Translanguaging as a pedagogical resource in Italian primary schools

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Outline

- Theoretical background
- Participating schools and main research aims
- Translanguaging-based activities implemented
- Research methods and instruments adopted
- Analysis of the impact of translanguaging pedagogy on children, teachers and parents
- Final considerations and further research perspectives
Theoretical background

- **Languages in contact**
  (Bagna, Machetti & Vedovelli, 2003; Bagna, Barni & Siebetcheu, 2004; Vedovelli, Barni & Bagna, 2009 *inter alia*).

- **Translanguaging:**
  “The process by which bilingual students perform bilingually in the myriad multimodal ways of the classroom” (García, 2011).

Adopting a translanguaging lens means that students’ entire linguistic repertoire would be engaged, recognized and accepted (García & Li Wei, 2014).

- **Monolingual paradigm VS Empowerment of bilingual pupils**
  “Home language incorporation into the instructional program is likely to contribute to the collaborative creation of power” (Cummins, 2012).
### Research contexts: participating schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total Citizens</th>
<th>Percentage Immigrants</th>
<th>Class Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cerreto Guidi (Florence)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11021</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>118 pupils (52 immigrant minority students)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 classes involved in the project (3rd and 4th Grade)</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>47 pupils involved in the project (15 emergent bilinguals: 11 Chinese, 2 Albanian, 2 Romanian)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 teachers involved in the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martiri della Benedicta School</td>
<td>Alessandria</td>
<td>6128</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>927 pupils (266 immigrant minority students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5 classes involved in the project (3rd and 4th Grade)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>99 children involved in the project (48 emergent bilinguals: 16 Arabic, 11 Romanian, 8 Albanian, 5 Spanish, 3 Polish, 1 Russian, 1 French, 1 Bini, 1 Swahili, 1 Hindi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8 teachers involved in the project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research aims

- Promoting educational practices based on translanguaging pedagogy, in order to emphasize the importance of children’s entire linguistic repertoires and promote bilingualism.

- Verifying the impact of such practices on teachers, pupils and parents.

- Encouraging the development of multilingual literacy skills and strategies for the empowerment of students’ home languages and identity in order to prevent youth marginalization (Cummins, 2015).
Main steps

**Summer/Autumn 2016**: First contacts with schools and formal meetings with school Headmasters and teachers.

**Winter 2016/2017**: Teacher training and introductory meeting with parents.

**February-May 2017**: Implementation of Translanguaging-based activities and data collection.

**End of May - June 2017**: Final meeting with parents, teachers and Headmasters and presentation of preliminary results.

- Micro-level language policy action (Chua & Baldauf, 2011)
Translanguaging-based activities implemented

Ice-breaking playful activities
Translanguaging-based activities implemented

Multilingual schoolscape (Gorter, 2015; Woodley & Brown, 2016)
Translanguaging-based activities implemented
Translanguaging-based activities implemented
Translanguaging-based activities implemented

Language portraits

(Bush, 2012; heteroglossia.net)
Translanguaging-based activities implemented
Translanguaging-based activities implemented
Translanguaging-based activities implemented

Bilingual story-telling and parents involvement
Translanguaging-based activities implemented

Multilingual texts (Cummins & Early, 2011)
Translanguaging-based activities implemented

Una matita se ne stava senza disegnare niente, quando vide trei markeri: unul roșu, unul verde și unul albastru.

Il rosso gridava e saltava, facendo un gran baccano, lasciando segni dappertutto: alla matita non piaceva proprio.

Verde a fost foarte timid, nesigur: lasciava solo dei puntini qua e là, e scappava in continuazione.

Marcațul albastru era vesel, dragut, frumos: la matita in un attimo se ne innamorò.

Che lingua è? 😊
Transformative Research Action: it “inverts the power position of researchers and teachers, as each brings their own expertise into the process, becoming co-learners” (García & Kleyn, 2016).

