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Social Aspects of Multilingual and Multicultural Education in a Hungarian Model

Społeczne aspekty edukacji wielojęzycznej i wielokulturowej w modelu węgierskim

ABSTRACT

In our globalised world there are more and more examples of multilingual and multicultural schools where a more complex social context is present than in a monocultural institution. Therefore, the collaboration of different partners is an organic part of education and plays an important role in these pedagogical settings.

This paper gives an account of research into multilingualism and multiculturalism in a kindergarten attended by children from foreign families working at a local air base. The highly interdisciplinary research aims to explore the main question, i.e. how can kindergarten teachers, children, parents and educational specialists form the common linguistic, cultural and pedagogical basis in this very complex setting?

The article outlines the background to the study and, with the help of the research methods applied, it focuses on the challenges of the situation and the cooperation of the actors. The findings shed light on linguistic-pedagogical questions, such as how languages relate to each other, how different cultural identities are manifested under institutional circumstances, what the actors' attitude is to early childhood multilin-

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gual-multicultural education, and how a dialogue can result in fruitful social and educational cooperation.

ABSTRAKT

W naszym zglobalizowanym świecie pojawia się coraz więcej przykładów wielojęzycznych i wielokulturowych szkół, w których oferowany jest bardziej złożony kontekst społeczny niż w monokulturowej instytucji. Dlatego też współpraca różnych partnerów jest organiczną częścią edukacji i odgrywa ważną rolę w takich warunkach pedagogicznych.

W artykule przedstawiono badania dotyczące wielojęzyczności i wielokulturowości w przedszkolu z udziałem dzieci z rodzin cudzoziemców pracujących w lokalnej bazie lotniczej. Wysoce interdyscyplinarne badania mają na celu znalezienie odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jaki sposób nauczyciele przedszkolni, dzieci, rodzice i specjaliści edukacyjni mogą tworzyć wspólne językowe, kulturowe i pedagogiczne podstawy w tej bardzo złożonej sytuacji?

W artykule przedstawiono najpierw kontekst badania, następnie za pomocą stosowanych metod badawczych skupiono się na wyzwaniach związanych z sytuacją i współpracą zaangażowanych stron. Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań mogą pomóc w znalezieniu odpowiedzi na pytania pedagogiczne dotyczące języka, takie jak wzajemne relacje językowe, sposób manifestowania się różnych tożsamości kulturowych w warunkach instytucjonalnych, stosunek uczestników badania do edukacji wielojęzycznej i wielokulturowej we wczesnym dzieciństwie oraz jak dialog może prowadzić do owocnej współpracy edukacyjnej.

Context

"Barbarians." This is how ancient Greeks stigmatised people who spoke a different language from their own.[1] Today, however, multilingualism or linguistic diversity, both on individual and societal levels, is a widespread occurrence. Multilingualism has been widely examined from the aspect of linguistics, just as early childhood education has from the side of pedagogy. There are also researchers in

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[1] *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language,* ed. E.J. Bakker, Chichester 2010, p. 282.

Hungary who deal with bilingualism,[2] childhood language acquisition[3] or multiculturalism,[4] yet the social situation completed with an early childhood educational setting is so novel in Hungary that a gap in the discussion can be noticed.

In the present research, a unique language educational situation is discussed. Since September 2008 the children of foreign families working at the air base of Pápa have been going to the local Fáy András Kindergarten, which was set as their host institution by the self government of the town. Families came from NATO members and two Partnership for Peace nations in the frame of the Strategic Airlift Capability programme called SAC/C–17 (Strategic, 2013). Families are usually made up of young parents and their children who go either

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[2] See: C. Bartha, *A kétnyelvűség alapkérdései* [The basic questions of bilingualism], Budapest 1999; J. Navracsis, *A kétnyelvű mentális lexikon* [The bilingual mental lexicon], Budapest 2007; J. Navracsis, "A kétnyelvűség pszicholingvisztikájáról – dióhéjban" [On the psycholinguistics of bilingualism – in nutshell], in: *A két tanítási nyelvű oktatás elmélete és gyakorlata 2008-ban* [The theory and practice of bilingual education in 2008], eds. Á. Vámos, J. Kovács, Budapest 2008, pp. 43–60; J. Navracsis, *Egyéni kétnyelvűség* [Individual bilingualism], Szeged 2010.

