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of the European Union



EDUGATE – Multilingual teaching in early childhood education and care

Project number: 2016-1- IT02-KA201- 024294

03 Educational Programme and Workplan



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1. INTRODUCTION

The present report on a project carried out in collaboration between preschools and schools in six European countries: Poland, Slovenia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Italy and Sweden. The document contains descriptions of children learning language, particularly a second or additional language, and how such learning can be supported by early childhood education and care (ECEC). In addition, to provide a contextual setting, there are short descriptions of the curriculum for each partner country. In the final section of the report, conclusions are presented and the discussion is related to learning more generally and education of high quality.

The report is structured in the following way: First, we discuss multilingual acquisition; how it is for a young child to learn more than one language, and what this process shares with and how it differs from learning only one language (Chapter 2). The chapter ends with questions for discussions among ECEC professionals. Then, we review language-based pedagogy (Chapter 3), presenting principles for enhancing children's language learning. This chapter ends with some important principles for ECEC professionals. Chapter 4 describes how very early language acquisition can be supported, with concrete examples. In chapter 5, the curricula of each participating country is presented, both more general principles and guidelines and more specifically what they say about language learning. In the final chapter (Chapter 6), some more general conclusions are drawn, highlighting the importance of facilitating all children's participation in practices.

The Educational Programme was produced in collaboration of the participating partners. It is a result of discussions between the partners but also the participating early childhood education teachers from the six countries: Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Italy and Sweden. Chapters 2 and 3 are written by Mirta Vernice (together with Elisa Danesi and Daniela Giorgi for one section in chapter 2). Chapters 4 and 5 have several authors: Marie Horcickova, Barbora Tomaskova, Jana Zachova for the Czech Republic; Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson for Sweden; Beata Chwistek, Ewa Nowak, Agnieszka Rybka and Małgorzata Sosnowska for Polen; Elisa Danesi and



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2. MULTILINGUAL ACQUISITION

Mirta Vernice

In the current chapter we will discuss what is multilingualism, a condition that is characterized by the co-occurrence of more than one language within the individual and in the educational context. First, we will describe different types of multilingualism and the characteristics of a multilingual acquisition of language as compared to the monolingual one. Then, we will shortly address some issues related to the development of multilingualism in childhood services.

Overview on language and language acquisition in a monolingual perspective

This paragraph will provide you with a (linguistic) theoretical framework to introduce the concept of multilingualism. In order to do so, we need to define first what is **language** from a theoretical point of view and to briefly introduce **the process that leads a child to acquire it**.

- **What is language?**

Language is one of the distinguishing characteristics of human beings. We use it to communicate, to think, etc. It develops during childhood without any effort, and without the learner being aware of its underlying internal structure. In the literature, language has also been defined as an “instinct” (Pinker, 1994): human beings are biologically predisposed to communicate through language and their brains enable them to do so.

The linguistic system is made up of different components: phonology (sounds), vocabulary, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Each language has its own sounds repertoire, syntactic rules and vocabulary. We will briefly summarize them below:

Phonology: classification of the linguistic sounds that are perceived and produced in a specific language, for example being aware of the difference between /m/ and /n/ in *moon*; being able to pronounce the different sounds;

Vocabulary: mental representation of words, that is an internal repository of “labels” that apply to elements in the world, but specific for each language, e.g., “doll” for English, “bambola” for Italian, “docka” in Swedish;



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Syntax: principles defining word order combination, that is rules determining the fact that the following sentences, although involving the same words, have opposite meanings: “Pat is chasing the dog”; “the dog is chasing Pat”;

Semantics/Pragmatics: the meaning and use of a certain word or sentence in a particular context, for example being aware of the meaning of a certain word, for example, “dinosaur”; but appreciate that, under a certain context, the same word might be ironically used to refer to a person.

- **How is language skill acquired in monolingual children?**

Language acquisition occurs by means of a process known as **language acquisition**. Through this process, a child acquires his/her mother tongue (L1), which develops thanks to spontaneous interaction with native speakers. The acquisition of language by a child takes place in an unconscious, spontaneous, gradual way regardless of the particular language modality used (oral or signed). A child exposed to Swedish will learn it in the same way and time as a child exposed to Polish or Italian (Guasti, 2007).

In the current paragraph we will outline the milestones that characterize language development in children, focusing on the acquisition of each language component (see previous paragraph). Therefore we will not extensively discuss the relation between cognitive and linguistic development. However, mind that language acquisition relies to a great extent on the development of other cognitive functions, such as the generation of concepts, the ability to develop abstract reasoning and to make logical inferences and during preschool years verbal and non-verbal development proceed in parallel (although, sometimes, at a different pace).

In language acquisition, each component of the linguistic system is acquired with different modalities and at different times during development. One first ability that is highly sophisticated in newborns since birth appears to be **perceptual ability (sensitivity to sounds)**, i.e., newborns are able to perceive contrasts in sounds such as that between /p/ and /b/. This impressive ability is further confirmed by the remarkable capacity to distinguish languages with respect to their rhythmic properties (Mehler et al., 1996). That is, newborns as early as 5 days olds, are able to build a representation based on the rhythmic properties of their native language, in order to distinguish it from other languages (involving a different rhythmic structure).



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As for vocabulary, children tend to produce their first words by the end of the first year. However, the crucial finding about learning and producing new words is that infants of one year of age are able **to make connections between words and what they stand for**. For example, children of one year of age can follow the direction of the speaker's attention when labelling an object (Woodward 2004).

After children have acquired the first 50 words, at around 18 months of age, their vocabulary rapidly increases. This phenomenon is called the 'vocabulary spurt'. New words are learned very fast, ranging from 20 to 40 words a month (Guasti, 2007).

An important aspect to consider about child's vocabulary development is that they comprehend more than what they produce. The reason behind this is that, in order to produce a word, children need to comprehend it. Additionally, as we have seen, the development of perceptual ability (recognizing sounds and the rhythmic pattern of a language) in infants is much more developed than their vocal abilities to produce linguistic sounds. For this reason, given the fact that **children comprehend first and then produce**, it is important to identify children with poor comprehension skills as they might develop a language disorder (Caselli, 1995).

