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# EDUGATE – Multilingual teaching in early childhood education and care

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## ***O2 Innovative Best Practices Collection***



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## Introduction

The collection of Best Practices (henceforth BPs) aims at offering a scientific, pedagogical and linguistic basis for structuring English teaching as a second language in a semi-immersion situation. The BPs identified can also be employed to promote the acquisition of the majority language by immigrant children.

The idea behind the current BPs is that learning a second language must be an enjoyable and engaging activity. Thus, teaching a second language must be based on playful and multisensory activities for children. However, to achieve the most from these activities they must be carefully structured on the basis of the goals to be achieved. In addition, scientific research on language acquisition (McLaughlin, 2013; Saville-Troike and Barto, 2016; Guasti, 2017), psycholinguistics (Traxler and Gensbacher, 2011; Grosjean and Li, 2012), educational neuroscience (Petitto and Dumbar, 2004; Pickering and Howard-Jones, 2007; Sousa, 2011; Immordino-Yang, 2011), and more specifically on bilingualism (García & Wei, 2014), developmental pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson & AsplundCarlsson, 2008), has enhanced our understanding about how learning functions and has made available techniques that can be transferred to educational settings. In the current document we summarize in 11 points, the intervention methods that informed the 35 innovative BPs so far identified. For each method we will discuss to what extent it supports and enhances second language acquisition.

Note that, as the BPs proposed can be used to advance learning a second language in a semi-immersion environment and in a natural way, but also to enhance the acquisition of the majority language in immigrant children, the linguistic material will change according to the goals.

The BP's methodologies focus on different aspects of language teaching. Three main areas can be identified: (1) methods for teaching; (2) tools to create networks; (3) language screening activity. More specifically, some BPs aim to promote the acquisition of language as an instrument of communication. Therefore, the methodology, which inspires several BPs is based on the daily content and language integrated learning methodology. Other BPs focus on structural aspects of language and aim to promote an appreciation of different ways to express concepts, or of different structures appropriate for different purposes. Other BPs promote a meta-linguistic awareness of language or propose a screening activity to detect potential language problems. Although language is the focus of the BPs, social and cognitive skills are of high concern and therefore



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special attention has been devoted to integrate these aspects in the various BPs.

For each BP's methods, we have presented the purpose, some examples about how to implement them and the benefits. The BP will enable teachers to get acquainted with the views and experiences as regards second language teaching and learning. The collection is useful both at partners' and teachers'/educators' level, because it fosters the knowledge of methodologies and approaches that could be implemented in the teaching of a second language in services.



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## **1) Methods for teaching second/majority language in early childhood**

### **BP 1: Choice of themes to organize learning sessions**

It is useful to choose themes to structure the linguistic interactions; this will ensure the use of the vocabulary that turns around such themes. Beyond vocabulary, the kind of sentences that are the goal of the linguistic interaction will be defined. These types of sentences will be proposed with different themes to reinforce their use. Themes must be interesting for children and part of their daily life. The choice of themes requires the cooperation between preschool teachers and English teacher so that common goals are identified and the themes are practiced in both languages. Therefore, the activities that are used to develop one themes are started with English teachers are continued with preschool teachers.

Possible themes relevant for children are: family, farm animal, food, body parts, vehicles (bus, car, plane), number, some basic mathematic. It may be useful to present these themes in different ways or in different contexts (when it is appropriate) and through games. For example, farm animals can be the topic of a game. If a visit to a farm is planned, farm animals may become the topic of this visit as well.

Different games can be planned around to talk about the same theme; different devices can be used to develop the same theme. For example for the theme family, one can use material (toys or pictures) to illustrate where families live (houses), who belongs to the family (mummy, daddy, brother, sister, baby), what families do (eat together, play together, clean the house). While using this material with children, it is useful to point to the relevant parts being named, to ask children to repeat alone and together, to rehearse words. The chosen theme must be used for several days and from time to time it is useful to return to it, when the classroom has moved to a new topic.

Another example, for the theme “body part” consists in inviting children to touch the relevant body parts through instructions like “touch your head” or somebody’s else “touch daddy’s head”, “touch mommy’s head”. These sentences can be used in opposition to make children appreciate different kinds of sentence. Another suggestion is to give children pictures and ask them to color the relevant part or to make collage and create an object (a bus, a car).

Themes chosen will develop the cognitive and social understanding of children. It is important to organize group activities and invite cooperation among children.

This BP method will ensure that (1) children are engaged in interesting activities, (2) learn words used in their life.



