

ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Early Languages Manual



Disclaimer:

"This publication has been produced with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the ToWe Project and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the NA and the Commission."

Contents Page

Introduction	3
Different linguistic realities	6
Reality 1: Welcoming children’s linguistic (and cultural) identities to the setting.	6
Why should we welcome children’s linguistic realities to the setting?	7
How can we welcome children’s linguistic realities to the setting?	8
	10
Reality 2: Bringing new languages (and cultures) to the setting.	11
Why should we bring new languages to the setting?	11
How should we bring new languages to the setting?	12
References	14

Authors and Contributors

Authors:

1. **Universitat Ramon Llull (ES)**
Cristina Corcoll and Carme Flores

Contributors:

2. **Kingston University (UK)**
Helen Sutherland and Yasmin Mukadam
3. **Universitetet I Stavanger (NO)**
Monika Röhle and Yngve Rosell
4. **Universitat Ramon Llull (ES)**
Cristina Corcoll, Carme Flores and Àngels Geis
5. **Achieving for Children (UK)**
Alison McGee
6. **Sandnes Kommune - Sandvedhaugen Barnehage (NO)**
Ingrid Eikeland, Liv Hjertø and Gudrun Skancke Eriksen
7. **Sinaturmo - Petita Escola (ES)**
Natàlia Turmo and Sílvia Turmo
8. **Suara Serveis – Escola Bressol Mas Balmanya (ES)**
Mireia Miralpeix, Maria José Riella and Maria Àngels Domènech

Introduction

Welcome to this manual which supports the practice of Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) to enhance the education and wellbeing opportunities for disadvantaged toddlers. It underpins EYPs' knowledge and understanding of the different dimensions that impact on toddlers' wellbeing as regards their languages. The manual will describe the role that languages have in toddlers' lives and how their use can be supported and promoted at the settings. It will also cover the application of three different tools to guide settings in the awareness of their linguistic realities thus helping practitioners make effective decisions. Two realities will be taken into account: settings with language and culture diversity, which may need guidance as to how to make this diversity visible and part of their daily educational tasks; and settings which aim at introducing an additional language, which may need guidance as to how this can be done in a way that is both effective and coherent with toddlers' needs.

Aims of the Manual

The aims of the early languages manual are to:

- Familiarise Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) with the theoretical background, dimensions and aspects of early language development and how these can be used to evaluate practice;
- Increase Early Years Practitioners' awareness of the complexities of the promotion of early languages;
- Provide Early Years Practitioners with tools to evaluate and help them improve the quality of their current provision and practice;
- Help Early Years Practitioners distinguish effective strategies of good practice for toddlers early languages identified by the Setting Partner EYPs through their action plans, strategies, shared practice and reflective dialogue.

Introduction

What do we mean by learning an additional language in early childhood education? “No es adquirir unas cuantas palabras, sino unas estructuras fonológicas, gramaticales, morfológicas y sintácticas que, junto al vocabulario, permitirán la comunicación” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 82). *[It is not about acquiring a few words, but some phonological, grammatical, morphological and syntactic structures that, together with the vocabulary, will allow communication]*¹.

For the introduction of an additional language to be successful in early childhood education, the teaching and learning process must be consistent with the characteristics of the stage and, therefore, respectful of the educational principles which are at the basis of the process:

“Por su interés e importancia y por la ventaja de un tratamiento temprano, merece la pena abordar algunos contenidos hacia los que inicialmente los niños no muestran interés, como es el caso de una segunda lengua. Para ello, no obstante, hay que respetar algunos principios educativos” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 20).

["Due to its interest and importance and because of the advantages of an early treatment, it is worth addressing some contents towards which children may not initially show interest, as may be the case of a second language. To do it, however, some educational principles need to be respected"].

At the basis of these educational principles, there is the need to create an environment rich in possibilities, rich in language and which stimulates acquisition: “(...) el lenguaje, cuya adquisición no es posible sin las bases madurativas adecuadas, pero cuyo aprendizaje va a depender de la existencia de un entorno que utilice el lenguaje y que estimule su adquisición” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 63). *[Language, whose acquisition is not possible without the appropriate maturational basis, but whose learning will depend on the existence of an environment where language is used and which promotes its acquisition]*.