Regarding syntactic/grammatical competence, by two years of age, when children's vocabulary grows, they start to combine words in a "telegraphic speech" (as in "want milk"): at this phase children are entering the multi-word stage. Even though length of utterances might increase, complex sentences made up of 4 or even more words is not comparable to adults' utterances. For instance, sentences might lack some parts as the subject of the sentence, functional words such as prepositions, articles and auxiliaries.

However, it is important to note that along the course of development and at the age of four - five, function words are no longer omitted. Therefore one might claim that children of two or three years of age do not ignore function words. In contrast, children of this age take advantage of a normal and rich linguistic input. Therefore, even though in their productions they omit function words, it is important that child-directed speech is not simplified.

To sum up, the development of language can be accounted as a natural and to a certain extent unavoidable process. However, before we go on and talk about multilingual acquisition, we need to make clear that another factor might crucially influence this development, namely the quality and the quantity of language use children are involved in. Recall indeed that language



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development takes place not only at home, but also in all the environments where the child has the chance to be exposed to a linguistic stimulus. There are numerous evidence that a rich and comprehensible language use is much more beneficial to a child's language acquisition than poor and limited language use.

Overview on multilingualism and multilingual acquisition of language

Multilingual acquisition refers to the condition through which a child acquires two or more languages in the course of language development. A multilingual is therefore a speaker with different degrees of proficiency in three, four or even more languages (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998). We will say that a child has a L1 (native language); a second language (L2), and possibly even a third one (L3). Obviously, there might be large differences between the level of competence in the different languages.

Given the fact that in the literature the term bilingualism often overlaps with the concept of multilingualism, what we are saying about multilingualism in this chapter can thus be applied to bilingualism too (i.e., defined as: “**use of two languages on a regular basis** according to communicative and socio-cultural needs”, Grosjean, 1999). It is important to clarify that to be considered a bilingual (or multilingual), one does not need to be able to *perfectly* speak two (or more) languages. As Grosjean (1999) stated: a bilingual is a person that uses regularly two languages, independently on his/her level of proficiency on both languages.

- **Distinguishing an L2 (or L3) from a FL**

In linguistics the term **second language (L2)**, but also third language (L3) and so on, is used to refer to a new language that is acquired by the speaker **in the country/context where that language is used by the majority of the population** without any formal instruction about the new language (only by means of exposure).

The term **foreign language (FL)** refers to a new language that is acquired by means of **formal instruction** in a country/context where that language is not normally used. The typical example is the case of a language that is learned at school through formal teaching. In such a case, the student will receive formal instruction about the FL in the classroom only for a limited amount of time (a couple of hours) for some days a week (depending on the program s/he is enrolled in). When there is no formal teaching and the language is learned through natural exposure to the new language input, we define it L2. For instance, if we extensively expose 3-year-olds



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children to English during classroom activities (for 80-100% of the school day), English can be considered an L2. If the exposure lasts no longer than a couple of hours a week we will refer to it as “familiarization” to the language.

- **Developmental milestones of multilingual acquisition**

When a child is learning more than one language from birth, their languages will grow simultaneously with the development of other cognitive functions. In general, *language acquisition in multilingual children will follow the same stages of monolingual acquisition*, though with the presence of some specific issues that occur only in this population.

If children start to acquire their L2 at a later stage (after three years of age; Kovelman et al., 2008) they need to have first developed the linguistic abilities necessary for the acquisition of the first language. Their competence in L1 will then scaffold the acquisition of L2.

- **Do multilingual children discriminate between languages?**

As we have seen for monolingual development, perceptual abilities are the first linguistic skills children manifest since the very first days of life. What about multilingual-to-be babies? Studies indicate that newborns regularly exposed to more than one language (as in the case of children exposed to Catalan and Spanish) are able to discriminate between their two mother tongues (Bosch & Sebastián-Gallés, 1997). *This means that bilingual babies are not confused by hearing two languages*, as one might possibly think, but they know how to deal with them and discriminate them.

- **Are there delays in the acquisition of some aspects of language in comparison to monolinguals?**

It is possible. Research has listed a number of language-dependent errors/weakness, such as for instance the accordance of article-noun gender, the richness of lexical vocabulary, that might be acquired with some delay in children acquiring more than one language.

- Accordance of article-noun gender: Italian-German and Italian-Swedish bilingual children make more errors in the accordance between article and noun than monolingual Italians.
- Vocabulary: some studies have shown that multilingual students generally have smaller vocabularies and that their access to lexical items is usually weaker (Bialystok, Craik & Luk, 2008). As adults, bilinguals reveal longer latencies to retrieve the name of a certain item as compared to monolinguals, because of the interference between the two lexical



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entries (Gollan & Goldrick, 2012). In general, recall that while monolingual in their acquisition build up one mental vocabulary, L2 children need to create two or more vocabularies, and L2 adults need to deal with them everytime they retrieve a word.

- Linguistic errors due to transfer of some aspects of L1 into L2: it normally takes place in structures that are similar in the two languages.

Other possible linguistic phenomena in multilingual speech: *code mixing* and *code switching*

Code mixing is considered a developmental stage in the multilingual acquisition of language and appears as the mix from one language to another within the same sentence. For example, children might use a word in L1 while producing a sentence in L2.

Code switching refers to the changing (switch) of the languages within a conversation. For example, children might start speaking in L1 and then switching to L2.

- **Types of multilingual acquisition**

We might distinguish different types of multilingual acquisition based on a number of factors:

1) Age of acquisition of the languages:

a. Simultaneous

When parents speak **two or more different languages**, they may decide to use the respective mother tongues with their child. The child will therefore be simultaneously exposed to two (or more) languages from birth.

b. Sequential

When a family moves to another country, the child will be exposed to the language spoken in that country. Consequently, the child will develop a competence in one or more languages, spoken by the majority of that country, besides his/her mother tongue. L2 will be the language of school, society, friends, etc.

