

Early language learning in a rural multilingual Montessori school in Málaga (Spain): a case study



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Structure

Aims and background of a wider research

La Casa Verde: a case study

Methodology and activities

Analysis

Concluding remarks and next steps



Aims of the wider research

- 1) To analyse attitudes, difficulties, needs, and current practices of Early Childhood Education **teachers** (pre-service and in service) in Málaga
- 2) To analyse **teaching materials** and to produce open educational resources (OER), including a toolkit with best teaching practices and guidelines for families
- 3) To analyse **language learning and communication strategies** of Early Childhood Education **pupils** in Málaga, as well as their **language biographies** and **language attitudes**



Background of the wider research

1.1. Need for **urgent teacher's training**

1.2. Significant **increase in foreign population** (including children)

1.3. Literature review: **research gap, lack of resources and learning materials**

1.4. **No support** for non-Spanish-speaking students in **Early Childhood Education** (Andalusian public schools)



Misconception:

Very young children soak up language (including L2 languages) as sponges (regardless of the degree of interaction, quality of input, etc.) (Muñoz, 2019)

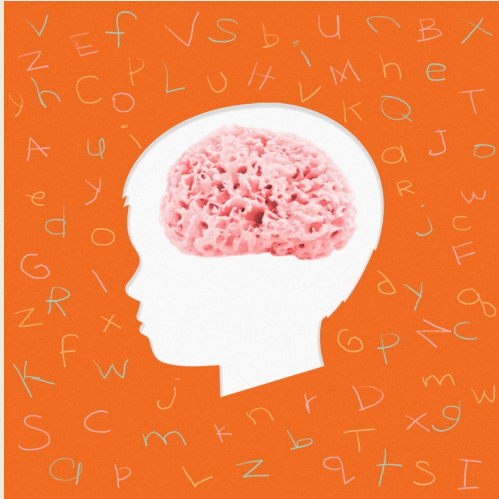


Illustration: Deanna Donegan,
The New York Times, 2020



Illustration: Sarah Bolton, 2018

Submersion method:
sink or swim
(Smidt, 2008, 2016)

La Casa Verde: a case study



Source: own photograph

La Casa Verde (Montessori school)

- Small, intimate, multicultural and multilingual school in nature
- Communication and collaborative work with families
- Montessori pedagogy (guides and the prepared environment)
- Montessori philosophy (respect, autonomy, and responsible freedom)



CHILDREN'S HOUSE

- Average of 24 children
- Mixed ages (3-6 years old)
- Different L1s: Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, English, Dutch, Polish, Czech, Arabic, Italian, French, and Spanish
- Different geographic varieties of Spanish: parents from Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, and Spain (Andalusian and Castilian Spanish)
- Communication between children and with guides: mainly Spanish and/or English
- Communication between children with the same L1 (Norwegian, Dutch, Italian), mainly at the playground
- L1 as an emotional and social link, L2 as a social link

Multilingualism and language learning



International school



Bilingual presentations and materials (Spanish and English)



English workshops divided by levels of competence



Resources that can be used in any language (wordless)



Peer teaching (their own languages or languages they know)

Multilingualism and language learning

- **The assembly**

- Children can express their experiences about own cultures or trips
- Guides: Stories and pictures books in Spanish and English, songs in different languages
- Families: reading tales, stories and poems in different languages, riddles

- **Cultures festival** (parents' talks, food, games, maps, photos, tales, costumes...)

- **Major plans:** to extend the bilingual programme, language and cultural exchanges with children from different countries in the world

Methodology and activities

- **Observation** (December-June)
 - Environment (learning class)
 - Playground (free play)
- **Activities** undertaken with the children
 - International Day of Multilingualism
 - Language portraits
 - River of reading
(Waddington et al., 2024)



Source: own photographs





Source of image (child): Power Point

International Day of Multilingualism

- Activities:
 - **Greetings** ('hello') in the pupils' languages
 - **Multilingual books** (greetings, animals)
 - **Words** in different languages and varieties of Spanish ('car', 'dog')
- **Awakening to Languages:** learning about languages (Lourenço, 2014, p. 41)



Analysis: preliminary results

Language portraits

Main communication and language
learning strategies used by children

Main outcomes

Language learning at La Casa Verde:
strengths and challenges



Language portraits

- Tool for data collection
- Raise awareness of multilingualism and language variation
- Analysis of language attitudes:
 - positive attitudes towards language diversity and language learning
- Analysis of language and identity:
 - intellectual (school learning)
 - social (friends)
 - emotional (mother and father)



Main communication and language learning strategies used by children

Curiosity “what is this?” and repetition

Mediation

Translanguaging

Strategic competence

Contextualised language

Play

MAIN OUTCOMES

Fostering real awareness of multilingualism

Making the most of multilingualism by introducing a more regular use of children's L1s

Using children's different L1s to create links

Curiosity for learning new languages

Early language learning and multilingualism at La Casa Verde: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Strenghts

- **Inclusive education:** children learn in a language that they understand (Spanish L1 or L2, English L2 or L1)
- Respectful with **linguistic and cultural diversity**
- Children's **positive attitudes** towards language learning and multilingualism
- Children's use of **strategies** to communicate with speakers of other languages and for L2 learning

Challenges

- Improve the level of the second language learned at school (English or Spanish)
- Integration between speakers of different languages (especially, between Spanish and English L2/L1 speakers)

Next steps

Research

European Language Portfolio (adapted version of the junior edition)

Interviews with guides (teachers) and families



Activities

Activities and recommendations to improve the level of children's second language (English/Spanish)

Activities to foster communication between speakers of different languages

Activities to foster intercultural communication and multilingualism

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