There is also the need for the adult who brings the additional language to the classroom to be highly proficient in the language in all its complexity, so that language can be used fluently and accurately in any communicative opportunity. The language that will be used by the adult is not an object of study, but a means to communicate spontaneously, that is, naturally. And above all, frequently.

The role of the adult who brings the additional language to the classroom is fundamentally the role of a mediator, that is, the one who mediates (linguistically) between the actions of the child and the verbal description of the action. This is what, in the field of language teaching, is called *information talk*, which is useful and beneficial when it comes to learning a first language as well as an additional language. Using information talk effectively will allow the child to interiorise sensorial, motor and symbolic action schemes:

“Así, la estimulación de los más pequeños consistirá en darles muchas oportunidades para actuar sobre objetos formando *esquemas de acción*, así como hacerles participar de numerosas situaciones y actividades en las que su acción pueda incardinarse. Si esas situaciones y actividades van acompañadas de verbalizaciones adultas adecuadas (“¡Huy!, si la empujas, rueda. Ahora la empujo yo y luego tú) la acción que es en sí misma atractiva y significativa se convierte en ocasión para el aprendizaje de algo más, pues a la actividad sensomotriz de empujar se le añade la actividad simbólica de categorizar esa acción como “empujar”. La labor de mediación del adulto es aquí insustituible, pues si para la acción sensoriomotora es suficiente con la presencia de objetos, para su explotación y manejo simbólico hace falta lenguaje” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 67).

¹ All references in Catalan or Spanish have been left in the original language and translated by ourselves.

[Thus, stimulation of the youngest ones is to give them many opportunities to act upon objects thus creating 'action schemes' and to make them engage in many situations and activities in which their action can be incardinated. If these situations and activities are accompanied by appropriate adult utterances ("Wow!, if you push it, it rolls. Now I push it and then you"), the action which is in itself attractive and meaningful becomes a new learning opportunity, as the sensorial and motor activity is added to the the symbolic activity of categorising that action as "push". The adult mediation task is indispensable here, as if for sensory and motor actions the presence of objects is enough, for its exploitation and symbolic management, language is needed].

This mediating role requires short distance, that is, the almost individual relationship between the practitioner and the child. Clearly, this has consequences for the practitioners' role.

One more element that needs to be considered is that the linguistic input that the child will receive should be meaningful and repeated. For this reason, linking the use of additional languages to routines is extremely interesting: routines facilitate meaningful use of the language, by its very nature, as well as repetition. In this regard, we understand routines like "features of events that allow scaffolding to take place, and combine the security of the familiar with the excitement of the new" (Bruner 1983, 1990). In other words, routines are moments that allow for the combination of the security of the known with the excitement generated by new things, all provided through the naturalness and meaningfulness of learning.

Furthermore, routines can also be planned so that they include the amount of scaffolding needed at each stage and so that they allow this scaffolding gradually disappears, while the routine gains in complexity (defined from the point of view of linguistic complexity but also increased autonomy).

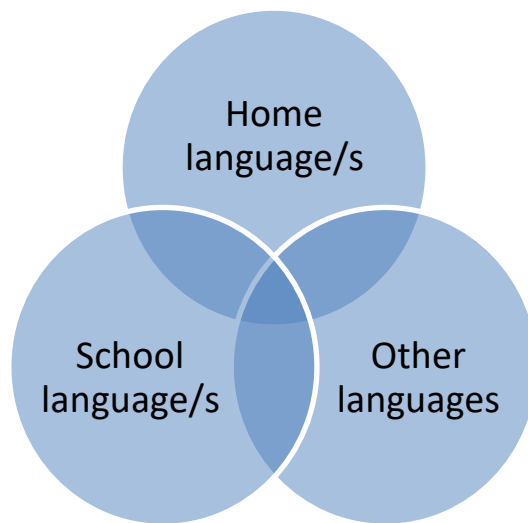
In short, "lo que los niños y niñas en las edades de educación infantil quieren no son 'unidades didácticas' de lenguaje, sino lenguaje a todas horas y en todos los contextos" (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 78). ["what children in early years setting need is not language 'didactic units', but language at all hours and in all contexts"].