In sequential bilingualism, we need to consider when the child is being exposed to the new language: before three years of age (i.e., while the acquisition of his/her L1 is still under



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development) or after three years (when the competence in L1 appears to be more consolidated)? Linguistic outcomes in L2 might be significantly different (Kovelman et al., 2008): the earlier children are exposed to their new L2, the better their linguistic competence in that language. In general we will call **early bilingual** children learning a second language before puberty, while the term **late bilingualism** will be used when L2 is learnt after puberty (Guasti, 2007).

In some cases, if the input in L2 is consistent, the new L2 may become dominant in comparison to L1 (which may only be used with family members). In this case the bilingual/multilingual child will be referred as “Heritage Speaker”. Therefore, an “heritage speaker” is a speaker whose L2 will become dominant, while his/her L1 will progressively fade away, due to less chances to use it, while exposure to L2 increases.

2) Quality and quantity of exposure to the language input and level of competence in the different languages:

a. Balanced

Children are equally exposed to the different languages, receiving a balanced input in all of them. This should result in the same level of fluency and competence in L1, L2, etc. along the course of development.

b. Dominant

The input of one of the languages is significantly greater than the other. The dominant language is spoken with greater fluency and competence than the other(s).

3) Socio-cultural environment

a. Additive

The L2 develops together with the L1. There is a strong motivation in the child to keep and develop both languages. Therefore, all the languages evolve in a harmonious way. It is typically encountered in situations where the child is characterized by a strong motivation both to acquire the L2 and to sustain the L1.

b. Subtractive



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The L2 is perceived as more important and develops at the expense of the L1, resulting in a partial loss of competence in that language.

- **Are there advantages in multilingual acquisition?**

Research suggests that children who know more than one language appear to have an understanding of language structure and therefore an enhanced sensitivity towards language (Bialystok 2002). Moreover, the regular use of two or more languages gives children advantages in non-linguistic component. Namely, cognitive flexibility and the control of attention benefit from multilingualism: bilinguals are better at selectively paying attention and at inhibiting irrelevant information (Bialystok & Martin 2004). Why? Because the regular use of two or more languages allows them to continuously select the language to use. This constant effort seems to enhance their selective attention skills.

Multilingualism in the preschool years

Multilingual acquisition of language might take place not only at home, but also at education settings. Therefore it is important for teachers and educators to be conscious that children in a multilingual situation will develop their linguistic competence in the classroom, during daily spontaneous interaction with them and with their classmates.

- **How do early childhood education deal with multilingualism?**

Preschools propose different educational programme to develop multilingualism in the classroom. We will consider below two possible scenarios describing how preschool might deal with multilingualism: Monolingual children enrolled in a bilingual preschool programme; multilingual children enrolled in a monolingual preschool programme.

- a. Dual education: during school time, children receive input and instructions in a second language (e.g. English), which is not the majority language spoken by the community. Depending on the quantity of the second language input, the programme can be divided into total or partial immersion, depending on the number of hours of instruction in each language.

This programme might be very successful with monolingual children wishing to learn a foreign (socially prestigious) language such as English or Spanish. However, linguistic outcome in this language will depend on the quality and quantity of linguistic input to which monolingual children will be exposed. An example of this is how preschool children in Italy have little activities in both languages throughout the day.



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- b. Monolingual education and maintenance of the multilingual status of the L2 children: the majority language (L2 for multilingual children) is used as the language of instruction, while minority languages are valued by means of constant contact between different languages and cultures during the everyday school activities. By doing so, the multilingual background of the classmates will be seen not as an obstacle, but as a resource to learning. In such a case multilingual children will have the chance to achieve full bilingualism (provided that in their families they receive a proper input in L1), while their monolingual classmates might develop a multicultural competence. An example of this is how the whole group learns the name of everyday objects in the minority languages from the classroom in Swedish preschool.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How many languages do you speak apart from your L1?
- Do you find some differences between the languages you speak? Which ones?
- Are there any words that you know in another language that you regularly use in your L1?
- What level of competence do you think one needs to have in their languages to be considered multilingual or simply bilingual?
- How can you encourage additive multilingualism in your students?
- Do you feel some languages have a higher status in your country?
- Do the children seem to prefer some languages more than others?
- Are you aware of any situations in your school/community that could be contributing to subtractive bilingualism?
- What characteristics do you think a balanced multi/bilingual needs to show?
- Do you have immigration in your area?
- Have the earlier groups integrated in the society?
- Did you find some strategies to support the development of second language learning in monolingual education? Which are the best ones?
- Did you notice in your experience some delays in language acquisition in children exposed very early to a foreign language? Describe them.
- How can you encourage multilingual children to use their L1 in your classroom?



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3. LANGUAGE-BASED PEDAGOGY

Mirta Vernice

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview about the activities that might be proposed in ECEC (Early childhood education and care) to evaluate and enhance the linguistic competence of children. The language-based activities we will present can be achieved through direct or indirect involvement of the child in the educational activity. Therefore, some of the language-based activities we will propose are meant to be carried out by teachers and educators, although the focus remains obviously on children, whereas other activities involve direct and active participation of the children.

Introduction

The preschool years, the period we are concerned with in the current project, are a crucial phase for the growth of linguistic abilities. During this period, we observe a general increase in vocabulary size of children, a more sophisticated sounds repertoire of their language and a greater complexity in the grammatical structure of their productions. In general, children's evolution as speakers improves significantly, such that by 36 months their speech appears to be (almost) fully intelligible (Guasti, 2007). However, it is important to note that this is generally true only to a certain extent.

Indeed, a number of children for many reasons might show a delay in their linguistic development. In some cases, such language delay might reflect a simple slowdown in development that could be easily overcome by means of specific linguistic activities, carried out in the classroom, leading children to catch up with their peers. In other cases, the delay might be due to the presence of a linguistic impairment whose causes are regarded to be neurobiological (Rice et al. 1998). If so, it is necessary to report the child to the services as soon as possible.