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## **BP2: Use of aids to organize learning sessions**

Another BP methodology involves the use of various aids, puppets, props and toys, songs and rhymes, technological aids, to structure the linguistic interaction.

These aids must be part of child's life and will create a richly structured input. It is useful to use a puppet to mediate the communication between caregivers/educators and children. For example, the puppet can be used by the educators to say silly sentences/words that the child can correct, to ask questions to the child, to say introduce new words/sentences. Toys that are used in the activity can be given to children to be manipulated. This may be important for very young children (2-3 years). The use technological aids, such as CD (for songs), tablets and apps (Sandvik, Smørddal and Østerud, 2012), pictures, animation, interactive board, carton movies can offer support to teachers, make them more confident and can be enjoyed by children.

This BP allow educators (1) to take advantage of the new technological aids, (2) to stimulate multisensory experiences, (3) to offer interesting material.

## **BP3: Use of music to accompany language**

Using songs including specific words regarding a certain theme is very important, because research indicates that it can foster the acquisition of language (Brandt, Gebrian and Slevc, 2012; Francois and Schön, 2011), especially the phonological aspect of language. Songs activate an involuntary verbal repetition and facilitate memorization of new words because the pronunciation of words is guided by the musical rhythm. Thanks to rhymes, rhythm and melody the child learns new words, idiomatic sentences and grammatical structures easily. The song can be used in association with activities, i.e., song can require children to do some actions. Children can be invite to sing.

Songs can be used in different languages to make children aware of multilingualism and to value all languages (see BP9) and this will promote social understanding. For example, teachers will work with groups of children where they first listen to a children's song, then the children are challenged and supported by the teacher in collaboratively translating the lyrics to another language. A child's song will be chosen that contains playful lyrics, such as wordplay and neologism (invented words). These kinds of studies could be seen as examples of the emerging paradigm of translanguaging and constitute one of the frontiers of contemporary research into multilingualism and how learning with and of several languages could be orchestrated and developed in early childhood education (for initial studies, see Jidai, Kultti&Pramling, in press; Kultti & Pramling, 2016, 2017).



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Another example of song use consists in pointing out similarities and differences between different-language versions of popular songs. Teachers will be invited to play for children a song that will be familiar to most – if not all – children. An example would be the lead song from the globally popular *Frozen* movie: In the original English version, this song is called (and contains the lyrics in the refrain of) “Let it Go”; in Finnish, this is ‘*Taaksejää*’ [literally: Left behind]; and in Swedish this is “*Slå dig fri*” [literally: ‘punch yourself free’]. Speaking to the children about these differences, after having listened to the different versions, is used to make children aware of the fact that the same song is different in different languages. Popular songs like this are used to engage the children and allow their experience to become resources in taking on a new challenge. Important meta-insights that could be developed in this way include realizing the transformative nature of translation, and hence, that when something is translated from one language to another there may be change in meaning. Children could also be engaged through such examples in talking about the fact that the metaphors may differ but whether these ‘say’ the same or not is a matter of interpretation. Leading children away from a simple substitution view of translation (i.e., the idea that one word in one language simply corresponds to its equivalent in the other language) in itself provides important meta-learning that could be promoted through this activity.

This BP method allows educators (1) to offer multisensory activities, (2) to promote group cohesion (singing together), (3) to improve the phonological skills in a language.

#### **BP4: Reading aloud**

Reading books aloud is useful for exposing children to a different style of language, to promote interest in book reading and in story telling, a paramount human activity. Books must be illustrated and while reading them, it is useful to dramatize the story. The same story can be read in English and in the majority language. For immigrant children, it may be useful to read it in their mother tongue, if possible (see BP8).

This BP enhances (1) the ability to listen to others, while they read aloud, (2) and promote respect for other people taking.

#### **BP5: Enhance, in a structured way, vocabulary and sentence structure**

During the activities, words can be used in isolation, but in a grammatical structure (e.g., “daddy”, but not “child”, rather “a child”). However, it is better to use them in short sentences (“this is daddy”, “daddy is eating”, but not “child is eating”, rather “the child is



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eating”). It is important to use words in short sentences that may be gradually become more complex; especially for verbs, it has been established that children learn new verbs in sentences (Fisher, Gertner, Scott and Yuan, 2010; Jin and Fisher, 2014); it is also important to provide children with a richly structures input, where, for example, the same verb appear in different type of sentences (e.g., “Mary has seen John”, “Mary has seen that John is sick”, “Mary has seen John run”) as this will provide the best chance to learn from age 2 (e.g, use of various kinds of sentences, Naigles, 1996).