[3] J. Kovács, "Az alsó fokú angolnyelv-oktatás helyzete Magyarországon az európai Unióhoz való csatlakozás küszöbén" [Teaching English at basic level in Hungary at the threshold of the enlargement of the European Union] *Modern Nyelvoktatás*, 2002, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 30–36; J. Kovács, "Innováció a kéttannyelvűségben: a párban történő magyar–angol általános iskolai program vizsgálata" [Innovation in bilingualism: Study of bilingual Hungarian-English programme at elementary school], in: *A két tanítási nyelvű oktatás elmélete és gyakorlata 2008-ban: Jubileumi tanulmánykötet* [The theory and practice of bilingual education in 2008: Jubilee edited volume], eds. Á. Vámos, J. Kovács, Budapest 2008; J. Kovács, *A gyermek és az idegen nyelv* [The child and the foreign language], Budapest 2009; J. Kovács, *Az óvodáskori nyelvtanulás, mint jelenség* [The phenomenon of early childhood language development], 2009, <http://www.pagony.hu/az-ovodaskori-nyelvtanulas-mint-jelenseg> (access: 25.04.2013); J. Kovács, "Kéttannyelvű tanító- és óvodapedagógus-képzés az ELTE Tanító- és Óvóképző Főiskolai karán" [Bilingual teacher and kindergarten teacher training at the Teacher Training Faculty of ELTE], in: *Kéttannyelvűség – pedagógusképzés, kutatás, oktatás* [Bilingual education, training, research, education], eds. J. Kovács, É. Márkus, Budapest 2009.

[4] See: E. Czachesz, *Multikulturális nevelés* [Multicultural education], Szeged 1998; J. Torgyik, *Fejezetek a multikulturális nevelésből* [Chapters from multicultural education], Budapest 2005; A. Varga, "Multikulturalizmus – inkluzív oktatási rendszer" [Multiculturalism – inclusive educational system], in: *Alapismeretek a romológia asszisztens képzéshez* [An introduction into romology assistant training], ed. R.K. Forray, Pécs 2006.

to school or to the kindergarten. Their delegation lasts approximately for 1.5–4 years. The multilingual-multicultural kindergarten in Pápa hosts 23 foreign families' children from 6 different countries and from the host country, namely, from Sweden, Bulgaria, Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, the United States, and Hungary, naturally. Apart from Hungarian, mother tongues of the children are Swedish, Bulgarian, Polish, Norwegian, Dutch and, in the case of the American families, English, Filipino and Spanish. The setting is exceptional, as NATO bases typically establish their own international schools elsewhere in the world. The town of Pápa, Hungary is, however, the first place where foreign children are trying to adapt to the local community from linguistic, social, educational and cultural aspects.

Aims and main research question

The complex language educational situation requires a theoretical background based on linguistics, education and sociology to answer the question: "How can kindergarten teachers, children, parents and educational decision-makers form a common linguistic, cultural and pedagogical basis for communication in their very complex setting?" Besides understanding and introducing the given linguistic community, the aim of the research is also to decipher new meanings, discover and reveal linguistic and pedagogical coherence that had been hidden till the establishment of this multilingual-multicultural kindergarten in Hungary.

Methodology

Due to the multifaceted features of the problem, the underlying theories to the empirical research had to be chosen from different disciplines. Therefore, in the secondary research (i.e., the literature review) Krashen's[5] language acquisition and language learning distinction, Lenneberg's[6] Critical Period Hypothesis and Cummins's (1976) Thresholds Theory give help to understand early childhood language development from linguistic and educational aspects.

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[5] See S. Krashen, *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, Oxford 1981.

[6] E. Lenneberg, *Biological foundations of language*, New York 1967.

