

Discovering writing (1): Words beginning with “B”

Age
4⁺



Context:

- This activity takes place in a Luxembourg pre-school class where the children are aged 4 to 6 (the first learning cycle). About a third of the children speak a different family language or languages than the main language of schooling, Luxembourgish.

Reasons for choosing this activity:

- This activity is not planned as such but emanates from the children themselves and is recorded by the teacher (→ meaningful language learning). In fact, this activity is the first in a series that base the discovery of the written word, letters and sounds on authentic and diverse situations that relate to the children’s experiences (→ continuous and coherent language learning).
- At the end of the school year, the majority of the children age 5 to 6 (the second year of pre-school) have acquired the basic principles of reading but have not completed pre-reading programmes (as they are not part of the preschool curriculum). Discovering the world of writing is a source of inspiration for children and adults alike.

Description:

- After spending the morning in the forest, the children are sharing their experiences; the big and small things they have seen, touched, smelled (e.g. insects, snails, birds, woodland fruits). Suddenly one of the children exclaims “*Bam fänkt mat ‘B’ un!*” (The word tree – ‘Bam’ – starts with the sound [bə]). The other children then start to contribute “*Bebé fänkt och mat ‘B’ un!*”, “*A Bambi*”, etc. (the word ‘bébé’ also starts with the sound [bə] just like the word ‘Bambi’, etc.) (→ active language learning).
- The teacher responds spontaneously, she takes notes of the suggestions made by the children and steers the children towards the sound (‘*Lesen durch Schreiben*’). After about 10 minutes there is an impressive list of words, in different languages, but all starting with [bə]. Most of the words are in Luxembourgish, the language of instruction : *Bësch* (forest), *Bam* (tree), *Beem* (trees), *Blumm* (flower), *Bomi* (grand-mother), *Bopi* (grand-father), etc. The children also invent new words without meaning (*Belf*, *Balo*, *Boli*, *Bopeknäpp*, this last word meaning ‘buttons for grandfathers’) (→ active language learning). From there, they automatically begin to compare languages, in particular Luxembourgish, German and French.

Description (continued):

- As a natural progression to the activity the children start to discover similarities and differences between the languages; the word 'bus' for example has a similar spelling in German and French ('Bus' et 'bus') but these are pronounced very differently ([bʊs] in German and \bys\ in French).
- The list is displayed at the children's eye level and is added to as the days go by. After a few weeks the children decide to do the same activity but with the letter 'M' (→ continuous language learning).

Observation:

- The list is entirely produced by the children and allows for a visualisation of their choices and documents the selection they have made on a predefined criterion (the initial sound [bə]). The sequence of words reflects the thought process of the children; the space given to family languages allows for a reflection of a metalinguistic nature.

