

PolkaNorski and StarWords - who needs outreach more: researchers or the world?

Calls for proposals always include a section on outreach (i.e., disseminating scientific results to the public). One reasoning behind this is that society needs to be informed about recent developments in research to be able to take advantage of new knowledge. Accessible dissemination of research findings may be also an important factor in strengthening the collaboration between researchers and practitioners. Furthermore, taxpayers deserve to know what their money is spent on.

Even so, not all scientists want to spend time on outreach as it is not considered to be a stepping stone careerwise (Kassab, 2019). In this talk, we will explore whether the outreach can also serve the purpose of recruiting participants for scientific studies, rather than limiting outreach to the presentation of the project's findings. We will highlight that the process of outreach can begin very early on with dissemination of the state-of-the-art knowledge on the topic of the project, which can then evolve during the project. For example, at the very beginning of the PolkaNorski project, we organised an opening conference with researchers and practitioners experienced in bilingualism research as well as being familiar with the Norwegian context. This has allowed us to identify possible challenges and establish collaboration with researchers working in similar settings.

Importantly, in both the StarWords and PolkaNorski projects, we need to convince parents that it is worthwhile to participate in studies on child development (Mieszkowska et al., 2022). We strive to present our research aims in the most clear manner so parents can understand our motivation to study the relationship between language development and demographic or socio-cultural factors as well as comprehend why it's important for them to participate not only in terms of supporting scientific development but also on a more personal level (i.e., having a chance to reflect on their child's development).

Our work to recruit participants involves different methods and relies on support from practitioners present in social media. Our methods include: interviews in Polish and Norwegian media (radio, TV, newspapers) and Polish sections of Norwegian websites, publication of information on social media (Instagram and Facebook), working with practitioners who become ambassadors of our projects and enable outreach to a larger public in the most accessible manner (e.g., with the support of social media), organising library events during which children are engaged in storytelling in two languages and parents can learn about bringing up multilingual children.

Kassab (2019) suggests that outreach to the public outside the scientific community should be part of the scientific assessment culture and be considered relevant (e.g., for promotion). On a similar note, we acknowledge the need for raising the status and priority of outreach in research projects like ours. Such a task is in fact very demanding and challenging, considering that it's not only an addition to the research we are conducting, but a vital part that requires planning and continuous implementation from the beginning to the end of the project.

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References

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