Learning languages

- ❖ Learning languages is learning about new cultures, thus broadening our experience and understanding of the world.
- ❖ Learning languages benefits learners at different levels: cognitive, emotional, social.
- ❖ Learning languages is a key competence today.
- ❖ Learning languages, if done well, is never damaging to the learning process.
- ❖ ...

Q1. What does 'learning a new language' mean to you?

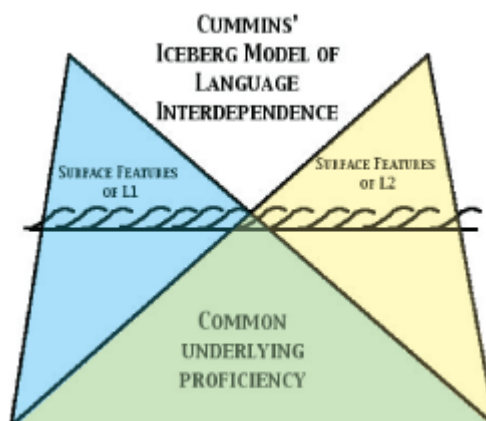
Languages in the lives of children



Language repertoire

Q2. What is your language repertoire? Think of all the languages that you have available and list them. When, with whom and what do you use them for?

What happens when we add new languages to our repertoire?



What is the Interdependence Hypothesis?²

Cummins' interdependence or iceberg hypothesis reveals the relationship of the first language to the learning of another language. What appears to be two very different phenomena on or above the surface is actually interdependent psychologically.

What is the Common Underlying Proficiency?

The **Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP)** model or the "one balloon theory" described by Jim Cummins purports that proficiencies involving more cognitively demanding tasks (such as literacy, content learning, abstract thinking and problem-solving) are common across languages. The CUP model is represented with the "dual iceberg metaphor" and is the basis of the hypothesis called the linguistic interdependence hypothesis.

The Common Underlying Proficiency is what allows **TRANSFER** to take place. Transfer can be conscious or unconscious, but inevitable with plurilingual speakers and learners. When children are exposed to different languages, transfer will happen. The role of the practitioner is to help children notice how they can connect the languages they have available.

“In the early months of their English language learning in the nursery or school, those children with a different home language learn to tie new words to concepts learned through their first language. They must also learn to transfer knowledge of the way language has worked for them in the home setting to the new environment of the early childhood setting. These children have the potential to become bilingual if they are given opportunities to use their home languages in the new setting and to learn new names for objects and actions already learned through their first language.” (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 23).

Q3. Think of the languages you know, can you think of an example (i.e. a word, an expression, etc.) where transfer is possible?

Different linguistic realities

Reality 1: Welcoming children's linguistic (and cultural) identities to the setting.

Globalisation and immigration mean that it is nowadays more and more common to find children whose home language is different from the school main language. In many settings, the number and diversity of home languages may be quite high. Welcoming children's linguistic and cultural identities to the setting means acknowledging and valuing their home languages, whilst offering children the chance to learn and use the main social language. The linguistic picture may be quite different depending on the country or the setting. One example of a Catalan setting would be the following:

² Source: <http://www.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/best%20of%20bilash/iceberg.html>. Retrieved: February 2016.

Children's home language: Catalan, Spanish, French, Chinese, Urdu, Arabic ...

School language: Catalan

Social languages: Catalan and Spanish

Foreign language: English

For children whose home language is not the school or the social language, these would be *additional languages*. For children whose home language is the same as the school or social language, English would typically be labelled their *foreign language*. However, to place languages at the same level, we are going to refer to all of them as *additional languages*.

Q4. Think of your setting. What is the linguistic picture like?

Children's home language:

School language/s:

Social language/s:

Foreign language/s:

Why should we welcome children's linguistic realities to the setting?