From another point of view, i.e. the sociological side, Berry's [7] acculturation strategy and its interpretations are worth taking into consideration.[8]

As far as the empirical research is concerned, the method of triangulation appeared to be a suitable tool. Triangulation as a method has become widespread in the social sciences since the 1970s when it was borrowed from navigation. There it means that the position of an object is determined from two other points whose location has already been known.[9] Although by now it is often applied to mixed method research where qualitative and quantitative methods are both used, originally, Denzin used it for the application of multiple qualitative methods.[10] From whatever aspect it is used (either for mixed method research or only for qualitative research), this suggests that "Triangulation is a method (…) to check and establish validity (…) by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives,"[11] and its major goal is "to validate one's conclusion by presenting converging results obtained through different methods."[12] However, the results do not have to be convergent, as Patton warns researchers and argues that

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[7]   J.W. Berry, "Globalisation and Acculturation," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 2008, vol. 32, pp. 328–336.

[8]   See: M. Feischmidt, "Multikulturalizmus: kultúra, identitás és politika új diskurzusa" [Multiculturalism: New discourse of culture, identity and politics], in: *Multikulturalizmus* [Multiculturalism], ed. M. Feischmidt, Budapest 1997, pp. 7–28; M. Rédei, *Mozgásban a világ: A nemzetközi migráció földrajza* [The world on the move: the geography of international migration], Budapest 2007; A. Kitzinger, "Bevándorlás, többnyelvűség és identitás a XXI. századi Finnországban [Immigration, multilingualism and identity in 20th-century Finland], in: *Kéttannyelvűség, pedagógusképzés, kutatás, oktatás* [Bilingual education, training, research, education], eds. J. Kovács, É. Márkus, Budapest 2009, pp. 187–198; A. Kitzinger, "Children in our Multilingual-Multicultural Europe," in: *A gyermekkor narratívái* [Narratives of childhood], eds. A. Tengerdi, L. Varga, Sopron 2009, pp. 17–29.

[9]   See: J.D. Brown, T.S. Rodgers, *Doing Second Language Research*, Oxford 2002.

[10] See: N.K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, second edition, New York 1978.

[11] L.A. Guion, D.C. Diehl, D. McDonald, *Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies*, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville (FL) 2002, paragraph 1, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy394> (access: 05.02.2014).

[12] Z. Dörnyei, *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, p. 164.

divergent results, due to their motivating force, can be just as much illuminating and stimulating.[13]

From among the different types of triangulations researchers have categorised up to now,[14] in this research data triangulation, methodological triangulation and interdisciplinary triangulation are applied. In the data triangulation I used information from different sources, i.e. the data gained from the interviewees with different roles and I was trying to understand their special aspects. By methodological triangulation in this research I mean the use of different methods side by side, i.e. observation and interviews with various types of actors. Simultaneously, the method can be called interdisciplinary as well, due to the linguistic and pedagogical methods applied along with some sociological and psychological value.

In light of the above, to achieve results from multilateral perspectives and to be able to expand the validity of results[15], the method of triangulation was employed in the research which was made up of the following components (Table 1).

In the research, qualitative and quantitative methods are related to each other in the following pattern: QUAL + quan, which means that mostly qualitative methods are applied with the completion of some minor quantitative data.[16] Qualitative research was preferred, as I believe, it will show the different experience and opinions (e.g. those of the families and professionals involved), the uniqueness and the complexity of the situation better than quantitative data.

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[13] As cited in: L.A. Guion, D.C. Diehl, D. McDonald, *Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies*, op. cit.

[14] V.J. Janesick, "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodology, and Meaning," in: *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks (CA) 1994, pp. 209–219; see: D. Freeman, *Doing Teacher Research: From Inquiry to Understanding*, Boston (MA) 1998; J.D. Brown, *Using Surveys in Language Programs*, Cambridge 2001.

[15] M. Nádasi, "A kikérdezés" [Interviewing], in: *Bevezetés a pedagógiai kutatás módszereibe* [Introduction into the methodology of pedagogical research], ed. I. Falus, Budapest 2004, pp. 171–211. See: I. Seidman, *Az interjú mint kvalitatív kutatási módszer* [Interview as a qualitative research tool], Budapest 2002.

[16] See Z. Dörnyei, *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford 2007.

