

## **Dilemmas in education for migrant students, part 1**

14. Multi Cultural Educational Research

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This is part one of a two-part symposium that aims to highlight and disseminate what dilemmas present themselves in education for migrant students. Issues regarding migration and education have been at the forefront in many Western countries, not least in a Nordic context. For the purposes of this symposium, we have chosen to use the term migrant students, as the definitions and terms vary between countries.

We have chosen to address dilemmas in order to emphasize that not all issues which arise in education for migrant students are problems that can be solved. The Cambridge dictionary online defines dilemmas as: a) A situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two different things you could do, and b) A situation in which a choice has to be made between possibilities that will all have results you do not want. Theoretically, dilemmas may be understood as a manifestation of systemic contradictions, which are not observable in themselves but possible to understand through their discursive manifestations (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). Further, dilemmas might not be preventable, or have a given solution. Addressing an issue as a dilemma rather than as a problem gives room for other perspectives and ways of action.

In previous research carried out by the contributors to this symposium, a few key dilemmas have emerged, two of which provide the underpinnings of the presentations. The first is whether migrant students should be placed in an introductory class or not. That issue ties in with both organisational, pedagogical and social aspects of education, as well as with processes of inclusion. The other key dilemma is teaching an increasingly transnational group of students within a strictly national curriculum. Migrant students may not plan to stay in the country in which they receive their education, which means that at least some of the curriculum may not be geared towards their needs. For instance, learning the dominant or national language is more often than not the threshold for moving forward in their education, but in a transnational perspective, learning another language might be more beneficial.

With these overarching dilemmas in mind, the different contributions will look into educational settings for migrant students, and further investigate what dilemmas can be identified and how, who they effect, what the effects are, how the dilemmas can be understood theoretically as well as point to possible ways forward in handling the dilemmas.

The symposium will delve into these issues with a broad perspective, both regarding national settings, educational settings, disciplinary approaches, and theoretical perspectives, with the purpose of contributing knowledge of how dilemmas in education for migrant students can be understood and handled in an international perspective.

### **“How much English should we speak?” Teachers’ and students’ multilingual practices in an introductory class in Norway**

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### *Research topic*

In this study, we followed a class for newly arrived migrant students at a Lower Secondary School (grades 8-10) throughout the schoolyear 2022/23. The school was new to introductory classes; thus, several experiences were gained and discussed as the classroom instruction proceeded. During the year, several issues raised by the teachers turned out to be too complex to simply solve. In our view these issues had the character of dilemmas (cf. the symposium abstract).

Here, we will tune in on one reoccurring topic brought to the fore, namely the question of what language(s) should be used in the classroom. For instance, one teacher asked, "How much English should we speak?". Another teacher commented on the students' use of different first languages in the group: "[...] it's fine for clarifications, (...) but not necessarily ok if others are excluded from understanding". Furthermore, teachers worried that the students did not practice Norwegian to a great enough extent. According to our observations, questions regarding language use and language learning remained an underlying issue for the teachers throughout the school year.

On this background, the paper will shed light on teachers' and students' balancing of different approaches to language practices and second language learning in a multilingual classroom. This encompasses perceptions of first languages as a resource, English as a lingua franca in a globalized context, and the need for practicing and learning the host country's language.

### *Theoretical framework*

In our analyses we will relate to current discussions within the translanguaging framework (Cummins, 2021; Garcia and Li Wei, 2014; MacSwan, 2017). Finally, we discuss how the dilemma of balancing can be met by practitioners, by adding concepts from the holistic model of multilingualism in education proposed by Duarte and van der Meij (2020) and crosslinguistic pedagogy proposed by Cummins (2021).

### *Methodology and expected results*

To empirically unpack the dilemma, we will conduct content analysis of perceptions about language use and language learning displayed by teachers (meeting minutes, interviews, observations), students (interviews, observations) and parents (interviews). The analyses will also contain a time aspect, as we will investigate how time spent in Norway as well as expectations for the future may be related to perceptions of language use and learning (Darvin and Norton, 2017).

### *Relevance to Nordic educational research*

This paper ties in with the second key dilemma to be addressed in this symposium and is relevant for understanding education of migrant students in a Nordic context.

## **Developing the biliteracy skills of Spanish-speaking migrant children in Scotland**

**Angela de Britos<sup>1</sup>**

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### *Research topic*

As patterns of migration shift across Europe, the mosaic of languages used in our societies and schools

also evolve and change. This paper will explore the dilemma around developing and maintaining biliteracy in Spanish-speaking migrant families in Scotland, where English is the language of instruction in 99% of schools.

### *Theoretical framework*

Grosjean (2019) describes biliteracy as the ability to read and write in two or more languages, whereas Lo Bianco (2003, p.27) goes further to define biliteracy as “literacy interdependency between two languages”, highlighting the relationship and connection between languages. Where children have a secure knowledge of reading and writing in their heritage language, studies have suggested that their literacy skills in the language of schooling are better (Cummins & Swain, 2014; Baker, 2011; Fielding & Harbon, 2020). Research evidence outlines that literacy in English improves in line with literacy aptitude in the heritage language (Tsimpli, 2017). However, biliteracy is not simply the ability to encode and decode written text in multiple languages, it is the ability to navigate flexibly across and between not only the languages themselves but also the cultures and identities of the child (Bauer & Colomer, 2016).

