



NEWSLETTER # 1 – January 2020

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## Intro

We are glad to present our first newsletter of the European project 'Planting languages. Seeds of success'. This project will focus upon 'Family Language Policy' in multilingual families. During two years we will develop our expertise and translate this into practical tools for future and young parents. In this newsletter we'll give you some first impressions about the depth interviews we did with multilingual families. You'll also read a short report of the project meeting which took place in Brussels in January. This meeting focused on the development of the theoretical framework and selecting crucial topics. In this and all future newsletters you will find some parental experiences and professional advices we wish to share. In each newsletter one partner will explain a bit more about their work and approach.

## Who are we?

*Five organizations that felt the need to strengthen their approach of multilingual families to give optimal language advices in very diverse contexts. We also experienced that parents search for sustained reflection and the possibilities to share experiences.*



- Foyer vzw – Belgium - [www.foyer.be](http://www.foyer.be) - [hilde.desmedt@foyer.be](mailto:hilde.desmedt@foyer.be)
- Association for promotion of Polish Language Abroad - United Kingdom - [www.appla.org](http://www.appla.org) - [a.martowicz@appla.org](mailto:a.martowicz@appla.org)
- Multilingual Café – France - [www.multilingualcafe.com](http://www.multilingualcafe.com) - [isabelle@multilingualcafe.com](mailto:isabelle@multilingualcafe.com)
- Stichting Onderwijsadvies – Netherlands - [www.onderwijsadvies.nl](http://www.onderwijsadvies.nl) - [m.vanmil@onderwijsadvies.nl](mailto:m.vanmil@onderwijsadvies.nl)
- UCLan Cyprus University – Cyprus - [www.uclancyprus.ac.cy](http://www.uclancyprus.ac.cy) - [AKanikli@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:AKanikli@uclan.ac.uk)



## First meeting of the five partners of the Erasmus + project Planting Languages

*From 13th till 15th of January the first meeting of the project Planting Languages took place in Brussels (Belgium).*

Foyer vzw, based in Molenbeek, hosted the first meeting.

*Planting Languages – our team*



The meeting started with the presentation of the activities of Foyer. The website of the project was also presented and the partners had the opportunity to give their precious feedback. Soon after the first meeting the project's website is going to be online.

During the first period of the project every partner got into research. The result is a document with different topics regarding Family Language Policy to be discussed.

At the end of the afternoon the eight topics were chosen: this topics are going to be the basis of the booklet for parents, one of the outputs of the project.

On the 14th of January the workday started with the presentation by each partner of the results of the interviews of ten families. The presentations were interesting and each partner contributed to define the content of the 8 topics which are going to be the basis of the first output of the project.

After a long working day the partners visited the palace of the Normal and the Strange things, which is an interactive workshop to help children to think critically and to know the difference between a fact and an opinion and what prejudice and discrimination mean.

Afterwards we visited the new project of Foyer: the museum of the migration.

The migration museum gives a permanent home to the stories of the first generation of guest workers, of the earliest inhabitants of the Petit-Château, of the expats, the war refugees, the Europeans who move freely within the EU and many others. It is a warm environment where the partners discovered Brussels and the lives of others through memories and souvenirs.

The last day of the meeting was dedicated to the planning of the next phase of the project: during the next two months the partners are creating the first version of the booklet. In March each partner is starting to use the booklet with fifteen families.

The next meeting of the partners will take place from the 2nd till the 5th of June 2020 in Lille (France). We are already looking forward of further exchanging results of our work.



## Depth interviews - some first impressions

*We executed about 50 interviews with multilingual families with at least one child under the age of five. Most of them lived in a family context with more than two languages present. The families represented different profiles: couples, single families, reconstituted families. Most of them had a migration background and we included also refugee families. We used an oral approach with open questions and at the end some multiple choice questions to check out respondent's understandings of multilingualism, maintenance and transmission.*

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*About the status of the languages: "Even though Berbers is a piece of father's identity, he chooses not to speak it with his daughter because it's a minority language in Morocco."*

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We give a summary of some first findings:

Most parents did chose their **mother tongue as first language of communication** with their child. The main motivation is to maintain close and easy contact with the family. Some families deviate from this approach. The main reason they express is the low status of the mother tongue. A clear explicit example was found in one of our interviews done by UCLAN. The family, living in Cyprus, did put forward Russian (mother tongue of the mother) and English but they avoided Romanian (mother tongue father). Both parents think that Romanian is a language that will not help their children have a good future.

Most parents planned their approach. Quite a lot of them **experienced a lack of information**. Some read some literature or searched for advice on the internet. Direct contact with an expert and workshops were experienced as most useful and needed. Hearing, reading experiences from other parents is a positive source.

Most parents felt they could make their own decisions but nevertheless they still have **doubts** about the balance between their mother tongue and the majority language. This results in some cases in cumulative language mixing. A lot of parents mention that they are concerned about the identity development of their children and are afraid their approach can create confusion. But other parents believe that children will integrate the languages in their identity and will be well prepared for our multilingual society.

