



Tool 2 – Reflecting on languages

Task: reflect on the 10 questions below.

There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. The comments provided for each question are intended for self-reflection without judgement.

1. How do you feel about children speaking a language other than the language(s) of education in your classroom?

- a. I worry that it interferes with their learning.
- b. It is ok, as long as it does not interfere with their learning.
- c. I encourage this whenever possible.

It is increasingly common for children to speak a language other than the language of the education system. Some educators worry that this might interfere with the children’s learning, but there are also teachers who actively encourage the use of different languages. Research has shown that children who can speak more than one language can outperform those who are monolingual in different areas such as problem-solving, cognitive flexibility and communication skills.

2. How do you feel about allowing the children to use their home language in the classroom?

- a. I worry that they will not learn the language of schooling.
- b. It is ok, as long as it doesn’t interfere with their learning of the language of the classroom.
- c. It is a valuable resource that I encourage when possible.

Allowing children to use all their languages in the classroom can be a valuable resource for both the children and the teacher. Some teachers worry that this might be a barrier to learning the language of schooling, however, research has shown that the use of different languages can support language learning and academic achievement by promoting a deeper understanding and supporting communication. This makes the different languages a valuable resource.

3. How do you feel about making adjustments for children that don't speak the language of the education system well?

- It is not fair on the other students and slows down the class.
- It is necessary but it is very difficult and time-consuming.
- It is essential to support the children's learning.

As educators it is our responsibility to ensure that all the children have access to learning and are supported in their academic growth. This means making changes where needed, to support all the children's learning. Although it might be time-consuming it is an important part of creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment that allows all children to reach their full potential.

4. How do you respond when a child makes a mistake in the language of schooling because of having a different home language?

- I correct them and move on.
- I make a note and address it with the child later.
- I use it as an opportunity to learn about their language and culture and appreciate their efforts to learn the language of the education system.

When a child makes a mistake in the language of schooling it is important to respond in a supportive and constructive manner. Correcting the child's mistake in a positive and non-judgemental way can help them learn and improve their language skills. It is important to acknowledge and value the child's other languages (and culture) as this can contribute to their overall sense of belonging and sense of identity. Encouraging a child to use their full linguistic repertoire as a resource and providing them with opportunities to practice their language skills can support their language development and academic success.

5. How do you respond when a child speaks a language you don't know or understand?

- I ask them to speak the language of schooling.
- I try to understand what they are saying through the context or by either asking another child to translate or by using translation software.
- I ask the child to teach me some words and phrases and make an effort to learn more about the language.

When a child speaks or uses a language that you don't understand, it can be challenging to respond in a supportive way. However, it is important to acknowledge and value the child's language and culture even if you cannot communicate in that language yourself. You can use non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions to convey understanding and support. Another approach might be to ask the child (or a peer) to translate or explain what they are saying. Creating a language-friendly classroom environment that welcomes and values linguistic diversity can support the children's sense of belonging and responding with respect, openness and curiosity can help to create a positive and inclusive learning environment.

6. How do you respond when a child shares something from their culture or language?

- I tend to ignore it and continue with the lesson.
- I acknowledge it but don't make a big deal out of it.
- I encourage them to share and try and incorporate it into the lesson.

When a child shares something from their culture or language it is important to respond in a supportive and respectful manner. Ignoring the child's contribution or not acknowledging it can convey a message that the language and / or culture are not valued whereas placing too much of an emphasis on it can feel performative or tokenistic. A supportive approach would be to acknowledge the child's contribution and show a genuine interest in what they have shared, and to, where possible, incorporate it into the lesson, while also respecting the child's privacy and not placing any undue pressure on them to share or expand.

7. How do you feel about learning more about the languages and cultures of the children in your class and classroom?

- I don't feel it is part of my role.
- I would like to learn more about it, but I don't have time for it.
- I think it is essential to allow me to build relationships and create an inclusive classroom environment.

By learning about the languages and cultures of the children in the class, you can get to know the child better, and form strong relationships. This will help you understand their learning needs and background and create an inclusive classroom environment. While it might require some extra time and effort, investing in learning about children's languages and cultures can benefit all in the classroom community develop their intercultural understanding and support their language development.

8. How do you feel about using multicultural and multilingual resources and literature in the classroom?

- I prefer to focus on the texts that relate to the language of schooling.
- It is ok as long as it doesn't interfere with their learning of the language of schooling.
- It is an important way to expose children to different perspectives and cultures.

Using multicultural and multilingual resources and literature in the classroom can provide children with an exposure to different perspectives and cultures. This can help the children develop an intercultural awareness and understanding. Providing multilingual literature and resources in your classroom can also help the children develop their language skills and can complement language learning by providing real-life examples of language use and contexts.

9. How do you feel about the children teaching each other their home languages where this is not the language of schooling?

- I would prefer children to speak the language of schooling in the classroom.
- It is ok, as long as it doesn't interfere with their learning of the language of schooling.
- It is a great opportunity for children to learn about different languages and cultures.

Children sharing their (home) language(s) can help to promote cultural exchange, foster language development and create a sense of community and inclusivity in the classroom. Becoming aware of different languages and language structures can support language and literacy development in the language of schooling.

10. How do you respond when you hear negative comments about a child's language or culture?

- I ignore it.
- I speak to the children or adults involved privately.
- I address this publicly and use it as a teachable moment.

Teachers and educators have an important role in promoting respect, diversity, and inclusion. It is important to understand the speaker's perspective and reasons for their comments whilst also emphasising the importance of respecting and valuing different cultures and languages. This can create an opportunity for you to talk about the value of diversity, the richness of different cultures and the benefits of speaking more than one language.

Interested in visualising your own linguistic repertoire and reflect on your attitudes towards languages and plurilingualism?

You can find more (reflective) tools and resources in the following ECML projects:

MALEDIVE – [“Visualising Language repertoires”](#) and [“Experiencing a new language”](#)

PEPELINO – [European Portfolio for pre-primary educators](#) – the plurilingual and intercultural dimension

Download the portfolio



Download the portfolio: [English](#) - [French](#) - [German](#) - [Polish](#) - [Spanish](#)

In order to use the Portfolio in an interactive way, first save the document on your computer and use Acrobat Reader (only v.11 or above) to add and save your texts in the Portfolio.

Download the Tracing the reflection process pages in [English](#), [French](#) and [German](#)