

Opening up new spaces for language and literacy practices in early childhood education for migrant children

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Abstract

During the last decade there has been new dynamics on mobility; mobility as a child response to changing global conditions (Doná and Veale 2011). Children are the group that best illustrate the limits and contradictions within the mobility paradigm. On arrival to host country, they often find themselves meeting an educational system divorced from transnational considerations of movement and exchange, including a tendency to problematize language and culture and to neglect children's skills, resilience and agency (Åkerblom and Harju 2019; Wernesjö 2011; Nilsson and Bunar 2015). The aim of the paper is to challenge this tendency by discussing how this deficit view of children and their language capacities can be changed and developed through the inclusion of children's perspective, aesthetic expressions, and reflexive dialogues with educators. The discussion is based on results from an action-research project carried out in Sweden. In the project practitioners and researchers collaborated, aiming to develop the practices in a preschool section with large linguistic diversity. Different activities related to language and literacy practices were implemented during the project, including photographs taken by children enabling them to share their experiences from the everyday activities of the setting, and activities focusing both verbal and aesthetic expressions. The results show that the language and literacy practices of the section became more focused on language as a process for expression and meaning making, rather than a tool for understanding instructions. This view of language is in line with translanguaging approach (Garcia and Wei 2013), where speakers use a variety of language assets in order to communicate. The notion of translanguaging refers to the use of language as a unitary meaning-making system, where the language users own one language repertoire, from where they can select linguistic features. The approach turned the educators away from working with deficit assumptions, and instead focusing on skills and agency by creating space for the children to express themselves and communicate in a diversity of ways (e.g. creating own narratives, books and taking part in multilingual language games). Based on the results of the research project we wish to discuss approaches and methodologies to study and transform the educational practices for the improvement of migrant children's education, as well as the conditions for transformation of the educational practices.

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