A cause of doubts and **changes in approach** are also introduced by the children, especially when they start at school and start using the majority language more frequently. Parents realize that multilingual education is a dynamic process. It creates stress when, as we saw in some cases, the child rejects one of the home languages. As an Arabic, Tigrinya family in the Netherlands told us their child said: 'Speaking home language is stupid because nobody understands me'.

**Reactions from friends and family** upon the parents' language choices often are positive but depend on their own experiences. If they lack experiences in multilingual education themselves, they express a lot of doubts. It's stressful for parents if environment question their choices. The religious, cultural community is mostly seen as supportive, in some cases by organizing classes and creates opportunities for peers' contacts in the mother tongue. Some parents often find themselves in a position of defending their choices. A couple using OPOL strategy (Greek/Czech) in UK (APPLA 8) said: "we get tired of explaining to other people what languages we use at home and why".



**Daycares and schools** differ a lot: some sustain strongly the choice for a multilingual education but in other cases they express doubts and even advice parents to drop their home language.

We still met some **myths**. Parents who thought their multilingual approach would cause language delay and even impairment.

**Some of the multiple choice questions:** We executed about 50 interviews. These questions were answered by one or both of the parents.

It was remarkable that for all families the home language was something to cherish and parents felt it was their responsibility to transmit these languages. For the majority this assumed at least two parental languages considered as minority language in their current lives. Nevertheless about 1/3 thought or doubted that more languages could confuse their children. So they felt clearly unsure about their approach. About 40% experienced negative attitudes towards these minority languages.

### Some of the questions and answers:

*When parents help their children to maintain their mother tongue, parents are giving them a valuable gift.*

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Either way/don't know	Somewhat disagree	Fully disagree
58	3	-	-	-

Using more than one language at home will confuse the children.

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Either way/don't know	Somewhat disagree	Fully disagree
3	9	7	12	26

In the society we live in, we often experience negative attitudes towards minority languages.

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Either way/don't know	Somewhat disagree	Fully disagree
13	12	13	13	10

## Language portrait

In this topic you can discover specific experiences of a family. This time about their feeling and emotions.

### FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS



#### Family + situation

The family is a Franco-Italian family living in France. The mother speaks in Italian to the children, although the father is a French-speaker, he speaks in English; the parents feel that they have the school and environment to speak in French and thus help develop this language for the children. The children are 5 and 3 years of age.

A language is not just like words. It is also about emotions... It is all about emotions. It is about how you see that language, the way that it comes from you... So maybe, I don't know, one of the kids will be better in one language in the way they prefer to live his life in one language and another kid in another one, we don't know.

I am aware that my family speak only Italian and so I want that my kids speak Italian because I want them to communicate with my family, but not just to say: "I would like some water", but to really talk with them.

The eldest child does not like to speak English here's what the mother is saying:  
I think in a way she knows that I speak Italian and you speak French, so again where is her need to speak English, because she can go without... Everyone that we know is bilingual... and they still speak French... so there is no need for her to speak English

## A partner in the picture

### *OnderwijsAdvies – Netherlands*

#### *OnderwijsAdvies@work*



OnderwijsAdvies (EducationAdvice) is a Dutch entrepreneurial entrepreneurial and innovative organisation assisting customers in schooling, education and care. In all our activities we focus on improving the best development and education of children. We employ about 200 passionate professionals involved in educating of children and supporting professionals herein.

For OnderwijsAdvies the development of children is the centre of all activities. Often we work in a school environment. We are also partners of local Youth Health Care Centres and day care. We look at what a child needs to develop her/his abilities and competences, but also how the family and professionals can accommodate this and if other organisations and institutions could help.

The Speech- and Language department consists of preventive working speech- and language therapists and language specialists. Early detection of young (multilingual) children with language problems is one of the main goals. We also advice families and professionals about language stimulation and multilingual development. The professionals of the speech and language department work daily with children aged 0-12 years at Youth Health Care Centres, day care, primary schools and Internationals Schools in the region Leiden and Hoofddorp. The activities of the preventive working therapists are usually financed by the local government.

## Some advice formulated by Antri Kanikli

*Question: Does watching television in the target languages help multilingual acquisition?*



TV is a significant aspect of a child's environment. Thus, some parents use it to increase the child's exposure to the target languages. However, parents should bear in mind that the linguistic input a child receives from television significantly differs from the one (s)he receives through social interaction, because when the child watches television, (s)he is not an active user of the language. As Hoff (2006:71) emphasises, 'even the best TV is not a fully adequate source of language input', and in cases where it replaces communicative activities that support language development, it negatively affects language acquisition in general.

#### References

Hoff, E. (2006). How Social Contexts Support and Shape Language Development. *Developmental Review* 26. 55-88. DOI: 10.1016/j.dr.2005.11.002



**CALL: we are looking for experts for our different reflection groups!**

Each partner will organize an expert group to reflect about our outcome and organize tryouts. These meetings will be especially interesting for people working with young multilingual couples who are still in the process of developing their Family Language Policy. You want to take part? Please contact one of the partners.



You can expect our second newsletter in June.  
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