



Treasure box filled with inspiring practices



... We hope they may support you in creating an inspiring language learning environment for both you and your children ...

The importance of caring

Ask parents or the children themselves about comforting or soothing words they use at home; rituals, favourite words or “family words”; ways of expressing needs; daily routines. **Caring about what children care about** puts the focus on the person rather than on his social role as a pupil. While this is particularly relevant during Early Childhood Care and Education, there is no age limit to the ‘care’ aspect.

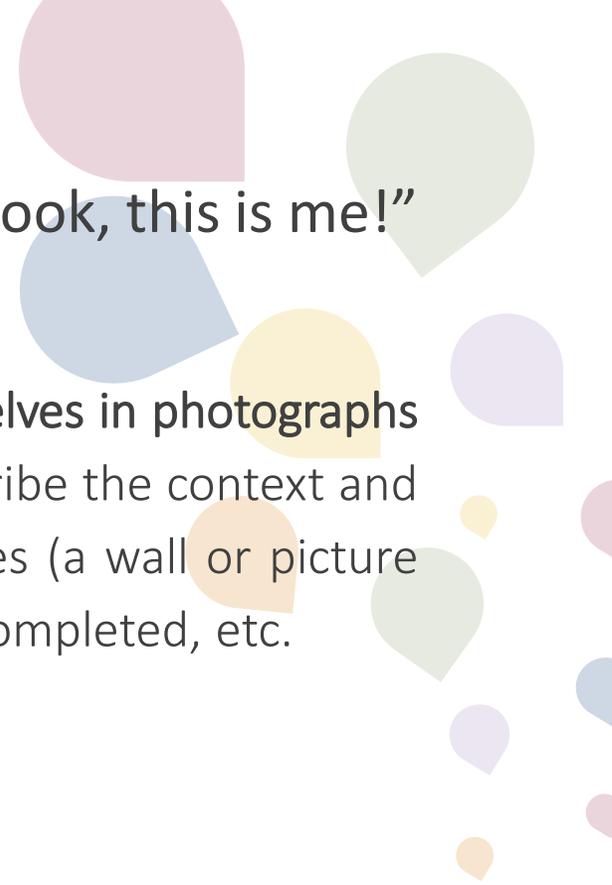


A “Me” book!

“Me” books can be started at whatever age, but ideally when children first enter a new class or school. This work should be done in collaboration with parents. A “Me” book accompanies a child on his/her learning pathways; it informs about **interests, talents, important learning steps** and also about **personal preferences, family rituals, words, everyday communication** in the family, etc. It may turn out to be a **multilingual** book, giving room to the languages of schooling as well as the home languages of the children, allocating different sections to specific languages, allowing for comparisons between languages, etc.

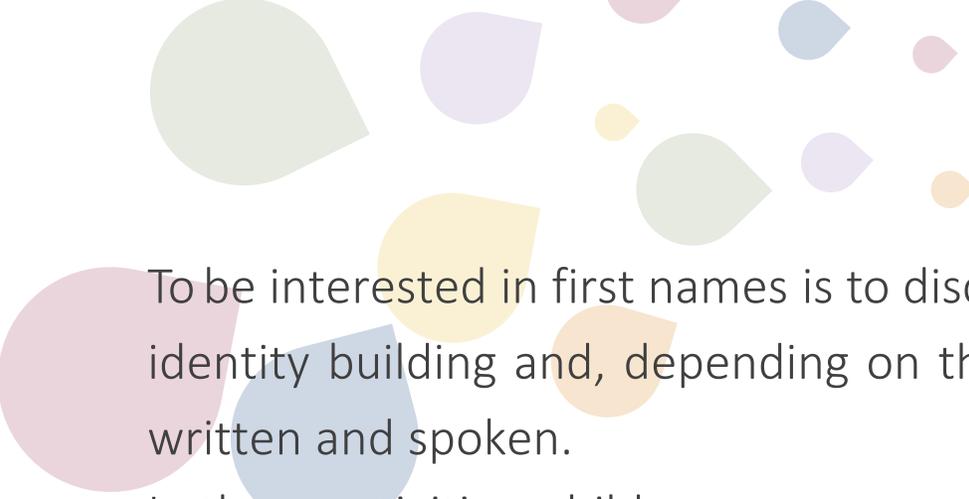
Please enter my world!