It is important to scaffold linguistic growth with activities that enhance and increase this crucial process not only in atypical but also in typical development. Therefore, in the current chapter we will illustrate a series of effective strategies, some carried out by teachers, some involving the direct participation of children, to promote language development in children.

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Language screening activities both in mono- and multilingual children

In the literature, there is a general consensus that the language ability is innate (Pinker, 1994). Evidence for this derives from the existence of developmental language disorders. These language disorders are innate, as they generally occur in other family members (Tomblin, 1997, Rice et al. 1998). This is why it is important to pay attention to children's acquisition of language, since a poor linguistic performance may be a sign of a possible language delay. For example, some children might show a cognitive level within the normal range, in absence of any hearing impairment nor any other sensorial deficit, but by the end of kindergarten they might still show problems in specific areas of language (i.e., linguistic sounds discrimination and repetition or a deficit in production of closed-class words). It is estimated that about 7% of children at the beginning of the primary school have specific linguistic problems (Leonard, 1998). These problems may lead to troubles in learning to read, that is, they may develop into a learning disorder such as Dyslexia (Leonard 1998).

Teachers and educators might now ask what they can do to screen and evaluate basic linguistic abilities in children of monolingual and bilingual classrooms, given the fact that they are not clinicians. Indeed we do not propose to teachers to test language skills of their children. Rather, we suggest to observe their linguistic competence by means of some playful but scientifically motivated activities to evaluate basic linguistic abilities in monolingual and bilingual children. For example, testing the phonological abilities of children through tools based on the discrimination and repetition of specific sounds appears to be in most of the languages an important assessment of an atypical linguistic development.

We report here a number of possible skills teachers might consider in their activities:

1. Syllable and rhyme awareness: identifying (and enjoying it by singing and clapping) rhyming words or overlapping syllables in subsequent words and/or in nursery rhymes (by 4 years of age).
2. Word and sentence awareness: repeating a series of sentences (of increasing length) as soon as children hear it (to evaluate verbal memory; by 3 years of age).
3. Phoneme awareness: e.g., manipulating phonemes by removing or adding the initial or the final sounds (e.g., "Say table without the /t/"); identifying and matching words



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with overlapping initial, final or middle sound (e.g., "Which picture begins with /p/?"; "Which picture ends with /r/"); discriminating separate phonemes (by 5 years of age); repeating strings of multi-syllable pseudowords (words that might be pronounced according to the phonotactic restrictions of a language, but that have actually no meaning; by 4 years of age).

Assessing the linguistic level of children might help educators to provide ad-hoc activities both within a specific child's skills, but also with respect to an entire class or a group, in order to help children to catch up with the delay before literacy skills are introduced.

Additionally, it is important that teachers and educators inform the family, encouraging parents to contact a speech therapist in the most critical situations. It will be the duty of the clinician to verify to what extent the delay emerged at school is due to a real linguistic impairment, to a transitory delay or to an impoverished linguistic stimulation (for instance, in the case of a multilingual child, but not necessarily, who is exposed to an impoverished input in L2).

Enhancing lexical and syntactic skills at ECEC

According to the literature, during the preschool years, vocabulary and grammar competences increase both in monolingual and bilingual development. However, as we have claimed before, there are a number of crucial factors that might support and enhance such growth; in the current paragraph we will review them, in order to propose language-based activities that might promote the development of lexical and syntactic skills.

- **Promoting lexical and narrative ability**

As far as vocabulary is concerned, children acquiring a language begin to use highly frequent lexical items and then proceed to acquire less frequent words as they become more proficient. So, what can teachers do to improve the use of vocabulary to become more creative (i.e., involving less repetition of the same words) and richer?

- **Conversational exchanges with children**

First of all, it is generally accepted that language input is more effective and therefore exerts a greater impact on language development when it is targeted to the child's behaviour (Hoff, 2006). Therefore a useful language experience with 2- and 3-year-olds in the classroom could be configured as a conversation in which numerous and continuous (where possible) conversational interactions take place between children and their teachers and educators. As



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we mentioned before, the teacher's observations must target child's actions, as well as his/her previous verbalizations.

Recall that the quality of the interaction is very important: the richness of the adult input speech (i.e., the use of different word types and different communicative functions) appears to directly affect children's vocabulary size as well as their comprehension skills (Sénéchal et al., 2006).

- **Use of narratives**

It is well known that children exposed to extensive and detailed narratives regarding past experiences ("When we went to the mountains last summer...") end up becoming excellent narrators (Fivush et al., 2006), and this tendency appears to influence other levels of language competence too, such as vocabulary. The crucial point is that, after producing narratives, teachers need to ask wh- questions about the events reported in the story, encouraging children to say the name of the characters/elements that were involved, where and when the event occurred, how one event led to another, and why characters behaved as they did (see Pramling & Degaard, 2011, for examples of such conversations in ECEC). By doing so, children become active learners not only of new words, but of the general structure of the narrative, as they are given the opportunity to make sense of a story. One of the major purposes of this task is to induce learners to reflect on the causal and temporal structure of a story, while acquiring new vocabulary items.

• **Promoting the development of complex syntactic constructions**

We have seen that the lexical diversity of the input that adults provide in child-directed speech is an important predictor of vocabulary growth in the preschool years. However, the grammatical complexity of utterances in the input appears to be another crucial aspect. According to the literature, the number of different grammatical structures in child-directed speech as well as the variety of grammatical structures in which the same verb might occur seem to enhance children's syntactic competence (Hoff, 2003; Huttenlocher et al., 2010).

