

Category: Pedagogies

Case Study from Reception Class in Denmark



Toolkit

**Successful Learning
Practices for
All Children to Thrive**



POLICIES AND PRACTICES BASED ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH FOR REDUCING UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN EUROPE



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Introduction

This toolkit, “Successful Learning Practices for All Children to Thrive,” is a practical resource that shows how to create successful learning environments in classrooms, schools, and communities. It helps teachers and school leaders build effective learning spaces that improve basic skills, support struggling students, and develop children’s social and emotional skills. The toolkit is based on 20 case studies from 9 European countries, offering practical strategies that have worked in real schools.

These case studies come from primary and secondary schools across Europe that have successfully helped underachieving students and prevented early school leaving. The research was conducted in diverse schools across Portugal, Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Malta. From these schools, we gathered concrete practices that improve both academic learning and social-emotional development.

The toolkit is organised around five key areas of successful learning environments:

Pedagogies

Teacher and Student Interaction

Peer Collaboration

School – Family – Community
Collaboration

Wellbeing and Support

While each tool is placed in one of these areas, many tools work across multiple areas. For instance, “Interactive Groups” not only helps students work together but also connects with the community, supports wellbeing, and improves academic results.

It’s important to understand that the most successful schools use multiple tools together. While each tool can help on its own, the best results come from working on all five areas across the whole school. We recommend looking at your school’s current strengths and areas for improvement to help you choose the most useful tools for your situation.

This toolkit is available as an online platform in seven languages: Spanish, Portuguese, English, Finnish, Maltese, Greek, and Italian. All the tools have been carefully tested and developed through dialogic co-creation with nearly 1,000 participants in the SCIREARLY project, including school staff, students, families, and community members.

Our aim is to give educators and communities the tools they need to help every child succeed in school. By sharing successful practices from different learning environments in an accessible way, we’re working to create schools where all children can thrive, regardless of their background.





Glossary

A glossary section is essential in this toolkit to provide clear definitions of key terms and concepts, ensuring that all users, including teachers, school leaders, education experts, policymakers, and community members, can fully understand and effectively implement the successful teaching and learning practices. This section helps bridge any gaps in terminology and ensures consistent understanding, making it easier to apply the evidence-based strategies and improve educational outcomes for students.

Dialogic Teaching and Learning

Dialogic teaching and learning emphasises dialogue and quality interactions as the primary means of achieving understanding, learning and development. A dialogic approach to teaching and learning aims at creating an environment where all students, teachers and other members of the community actively engage in meaningful and respectful dialogue. Here are some of the key premises:

Ensuring that everybody's voice is valued equally, and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue. This encourages diverse perspectives and ensures that all voices are heard.

Recognising and valuing the cultural backgrounds and experiences of all students and teachers. This helps to create a more inclusive and understanding learning environment.

Dialogic interactions among students, teacher-student and within the community are oriented towards transforming the sociocultural context and create optimal conditions for learning and development.

Co-constructing meaning and understanding through dialogues between students and teachers. This collaborative process helps deepen comprehension and retention of information.



Building a sense of community and mutual support among students and teachers. This principle fosters collaboration and collective responsibility for learning.

Respecting and valuing differences among students and teachers. Dialogue should celebrate diversity and use it as a resource for learning. Encouraging critical thinking and challenging everyone to think deeply and question assumptions.

Emotional Dimension

Recognising the importance of quality relationships in learning. Successful practices create a supportive environment where students and teachers feel safe, supported and confident to express their emotions and experiences.

Authentic Learning

Ensuring that the dialogue and learning are relevant to the students' and teachers' real-life experiences and contexts. This makes the learning more meaningful and applicable.

Translanguaging

When one person speaks in one language while another person responds in another.

Reception Classes

Classes where children with another mother tongue are in specialised classes where translanguaging is used to help children learn the host country language - with the intention that the children enter mainstream education as they gain language proficiency.

Case Study from Reception Class¹ in Denmark

Overview:

This tool highlights the translinguaging² approach to teaching Danish to children enrolling in the Danish educational system with no or few Danish language skills. Translinguaging is both a mindset and an approach to children as well as a specific methodology. The assumption is that this approach enhances and improves not only the languages spoken as a second language, but also written language skills and other academic skills that are taught in the class (mathematics for example). The method leans on three pillars:

1. **Stance** refers to the attitude of the teacher, basically that multi-lingual children have resources and that languages are an asset, not a problem. The teacher must accept a holistic approach to children and learning and be prepared to collaborate with the students' families.

2. **Design** is at the core of the method. The plans demonstrate a methodology that involves the mother tongues of the students, alternates between languages and uses a mixed-method approach to learning such as experimenting, dialogue and a broad variety of learning modalities.

3. **Shifts** refers to the ability of the teacher to work in an agile and adaptive manner. However good at planning, the teacher should be comfortable in capitalising opportunities that arise, respond to the dynamics in the class and maintain the learning objectives but change methodology if required.