Table 1. Methods of empirical research

Methods	Subject of research	Research tools and methods of analysis
Observation	• personal & material conditions in the whole kindergarten • curricular & extracurricular activities in 3 kindergarten groups (61 children)	Content analysis of the observation chart
Interviews	• 9 parents in 3 groups: Hungarian, native English, non-native English/Hungarian • 3 educational decision-makers • 5 kindergarten teachers • 6 children	Content analysis of the answers to the semi-structured interview questions
Desk research	• the intercultural programme of the kindergarten	Analysis of the document within the frame of Grounded Theory

Discussion

All questions and ideas of the research converge in one point, i.e. to identify the advantages and drawbacks of multicultural education in order to evaluate the situation and provide source for future research.

It is undoubtedly a very important outcome of the interviews how parents see the whole situation of multilingual-multicultural education in a Hungarian little town. American parents see its peculiarity and their remarks show that they are satisfied with the situation and the way it is handled by the kindergarten teachers. The rich linguistic and cultural exposure is definitely stressed as a benefit. An American father points out that American children go to "international schools" on other military bases in the world where they are under homogeneous circumstances. He uses the expression *military brat* which alludes to children whose parents serve in the armed forces and usually move from one military base to the other. Hungarian parents emphasise the linguistic input that children get. Zita, the English teacher, definitely likes the natural method of language acquisition in the kindergarten and mentions the advantage of "learning

by doing." It may easily be called one of the biggest advantages of early childhood education; if the pedagogical approach is appropriate. Klára adds a very important fact, i.e. Hungarian schools are not yet ready to welcome children who already have a language basis from the kindergarten. This problem is real in Hungarian education and should be solved by giving the opportunity of L2 learning earlier in case it is required by the families.

According to the results, foreign language development and tolerance prove to be the most beneficial parts of multicultural education. Early start in language acquisition is appealing to most parents even if children with a non-Hungarian and non-English background definitely face more difficulties. English is not welcomed by all Hungarian parents. Here different approaches can be noticed, e.g. from an English teacher mother and another Hungarian parent who is critical of the multicultural setting.

Parents' meeting is the regular forum of discussing actual linguistic and pedagogical issues in the kindergarten. The interviewees have noticed some results due to the discussions and they are pleased with the changes. As it is shown, the kindergarten is also the scene of learning for parents as well. As the American father puts it, the learning process is extended to everybody, not only to the children. Physical closeness is a peculiar characteristic feature of Hungarian kindergarten teachers. Parents find the atmosphere friendly and familial, which is due to the pedagogical competence and personal traits of the kindergarten teachers.

Besides the advantages, drawbacks have to be mentioned, too. Criticism was given to the age composition of the groups from the side of Hungarian parents, while food, afternoon nap, outside activities and the way of sitting were objected by foreign parents. It must be difficult to favour all children and parents as they came to Hungary not only with a different cultural background but they grew up in different education systems as well. At the same time, the new situation places increased demands on teachers whose pedagogical repertoire had to be revised from one day to the other. Extra workload must be devoted to preparation and it has effect on teachers' private life as well.

The status and appreciation of kindergarten teachers in the educational process seems to be contradictory. A paradoxical situation

can be noticed here: while the educational activity is labelled "elite", there is no additional benefit for extra work. A sober and clear system of payment should be formed which is valid for the different specialities and not the different specialities but the basic services and the specialities should be compared. Otherwise, the danger of fluctuation will unavoidably occur especially today when early start of foreign languages is a key term also in the European Union (*Council Resolution of 16 December 1997 on the Early Teaching of European Union Languages*, Official Journal, C1 of 03.01.1998).

The characteristics of different (pre-)school systems in the world seem to cause misunderstandings or wrong interpretations. Criticism may result in frustration and a defensive attitude. Yet, the positive feedback from the primary school seems to acknowledge the efforts of the kindergarten teachers. Although it can be considered to be true for the Hungarian educational setting, this fact cannot guarantee that children, after being educated in a bilingual kindergarten in Hungary, will achieve well in any other primary school in the world. Naturally, it is not the major aim of this kindergarten. It also turns out that there were no clear expectations and rules at the beginning, which might be the source of initial confusions that might lead to criticism.