Moving from this finding, we propose to develop in the classroom focused communicative tasks involving both reception and production of syntactically complex sentences. This activity is based on a natural tendency to repeat the same syntactic structure over subsequent utterances (Pickering & Branigan, 1998). Therefore, one might use this methodology to train children on specific structures such as actives/passives; dative structures;



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full nouns/pronouns; etc. This activity might provide a way to measure whether learners have acquired a specific structure or not. For example, if a teacher describes an event consistently using a passive structure (i.e., “Look here! In this picture the cat is chased by the dog. And now tell me, what’s going on here?”), the child should tend to describe a similar picture (e.g., showing a cat chasing a mouse) using a passive. If the child uses an active structure the teacher will provide an additional description of the event, clarifying that the same event can be verbally realized in different ways. Another consequence for this activity could be that an increase in children’s sentence complexity may be indicated not only by longer sentences, but also by the use of more complex syntactic structures.

Language-based activities in the multilingual classroom

Raising in a multilingual context is becoming increasingly common; therefore, it is important for teachers and educators to be aware of the activities that might enhance language ability in children exposed to multiple languages from birth. First of all, it is important to clarify that being multilingual does not involve a great risk for language impairment (Paradis et al., 2011).

However, according to the literature, vocabulary skills appear to be an area of weakness for some multilingual learners (Carlo et al., 2004). For example, 4-year-olds multilingual children coming from a low socioeconomic (SES) background are at risk for delays in early literacy development due to poor oral language abilities, and specifically to low levels of vocabulary in all the languages they spoke (Páez et al., 2007, August et al., 2005). Interestingly, the gap between monolingual and multilingual children in lexical ability persisted from 4 years of age through first grade of primary school.

Therefore, when considering the variety of activities that may be proposed in a multilingual classroom the teacher should consider the (socio-economic and cultural) profile of their multilingual pupils. If children seem to be at risk of impoverished linguistic input, it might be important to propose activities focused on lexical enhancement in their second language (L2) as well as in their first language (L1). Note indeed that an activity promoting the development of language skills (lexical, phonological or syntactic) in one language will support the development of the same skills in the second (or third) language of the child.

For instance, as for lexical ability, improving vocabulary growth in the second language is associated with enhancing literacy readiness skills in first language (Rinaldi & Páez, 2008).



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Phonological awareness too shows a positive transfer from one language to another: phonological awareness in low-income bilingual children at the end of the kindergarten was associated with the development of phonological awareness in the second language (Dickinson et al., 2004). Therefore, research evidence strongly supports the idea that language activities in the multilingual classroom should provide the chance for developing both L1 and L2 languages, according to the fact that training a competence in a language is beneficial for the parallel skill in the other.

- **Developing meta-insights about language in multilingual development**

The emerging paradigm of translanguaging offers some interesting insights about the way a multilingual approach to learning might improve linguistic skills in early childhood education (Kultti & Pramling, 2016, 2017). An activity worth mentioning is based on the employment of the same nursery song in different languages in the classroom. In this activity, children listen to a familiar lyrics and then they are challenged and supported by the teacher in translating it to another language. By doing so, children will be aware of multilingualism and will learn to appreciate all the languages. Alternatively, the teacher can point out similarities and differences between different language versions of the same song. Making children aware about these differences, will allow them to reflect about the arbitrary nature of language. Additionally, children will gain an important meta-cognitive insight, realizing the transformative nature of translation, namely, that when a word is translated from one language to another, it might involve a slight change in meaning. Children will reflect on the fact that translating does not simply mean substituting a word with another (i.e., the idea that one word in one language merely corresponds to its equivalent in the other language), providing important meta-learning skills that will support the process of second language acquisition, and increase children's general meta-linguistic skills.

- **Conclusions**

To sum up: what can teachers and educators do to make sure that children develop adequate multilingual skills?

1. Create an environment in which each language is supported (i.e., ensuring that children in multilingual contexts have adequate and enriched exposure to both languages in different contexts, Paradis et al., 2011).



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2. Develop educational activities and linguistic programs to expose children to high-quality input in L2 at early ages; provide them with plenty of opportunities to use L2 in activities that involve both comprehension and production of language.

3. Support L1 as much as possible by proposing activities that foster the L1 of the child, such that the classroom will result in a richer and various language environment.

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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4. SUPPORTING VERY EARLY LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

In this chapter we present some examples of how to support language acquisition based on teaching experience in the ECEC practices that are part of the project. In several of them, learning English as a foreign language is focused.

*Multisensory learning*¹ as a strategy to use is pointed out by one of the participating preschool. It engages more than one sense at a time. According to the participant, it is a very useful strategy especially in kindergartens. The more senses that are engaged in a child's learning, the more likely they are to gain and retain information. It also helps children with special educational needs since the approach strengthens one of their abilities (one of their senses) to learn new information. *Total Physical Response* enables teaching through movements and goes together with multi – sensory learning. Teachers should always connect teaching with a child's environment, way of thinking and connect new information with familiar information. In addition, they also stress *connecting verbal and nonverbal communication* through repeating daily routines strengthens languages. Gestures help any child who does not speak the target language or the majority language. Another useful thing according to them is to find individual time to talk to each child (e.g. lunch time).

In addition, *native speakers* not only help teachers with teaching, but they also provide language models of the target language. They are familiar with different cultures and therefore they can help children to settle down in a different environment. *Translators/mediators* enable teachers to communicate with parents.

Children also learn language from each other. Teachers often experience that explaining something in the target language does not meet with success until children have the opportunity to express the same thing in their own way.

Materials

Songs, rhymes, drama and storytelling are great ways to develop children's vocabulary while using experiences from their mother-tongue and also sensor-motoric skills. Using *visuals* such

¹ *Multisensory Instruction: What You Need to Know* By Amanda Morin [online]. [cit. 2017-10-30]. Retrieved from: <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/instructional-strategies/multisensory-instruction-what-you-need-to-know>



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as flashcards, signs or children's own drawings encourages remembering by seeing and doing. The more senses involved, the better². Modern technologies are a great source of learning/teaching. For example, *Talking Pen* allows children to experience different languages simply by touching a word with the pen to hear the correct pronunciation.