Everyone working with children remembers countless situations in which young children proudly show their new shoes and clothes, talk enthusiastically about their dog's adventures, the birth of a baby; bring with them a collection of stickers from the newest film production or sporting event, etc. All these objects and items support language: **children want to talk about what they have experienced; want to describe**, often in a very detailed way, **what they have got**, etc. If children are given the opportunity to tell or write down what matters to them, they do not only use language and positively experience the use of language, but also feel valorised as those things that matter to them have their place in the group/class. This activity can be done in whatever language seems appropriate: the language(s) of schooling, the foreign language learnt at school or the home language(s) of the children



“Look, this is me!”

When children are given the opportunity to **look at themselves in photographs or videos**, they like to talk about what they are doing, describe the context and the situation, etc. If there is a space to display the pictures (a wall or picture rail), the stories can be told and retold, written down and completed, etc.



Discovering the world of first names

To be interested in first names is to discover and recognize both their importance for identity building and, depending on the language, the different ways in which they can be written and spoken.

In these activities, children

- **search and compare first names in different languages:** *Jean* (French), *John* (English), *Johann* (German), *Jang* (Luxembourgish), *Juan* (Spanish), *Giovanni* (Italian), *Jan* (Dutch), *Yann* (Breton), *Đorđe* (Serbian), *Seán* (Irish), etc;
- **look at phonology** ("J" isn't pronounced in the same way in French, Spanish and Portuguese);
- **become aware of the emotional value of first names** and the importance of pronouncing them correctly (especially for less common first names);
- **investigate the reasons for the parents' choices** of first names;
- discover that languages sometimes blur the lines for the **feminine and masculine** (e.g. *Claude* can be masculine or feminine).



Creating multilingual spaces

Reflect on the day you spent with the children in class/in the group: **Were there learning activities or moments in which children used languages other than the language of schooling or the foreign languages?** Moments in which they were able to draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire, e.g., when they were working in groups in order to solve a mathematical problem? Negotiating a theme for the next project? Discussing the material to be selected for handicraft? These are moments when language plays an important but not *the* most important role; when **making meaning** outweighs language learning.

If you want to check if learning objectives are achieved, allow for **collective moments at the end of group sessions** where children present and explain their work to others in a common language (the language of schooling). Then comes your turn to build bridges between languages; to make them become aware of similarities and differences between languages; to support them by using words in the language of schooling to identify notions and concepts they already know in other languages, e.g., their home languages.

Setting up a Language Corner

A Language Corner can be set up in an individual classroom or a corridor used by various class/groups. The Language Corner has a poster inviting all the children who would like to write a poem or story in any language they wish to make a contribution. Children put their work, written in their language of choice, into a decorated box on the language table. They do the writing/decorating themselves. **Children are invited to write their own self-directed work and leave it in the box for others to read. This can be a very effective way to encourage children to talk about/to write on topics that are of interest to them.** It is very important that teachers encourage and affirm all children's efforts sensitively.



Getting children to talk to each other!

Known questions are written or pasted on **wooden spatulas or any similar support**. Each child chooses a spatula, finds himself a partner, asks the question written on the spatula and gets an answer (prompts are on the spatula's back). Partners exchange spatulas.

Reading resources

The school library needs to have a section with good quality publications in all the languages of the school – including dual-language and multilingual versions where possible.

- **Senior classroom libraries** need dictionaries and thesauri in the languages of the classroom.
- **Junior classroom libraries** need attractive picture books and books that contain simple text in the languages of the classroom.

A list of multilingual books as well as books without text is to be found in the section “Resources for inspiring language learning” on this website.



A book box

Install a box (or alternatively a small cabinet) and fill it with different types of books (storybooks, dictionaries, thesauri, etc.). Invite children, their parents as well as grandparents and/or friends to borrow books and to share the stories they like best. The rules are very simple: anyone wanting to borrow a book from the collection replaces it by one of his/her own books. This dynamic way of sharing stories and different kinds of information in a regularly changing collection gives children **access to a multitude of books**. Book boxes may be installed inside the school or in a public place as you will see when looking at the inspiring projects from all over the world.