As for sentence structure, one can transfer methods used for research purposes to educational practices. We will propose two of them. One is the elicited production method, which consists in asking children to produce specific kind of sentences, once this kind of sentences have been introduced to the child. This method is useful to practice a given kind of sentence. Depending on the sentence, one needs to create the pragmatic set up that makes the use of a given type of sentence felicitous. For example, if you want a child to produce a question, you show her/him a picture, with two characters, one of which is hidden. The visible character is pushing the hidden one. You ask: “The bear is pushing someone. Ask the puppet who (is getting pushed vs. the bear is pushing)?”.

Another method is based on the psycholinguistic phenomenon of syntactic priming (Pickering & Branigan, 1998). Syntax is the linguistic component that takes care about how words are organized in sentences. A syntactic structure is a way of organizing words, which results in a kind of sentence; for example, a passive sentence has a specific syntactic structure consisting of a subject, who undergoes an action (“the boy has been washed by the mother”), a verb expressed in a specific form and so on.

The effect known as syntactic priming refers to the natural tendency to repeat the same syntactic structure over subsequent utterances. For instance, if a speaker hears a sentence such as: “Give Stella a book” (called double object dative structure), s/he will more likely describe a similar event (but involving different characters) by saying “Give Paul the cake” (again, double object dative) instead of “Give the cake to Paul” (called prepositional object dative structure). In particular, one might use this methodology to train speakers on actives/passives; dative structures; full nouns/pronouns; etc. This methodology has been extensively used in rehabilitation with aphasics, as well as with children affected by primary language impairment. As far as we know this methodology has never been proposed as an educational activity in schools. For its implementation, it would be possible to propose it as a classroom activity not only with children learning English, but also with multilingual children to improve their syntactic competence on specific syntactic structures in the majority





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language. Obviously, the choice of the syntactic structures depends on the specific language targeted, as languages vary (for example both the double object and the prepositional dative structures exist in English, but only the latter is acceptable in Italian).

The current best practice assumes that linguistic development is based, among other things, on the implicit learning of syntactic procedures (Chang et al., 2001). Procedures that are more complex, but also more rare, will be acquired later by children. Additionally, the current practice is based on the assumption that language learning depends to a great extent on the quality of the input provided to the children. Therefore, a richer input, not only in terms of lexicon, but also with respect to syntax, will help the child to acquire adequate linguistic, narrative and syntactic skills.

The child will be prompted to produce short sentences in English/Majority language after hearing a description involving a specific syntactic structure produced by the teacher. To do so, children need to comprehend what the teacher is saying and continuously interact with him/her, by providing another description.

To implement this BP, cards are used. The teacher/experimenter has a sets of picture/cards involving colored hand-drawings illustrating events (mother washing boy, bear chasing a mouse, cow kicking cat). The teacher shows to the children the first card describing it with an active structure and asks a child to describe out loud the second card. The choice of specific syntactic structures may depend on the goals of organized teaching activities in BP1.

The exercise will allow children to acquire a deeper knowledge of the different syntactic structures of English (or of the majority language spoken in the country). Children might eventually become more aware about a structure, which is more complex and less used.

The current BP will improve child's syntactic competence by allowing him/her to realize: 1) that language offers many different options to vehicle a message; 2) that some options that are more rare and difficult might be also communicatively effective under some conditions.

## **BP6: Organize ritual or activity in the L2 (English)**

Beyond the use of theme to organize the language activities, it is important to plan the use of English in everyday activities, such as table setting, or to use it during ritual, for example in the morning when one say the day of the week or during lunch time. For example, for table setting, the educator explains the aim of activity to children and shows them a trolley of their measure, where there is all the necessary material



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adequate to the number of children who will eat in that day (tablecloth, american placemats with the name of the tools, glasses, plates, bread basket, jug of water, an empty container for dirty cutlery, a flower pot as a table center). The educator takes the tablecloth and says its name, then he/she starts to put it on the table, with the help of a child. At last he/she splits the children into three pairs and asks them if they would like to try, helping them and telling the name of their actions in English.

In the previous week the same group of children did the activity with the educator speaker the L1, in order to learn the development of the activity.

This BP method allows children to learn: 1) the language of everyday rituals and activities.