There are a lot of options for improving language when using *books*. Lots of skills and subskills are developed. An efficient beginning could be met with *silent books*. They are picture books without any text so each child can "read" the story in his/her own language using their own imagination as well as experience. *Bilingual books* have the advantage of two languages – e.g. one side is in Finnish and the other one in Swedish. *Sound books and audiobooks* provide pictures as well as listening to a story. It can naturally help to develop reading as well as listening skills.

Signing, for example using *TAKK* signs can support a general understanding of everyday situations in different languages. By using images children can follow the transition between each language environment. A teacher learns a sign for a specific word (a list of signs available online³) and shows it to children who understand what it means.

Cooperating with families

Cooperating with families is noticed by several of the participating preschools in the project. For example, cooperating with families from different culture backgrounds is highly appreciated. They can join classes from their experiences, ideas and knowledge.

When looking at the quality of preschool program, and also when children develop the most in young age, it is often related to cooperation between parents and preschool. When parents have knowledge about what is happening in preschool, and preschool staff knows about each child's experience and situations in the family the child can feel more secure and trustful.

² Jim Scrivener. *Learning teaching*. Macmillan, 2005.

³ Takkforspraket (ACC for multilingualism). *Takkforspraket* [online]. [cit. 2017-10-30]. Retrieved from: <http://www.takkforspraket.se/en/s0>



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In the Italian preschool services, in presence of children and parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, teachers have meetings/interviews with their parents, before children start to attend the preschool. The meeting usually requires a *mediator* who is not just an interpreter but also knows a lot about the culture of the family. He/she explains the cultural issues/differences to the teachers and the local culture to the family. An important task of a mediator is also translating documents. Such mediators can be requested from agencies. Whole school meetings or class meetings are held with the help of mediators or interpreters. Another possibility is that fellow parents help or interpret for other parents. Parents, educators and management also meet to organize events like parties and trips and to arrange the purchase of materials etc. Also here, parents help to interpret and there are interpreters and mediators, if needed.

Another point the project countries stresses is that parents should be encouraged to use their mother tongue with their children, as well as that they are welcomed to:

- bring books to read in their mother tongue
- prepare activities and try to teach others their mother tongue
- introduce daily routines of their culture
- as far as feedback on the child's day in the kindergarten is concerned, it is very useful to use photos and videos.

ECEC teachers agreed on the advantages of having parental support since:

- in classrooms, there are bigger groups of children, at home the child has individual treatment
- the child benefits a lot because the exposure to L2 is more frequent
- it is a help for the teacher, children learn faster and the responsibility for child's progress is shared
- using English out of the classroom can raise motivation. A child hears a song at home and then he/she is very happy to hear it also in the preschool (teacher's experience)

Different expectations

Parents' role may differ in different ECEC. For example, in the preschool in Prague, the parents want their children to learn (or be exposed to) L2 as a foreign language. However, the level of parental motivation can vary. Parents are highly motivated since L2 is not taught at many preschools in the Czech Republic. The Slovenian model is different, as nowadays L2 (English) is



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taught at all the kindergartens and elementary schools. Parents there have not selected this particular school because of L2.

Another example within the project is the Prague club “Mum, Dad and me” for toddlers (2 - 3 year olds) is an example of an easy way for a parent and child to start with L2. Children and parents attend the club together. The child feels safe thanks to the caregiver’s presence. Parents see and practise “methods of teaching” because they do all the activities along with their children, sing songs, dance, TPR activities, craft etc. They are required to communicate in L2 with their child during the lessons, even if their L2 is not perfect. They then get to take some materials home (pictures, craft products and lyrics of the songs) to practise with their child. Parents get a lot of ideas and experience.

However, if some parents do not feel comfortable speaking/reading in L2 to their children, it is not a problem. Communication in L2 with your child is really a big challenge and we cannot expect everybody to be able to do it. It’s also a question of each family’s preferences. There are parents who may have just partial or no knowledge of L2 themselves. In such cases they can at least support their kids by playing videos and songs for them.



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5. NATIONAL/REGIONAL CURRICULA AS A FRAME FOR ECEC

To be able to get an understanding of each others' preschool system and ways to work, it is important to make each partner's national/regional curriculum visible, which is the intention with this chapter.

SWEDEN

Sweden got its first national curriculum for preschool in 1998, two years after the Ministry of Education took over the responsibility for Preschool, which in Sweden is for children 1 to 5 years of age, including what other countries use to call Kindergarten and Day-Care. The curriculum has 20 pages and includes the mission of preschool related to society values for democracy, "the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders, as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the preschool should actively promote in its work with children" (p. 4). There is a perspective on learning as integrated by care and play. Language and learning is considered to be inseparable, and it is spelled out that children with foreign background who develop their mother tongue create better opportunities for learning Swedish and develop their knowledge in other areas. "The Education Act stipulates that the preschool should help to ensure that children with a mother-tongue other than Swedish, receive the opportunity to develop both their Swedish language and their mother tongue" (National Agency for Education, 1998/2016).

The objectives and goals are formulated as goals to strive for, not to reach in preschool, which means that it is to make children interested in and begin to discover various content areas. The goals for language and communication concerns for example that children should be given possibilities of acquiring shades of meaning in concepts, see interconnections and discover new ways of understanding the surrounding world.

There are value goals and a special chapter about influence of the child. Children are expected to learn about democracy in relation to their capacity, as well as take responsibility for their own actions and for the environment in the preschool. The needs and interests which children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning activities.



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The teachers are expected to be able to put the goals and intentions into practice based on their education as preschool teachers. One can claim that there is a parallel between the openness of the curriculum in that the teachers need to think and reflect and take stands themselves, at the same way as children are expected to do – that is the way teachers are expected to work in great openness and freedoms for children.

In the revision now planned, multicultural multilingual questions will be expanded as well as sustainability.

