Challenges, opportunities, risks and hopes. Making the voice of non-English speaking children stronger in Early Years provision.

Federico Farini, Shirley Allen, Angela Scollan, Brooke Townsley
Middlesex University, London, UK

In the last decade, the needs of young children who are learning English as an Additional Language has been a popular research topic in the area of ‘multilingual education’ (Gorter et al., 2013), with a view of enabling children to have full access to the curriculum (Conteh et al., 2007). However, if the focus of the research is centred on children’s experience in Early Years settings, rather than their needs, the situation in which a shared language is unavailable appears to be under-examined. Moreover, while there is research on the adaptation strategies of the non-English speaking children (Drury, 2007), there is still a gap concerning the multilingual settings as a complex network of relationships.

This presentation discusses the results of research exploring provision in Early Years settings where communication is hindered by the absence of a shared language. The research investigates the phenomenon of language diversity as observed by the professionals who deal with linguistic differences in their everyday practice. In the next stage of the research, the phenomenon will be examined from the perspectives of children and parents. The research, which uses mixed-methods methodology that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods, takes a phenomenological approach, seeking to understand professionals’ experience with non- or limited-English speaking children.

The first phase of the research consisted of an online survey for professionals working in Early Years settings, using 'Survey Monkey'. Two hundred completed surveys were collected, which offer information about the lack of resources that the staff experience and their attitudes towards the management of multilingualism in their settings.

The data from the survey was used to design qualitative individual interviews. Twelve professionals have been interviewed in six Early Years settings in Greater London. The interviews highlight both the challenges that the professionals observe and their perceived need to improve existing practice through professional development.

This study offers valuable insights, developing a realistic picture of Early Years practice with a view to generate understanding that can be applied to recommendations for framing good practice and support the development of new pedagogical approaches.

References (abstract):