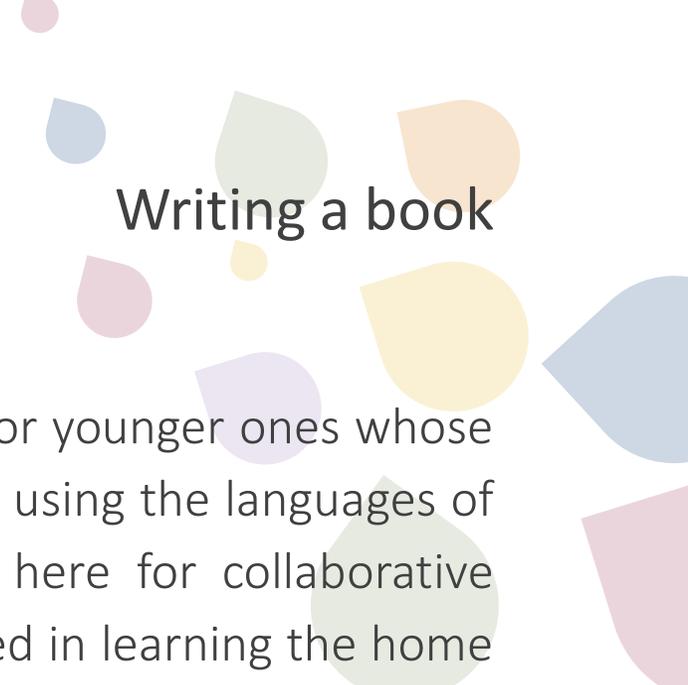
Multilingual storytelling

Transform monolingual stories into bilingual or multilingual ones. Books that are best suited for this type of activity are those which present dialogue as well as repetitive words and phrases or predictable text and rhymes (e.g. Eric Carle's books). They give children orientation and facilitate the understanding of parts of the stories in different languages.

Use one language for the frame story (e.g. the language of schooling) and one language for the main characters (e.g. the foreign language taught in school) . You can also choose several languages to let main figures speak (e.g. the home languages of the children), depending on the linguistic context you're working in.

Example taken from a children's book written by E. Carle: *L'araignée qui n'a pas le temps/ The very busy spider*

- « *Tu viens de promener avec moi ?* », said the horse. *The spider didn't answer. She was very busy spinning her web.*
- « *Tu veux manger un peu d'herbe ?* », said the cow. *The spider didn't answer. She was very busy spinning her web.*
- (...)



Writing a book

Older children write a book in their home language(s) for younger ones whose language is the same. Books may also be dual language using the languages of both home and school. There is also the possibility here for collaborative writing by older children where one of them is interested in learning the home language(s) of a schoolmate. Because the content is intended for younger children, and will be at a simple level, this can also be an opportunity for older pupils to explore the books they have written and be inspired to begin learning a new language from their classmates.

The idea of **writing a book for a young user of the same home language** has benefits for both age groups from the points of view of identity, self-confidence, building friendships, helping (both parties) with developing literacy skills including language awareness, each at their own level of proficiency.

Personal storybooks

Creating a personal story book based on an existing story is a good way to keep track of the stories told in the classroom ... and a to make language learning visible.





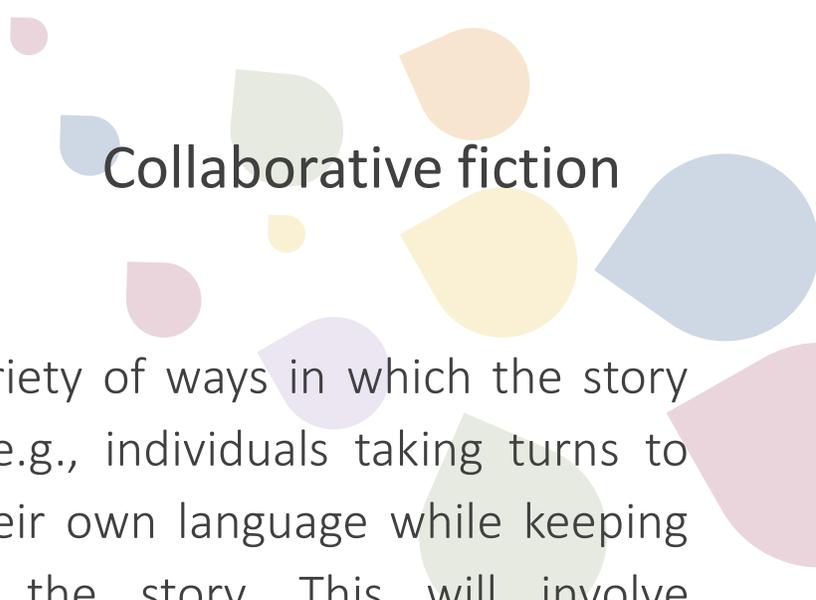
Multilingual collaborative writing using all the languages of the group