### **BP7: Creation of stories**

We propose to stimulate the creation of stories by children with the use of apps (Sandvik, Smørdal and Østerud, 2012). The teacher participates and scaffolds the activity by giving suggestions and asking questions on the basis of genre knowledge (how to structure a narrative), relate the world of fantasy to the world of the child's lived experience (e.g., "imagine you had met such a large squirrel then!") and in other ways reminding and contributing to the evolving story. Hence, the activities in which the technology and its apps are used develop into different kinds of talk, where the app affords the narration of events contributing to children engagement in more complex and higher-order skills such as narrating, imagination and reasoning.

This BP allows children to develop (1) narrative ability, through story generation or story retelling; (2) enhancing temporal and causal reasoning in children.



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## **2) Networking among caregivers (parents and teachers) and social aspects of language**

### **BP8: Parents involvement**

Some of the material used in classroom activities can be brought home and used with parents to rehearse words and sentences introduced in the child day care. This BP methodology requires involvement of parents, who must be aware of specific learning goals and must be able to help the child at home (for example if the target language is English, parents must know English). This kind of involvement may be very important for immigrant parents who can use the material to foster the child acquisition of the L1 at home. Current research suggests that enhancing L1 does not hinder L2 (Butzkamm, 2003). In contrast, it seems to show some beneficial effect at academic level (Cook, 2001).

To involve parents and allow them to use some of the material used in school a section of the Edugate website will be dedicated to parents and the relevant material will be uploaded there.

This BP (1) will make parents aware of linguistic-based activities their children are involved in at school, (2) will value languages for parents (especially for languages of immigrant children).

### **BP9: Give value to all mother languages**

Given that it is important to foster the L1 of immigrant children because it may be beneficial to the L2, it is important to ensure that the child benefits from the best conditions to reach this goal. One relevant factor in this enterprise is to ensure that the attitude toward languages, any language, is positive (Tang, 2002). A child who feels that her/his language is not valuable will not be motivated to acquire it. In addition, from the cognitive point of view, learning any language is equally beneficial, that is, there aren't languages that are more beneficial than others or more valued than others; finally, as biodiversity is a richness for humanity, so is diversity of languages a richness for humanity.

Given these premises, one BP to value languages spoken by children and parents in the educational setting is to involve them in different times of the school year in a Multilingual Bingo. The educator/parent or the two together propose to a small group of children (4-5) to play Bingo (at a table). Each parent will lead the game in her/his mother tongue, using images of common things, toys, animals and so on (coordination with the themes chosen for language classroom may be advised).The



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name of the object is written under each image in each language present in the class. Beforehand the parents had taught the educators how to pronounce the words, so that the educator can also lead the game. To facilitate the learning process a CD can be created with the help of cultural mediators.

A second way to achieve the goal of valuing mother languages is by involving parents in reading very simple stories in each mother language of the class. The story may be the same used in the language activities. The story may be previously told in the majority language understood by all children. While reading the story in the mother language, educators may dramatize the stories so that they can be understood by all children. Books may be illustrated so that children can take advantage of them to understand. All children will be invited to repeat some words. Notice that the goal of this activity is not to have all children learn the languages spoken in class by some of the children, but merely to appreciate that there are different languages, that their peers speak different mother tongue and that all these mother tongues are equally valued. Through this activity, children may also appreciate different aspects of different culture. For example, if a book turns around food, children may appreciate that in different cultures, people eat different kinds of food or that in different countries different kinds of animals may be found.

This BP methodology will (1) promote a positive attitude toward languages, (2) an appreciation of differences among cultures and (3) tolerance towards different people.

## **BP10: Peer to peer interaction**

It is important that teachers promote the peer to peer interaction, by proposing activities in which children use English for communicating with their peers. One illustration is offered in BP6 through the table setting activity. Other suggestions are the use of games that encourage children to work together for reaching a given goal or the creation of something together. The Edugate website can include a section for teachers taking part in the project to exchange experiences for teaching English, sharing ideas, material. This will create a sense of group among the participants and will multiply the opportunities to be in touch with other participants.

This BP methodology promotes: 1) the learning of social skills; 2) the ability of working together.



### 3) Language screening activities

#### **BP11: Screening language disorders**

The BP proposed involves screening children with potential speech and language delay using a scientific-based but playful and non-clinical approach. It is addressed to children from age 4, because there is a large variability in the language attainments of children and before that age it is difficult to establish a diagnosis of language impairment (Tomblin, 1996;), although some risk factors can be identified.

