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Plaisir, Jean (2024). **‘You Ask Many Questions,’ An Inquiry Into Translanguaging Practices Across Early Learning Settings In New York City: Implications for staff diversity, equity, inclusion, and quality in the ECEC workforce.** Paper presented on the 32nd Annual EECERA Conference, Brighton/United Kingdom, 4.9.2024.

This research aims to share insights on the importance of multilingualism in ECEC settings. Previous studies show that translanguaging and intentional teaching benefit students from diverse cultures (Garcia, 2020; Epstein, 2015). Translanguaging is defined as a pedagogical approach that utilizes more than one language in classroom activities (Garcia, 2020), and intentional teaching strategies along with teacher reflexivity (Epstein, 2015) facilitate children's learning and improve teaching skills. Both theoretical and conceptual frameworks guide this research. Monolingual teachers may at times feel unprepared to teach linguistically diverse children, who are sometimes perceived as great challenges. Providing monolingual teachers with multilingual training and support can change perceptions, facilitate multilingual learners' integration, and yield benefits for all children in ECEC settings. This six-month inquiry utilizes qualitative research methodology (e.g., fieldwork notes and teacher reflections) to gather and analyze data on the translanguaging practices (Garcia, 2020) and intentional teaching strategies (Epstein, 2015) of 10 bilingual preservice early childhood educators in the implementation of lessons and activities to support culturally and linguistically diverse children across preK-2nd grade settings in New York City. The researcher applies APA Ethical guidelines (2017) and strictly safeguards the anonymity of the participants for the duration of this research and thereafter. The study concludes that multilingual staff can provide much-needed support to both emergent bilingual children and monolingual teachers in ECEC. It discusses how multilingualism can be instituted in staff development training and teacher preparation programs as an effective strategy for increasing staff diversity and quality in the ECEC workforce.

### **Keywords**

*translanguaging, intentional teaching, teacher reflexivity, multilingualism, social and emotional learning*

### **Presenter:**

Jean-Yves Plaisir, Borough of Manhattan Community College, United States

# 'YOU ASK MANY QUESTIONS'

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*AN INQUIRY INTO TRANSLANGUAGING PRACTICES ACROSS EARLY LEARNING SETTINGS IN NEW YORK CITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR STAFF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND QUALITY IN THE ECEC WORKFORCE*

BY

DR. JEAN-YVES PLAISIR, TEACHER  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE (NY, USA)



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## KEY WORDS



Multilingualism;



Translanguaging;



Social-emotional learning;



Intentional teaching;



Critical teacher reflexivity.

## **PRESENTATION OBJECTIVE**

Share and discuss preliminary findings from a place-based inquiry focusing on how multilingual student teachers used translanguaging practices, intentional teaching strategies, and teacher reflexivity to support emergent multilingual learners' social-emotional learning and integration process across early childhood settings in New York City.

# PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Multilingual student teachers supported multilingual learners' social-emotional learning and adaptation across ECEC programs and services in New York City.

- Translated instructions and mediated interactions to foster a sense of belonging and mattering for multilingual learners in ECEC settings.
- Constituted a vast reservoir of empathy for multilingual learners and families in ECEC programs and services.
- Contributed to implementing DEI principles and quality improvement (added value) in ECEC environments.



# INQUIRY'S CLAIM & GUIDING QUESTIONS

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**Inquiry's claim:** Teacher education programs can further develop multilingual student teachers to intentionally promote emotional learning and the integration of children from differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds across ECEC program types and urban contexts.

**Guiding questions:**

Why and how do student teachers use languages other than English in interactions with multilingual learners in ECEC environments?

What are the perceived benefits of using heritage languages with multilingual learners in ECEC programs and services?



## QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this inquiry is inductive and subjective in that it relies heavily on observation notes focusing narrowly on multilingual practices and related themes that emerged during unplanned, unstructured, and unpredictable interactions involving 10 multilingual student teachers supporting children from differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds to adjust and integrate into different ECE programs and childcare services in New York City (USA).

# PROGRAM TYPES & URBAN CONTEXTS

Place-based observations of multilingual student teachers were conducted in multiple program types, geographical areas, and contact language (multilingual) situations in New York City. The multilingual student teachers observed largely reflects the children's race/ethnicity, heritage languages, and cultural backgrounds.

- **ECE Program Types:** 3 PreK programs for 3–5-year-olds operated by community-based organizations in Manhattan; 2 PreK programs for 3-5-year-olds operated by community-based organizations in Brooklyn; 1 PreK program for 3–5-year-olds on a college campus in Manhattan; 1 PreK/3K program for 3-5-year-olds in a K-5 public school in Brooklyn; 1 PreK/3K program in a K-5 public school in Manhattan; and 1 privately-owned PreK program for 3–5-year-olds in Queens.
- **Geographic Locations and Socioeconomic Features of the Programs:** 3 sites in Brooklyn (2 in low-income areas and 1 in a middle-income area); 4 sites in Manhattan (2 sites in high-income areas; 1 in middle-income and 1 in a low-income neighborhood); and 1 site in a middle-income area in Queens.
- **Demographic Characteristics of the Programs:** Native and foreign-born children and staff are from diverse races, ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religions—boys and girls, ages 3 to 8;
- **Contact Languages in the Programs:** The languages identified in this inquiry are Arabic, English, French, German, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Mandarin, Mandingo, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Ukrainian, and Urdu among others.