Topics for this kind of writing can vary from

- legends and fairy tales pertaining to the cultures of the individuals involved;
- legends and fairy tales of the host country that have been studied in class and are being re-told;
- original fiction created by the group;
- procedural writing, e.g., recipes, menus of special foods pertaining to the cultures of the group;
- weather, historical events, scientific experiments;
- etc.

Picture dictionaries

Children sometimes like to make picture dictionaries of words in their home languages and include translations in the language(s) of schooling (including foreign languages) and/or additional languages of interest (languages they would like to know better).



Collaborative fiction

The group, working with the teacher, creates a fictitious story based on an interesting poster, a piece of music, etc. This work is carried out orally in the language of schooling, and children are free to contribute using their own language(s) as well. The story is then written collaboratively with the children; they suggest the storyline which is written by the teacher on the whiteboard. Subsequent to this, children may re-write the language-of-schooling-version (or the foreign-language-version) in their home language(s) thus creating a dual language text.

There are also a variety of ways in which the story may be rewritten, e.g., individuals taking turns to write sections in their own language while keeping the coherence of the story. This will involve explanation by users of home languages as to what their contribution means in the language of schooling and agreement with the group that what they are writing is in sequence. A further possibility would be to make an audio/video recording of their collaborative effort.



Creating lists on specific topics

At certain points in their development, **children like to 'gather information' and make lists on topics that interest them**, e.g. sports heroes; wildlife; pets; actors; etc. They may do this as an individual or groupwork. Teachers can encourage list making by suggesting, e.g., *I wonder how to say Good morning; chocolate; etc. in all the languages of our classroom? In how many languages can you say 1,2,3, etc.?*

The teacher can encourage **comparisons and exploration of possible language connections**, e.g. *Does anyone have another word for a horse? Hestur (Icelandic); hest (Norwegian); capall (Irish); caballo (Spanish); cheval (French), cavallo (Italian); Pferd (German), Päerd (Luxembourgish).*

Some of them are similar (*hestur* and *hest*; *cavallo* and *caballo*; *Pferd* and *Päerd*), some of them sound different (*hestur* and *cavallo*)

It is important not to discourage children by telling them they must make lists or gather particular information. It is rather a matter of the teacher suggesting the idea almost as if she/he were thinking aloud. Once the idea has taken root, the children will develop it. However, children's efforts must be affirmed even if the work they choose to do is not on the teacher's list. Otherwise they will not engage, and this opportunity for self-directed learning will be lost.



Discovering words from different corners of the world (1)

Over time, languages all over the world have gradually become richer, resulting from inclusion in their vocabulary. With travel and contacts of different kinds (trading, conquest, etc.) **people needed to borrow words to name what they did not know until then, or what was specific to a culture:** objects (*turban* from Turkey), cooking (*couscous* from Arabia, *pizza* from Italy), nature (*koala* from the Aborigines in Australia), music (*piano* and *concerto* from Italy), sports (*football* or *jogging* from English speaking countries) and technologies (*fax*, *Internet* and *computer* from English speaking countries).

Borrowings are words or expressions borrowed from another language, without being translated, but generally being adapted to the rules of the language which borrows them. Borrowing activities can be very spontaneous, as there are so many opportunities to use them. They make it possible to **integrate aspects of Language Awareness into all subjects,** e.g., geography (*Locate the places/countries where the borrowed words come from!*); history (*When and for what reasons did these words travel? What do they tell us about the history of mankind?*)

Discovering words from different corners of the world (2)

Children are invited to look for borrowed words while reading a text, visiting a museum, buying food at the supermarket, dining at a restaurant (*pizza, hot dog, sushi, sangria, abricot, sfumato, museum, etc.*).

Guess where the following words originally come from?