In the Scottish context, Hancock (2020, p.6) explains that most teachers were “unaware that the bilingual children in their class were involved in learning literacy outside of school, and they showed little interest in their accomplishments outside English literacy acquisition”. Molyneux, Scull and Aliani (2016) state that negativity and the promotion of monolingualism sends strong messages about the value of heritage languages.

### *Methodology*

This study of fourteen Spanish-speaking bilingual families involved semi-structured interviews with 36 participants, with children and young people aged between 2-16 and their parent/s. Interviews were conducted in the family homes of participants to make them feel more comfortable and at ease in a familiar environment. It helped counter power dynamics between the researcher and the participants, and it also meant that the children could take a break or exit the interview if they wished. To reflect the bilingual identities and repertoires of participants, the interviews were conducted using the linguistic strategy of translanguaging, whereby the researcher alternated between Spanish and English mirroring the language use of the participants.

### *Findings*

Findings revealed that developing and maintaining children’s biliteracy skills in reading and writing was extremely challenging due to several factors. For example, the lack of texts in school and in public libraries was a hinderance and meant that families had to purchase books and magazines at their own expense. Furthermore, teachers’ negative attitudes and value of bilingualism were a barrier to biliteracy, as was low parental confidence and knowledge in how to teach reading and writing to their children. Nevertheless, families were innovative in their use of digital technologies to overcome some of these barriers.

### *Relevance to Nordic educational research*

This study is relevant to Nordic educational research as the increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic profile of Scottish schools is similar to the context in the Nordic regions, including the geographical challenges faced by rural and remote schools.

**What’s the purpose? Preliminary findings on the reception of Ukrainian children and youth in the Danish school system**

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### *Research topic*

This paper presents preliminary findings from the *Ukrainian children in Danish schools*-project regarding the school-based reception of children and youth, who arrived from Ukraine in the wake of the Russian invasion in February 2022. Specifically, the paper investigates how the purpose of the reception system in the primary and lower secondary school system in Denmark was formulated in the special legislation, which was put in place during the Spring, and how the purpose evolved when the legislation was implemented on the level of the municipality and on the school-level.

### *Theoretical framework*

The theoretical framework includes on a critical perspective on 'integration' in a Danish context (Rytter 2019) and is informed by a central tenet in the research field of refugee education, that variation among models for reception institutions, according to various purposes, is linked to the matter of what future the refugee children and youth, in question, are thought to be facing (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019).

### *Methodology*

The empirical material is generated via document analysis and an ethnographical-inspired design, including observations of everyday activities in reception classes, interviews with children, teachers, school management and key personal from two municipalities.

### *Findings*

It is found that the purpose of the school reception was ambivalently formulated in the special legislation. On municipality and school levels, the purpose can be subject to contractionary reformulations, which can lead to confusion regarding the scope and content of educational practices implemented in reception classes.

### *Relevance to Nordic educational research*

The paper offers insights from the Danish educational context to the field of refugee education, in particular regarding the reception of children and youth from Ukraine, alongside other studies (Karbowiczek, Ordon, & Łapot, 2022; Parmigiani et al., 2023; Van Esveld, 2023). Focusing on a core theme in refugee education – the purpose – with regard to a comparable situation – the reception children and youth from Ukraine – the paper might offer a vantage point for better understanding similarities and difference in thinking and practice regarding refugee education in general across the educational systems of the Nordic countries.

## **The role of digital technologies in lives and learning: Dilemmas and potentials for migrant students and schools**

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### *Research topic*

The Ukrainian refugee children who arrived in Denmark, found themselves in a highly digitalized school environment, where learning materials and activities are organized around so-called learning platforms. Additionally, tools for translation, writing and content-searching are widely available, and the result is, that teaching and learning in the reception classes can be seen as a series of practices, that are neither analog nor digital but rather an entanglement of the two (Fawns, 2022).

#### *Theoretical framework, methodology and findings*

However, this digitalization raises both ethical, pedagogical and linguistic issues: Using learning platforms and making for-profit and non-educational technologies an integrated part of teaching and learning can be problematic in a free, public school system (van Dijck, Poell & Waal 2018). From a language pedagogical viewpoint, the often highly individualized digital learning activities pose a challenge to language pedagogy, as language acquisition is linked to a communicating classroom. The learning platforms can also introduce pedagogical practices for feedback not normally associated with current pedagogical trends. At the same time, we also see that the access to just-in-time linguistic support in the form of translation technologies enhances opportunities for active participation in teaching activities and peer interaction. However, the use of automatic translation constitutes a practice that may overlook linguistic and cultural aspects of translation and language acquisition (Lundtofte, Andersen & Christensen, forthcoming).

Digital technologies also provide the students in our study with a unique possibility of continuing their Ukrainian education, as many of them participated in online education provided by the Ukrainian government. The initial purpose of the online-school was to make sure the students were able to follow a Ukrainian curriculum and hence facilitate their return to the Ukrainian school system. However, the students who participate in Danish and Ukrainian schooling experience long school days and conflicting demands from two very different school systems, and they are faced with questions regarding their investment in both language and subject learning in the new country (Christensen, Kapustian & Nielsen, forthcoming).

#### *Relevance to Nordic educational research*

In our presentation we will explore the dilemmas and potentials regarding the observed practices in our study and we will discuss these in the light of teaching and learning for migrant students and more overarching pedagogical discussions regarding the use of digital technologies in schools.