

***Handbook of Early Language Education*  
Mila Schwartz (ed.) (2020)**

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*Reviewed by Beatriz Cortina-Pérez*

The *Handbook of Early Language Education* (ELE) is an essential volume for all of those who believe language education for very young learners is not only about teaching languages, but also about caring for children's wellbeing, understanding and educating the child within a respectful multilingual learning context. The authors' interest is placed on this research domain, as indicated by the editor Mila Schwartz, because 'ELE is viewed as an essential dimension of young children's well-being and development as well as their fundamental right worldwide' (p. 2). Within this process, languages play a key role in helping the child to explore the surrounding world, thus allowing them to develop holistically as a social human being (Vygotsky, 1930/1978, 1934/1986; UNESCO, 2016; Council of Europe, 2019).

The volume starts with the editor's introduction describing the main lines of the present volume and defining ELE as a complex learning phenomenon in which all types of different multilingual learning contexts from birth until the beginning of compulsory education are covered. Thus, ELE encompasses a myriad of sociolinguistic contexts not easy to classify; they still share a learning approach based on feelings and affection involving different agents, including children themselves. Based on Bronfenbrenner's concept of the ecology of learning (1994), the editor has assembled 33 chapters to explore 'how children's social and educational experience is intertwined with their intensive emotional, cognitive, and academic development during the preschool period

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from the perspective of children's well-being' (p. 5). By doing so, this Springer *Handbook* offers an interdisciplinary perspective on multilingualism from birth until the beginning of compulsory education.

The book is divided into four sections: General Foundations in Early Language Education, Diversity of Contexts in Early Language Education, Caregivers in Interaction in Early Language Pedagogy, and Early Language Education in Different Countries. The first part of the volume comprehensively defines the main theoretical tenets of this fresh research domain, which includes the key notional aspects for understanding ELE. Yuko Butler approaches the complexities of the cognitive and metacognitive processes underlying early language learning in Chapter 2, 'Cognition and Young Learners' Language Development'. In addition, she discusses the latest neuroscientific insights, making clear the need for further research in understanding these complex processes, especially with regard to the measurement and role of environmental factors.

Chapter 3, 'Vocabulary Development in Early Language Education', by He Sun and Bin Yin and Chapter 4, 'Grammatical Development Within a Context of Early Bilingual Education and Language Support Programs', by Natalia Gagarina and Alessandra Milano, introduce us to understanding lexical and grammatical development in young learners from a psycholinguistic perspective and portray strategies that may be useful for teaching. These authors call for the development of educational programmes that build on scientific findings.

In Chapter 5 'Emergent Literacy Development in Early Language Education', Miriam Minkov and Liubov Baladzhaeva exhaustively unravel the inner workings of the cognitive processes underlying multiliteracies, delving into cross-linguistic strategies that enable the development of reading in several languages. They conclude that it is possible for bilinguals to develop emergent literacy in both languages, especially if the languages are similar to each other, and if play is at the centre of the educational approach.

Asta Cekaite brings in the sociolinguistic perspective in Chapter 6, 'Early Language Education and Language Socialization', by analysing the processes that underlie preschool settings when bilingual children are introduced into monolingual contexts. The chapter's main contribution is its approach to children as active agents, capable of transforming the ideological perspective of the class and of teachers.

In Chapter 7, 'Language Education Policies and Early Childhood Education', Åsa Palviainen and Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen examine ECEC language policy from the perspective of discourse analysis and ecology, highlighting the unbalanced advantages of native speakers of majority languages and the lack of participation of children, parents, and teachers in the design of language

policies in most countries. They exemplify language policies and planning as an intertwining of multiple factors as agents using the metaphor of the onion as a ‘rather chaotic pile of overlapping, sliced onions rings lying on a chopping board’ (p. 185).

In line with this, Chapter 8, ‘Ethical Issues in Research with Young Children in Early Second Language Education’, focuses on children as empowered and decisive agents of their own multilingual education process, despite their young age. Máire Mhic Mhathúna and Nóirín Hayes highlight the role of children themselves in research. This paradigm shift lays the foundation for an ethical stance in research on very young language learners.

The last chapter of this section, Chapter 9, ‘A Critical Overview of Research Methods Used in Studies on Early Foreign Language Education in Pre-schools’, by Marianne Nikolov and Réka Lugossy, covers research issues of ELE. Through an analysis of the research methods used in 22 indexed papers, authors show the great variety of research designs, thus contributing to the understanding of this domain from different perspectives. The focus on vocabulary issues and motivation, as well as research in EFL context are recurrent. The authors advocate for more research on this particular domain, particularly implicit learning contexts.