For further reading, see: The National Agency for Education (1998/2016). *Curriculum for preschool, Lpfö98*. Stockholm: Skolverket

CZECH REPUBLIC

The aims of preschool education in the Czech Republic are defined by the key curricular document known as The Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education. Preschool education is regarded as the initial level of public education organized and managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. This first stage should, as well as at the other levels of education, lead towards key competences and thus initiate and support each child's lifelong learning process. The institutions providing preschool education are both kindergartens and the so called preparatory grades of elementary schools. Preschool education is usually begun at age three and lasts until a child reaches six or seven years old. Since 2017 kindergartens are open to children from the age of two as well.

The Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education regards language development as one of the areas of a child's development. This curricular document however does not implement second language (L2) acquisition. According to the document children are expected to know that people communicate also in other languages and that it is possible to learn other languages. Moreover children should develop an elementary basis to learn foreign languages. Learning L2 becomes part of the compulsory curriculum from the third grade of elementary school.

In conclusion, early language acquisition is seen mostly as an extra-curricular activity at preschool age. The Czech preschool curriculum does not focus on L2 acquisition but rather highlights raising a child's awareness of other languages and building children's multicultural competences.

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<http://www.nuv.cz/file/696/>

LATVIA

The latest curriculum for preschools in Latvia was issued in 2016 by National Centre for Education which is subordinate by Ministry of Education and Science. The aim of the pre-school education programme is to promote the development of human and responsible individual personality, to encourage the formation of inquisitiveness towards individuals, environment and society and its diversity and unity. Pre-school education programmes are acquired by children from the age of 2 up to the age of 7. Preparation of five and six-year-old children for the acquisition of basic education is compulsory.

The aim is to promote the comprehensive and harmonious development of children, taking into account the regularities of their development and the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary for life, based on the development of a positive attitude and learning to do so. According to language learning, the education should create an opportunity for each child to enrich vocabulary, learn listening and speaking skills, prepare for reading and writing skills.



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For further reading, see: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/en/education/general-education>

ITALY

In Italy the pre-school system is divided into two major segments: nursery school, that can be public or private, for children from 0 to 3 years of age and kindergarten, which can also be public or private, for children from 3 to 5 years of age. The two systems were regulated by different national and regional laws. Due to this law (art.1 comma 181) the integrated educational system has been introduced: it concerns education from birth till 6 years of age. It is formed by early child services and kindergartens to guarantee the same educational, care, relationship and play opportunities. For now, these two systems are separate: they have different kinds of pedagogical projection and curricula and they are not compulsory.

In Emilia Romagna experimental services for children aged 0-6 have grown in the last 4 years.

Nursery school (0/3 years of age)

Nurseries are supposed to educate and help children's socialization process, always considering their psycho-physical wellbeing, the development of their cognitive, emotional and relationship functions. All this is done in continuity and to sustain the family.

Methodological guidelines

Kindergarten (3/6 years of age)

Kindergarten, both public and private, as declared in the "Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo per la Scuola dell'Infanzia 2012" (National indications for kindergarten of year 2012) is for all children between 3 and 6 years of age, and is the answer to their right to education and care. Kindergarten is supposed to promote children's identities, autonomy, competences and should contribute to promoting their citizenship. The teachers give value and increase children's curiosity, explorations and proposals and create learning opportunities, for example, for languages, creativity, expression (gestures, art, music, multimedia); speech and words (communication, language, culture); Knowledge of the world (order, measurement, space, time, nature)

Italian Bilingual approach in ECEC

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Usually in early child care services there are different activities that stimulate children's linguistic competences (reading out loud classic literature proposed through dramatization, bingo, memory etc.) but the teaching of a second language (usually English) depends on the managing institution and on the staff.

In kindergartens the law does not demand the teaching of a second language but the law does talk about the importance of a "significant linguistic heritage". Kindergarten has to "promote the development of the Italian language in each child but has to also take into account and give value to the child's mother tongue. The National Indications also say that "children often live in a plurilinguistic environment and that they should be guided to familiarizing with a second language in ordinary situations, while dialoguing, in every day life situations so that they can become more and more aware of sounds and different meanings".

A bilingual 0-6 service has been opened from the Municipality of Piacenza and a bilingual pre-school has been opened from University Bicocca, where English is being introduced from the educators gradually day by day in certain activities such as play and care and a mother tongue educator will be working at the service two days a week.

For further reading, see:

Legge Marzo 1968, n. 444: www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/leggi/l444_68.html

Legge 6 Dicembre 1971, n.1044: www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/leggi/l1044_71.html

Legge Regionale 25 Novembre 2016, n. 19

<http://bur.regione.emilia-romagna.it/nir?urn=regione.emilia.romagna:bur:2016;351>

Il progetto pedagogico e la valutazione nei servizi per la prima infanzia- Linee Guida Regionali, Regione Emilia Romagna, 2013

<http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/pubblicazioni/guide/altre-pubblicazioni-servizio-politiche-familiari/2012/il-progetto-pedagogico-e-la-valutazione-nei-servizi-per-la-prima-infanzia>

Indicazioni Nazionali per il curriculum per la scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione, Settembre 2012

[www.indicazioninazionali.it/documenti/Indicazioni_nazionali/indicazioni_nazionali i...](http://www.indicazioninazionali.it/documenti/Indicazioni_nazionali/indicazioni_nazionali_i...)

Legge 13 Luglio 2015, n.107 ("La buona Scuola"):

www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg

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POLAND

The basic principles of the Polish education system are included in the Education System Act of 7 September 1991, with further amendments. The Ministry of National Education is responsible for the whole system of education with the exception of higher education. Preschool education is the first level of school education and it is offered to children aged 3 (in particularly justified cases also to children of 2.5) to 6 years. Attending kindergartens at the age of 3-5 is not compulsory, but 97 percent of children attend. Six-year-olds are required by law to attend a year of preparation for primary education.

Kindergartens, preschool classes and institutions offering preschool education are obliged to follow a curriculum based on the Core curriculum and adjusted to the needs and abilities of the children concerned. The preschool curricula are reviewed and accepted by the Minister of National Education. Both kindergartens and preschool classes are obliged to follow a curriculum based on the Core curriculum, either selected from the Ministry's register or prepared by an individual teacher or a team of teachers. The selected curriculum can be accepted by the head of the institution (kindergarten or school) upon the opinion of the pedagogical council and the parents' council.

