

Teachers misunderstanding of translanguaging in preschools

What this research was about and why it is important

Young multilingual children translanguage naturally. They use their linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire to express themselves, but also to make meaning of the school environment and learn. When multilingual children come to a school where they do not understand the language of instruction, they are confronted with learning difficulties, which influences both their school progress and well-being. Translanguaging pedagogy helps teachers to create a space in which multilingual children can make meaning, feel well, and learn. By using this pedagogy, teachers support children's multilingualism, which they see as a resource, and design inclusive activities accordingly. In this study, 40 Luxembourgian preschool teachers followed a professional development course in translanguaging pedagogy over six months. After the course, the researchers filmed teachers' translanguaging activities with children. Three foci teachers designed an activity in which they invited three Portuguese and one Serbian child to choose the flag of their countries. However, all four children said that they speak Luxembourgish and thus wanted to choose the Luxembourgish flag. The teachers insisted that the children should choose Portuguese and Serbian flags, explaining that it is not possible for them to speak Luxembourgish. The children were confused and their body language showed their silencing, diminishing and shutting down. This scene showed not only that teachers misunderstood translanguaging, which they saw as multiple languages attached with nation states and flags, but they also, despite their good intentions, showed raciolinguistic ideologies, harmful for children in question.

What the researchers did

- They organized a professional development course in translanguaging pedagogy for preschool teachers working with multilingual children with immigrant background in Luxembourg. The training lasted for six months and 40 teachers, divided in 4 groups, received over 17 hours of training delivered in seven sessions.
- They asked interested teachers to film their classroom activities with children, following the principles of translanguaging pedagogy: positive stance towards children's multilingualism, designed activity for translanguaging space, and teachers' flexibility and support for children's translanguaging.
- Three foci teachers organized an activity in which they invited children with immigrant background to select the flags and language of their respective countries.

What the researchers found

- During the activity, three Portuguese and one Serbian child wished to choose Luxembourgish flag and said that they too speak Luxembourgish as they peers do.
- They gave several arguments for their choice, explaining that their siblings and parents speak it at home as well.
- The teachers insisted that Luxembourgish is not their language and explained why it is not possible for them, their siblings and parents to speak Luxembourgish.
- All four children chose the Portuguese and Serbian flags and withdrew from the activity.
- The teachers did not understand translanguaging. What they designed was more of a multilingual awareness activity than an activity with translanguaging pedagogy elements. They insisted that the school language is a school language that stands on its own and cannot be part of children's multilingual repertoire.
- Despite teachers' good intentions, the teachers showed raciolinguistic ideologies against the immigrant children.

Things to consider

- It is important that teachers understand that multilingual children make sense of their complex worlds by using their whole linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire, which goes beyond nation named languages. School language is not isolated and it belongs to their repertoire.
- With this understanding teachers develop translanguaging stance and create activities to support multilingual children. They can invite children's families to participate and learn about children's linguistic and cultural practices, which can help them examine their own attitudes and practice.
- Teachers also need sustained support from the national educational policy and school system.

Material, data, open access article: N/A

How to cite this summary: Aleksić, G. & García, O. (2022). Teachers misunderstanding of translanguaging in preschools. *OASIS Summary of Aleksić & García (2022) in International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. <https://oasis-database.org>

This summary has a [CC BY-NC-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.