The second section of the *Handbook* reflects on the sociolinguistic richness that emerges in early foreign language learning. Although we have traditionally tried to classify these contexts into different sociolinguistic models (heritage languages, foreign languages, second languages, etc.), the reality, as Chapters 10 to 18 show, is that it is not easy to pigeonhole multilingual diversity in young learners nor even necessary to do so. The authors of these eight chapters open the door to an under-researched linguistic diversity, that of minority or endangered languages, which undoubtedly need more attention.

In Chapter 10, ‘Early Years Education and the Reversal of Language Shift’, Renée DePalma and Iria Sobrino-Freire delve into endangered languages, frequently relegated to a secondary role in family contexts. The authors show how these languages are often a fun learning experience for very young children, as is the case with the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Chile, narrated in Chapter 11 by Rukmini Becerra-Lubies, Simona Mayo, and Aliza Fones from Chile, ‘Indigenous Languages in Early Childhood Education in Chile’. Chapter 12, ‘Heritage Language Early Years’ Immersion: Irish-Medium Preschools in Ireland’, written by Tina M. Hickey, describes the context of Irish-Medium Preschools in Ireland as a way of revitalising an endangered language, addressing the need to differentiate between children who are heritage-language speakers and those who are learning Irish as a heritage language.

The next chapter (13), 'Early Immersion in Minority Language Contexts: Canada and Finland' by Karita Mård-Miettinen, Marie-Josée Vignola and Stephanie Arnott, critically analyses two immersion models of minority language education in Canada and Finland. In both cases, the models are questioned given the increasing linguistic diversity of both countries. So far, multilingualism at an early age has not differentiated the processes occurring in early childhood. In Chapter 14, 'Russian as a Home Language in Early Childhood Education', Ekaterina Protassova, Anna Golubeva, and Ilze Mikelsona present the case of Russian as a home language, and how parents, teachers, and policy makers interact and sometimes collide. Chapter 15, 'Dual Language Education Models and Research in Early Childhood Education in the USA', shows the positive effects of early additive bilingualism through the example of dual education in the United States. Faidra Faitaki, Annina Hessel, and Victoria A. Murphy look at minority language learning in Chapter 16, 'Vocabulary and Grammar Development in Young Learners of English as an Additional Language', in the United Kingdom context. They do, so, however, from the point of view of the vocabulary and grammatical development of young learners, concluding that child's ecology needs to be taken into account.

The last two chapters show the contexts of learning English as a foreign language in Early Childhood Education. Chapter 17, 'English as a Foreign Language in Early Language Education' by Danijela Prošić-Santovac and Vera Savić, goes through different language policies in which the learning of English as a foreign language takes place at such an early age, highlighting the need for well-trained professionals to ensure the linguistic models are correct. In Chapter 18, 'Content and Language Integrated Learning in European Preschools', Olivia Mair focuses on the introduction of CLIL as a methodology to promote a natural first approach to EFL in contexts such as Italy, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, and Finland, emphasising the need for detailed and centralised teaching guidelines to help bring CLIL to Early Childhood Education in monolingual contexts.

Part III develops the figure of the caregiver as an essential element in the ecology of early language education. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982), at this age, the caregiver figure is usually the parent(s) or their closest relatives, progressing into the Early Childhood educator as soon as the child attends school. Chapters 19, 20, and 21 deal with the language ecology model to highlight the fundamental role of parents, teachers, and children in this process and to show how it is a multiple interaction between the different agents, having both positive and negative effects. Gee Macrory in Chapter 19, 'Caregivers' Linguistic Interaction in Early Language Learning and Education', advances the concept of 'multilingual pedagogy'. They conclude that there are

tools such as the European Language Portfolio (ELP) that allow for joint reflection between caregivers and children on their multilingual development and advocate for a more ethnographic approach from the ecological perspective. Moreover, Chapter 20, ‘The Interaction between Family Language Policy and Educators in Early Language Education’ by Irem Bezcioglu-Göktolga, focuses on families and educators from the standpoint of language policies, advocating for a closer understanding between families and institutions. In Chapter 21, ‘Educational Partnerships of Teachers, Parents, and Children in Multilingual Preschool Contexts’, Hanna Ragnarsdottir continues on the path of families by providing practical examples of how the involvement of parents as key players in multilingual education can and should be made effective in what she calls ‘educational partnerships’.

Chapters 22 to 25 look at pedagogical aspects as factors for success in multilingual programmes, addressing the need to promote language in the classroom (Chapter 24), multilingual children with educational needs (Chapter 25), teacher training (Chapter 22) and the important transition between pre-primary and primary education, which entails an imperative need for the continuity of multilingual pedagogy (Chapter 23). In Chapter 22, ‘Preparing Teachers for Early Language Education’, Gunhild Tomter Alstad carefully reviews the theoretical models underlying two areas of teacher education: that of the language teacher and that of the early childhood educator. From there she develops the profile of the ‘ECEC language teacher educator’.