1. *Pyjama*
2. *Piano*
3. *Artichaut*
4. *Chocolat*
5. *Igloo*
6. *Cravate*
7. *Yoghourt*
8. *Marmelade*
9. *Clown*

Responses: 1 Hindi, 2 Italian, 3 Arabic, 4 Nahuatl, 5 Inuit, 6 Croatian, 7 Bulgarian, 8 Portuguese, 9 English

Using sign languages



There are a whole lot of different ways of communicating with others ... and you do not always need words to do so!

This multicultural Norwegian Primary School regularly uses different signs relating to topics the children are interested in. The signs are based on the Norwegian language and give children the opportunity to use them and learn Norwegian or other home languages as well (e.g. Spanish, English, Swedish).

Are animals plurilingual?

Noises and sounds such as those made by a bell, car or drum, as well as human cries and animal cries **differ from one language to another**, depending on the reality they represent and the phonological system specific to each language. Such sounds provide an opportunity for children to ask themselves questions about language phenomena that are part of their daily lives.

Examples:

- *Meow, miaou, miau, miao, mjau* (cat)
- *Neigh, hiii hiii, hūa, mi hah hà* (horse)
- *Woof woof, ouaf-ouaf, wau wau, guau guau, waf waf, hau hau* (dog)
- *Oink, groin, grunz, oinc, ruk, knor, chrum* (pig)

- *Cock a doodle do, cocorico, kikeriki, kukkokiekuu, chicchirichi* (rooster)
- *Croak, coac, quak, kurr, cra, kvekk* (frog)
- *Glug glug, glou glou, gluck gluck, klok klok, glo-glo* (drink)
- *Tick tock, tic tac, tick tack, tique-taque* (bell)
- *Knock knock, toc toc, klopf klopf, bank bank, tuk tuk, cioc-cioc* (knocking on a door)
- *Chomp, miam, mampf, chrup chrup, namm* (eating)
- *Mwah, smack, schmatz, chuac, mopsti, pakšt* (kissing)
- Etc.

Invite the children to translate phone numbers they know into different languages and help them to discover the logic behind this.

Example: 00 79 221 19 97

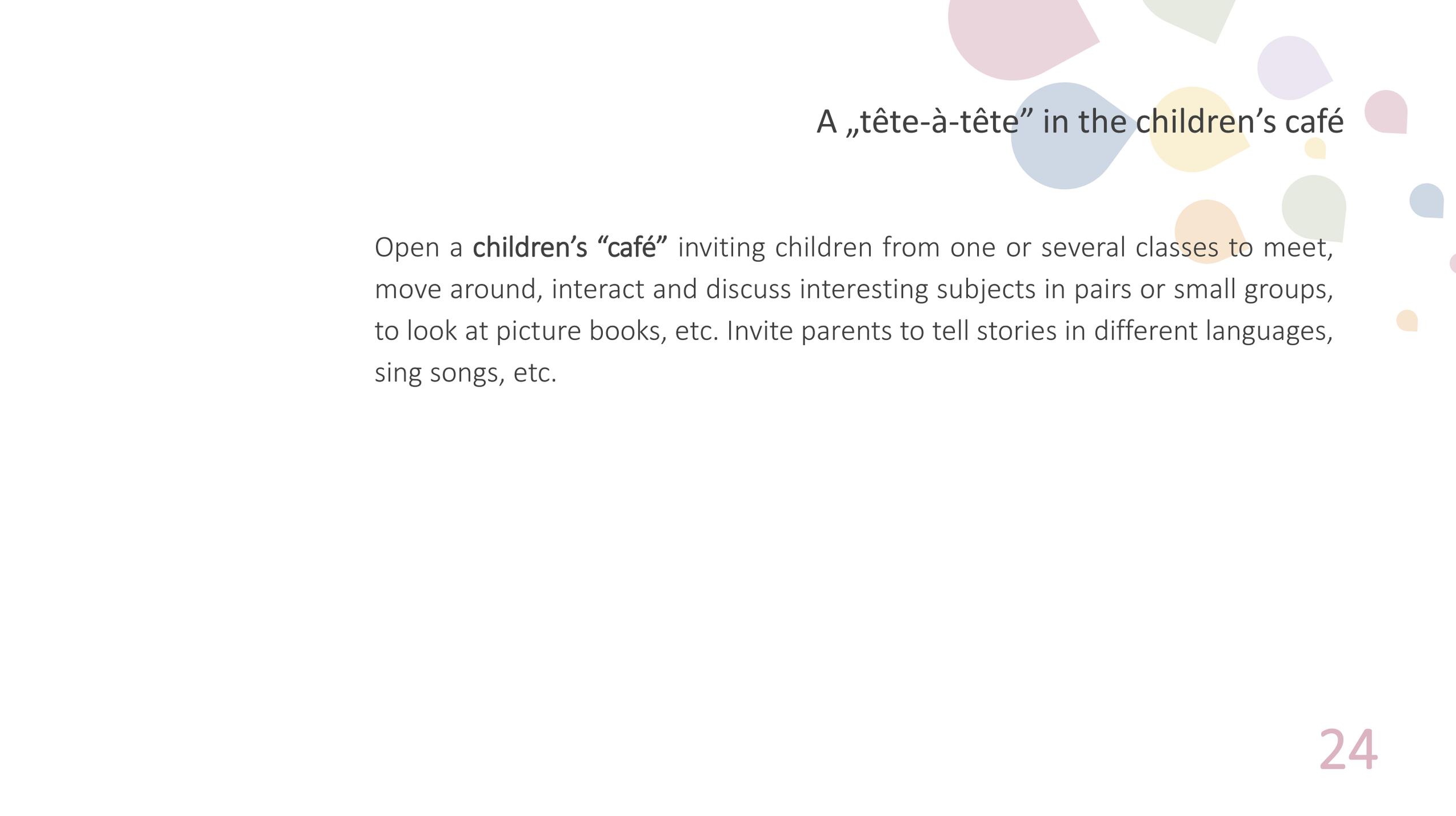
- *Zéro zéro – soixante dix-neuf – deux cent vingt et un – dix-neuf – quatre-vingt dix-sept* (French)
- *Null null – neunundsiebzig – zweihundert-einundzwanzig – neunzehn – siebenundneunzig* (German)
- *Zero zero – Seventy-nine – two hundred and twenty- one – nineteen – ninety-seven* (English)