The main goal of preschool education is to support and stimulate the child's development, in the process of which the needs and possibilities of each child ought to be taken into account. This level of education introduces them in the world of knowledge. They spend time playing educational games, learning basic skills and integrating with peers. They learn occasionally and spontaneously. Teachers encourage children to undertake various forms of activity, to develop their self-reliance and ability to cooperate in a group in safe conditions suited to their needs and abilities. The main aims of pre-school education include, among other things intellectual, social, emotional, esthetic and physical development, values and health.

From 2014 it is optional for every kindergarten to start free foreign language lessons. Compulsory foreign language lessons were introduced in 2015 for all 5-year-olds and from 2017, all children attending kindergartens will be learning a foreign language. A teacher working with children uses natural situations arising from spontaneous playing to introduce or revise expressions and vocabulary. It can be done by asking simple questions, using a mix of the



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native and a foreign language to converse with children, label children's actions, including elementary songs, chants and poems.

For further reading, see: The Act from September 7, 1991 on the education system, with later amendments; Regulation of Minister of National Education from 27 August 2012 on the core curriculum of pre-school education and general education in different types of schools; Regulation of Minister of National Education from 14 February 2017 on the core curriculum of pre-school education and general education in different types of schools

SLOVENIA

The *Kindergarten Curriculum* is a national document, intended for pre-school teachers and their assistants, headmasters, education counsellors; it is a document that, together with professional literature and handbooks for pre-school teachers, enables professional planning, ensures the quality of pre-school education, further develops and evolves in terms of the implementing curriculum, and takes into consideration the direct responses of children in class, the organisation of life there, and the integration of kindergartens into the broader environment.

In enforcing the principle of equal opportunities for all children and respecting diversity among children, equal conditions for the optimal development of every child are ensured, while taking into account children's individual differences in development and learning. This also implies the ensuring of broader and flexible, yet nonetheless professional conditions for permanent and temporary integration of pre-school children with special needs in kindergarten classes.

The Kindergarten Curriculum includes activities that are divided into the following specific fields: movement, language, art, society, nature, mathematics. Language activities in the pre-school period – the most important period for speech development – includes a wide area of cooperation and communication with adults and children, helping children to become familiar with the written language and (through experience) to learn about national and world literature – their own and foreign culture. During this period children learn to talk about their experiences, feelings, and thoughts and they come to understand what other people are trying to communicate. Language activities are associated with all linguistic levels: the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic, whereas language development is naturally



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incorporated into all fields of activity. The development of preliminary writing and reading skills is important particularly for children aged 3 years and over. Some of the global goals are:

- Being aware of the existence of one's own and other languages and other cultures;
- Listening, understanding and experiencing the language;
- Language development in terms of a moral-ethical dimension;
- Developing non-verbal communications skills;
- Encouraging language skills (articulation, vocabulary, texts, communication, etc.);
- Learning about the symbols of written language;

Adults who work with children tell and read children age-appropriate tales, stories, riddles, and songs; they organise puppet shows and enable that children already in this age period come into contact with the standard language (spoken or colloquial) and learn about literary genres of language through dialect and colloquial language. Didactic and methods are described in detail, for example topics for discussions are given and that 'baby talk' should not be used.

For further reading, see

Bahovec, D.E. (2013). Kurikulum za vrtce: predšolska vzgoja v vrtcih. Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport: Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo



6. CONCLUSION

In this final section we will discuss in more general terms learning and education.

In proposing education for all as the first initiative for sustainability, UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon also promotes a focus on shifting from education to learning, since many children worldwide receive education, but do not always experience quality education, and do not develop to their full capability because of this. What do we know from research about educational practice that contribute to young children's learning and wellbeing?

In the EPPE project (Effective Provision in Preschool Education) quality turns out to be in preschool programs where teachers and children communicate and share focus, is also where children develop skills and knowledge the most (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). There are also other factors, like the skills of the teachers, the cooperation with parents and work towards curriculum goals, that makes a difference for quality and children's learning.

It is also obvious from other studies that the more school-like the program is the less will children learn; and the opposite, the more play-based the program is the better will children learn (Marcon, 2001). Learning is an active process by the learner, which means that there needs to be space for children's initiatives, creativity and imagination in a preschool of high quality.

Learning one or more languages in ECEC needs to be integrated in everyday activities, rather than merely stand-alone fragments. It should also be remembered that learning a language is not something isolated from other learning. Rather, learning a language always also means to learn about something else: what is talked about (content) and cultural practices.

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Participation can be viewed in two different but related ways. First of all, an active participation is a question of *democracy*, of being counted on as an important human being who can contribute in different ways. Participation is grounded on human rights. Rights to be viewed as someone who has something to say, someone who develops an attitude and identity as a



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democratic person who want to cooperate, share and listen to others. The other side of participation is related to *learning*. If we want to promote children's participation in their own learning, we have to make them active participants. This means that the teacher's role is to be a guide or someone who points something out to children, but what they learn is all a question about what every child brings with them to the teaching situation of earlier experiences, as well as how they are perceiving the task or situation as such (Doverborg, Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2013).

In most curricula in ECE today, the notions participation and codetermination are used, but what does this mean in practice? A good example of what this means is expressed by Sheer (2001) in his article *Pathways to participation*, where he develops five step to make it possible for the child to participate on equal terms as the adult: 1) children are listened to, 2) the teacher create opportunities for being able to listen, 3) children's perspectives are taken into consideration, 4) children are partners in decision taking, and 5) children share power and responsibility for decisions together with the teacher. Studies from Norway has shown that these steps can be viewed also in toddler groups (Eide, Os, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2012). Another study exploring toddlers' participatory opportunities when communicating nonverbally (Kultti, 2016) shows how supporting the toddlers to express their wishes and ideas lead to them being able to participate in decision making processes.

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



2016-1- IT02-KA201- 024294

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.