The rationale for this BP is based on the literature. Under the view that language development and learning are strictly intertwined (Leonard, 1997), the current practice is based on the account that an early identification of language problems might be important for the appropriate planning of educational activities in order to support all children, but specifically those who show a delay. More specifically, a delay in reaching typical milestones of language and communication development is a risk factor for later language difficulties (Whitehurst & Fischel, 1994) and a predictor of difficulties with literacy (Catts et al., 1999). Therefore 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 group in order to help children to catch up with the delay before literacy skills are introduced. In multilingual classrooms such assessment might provide additional information, as immigrant children language attainments may suffer from reduced exposure to the majority/minority language, from the problem of immigration (social, emotional problems). Indeed, according to results from cross-linguistic research, children's early word productions are sensitive to language-specific phonologies (Levelt, Schiller, & Levelt, 2000; Roark & Demuth, 2000), therefore, it would be important to test the linguistic level of children speaking a minority language in their L2. In such a case, it would be interesting for the school to verify whether there is a delay in L2. If so, it will be the duty of the clinician to verify to what extent the delay is due to real linguistic impairment or to impoverished linguistic stimulation. Up to date kindergarten and crèche services are prevented from performing a (linguistic and cognitive) screening due to the absence of clear protocols of testing, agreed by clinicians, researchers and educators.

Based on these insights, the current methodology proposes some playful activities to evaluate basic linguistic abilities in children of monolingual and bilingual classrooms by means of tools that might be easily proposed by teachers too, but that are created by academics/clinicians. The child will be individually tested on a series of very short, but scientifically inspired games. The language skill to be examined is



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phonology, as this skill is often impaired in children with language difficulties, it is the most widespread difficulty (Bishop et al., 2006), which most of the times is overcome with specific intervention (Munro et al., 2008). To provide an example for the Italian language, the activity consists in exposing children to a series of words/sounds that are selected with respect to their phonological characteristics as well as by their frequency based on the Italian Child Lexicon (Marcolini et al., 1993). The educator presents different types of tasks by means of a computer/tablet. The tasks are:

1. Words discrimination based on a single phoneme change
2. Identifying pictures and matching them with their corresponding word
3. Repetition of multi-syllable non-words ( GAPS; Vernice et al., 2012)
4. Sentence repetition (14 sentences) (GAPS; Vernice et al., 2012)

The overall evaluation would provide the teacher with an overview of a child's phonological skills with respect to normative data for Italian children. This BP methodology will allow 1) early identification of children with a delay in language development; 2) to inspire classroom-based interventions to train linguistic areas (vocabulary, phonology) that appeared somewhat delayed.



## CONCLUSION

According to the Project objectives, the Best Practice Collection aims at enhancing the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and at strengthening the profile of the teaching professions, promoting second language teaching in a lifelong learning perspective.

The Best Practice Collection will thus contribute to improvement of skills of teachers and educators and to the quality of the entire pre-school education system by disseminating pedagogical and linguistic good-practices and relying on a professional profile.

The aim of the EDUGATE project is to support ECEC teachers delivering high quality teaching by fostering the development and adaptation of new teaching methodologies as well as to deal with diversified groups of learners, such as children coming from disadvantaged contexts, and to adopt collaborative and innovative practices.

Moreover, EDUGATE practices and methods address inclusive education, it applies to teaching a majority language to disadvantaged learners facilitating their linguistic and social inclusion; in particular migrant children will be facilitated in learning the local language. Nevertheless, even in those contexts that are less touched by the migration phenomena, it is extremely useful for children to learn English or another vehicular language that can be precious for them in their adult life for crossing linguistic and cultural barriers. In both cases, learning a second language for children can be a precious instrument for living in a multilingual, multicultural and open society.

Teachers from all the partner states have been using highly useful and mainly similar methods in teaching a second language. The teachers/educators involved are well aware of the necessity for children to mime words, listen to sounds, touch things, sing, listen to stories, tell stories and dramatize stories, and –on the top of all – play games.

It is obvious that in general the partner countries show a common view regarding the methods applied. However, it is always possible to find something completely new in the current BPs and extremely valuable in a teacher's routine.

The best practice collection could serve as a common programme that has been developed starting from crèche children, to 3-4 years old children, and then 5 and 6 years olds. The BP programme would allow to delineate the sequence and development of language acquisition for very young learners. Furthermore, the teachers could better



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understand how to make progress and get children talking. In addition, the teachers know what is expected from their pupils in two or three years and it is really helpful.

As this programme implies good language knowledge of pre-school teachers and an additional professional load for them, we point out the necessity of a strong collaboration between all the different caregivers in order to implement the current BP programme in a bi- and multi-lingual classroom.





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