- **Children Language portraits** (Bush, 2012): 135 portraits collected.
- **Language background self-rating scale** administered to parents (Extra & Yagmur, 2004): 179 questionnaires collected.
- **Focus groups** with children pre- (36 interviews) and post- intervention (36 interviews)(Gibson, 207).
- **Semi-structured interviews with teachers** (13) and parents (10) pre- and post- intervention (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).
- **Linguistic schoolscape observational schemes**.
- **Performance-based assessment grid**.
Data Analysis

**Grounded Theory** (Charmaz, 2006)

**NVivo 11** software for the qualitative analysis of:

- Interviews
- Reports
- Questionnaires
- Drawings and texts
Impact of translanguaging pedagogy

Impact on children

- “L’altRoparlante is like a loudspeaker from which messages in lots of different languages come out at the same volume” (Ch. 15, Italian, Stabbia, March).
- “I can speak a little bit of Chinese. I’m attending an intensive course here at school with Mei Jia” (Ch. 24, Italian, Stabbia, March).
- “Working in group is wonderful and important because if we help each other using the languages that we know, we can get together where we can’t get alone” (Ch. 27, Italian, Stabbia, May).
- C: “I like this project because it’s expressive”
  R: “What do you mean?”
  C: “I mean that I can express things about myself that the other children haven’t known yet”
  R: “Can you give me an example?”
  C: “For instance, my language (Ch. 9, Arabic-Italian. Serravalle, March)."
Impact of translanguaging pedagogy

Impact on children

- C: “I think this project is very interesting because I have never talked at school about the languages I am able to speak and now I can vent out, I feel a bit better”

  R: “Do you feel better? That’s positive. Do you mean that now those languages can come outside?”

  C: “Yes, now I feel free. I also told this to my mum, I went to her when we received the communication about the project and I said: -Mum, we will carry out a project on all the languages! I can use Arabic in class.

  Yeah! Finally” (Ch. 68, Arabic-Italian, Serravalle, March).

- “I was very happy that my elder sister came to school and we worked on concept maps in Albanian with my friends. I taught them a bit of Albanian and they have learnt a lot!” (Ch. 31. Albanian-Italian, Serravalle, May).

- “I feel closer to Marwa now, I know many things more on her. I think we are all more friends now” (Ch. 45, Italian, Serravalle, May).

- “I can speak two languages, too! Italian and Serravalle dialect! And a bit of Romanian” (Ch. 79, Italian, Serravalle, May).
Impact of translanguaging pedagogy

Impact on parents

- “Since kindergarten I have been told by teachers that I had to talk only in Italian at home, otherwise the child would have been confused and he would not learn Italian. This project seems very new, now she can use Romanian even at school, she’s very happy” (P., Serravalle, May).

- “I was a bit concerned at the beginning, at the first meeting with you. I thought: ‘How can they do it? It will be confusing’. I am sorry, I was a bit harsh. Then, when *** came home saying: -Mum, today Omama’s mother came to school, I learnt Arabic and we drank tea - then I was happy of his enthusiasm” (P., Serravalle, May).
Impact of translanguaging pedagogy

Impact on teachers

“This project is encouraging us to re-think a more inclusive pedagogy, in order to meet the educational needs of pupils coming from abroad, as we have partly done for several years” (Te. 3, Stabbia, April).

“Since they are all fluent Italian speakers now, we have thought that the ‘problems’ have been solved, but in this project we understood that there are several identity dynamics that we have to consider and we can do that through the legitimacy of their home languages” (Te. 1, Serravalle, May).
Final considerations and further research perspectives

- **Emergent bilinguals’ linguistic repertoires**, in particular those of immigrant minority students, must be conceived as a precious resource, especially in the daily pedagogical praxis at school.

- The actions implemented in order to welcome students from abroad within Italian schools cannot be occasional: they **must be systematic and effective**.

- It is important to **encourage students’ creativity, cooperation and participation** also in the planning phases of activities based on translanguaging.

- Necessity to promote **concrete actions of schools’ micro-policy**. The promulgation of a chart of the students’ language rights in the investigated schools could be of great interest.
«To reject a child’s language in the school is to reject the child (Cummins, 2001)

Il bambino ha cento lingue, ma gliene rubano novantanove (Loris Malaguzzi)
A child has 100 languages but they steal 99

.... Let’s try to steal him/her only 98 :-)
References