Writing numbers in different languages

Observations:

- In English we sometimes say “o” and not “zero”
- In German, units are stated before tens in the range from 11 to 99 (*neunundsiebzig* (79), *siebenundneunzig* (97)) in contrast to French and some numbers in English (*seventy-nine*; *soixante dix-neuf* (79))





A „tête-à-tête” in the children’s café

Open a **children’s “café”** inviting children from one or several classes to meet, move around, interact and discuss interesting subjects in pairs or small groups, to look at picture books, etc. Invite parents to tell stories in different languages, sing songs, etc.



Working on projects

Projects on different countries/historical events/sporting and cultural events, etc. generate a **specific vocabulary**.

Teachers and educators can suggest and encourage children to include the language(s) spoken, foreign language(s), etc. Vocabulary lists in different languages can be included on aspects of the topic, e.g., names of the countries being explored; name of a piece of music; sports terminology; etc. This presents further opportunities for children to explore their own interests in relation to the topics concerned.



Events engaging the whole school community

Whole school events, e.g., concerts, art exhibitions, historical occasions, etc. can be used **to support all the languages in the school** (including foreign languages and children's home languages) orally and in writing. Children can announce the various acts to be performed in a variety of languages present in the school. This creates an awareness among children that the same announcement can be made in a variety of languages; the same information may be conveyed in writing in different languages using scripts that are both familiar and different. All this helps to **create interest and normality around using more than one language**. It also shows that everybody's language is valued.

Songs and poems

Songs and poems are really good for multilingual/plurilingual use as they may involve the same theme and lots of repetition. Each country/culture will have simple tunes for children's songs that are easily adapted to a range of languages. Children may be taught a song in the language of schooling/modern language(s) and then encouraged to translate the meaning and sing it in their home language(s). This helps with **language learning**, **language awareness**, and **content learning** as well.

Sources

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- 15: Polish primary school
- 21: Hola Barnehage – Ulna AS, Oslo, Norway
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- 5, 19, 22, 23: Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Luxembourg (2010): *Ouverture aux langues à l'école Vers des compétences plurilingues et pluriculturelles* <http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/themes-pedagogiques/enseignement-langues/langues-ecole/fr.pdf>
- 3, 4, 24: *Sprach-Kitas*, a federal programme developed by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth <https://sprach-kitas.fruehe-chancen.de/>