1. See Glossary pg. 9

2. See Glossary pg. 9





Implementation Steps:

Translanguaging offers a perspective on children as having one full and holistic linguistic mastery. The mother tongue is part of the resources of the child. By using the mother tongue also in the classroom, the child will use all their competencies when learning Danish – and in principle any new language where proficiency is required – and also other subject matters. Children will tend to use the same strategies when learning a new language as they use in their mother tongue. In the reception class, children use a variety of strategies, for example dictionaries, computer games, music, literature, picture-based learning, using mother tongue mixed with Danish, and using English if appropriate. At its core, translanguaging uses the mother tongue as a vehicle for learning a new language.

In the implementation, all three pillars of translanguaging competencies should be included:

Design:

The lesson is carefully structured so it can be executed with simple instructions and children are encouraged to help each other. The linguistic competencies of the students are actively included: Design builds on teachers' experience and competencies. Teachers involved in translanguaging are generally, in the case study and in the background literature, presumed to be well educated (have a teacher's diploma) and a top-up on translanguaging. Design can be quite individual- and some of the criticism in the literature highlights the subjective nature of the design in some cases. Our case study showed that a two-teacher system, a solid background in educational theory and teachers' experience as well as supervision can embrace differences and use them as part of the creative process.

Stance:

An overall attitude that favors tolerance and containment of different languages and students' backgrounds. Children are given small assignments to carry out at home and are encouraged to involve parents. The reception classes collaborate with the families in matters of both social and academic development of the students. During the observation the teacher(s) show an active interest in the countries of origin of the children. The ability to demonstrate and maintain this stance is an adult responsibility. Teachers' confidence requires training and ongoing supervision and support.

Shift:

There are several examples of shifts in the observed lesson. There are shifts from abstract to concrete levels, for example when checking in on the work of the students. There are several shifts in the lesson, from work in plenary to small group work and individual support. The teachers can alternate between supporting the students and encouraging peer support. They check in often and make sure everyone has understood the task.

Examples and Case Studies:

The reception class which is used in this case study is part of a reception class department, hosted by one of 10 schools in the municipality of Gladsaxe in Greater Copenhagen, Denmark. In total the school has 550 students, with an age range from grade 0 (reception) to grade 9. This means that the students in the school are in the age range of 6- 15 years of age.

Reception classes are designed and offered for newly arrived non-Danish speaking students, and normally cater for 12-18 children in a classroom, managed by two teachers, specialized in Danish as a second language. After two years at the latest, students should transition into the mainstream education system. Reception classes are the mandate of the municipality, and it is the responsibility of the municipality to ensure that a relevant assessment of the student is made before entering into the reception class and at the time of referral to mainstream education.

To strengthen the learning environment in the reception classes in the surveyed school, the "translanguaging" approach is applied in the everyday planning, execution and management of the lessons in the reception classes. Translanguaging is not a new idea, and its application is not limited to these specific classes, but in this particular school the approach is used consistently. The teachers in the reception classes are required to take courses in translanguaging in addition to being specialized in Danish as second language on top of the teachers' certificate.





Benefits:

Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that leverages students' multiple languages as resources for learning, offers several benefits:

- **Enhanced Language Development:** Strengthening mother tongue by allowing students to use their mother tongue in the classroom, their primary language skills are maintained and developed.
- **Facilitates Second Language Acquisition:** Utilising the mother tongue as a bridge, students can more effectively learn a new language, transferring linguistic and cognitive skills between languages.
- **Cultural and Identity Affirmation:** Recognising and valuing students' home languages and cultures promotes a more inclusive and respectful learning environment.
- **Positive Identity Formation:** Acknowledging and celebrating students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to build their confidence and help them feel accepted.
- **Social and Emotional Benefits:** Increasing students' engagement and motivation to use their full linguistic repertoire, and be more likely to participate actively and remain engaged in learning activities.
- **Enhanced Self-Esteem:** Validating their home language and culture boosts students' self-esteem and fosters a positive attitude toward school.

Tips for Success:

Using translanguaging in the classroom appears to require a robust and varied set of skills from teachers. It is best supported through careful recruitment, clear and value-based management as well as ongoing reflection on practice and experiences

It is the impression of the observation team that translanguaging requires flexibility and confidence as well as robust competencies in the teacher, and works best in an environment open to holistic approaches to children, emphasis on social and emotional functioning and ongoing reflection on the practice

Enhance the impact of translanguaging by applying it in an environment that has a deliberate focus on social and emotional development and wellbeing of the students.

Conclusion:

Translanguaging has demonstrated significant efficiency in improving both learning outcomes and the overall wellbeing and functioning of students. This approach supports language acquisition by allowing students to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, making the learning of new languages more accessible and effective. Beyond language development, translanguaging enhances children's self-confidence by validating their home languages and cultures, which fosters a sense of pride and identity. Moreover, the inclusive and affirming environment created through translanguaging boosts student motivation and engagement in the classroom. When students feel their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are respected and valued, their enthusiasm for learning increases. This, in turn, leads to greater joy in the learning process, as students are more likely to participate actively and take ownership of their education.

Additional Resources:

Wlosowisz, Teresa (2020). The Advantages and Limitations of Translanguaging in Teaching Third of Additional Languages at the University Level, *Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education* 9(1(17)):135-169

Hamman, L. (2018). Translanguaging and Positioning in Two-Way Dual Language Classrooms: A case for Criticality. *Language and Education*, 32(1), 21-42.





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