## OBSERVATION AND POST- OBSERVATION TOOLS AND STRATEGIES IN THIS INQUIRY

**Observation Tool:** Three criteria from the 2008 version of CLASS (classroom assessment scoring system) Observation Sheet (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2008) were used to observe and assess student teachers' interactions and relationships with multilingual children in indoor and outdoor activities—e.g., positive climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives.

**Field Notes and Journals:** Field notes and journals were kept for collecting data and engaging in reflective conversations on 'big moments' captured during student teachers' interactions with multilingual children inside or outside of the classroom. Information was recorded on notebooks, tablets, and cell phones.

**Reflective Conversations:** The researcher held post-observation conversations with the student teachers focusing on identifying big moments during their interactions with children, reflecting on their own learning experiences, and critically assessing the effectiveness of using heritage languages in interactions with children.

# **CODING TECHNIQUES FOR OBSERVATION SCRIPTING**

- **ACI:** Adult-child Interaction(s)
- **AS:** Adaptation strategies
- **BIL:** Bilingual
- **CTR:** Critical Teacher Reflexivity
- **EBL:** Emergent Bilingual Learner(s)
- **ENG:** English
- **HL:** Heritage language
- **ITT:** Intentional Teaching Technique(s)
- **ELL:** English language learner
- **MLG:** Multilingual
- **Q&A:** Question(s) and Answer(s)
- **RCA:** Recasting
- **RDA:** Read aloud
- **SEL:** Social-emotional learning
- **SSA:** Student Self-assessment
- **ST:** Shared Thinking
- **TLG:** Translanguaging

# DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

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The observation data collected were organized and analyzed to capture recurrent themes from the field notes and post-observation conversations with the student teachers involved in this inquiry.

The researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the data collected so far to seek out and capture exemplars of key findings that emerged from this inquiry—i.e., translanguaging practices, shared thinking, social-emotional support, critical student-teacher reflexivity, and DEI principles and practices.

## **TRANSLANGUAGING PRACTICES**

Multilingual student teachers used children's heritage languages to foster a sense of belonging and help these learners feel accepted in ECEC programs

- Held conversations with children in heritage languages at mealtime.
- Translated classroom instructions, labeled materials in heritage languages, and interpreted children's responses during activities (Garcia & Kleyn, 2020; Skau & Cascella, 2006).
- Read children's books in English and learners' heritage languages.
- Used multilingual materials to promote language development and early literacy skills in English and heritage languages (Prošić-Santovac, 2015; Dunst et al., 2011).
- Learned and used vocabulary words and formulaic speech from the multilingual learners in their programs.

# SHARED THINKING

Multilingual student teachers validated and expanded children's perspectives and ideas by asking open-ended questions and recasting experiences in both English and the learners' heritage languages.

- Used heritage languages to think aloud, solve puzzles, and read picture books.
- Expanded learning experiences by asking open-ended questions in learners' heritage languages before, during, and after activities (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008; Scull, Paatsch, & Raba, 2013).
- Utilized heritage languages to clarify concepts and entertain multilingual learners.



# **SOCIAL- EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

Multilingual student teachers constitute a vast reservoir of empathy and emotional support for multilingual children in ECEC settings.

- Proactively monitored the behavior of learners and used heritage languages to redirect attention when children were upset.
- Fostered safe spaces and respectful climates for emergent multilingual learners to practice their listening, speaking, and conversational skills in English and their heritage languages—i.e., regard for children’s perspective, empathy, SEL, etc.
- Shared personal experiences to motivate and help multilingual learners cope during their adaptation process.
- Formed strong relationships with emergent multilinguals to create pathways for positive adaptation in ECE environments.

# CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY PROCESS

The observer held reflective conversations (post-observation meetings) with the multilingual student teachers to identify and analyze big moments or actions taken during interactions with multilingual learners.

- Observed and assessed the effectiveness of translanguaging techniques used.
- Engaged in critical self-assessment of their own learning processes.

# APPLYING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

Multilingual student teachers hugely contributed in applying diversity, equity, and inclusion principles across ECEC programs and services in New York City.

- Embraced inclusive and student-centered pedagogy, critical thinking, and social-emotional learning.
- Helped foster safe spaces for multilingual learners' adaptation and integration into ECEC environments.
- Participated in the valuation of heritage languages in ECEC.

# FORMATIVE CONCLUSION

- Teacher education programs can develop multilingual student teachers to intentionally support multilingual children's social-emotional learning and integration into ECEC environments.
- Monolingual and multilingual staff can develop meaningful collaboration models to foster relatively more welcoming environments for multilingual learners.
- Professional development modules can be designed to promote multilingualism, DEI principles, and quality in ECEC programs and services.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, FUTURE RESEARCH & POLICY

More research is needed to increase knowledge on how multilingual student teachers positively impact social-emotional learning and the adaptation of multilingual learners in ECEC programs and services, language communities, and national and international contexts.

Teacher education programs can develop multilingual teachers to intentionally support social-emotional learning and the adaptation of emergent multilingual children in ECEC environments.

Monolingual and multilingual teaching staff can develop meaningful collaboration models to positively impact the adaptation process, increase educational achievement, and foster a relatively more welcoming community for emergent bilingual learners in ECEC programs and services.

Professional development modules can be designed to promote multilingual practice, DEI principles, and quality in ECEC programs and services.



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# Q & A

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Contact Info:

Professor Jean-Yves Plaisir

Borough of Manhattan Community College

Teacher Education Department

199 Chambers Street

New York, NY 10007

Phone: 212-220-1214

Email: [jplaisir@bmcc.cuny.edu](mailto:jplaisir@bmcc.cuny.edu)