Together, the results suggest that kindergarten teachers managed to understand the nature of multilingual-multicultural education and they are trying to put the bilingual programme of the kindergarten in practice.

Main findings

The main findings can be presented along the six hypotheses (H) of the research which are either confirmed or rejected here.

H1. There are theoretical issues that generate debate in early childhood language development.

The hypothesis is confirmed. There are still a few crucial issues the discussion of which is not exempt from emotional overtones either. Chomsky's Innate Hypothesis, Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis and Cummins's Thresholds Hypothesis are still widely argued, moreover, the ever-green dispute on early start does not seem to end. This latter takes on outstanding importance in the present

research subject as examination was made in a kindergarten. Findings show that the debate branches off into different directions and questions like when to start learning a L2, whether bilingual children have advantages over monolinguals and what the advantages of starting earlier are have still not been responded unanimously. In these questions Krashen's distinction between language learning and language acquisition and Johnstone's[17] comparison of early and late language learning give invaluable help as they focus on the different characteristics of the different ages and reveal that both early and late start have their *raison d'être*. Taking these findings into consideration, I must add that the focus instead of "what age" should shift towards "how" at any age.

H2. The pedagogical and material conditions of starting multilingual-multicultural education in the kindergarten were given.

This statement can be considered to be partially confirmed. The pedagogical conditions became favourable due to the enormous work on the part of the heads and staff of the kindergarten. They undertook, and continue to do so, the lion's share in the process of forming a multilingual-multicultural kindergarten from a monolingual one. It is questionable, however, that without their dedicated work how long the programme could have been continued. The local self-government also seems to support their educational work, for instance, with study visits and language courses. Yet, they cannot offer any extra benefits for the extra work. The role of the NATO in the given language educational situation appears to be also vague: it does not turn out whether they really wanted to establish this multicultural institute, and if yes, what their responsibility would be. More support could be expected from them in the field of mother tongue help (e.g. L1 assistants' continuous presence), organisational and administrative work.

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[17] R. Johnstone, *Addressing 'the Age Factor': Some Implications for Languages Policy. Guide for the development of Language Education Policies in Europe: From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*, Strasbourg 2002, Council of Europe Reference Study, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/JohnstoneEN.pdf> (access: 19.09.2014).

H3. Integrated language education is applied in the kindergarten (*vs.* separated education) which is manifested in parallel Hungarian-English language use.

This statement is confirmed. Integration is one of the major aims of the intercultural programme, which seems to be completely fulfilled in the kindergarten's curricular and extra-curricular activities. Within integration each group houses two types of education, i.e. immersion and submersion education, which can be called unique under one roof. To diminish the challenges of submersion, the kindergarten teachers have already asked for foreign parents' help in order to compile a "survival kit" in children's L1. To go further, negotiations could be made with the maintainer to lessen this problem with L1 assistants; in case the kindergarten wants to turn into a multilingual kindergarten from a bilingual one.

H4. (a) All participants of multilingual-multicultural education in the kindergarten have to face linguistic, cultural and pedagogical challenges.
(b) Children whose mother tongue is neither English nor Hungarian have to face the most challenges.

Although both parts of the hypothesis can be considered to be confirmed, the challenges do not affect every participant to the same extent. While most educational experts had to revisit their language command and intercultural strategies seriously so that they could do their jobs, not all the parents or children had to do the same. English-speaking children and parents can speak their own mother tongue, and it is the same with Hungarian children. Non-English Hungarian speaking children have to accommodate themselves to the language educational situation offered by the kindergarten. At the same time, foreign parents do not expect mother tongue education in the kindergarten in all the cases and the programme also assigns mother tongue development to the families. It is also true that L1 in several cases is pushed into the background, and Hungarian and American culture seem to be in the limelight. The new intercultural educational programme with its wide educational implications (e.g. new methods, tools and strategies) highlights the pedagogical challenges which had to be faced by the actors.

H5. (a) Children will not become automatically bilingual under institutional circumstances. (b) Children can become bilingual with the help of a carefully elaborated educational programme.

