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Personal Statement

Since the beginning of my studies I have been fascinated by how children become multilingual. This strong interest led me to focus my research on multilingual early childhood education and teachers' inclusive pedagogies. As an immigrant myself, my mission has quickly become to advocate the importance of children's home languages and cultures for their sense of belonging and school success and to promote social justice for linguistically and culturally diverse communities. I became very passionate about doing cross-disciplinary research through innovative ways, not only to inform educational policy and science, but also to provide a creative space for my participants' reflection, learning, and expression.

Personal details – Individual narrative profile

I was born and raised in Serbia where I completed my studies. I graduated pedagogy at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia (2003), followed by the leadership and developmental youth work course (University of Jönköping, Sweden, 2005). As a youth worker and trainer, I worked in war-affected areas in the former Yugoslavia by offering creative workshops for children. Soon after, as an immigrant, I applied for the Master program in evaluation and assessment in psychology at the University of Luxembourg, where I obtained the Master degree on the topic of cultural differences of youngsters' social skills (2008). After that, I received an AFR grant to do a PhD on the importance of home languages of immigrant children for their school success (2009-2011). This PhD thesis won the award for the best PhD thesis in all disciplines (University of Luxembourg, 2013). Following the award, I received a tenure at the University of Luxembourg as a postdoctoral researcher and an FNR grant to work as a visiting researcher at the City University of New York (2015-2016). After my return, I received two grants for the projects on home literacies (HOMELY: University of Luxembourg, 2018-2019) and translanguaging training for teachers working with multilingual preschool children (TRANSLA: FNR, 2019-2021). Since 2020 I have been the leader of the quantitative analyses in the COMPARE project (FNR 2020-2023; PI: Claudine Kirsch) on home-school collaboration and multiliteracies.

Key outputs, contributions, and achievements

Generation of new knowledge

There are two recent publications I would like to highlight. The first one is the book *Drama of Multilingualism: Literature Review and Liberation* (2021). This book is original because it is an autobiographical narrative of my own experience of multilingualism. I combined personal storytelling and academic reviewing to transfer my knowledge and experience of multilingualism to researchers, teachers, and parents. For this book, I also interviewed world renowned experts in the field of bilingualism: Ellen Bialystok, Jim Cummins, Ofelia García, Nancy Hornberger, and Catherine Snow with whom I discussed their theories and gaps in research. By this, I successfully created a supporting interdisciplinary network of world-renowned experts and offered new topics for further research.

The second publication is the paper *A multilingual pre-schooler's school belonging: The role of translanguaging pedagogy* (Aleksić & García, forthcoming), on the influence of translanguaging pedagogy on preschool immigrant children's sense of school belonging. There is a gap in this research field and by this publication we generated new hypotheses, described new theoretical links between the psychological concept of belonging and sociolinguistic translanguaging theory, and offered new methodologies such as imaginative assessment sessions for children.

Contribution to broader society

There are several outcomes for broader society from the project TRANSLA. First, I created and, together with my associate, delivered the *translanguaging professional development (PD) course*, accredited by the Ministry of Education, to 40 preschool teachers in Luxembourg over 6 months. We focused on the inclusion of children's languages and cultures in the classrooms to promote their well-being and school progress and reinforce home-school collaboration. After the course, we organised teacher-parent conferences in which we facilitated the dialogue on home-school collaboration and children's well-being.

Based on the PD course I created the *website* www.transla-program.org for teachers, parents, students, and practitioners. The website contains summarized information on multilingualism and over 100 practical activities on the classroom use of children's home languages and home-school collaboration. The website (English, French, and German) is linked with the *Bilingualism Matters* website, the most visited branch in the international research network.

Finally, two other outcomes are the illustrated book for parents, *Sumak*, and the illustrated book for children (with the CD of the audio story narration and the song), *Mara's song*. The book [Sumak](#), illustrated by Madalina Andronic and inspired by my own story, is a story of a woman who fled her country and has difficulties with integration in a new one. In the *Mara's song* book, illustrated by Maristella Mangipinto, a girl Mara who fled her country experiences linguistic shame in the new school and tries to sing in her own language helped by the colourful bird (I sing the songs on the CD). [Mara's song](#) was born out of classroom observations of immigrant children's linguistic shame. I distributed 300 books to experts, teachers, and parents in Luxembourg and abroad and received excellent comments. This shows my capability of transforming scientific topics creatively into outcomes that affect adults and children, in order to create a stronger community and contribute to more social justice for immigrant children.

These outputs have been communicated via the local conference, in which we invited guests from the Ministry of Education, the National Youth Service, local press, as well as local and international experts, in order to inform educational policy and promote a follow-up project. I also presented them in several international conferences (*AERA, CIES, AILA, EARLI*).

Development of research teams and individuals

I successfully trained, supervised and managed several persons and teams. First, before the PD course, I trained my associate to deliver the course and based on her success, she was offered a position of a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Luxembourg. In addition, two students worked on the TRANSLA project for one year, of which one student wrote a Master thesis under my supervision and is now successfully employed in a private company. Finally, in order to produce the website, the two illustrated books, and the audio CD, I successfully managed the team of 23 people (the researcher, illustrators, music composer, musicians, translators, students, data analysts, web designer, graphic designer). This shows my good management skills in artistic networks and private industry.