"When young children who speak a home language other than English start in the nursery or pre-school setting they begin the process of learning an additional language. Some of these children already speak more than one language. However, suddenly the language that they have used for their daily lives is no longer the language that they hear around them (...) Unless early childhood educators are familiar with the children's home language, social class background and culture, and provide a supportive environment, these children are in danger of being marginalized and may experience an insecure and anxious start to their entry into nursery and schooling" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 22)

1. To *actively* respect all identities: language is an essential part of identity: "the way children feel about themselves is not innate or inherited, it is learned" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 3).
2. To promote children's self-esteem: "positive self-esteem depends upon whether children feel that others accept them and see them as competent and worthwhile" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 3).
3. To improve learning atmosphere: "researchers have shown the connection between academic achievement and self-esteem" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 3).
4. To create an inclusive culture (Mistry & Sood 2015, p. 14)

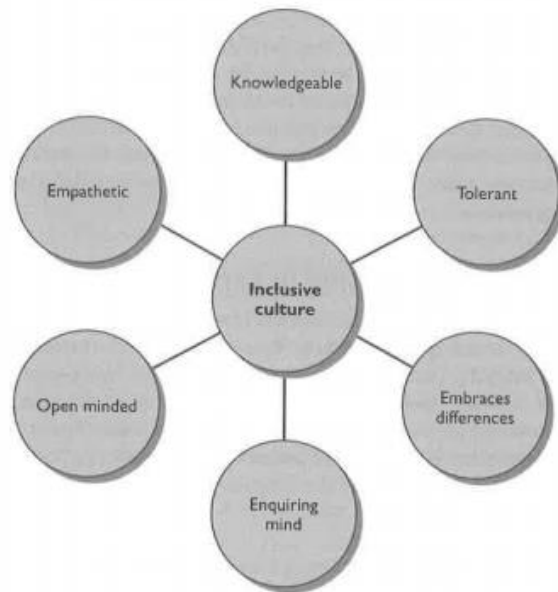


Figure 1.1 A mental map of features of an inclusive culture

Q5. Discuss the reasons listed above and think of your own setting. How would you rank them? Would you add any other reason?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. ...

How can we welcome children's linguistic realities to the setting?

1. By collecting all linguistically-relevant information from families. The questionnaire below (Figure 1) is a tool that can be helpful here.
2. By making languages visible at the setting. The rubric below (Figure 3) can be used to assess the situation in the setting.
3. By developing our own linguistic competence.
4. By giving children (and their families) opportunities to share their knowledge.
5. By creating a stressfree environment where children can use language.
6. By using relevant pedagogical strategies (some will be addressed when dealing with reality 2 below).

Reality 1: Questionnaire to gather data regarding language diversity in the setting.

Basic characteristics of the family

1. Family type (nuclear, reconstituted, lone-parent, extended family).
2. Education level (University studies, Secondary Education, Primary Education).

3. Ages of the members of the family.

Perceptions towards the home language (HL)

4. Do you feel your home language should have a place at the setting? Why?

5. How do you feel when you hear or see your home language at the setting? (proud, embarrassed, I do not feel anything...)

6. Would you like to take part in Early Childhood Education activities to learn more about the children's language acquisition process?

7. Would you like to cooperate with the setting to make your home language visible?

Use of the home language in the family

8. Are you provided with resources to support your toddlers' linguistic development at home?

9. What type of linguistic activities do you do at home with your toddler? (read stories, listen to songs, sing songs, talk, etc.)

10. Which language is used at home with the toddler?

11. Who uses each language?

12. What is each language used for?

Figure 1 – Reality 1 Questionnaire

Visibility of HLs at the setting	They are not visible.	They are visible occasionally.	They are clearly visible.
Use of resources linked to HLs: photographs, books, information in different languages, objects and artifacts of different cultures.	No resources are used.	Some resources are used.	A great diversity of resources is used.
Effectiveness of resources linked to HLs to support language learning.	They are not effectively used.	They are used occasionally.	They are effectively used.
Sufficiency of resources in terms of quality and quantity.	Insufficient	Sufficient	Excellent
Time devoted to HLs.	No time is devoted.	Some time is devoted.	A lot of time is devoted.
Activities done related to HLs: read stories in different HLs, sing songs in different HLs, give children (and their families) time to share their HLs	No activities are done.	Some activities are done.	Many activities are done.