In Chapter 23, ‘From Preprimary to Primary Learning of English as a Foreign Language: Coherence and Continuity Issues’, Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović and Stela Letica Krevelj focus on the transition stage between pre-primary and primary education. They emphasise that this process is very complex and involves many stakeholders: thus, the ecological perspective is the only research paradigm possible.

Based on Gass and Mackey’s (2007) input-interaction-output hypothesis and on the fundamental role of the teacher as an education agent (Epstein, 2007), in Chapter 24, ‘Language-Conducive Strategies in Early Language Education’, Mila Schwartz develops the need to promote language conducive strategies within the multilingual classroom in order to encourage correct language use. Rama Novogrodsky and Natalia Meir discuss specific educational needs of multilingual children in Chapter 25, ‘Multilingual Children with Special Needs in Early Education’. They focus on three aspects: assessment, diagnosis and intervention, and finally support multilingual interventions.

The last part of the *Handbook* (Chapters 26 to 33) describes different realities that provide the reader with an international panorama on how multilingual

education in Early Childhood Education has been developing in different countries and how it will evolve in the coming years. Chapters 29 and 31 look at two realities of early multilingualism in Europe. Chapter 29, 'Early Language Education in Luxembourg', by Claudine Kirsch and Claudia Seele, shows us the context of Luxembourg in which Luxembourgish, French, and German coexist, generating a wide linguistic diversity in everyday life and how the teacher agency plays a fundamental role in the design of the country's language policy. On the other hand, the bilingual context of Malta, presented by Charles L. Mifsud and Lara Ann Vella in Chapter 31, 'Early Language Education in Malta', introduces the reader to an asymmetrical bilingualism where English is often ideologically linked to a higher social class and a higher economic and social status.

Poh Wee Koh and Beth Ann O'Brien detect unbalanced bilingualism as a critical issue of the Singapore model in Chapter 32, 'Early Language Education in Singapore', and point out the risks of becoming a monolingual society. Chapter 26, 'Early Language Education in Australia' by Susana Eisenclas and Andrea Schalley, uncovers early multilingualism in Australia where true multilingualism is promoted through both macro- and microlevel initiatives, although the authors draw attention to the fundamental role of families in the promotion of heritage languages.

This role of families and communities is highlighted by Ekaterina Protassova in Chapter 30, 'Early Language Education in Russia', describing the revitalisation of the Karelian language in Russia. She concludes that there is a need for greater cooperation in EFL between educators, researchers, and parents to dispel myths about early multilingualism. Similarly, Chapter 27, 'Perspectives on Heritage Language Programs in Early Childhood Education in Canada', covers the multilingual context in Canada where multilingualism is part of the country's peculiarity. According to Themistoklis Aravossitas, Spyros Volonakis and Momoye Sugiman, this is articulated in policies and programmes that aim to keep the different heritage languages alive, such as the dual English/French plus one heritage language programme.

Moving across the globe, in Chapter 28, 'Early Language Education in Israel', Shulamit Kopeliovich narrates the difficult situation of Israel in trying to maintain the multilingual nature of its inhabitants, with parents being the main promoters of bilingual education initiatives such as English-Hebrew. However, despite being a declared multilingual country, there is still a long way to go to transfer these policies from macro- to microlevel.

Finally, Chapter 33, 'Early Language Education in the United Arab Emirates', by Kay Gallagher, provides a detailed overview of early multilingualism in the

United Arab Emirates, where English is the lingua franca and Arabic the majority language, and the difficult task of introducing multilingualism at an early age due to a very low enrolment rate in early childhood education. Thus, the models of exposure to the different languages are families and caregivers who usually have neither English nor Arabic as their mother tongue. The reader may easily conclude, after reviewing this section, that ELL models and policies are varied but share the need to involve many different agents to be successful.

This volume has managed, through the ‘research activism’ (p. vii) highlighted by its editor in its preface, to spot the area of early language learning as a distinctive research domain, and in doing so, the authors thrived on conferring prestige and the international presence that children deserve. The meritorious work of the editor in bringing together a group of internationally prestigious academics researching such a specific area, which at the same time requires scientific rigour, is also to be noted.

From this reviewer’s point of view, the richness of this book includes its inclusiveness, not only dealing with stereotyped examples and conceptions of multilingualism but also going further into unexplored models and learning settings. Other volumes that focus on early language learning are, for one reason or another more limited in outlining the real variety of sociolinguistic contexts that arise in early multilingualism. The *Handbook of Early Language Education*, however, not only focuses on foreign language, second languages and additional languages, but also consciously includes heritage languages, indigenous languages, marginalised languages, minority languages, etc, all under the umbrella of Bonferroni’s ecological perspective, which gives meaning and coherence to the 943 pages of the volume.

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