.
- Participants can use the catalogue of best practice examples as “food for thought”, starting points for reflection or as models for future initiatives in their own contexts.
- Participants should use the “guiding questions for reflection” to critically examine the case studies and best practice examples.
- Participants can use the literature list to read articles from the literature review.

5. REFERENCES


Massler, U., Ioannou—Georgiou, S. Best practice: How CLIL works. (I only had this as a text, no title of the book, nor published year or number of pages)
TODDLER – Promoting and supporting language development in multilingual and multicultural early childhood settings