Engagement of children in HLs activities: they show interest in listening to stories in HLs, they play with languages and show curiosity, they like to show what they know in other HLs.	They are not engaged.	They are engaged occasionally.	They are very engaged.
Engagement of families in HLs activities: they bring materials in HLs, they are happy to participate in school activities.	They are not engaged.	They are engaged occasionally.	They are very engaged.
In-service training related to the visibility of HLs	No training offered.	Training offered occasionally.	A lot of training offered.

Figure 2 – Internal Evaluation for Improvement Rubric

Strategies for helping babies and toddlers develop language (based on Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 43)

1. Maintain eye contact
2. Take turns in conversations and encourage replies
3. Use singing and chanting as much as possible
4. Use visual support as much as possible
5. Use physical contact as much as possible
6. Keep conversations simple, using repetition and basic Language
7. Imitate toddlers' words and sounds

Q6. Can you identify any strategy that you already use?

Strategies for helping babies and toddlers develop language (based on Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 44)

1. Read, tell and retell stories
2. Give good Language and conversation models
3. Use information talk as much as possible
4. Use songs and rhymes as much as possible
5. Use visual support as much as possible

Q7. Can you identify any strategy that you already use?

Reality 2: Bringing new languages (and cultures) to the setting.

In some European countries, learning a foreign language (English mostly) is a social demand: it has become a must for our students to have an advanced level of the language by the time they leave school. This means that children are starting to be exposed to the language at an earlier age and many settings need to find the best way to make this possible and beneficial for the children and their learning process.

“Language develops rapidly in the early years and all children, including those who come from language backgrounds other than English, benefit from good quality programmes which emphasize interaction and the development of communication skills. It is clear that the best programmes build on children’s individual needs, interests and identities” (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 20).

Why should we bring new languages to the setting?

Due to its interest and importance and due to the benefits of an early treatment, it is worth addressing some contents towards which the children may not be initially interested, such as a second language. To do this, however, some educational principles need to be respected (Paniagua & Palacios 2005).

Growing up with two languages (Paniagua & Palacios 2005, p. 82-84)

In a society in which the mastery of two or three languages is beginning to become more and more important, or at least highly valued, families are increasingly interested in the possibility of their children learning a second language at an early age. They are not wrong because, as we have just seen, language is easily learned at an early age, while later they will have to study it, sometimes with a great deal of effort. This makes it sensible to consider the possibility of early bilingualism, which is enriching from both the cognitive and linguistic standpoint. On the other hand, major language immersion efforts have been made at early ages in bilingual communities with sound results, which have taught us a great deal about second language acquisition in small children. We have also learned from the children of immigrant families who have started their schooling early and soon mastered the new language without anyone at school knowing their native tongue or anyone at home knowing the school language. Even though it is clearly recommendable, early initiation into a second language implies a series of conditions to ensure that it is both positive and productive. On the one hand, learning a language means not just acquiring a few words but instead learning phonological, grammatical, morphological and syntactic structures which, along with vocabulary, make communication possible. On the other hand, if we introduce a second language early in order to take advantage of humans’ enormous early receptivity to language, we have no choice but to follow the conditions of early language learning. Thus, the first condition is as important as it is obvious: the adults in charge must have a mastery of this language, at least orally. What would we think if a mother spoke to her small child telegraphically, with poor vocabulary, incorrect grammar and serious pronunciation difficulties? For small children, it is more important to have good conversation partners who master the language with fluency and know how to interact with children of this age than to have professionals who are experts in grammar but are unable to hold a fluent conversation in the second language. The basic rule is simple: at these early ages, the second language should be learned the