The first part (a) of the hypothesis can be considered to be fully and the second part (b) partially confirmed. Becoming bilingual is a very complex and delicate matter: several components may influence its development. An appropriate educational programme, although it may serve as a decisive factor, cannot guarantee absolute success either. In Fáy András Kindergarten an intricate network of relations can be observed, which can all make their impact on language use and communication. Therefore, language use can be partially influenced by the teacher, and the role of peers and the family cannot be neglected either. Also, intrinsic and instrumental motivation may stimulate bilingualism; thus, it cannot be stated that children "gain" languages without their own participation or as a gift.

H6. The multilingual-multicultural group gives the opportunity for children and kindergarten teachers to: (a) create language self, i.e. which language(s) they can identify with and (b) develop cultural identity, i.e. which culture(s) they accept and belong to.

These suppositions can be regarded as confirmed. The special setting favours children and their teachers to create a language self and develop cultural identity; earlier than the school age as they already get to be familiar with different languages and cultures at a very young age. To what extent it remains an opportunity and to what extent the actors catch this opportunity is mostly up to them. The kindergarten, by all means, tries to provide children and adults with varied linguistic and cultural inputs which promote the development of these dimensions. In the case of most children it was observed the positive effects of the educational setting; mostly due to the kindergarten teachers' positive approach and serious efforts. However, there are still special fears, e.g. of identity confusion in Hungarian parents and slight pedagogical criticism, e.g. about food and daily routine among foreign parents.

Relevance of the research

Although the major outcome of the research is undoubtedly the identification and introduction of the "Pápa Model", the research bears other relevance to early childhood multilingual-multicultural education as well, which are as follows:

1. It reveals literature from widely interdisciplinary aspects; introduces and compares theories and debates and by drawing conclusions it forms a solid theoretical framework on which empirical research can be based on. Additionally, by recognising gaps in literature, the dissertation aims to fill the gaps with the help of valid meanings of the actual empirical research and offers new meanings to early childhood language educational phenomena.

2. It applies methods (e.g. interviews with different categories of parents, interviews with the youngest ones, Grounded Theory) which can be considered less widespread in early childhood language pedagogy research while it aims to collect them under one roof under the auspices of triangulation.

3. Beyond observing and introducing the Pápa Model (PM), the research aims to reveal a network of influences, i.e. cohesion and coherence between the different actors; linguistic, social and cultural phenomena; and the theory and practice of early childhood language development.

4. The research also observes, recognises and identifies the needs and responsibilities of the actors in early childhood multicultural education. Besides, it draws attention to the existing setting and the achievements, while it shows the gap between the present situation and the future potentials.

5. Since to date there is no recorded documentation of the PM, the dissertation can serve as a source of information about the programme and about the advantages and drawbacks of multilingual--multicultural education at early age. Therefore, the dissertation can be recommended to researchers, active participants, language educational decision-makers, kindergarten teachers and trainees, parents and laymen who are interested in the theoretical and practical sides of the topic.

Directions for future research

An interdisciplinary research study like this may open different directions for future research into the academic field. The recommended areas would be mostly linguistic and pedagogical. It would be interesting to carry out a follow-up research, i.e. a longitudinal investigation examining the linguistic and/or cultural outcome of this special (trans)migratory period of the actors with research questions like: *How has the period spent in Hungary made an impact on children's later personal and educational career? How can they benefit from the linguistic and cultural experience gained in Hungary? How has their linguistic competence developed? What has remained from the Hungarian language? How has it influenced language learning, language learning motivation and the attitude to foreign languages and cultures later? etc.*

Another relevant point could be the examination of the transition from a multilingual-multicultural kindergarten to school examining the questions, e.g.: *How has kindergarten promoted the linguistic development and the acculturation strategies of the children? To what extent was it beneficial to go to this kindergarten from the aspects of school? What were the difficulties and benefits of the transition? Was transition more or less difficult than for those who came from a monolingual kindergarten? etc.*

It could also be instructive to compare the operation of Fáy András Kindergarten with other kindergartens with a similar profile, e.g. bilingual, multilingual, ethnic minority kindergartens in Hungary and abroad alike. With the application and extension of the present results, such studies would shed further light on this underrepresented area of language pedagogy and could enhance innovation both in the theoretical and practical sides of early childhood multilingual-multicultural education.

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