same way the first one is. And we have already seen that children do not have to memorize lists of colours, nor do numbers appear in their earliest language learning, nor do they learn random words one after another. The language should be not a subject of study but a means of communication, that is, an instrument that the adult uses spontaneously to make themselves understood, to play with the children, to remind them of a rule, to greet them and say goodbye to them, to sing and tell stories, to play and to work. Thus, the new language should not be viewed as a goal in itself, nor should it be studied out of context by repeating names, songs, etc. The adult in charge of the second language should speak to the children in terms similar to those used by the classroom teacher, probably drawing from the strategies from the early years of language learning: lots of contextual support (objects, visuals, etc.), many references to the here and now, lots of support from gestures (pointing, exaggerating expressiveness, reproducing actions in a somewhat theatrical way, etc.) and every day, repetitive messages in appropriate, meaningful contexts. It should also be borne in mind that understanding precedes expression, without any expectation that they both arise simultaneously. And that expression is not correct from the very start... Likewise, affective factors should not be disregarded: an effort should be made to understand the child no matter what language they use. Invitations to use the new language should be appealing and fun, based on enjoyment of the situation instead of on impositions and demands from the adult. The child's relationship with the adult is essential for the former to want to express themselves in the language required. In addition to the aforementioned methodological considerations, in order for children to truly learn something from a new language the interaction has to be frequent and the situations repeated. It would be difficult to acquire a language when one is exposed to it twice a week for barely an hour. Likewise, the person learning has to play an active role as interlocutor by having opportunities to converse with the adult – even if they express themselves in their own language at first – and this only happens by working with small groups. The supposed group conversation, "What is this?" with 20 children answering in unison "A dooooooog!" has nothing to do with situations in which children learn a language. Poor us if we had had to learn the language we speak so fluently in this way! We would still be at the level of a four and a half-year old trying to master subject-verb agreement, learning how to construct grammatically correct questions, using our first subordinate clauses. We would barely be able to handle all the exceptions in the language... and we would clearly have a non-native accent. So learning a second language is worth promoting in early childhood education, but with the proviso that there are enough resources to do it (and maintain it) under the conditions in which early language learning really takes place. Someone who is very fluent and easily speaks the language being learned, and who also has training in early childhood education, is the right person.

"Research has shown that the first six years of life are as critical for language development as for all other development (...) contributes to their cognitive flexibility" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 30).

How should we bring new languages to the setting?

"Children do not understand that we use language to communicate, do not want to know if a language is foreign or additional, nor are they conscious of how important it is to speak as many languages as possible. Children want to discover the world around them, want to enjoy games and pauses, want to be spoken to significantly and to experiment, want to discuss and reflect. They want to be children.

And, in a setting like this, children will play, as they should, the main role. They will show adults that the English language is not only a different language that we can use to sing songs, but a language that can also be used to learn, to discover and even to let the teacher know that, one day, Laura went to the zoo with her mum and dad." (Flores & Corcoll, 2008)

1. In a natural way.

2. By focusing on routines and play.
3. By using information talk.
4. By using routine chants.
5. By scaffolding language.
6. By taking advantage of golden opportunities for interaction.
7. By focusing on transfer: “The early years curriculum should (...) incorporate work on children’s awareness of similarities and differences” (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 9).

The table below can be used as a tool to assess how the additional language is brought to the setting:

O’CLILS OBSERVATION SHEET				
O’CLILS Moment				
Time of the day				
Duration				
Number of Toddlers				
Number of Early Years Practitioners and Teachers (EYPTs)	EYPTs. using Additional Language		EYPTs. using L1 (First Language)	
STRATEGIES	NEVER: Not observed	RARELY: Rarely observed	SOMETIMES: Observed but occasionally	OFTEN/ALWAYS: Regularly observed
Use of routines				
Use of information talk				
Use of scaffolding techniques				
Use of songs and routine chants				
Use of visuals (pictures, frames, realia...)				
Use of ‘golden opportunities’ for interaction				
Use of repetition				

Use of modelling				
------------------	--	--	--	--

Figure 3- O'CLILS Observation Sheet (Outdoor' Content Language Integrated Learning in Schools)

References

Bruner, J. (1983) *Child's Talk: Learning to Use Language*. New York: Norton.

Corcoll, C. & Flores, C. (2014) Openings doors to the authentic use of English. Everyday moments at school. *Guix d'Infantil*, n. 78, p. 31-35, November 2014.

Flores, C. & Corcoll, C. Learning a foreign language in infant school: A challenge for the school. At <http://srvcnpbs.xtec.cat/cirel/cirel/docs/pdf/challenge.pdf> (Accessed:February 2016)

Mistry, M. & Sood, K. (2015) *English as an Additional Language in the Early Years*. UK: A David Fulton Book, Routledge.

Paniagua, G. & Palacios, (2005/2014) *Educación infantil. Respuesta educativa a la diversidad*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Clarke, P. (2000/2011) *Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in the Early Years*. UK: Open University Press.