

WelComm: Communication Skills for Integration of Migrants Erasmus+ Programme 2014

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF THE NEEDS ANALYSIS

Target group: Language Educators, Volunteers, Migrant Organisations

INTRODUCTION

Language barriers among migrant families

Families migrating to a new country often experience language barriers, insecurity about finances, employment and housing, lack of traditional support mechanisms such as family and friends, and misunderstandings due to cultural differences.

Regardless of how long immigrants have lived in the new country, they feel distinct from other local people because of cultural practices and beliefs, language, religion, habits, etc.

Concerning the children, in reality, there is great diversity in the language abilities among young children when they start their school life.

Some children grow up in households only hearing and speaking the native language of their parents, while others learn the local language simultaneously with another language and are on a path to become bilingual in two (or sometimes more) languages.

Young children with less exposure to the host language in their earliest years will be challenged by their language skills upon school entry. Research shows that the foreign young learners score lower on measures of academic achievement than native speakers. This achievement gap begins early and can persist throughout the elementary and secondary years.

Early education can address school readiness and language acquisition, enabling children to enter kindergarten with more advanced language skills and better preparing them to learn and to succeed. Participation in early education may also facilitate integration for immigrant families into the host society.

The WelComm project is aimed at addressing those issues by providing opportunities for **equal start in education for migrant children** in pre-primary and primary school age, and at the same time, raising awareness of **the importance of education for social inclusion from early age** among migrant parents. This is to be achieved through the development of a **Multimedia Learning Kit for Migrant Children** creating basic communication skills in the host country language. The Kit will include fully animated films, games and comics where all themes are presented as learning activities with personal involvement of learners.

Number of questionnaires collected in all countries: 98

1. Type of institutions

Most of the respondents that took part on this project collaborate with **educational institution/schools (69)**, while **17 of them are linked to organisations working for the integration of migrants**, **12 to volunteer organizations** and **5 to governmental institutions / public authorities**.

2. Organizations' location

On the universe of this questionnaire, 22 organizations are located in Italy and 16 in Spain. Each of the remaining countries - Bulgaria, Cyprus, Netherlands and Portugal - concentrates 15 participating institutions.

| Country | City |
|-------------|---|
| Bulgaria | Plovdiv (1), Sofia (15); |
| Cyprus | Larnaca (4), Limassol (2), Nicosia (9); |
| Italy | Scandicci-Florence (6), Siena (16); |
| Netherlands | Rotterdam (15); |
| Portugal | Leiria (5), Lisboa (4), Loures (3), Oeiras (3); |
| Spain | Valencia (15). |

3. Experiences of language/cultural misunderstandings among migrant and native children

Most of the answers (65 against 33) testify situations where language and/or cultural misunderstandings among migrant and native children have occurred.

The ways each participant did handle with such experiences were rather diverse. Right after follows how each of them act in order to solve those situations.

- Together with colleagues we tried to make a link between both cultures, by talking to each child first separately, then together;
- I translated and tried to break the language barriers in that moment;
- We tried to interfere as cultural mediators;
- By games based on the parts of human body and sensations (using few words);
- By repeating requests;
- By listening and understanding the different perspectives;
- With the help of an interpreter (most often a family member or a friend);
- Trying to use google translation;
- Explaining with simple words/gestures;
- Asking experienced colleagues for help and assistance;
- Talking to the parents;
- With tolerance, patience and understanding;
- By spending time individually and in groups, helping them to unite in a project, i.e. creating simple artwork (could be traditional dress or food as the subject);

- I try not to divide students based on cultural differences and I look for a common language and interests;
- Interactivity in the communication along with genuine expression of emotions is an universal “language” in all cultures;
- Transmitting empathy to them to be able to take the place of the other;
- Asked students to collect information on their classmates’ country;
- Discussion on cultural differences;
- Explanation of language differences and similarities;
- Presentation from immigrant students about their country;
- Asked local students to teach every day their immigrant peers a new word/sentence/expression in the local language.

4. Important aspects for working in a multicultural environment

In this field as well, several issues were pointed out as being important for a good multicultural environment at work, namely as follows:

- To have contact with foreigners;
- To know how to respect different cultures;
- To be calm, friendly and comprehensive;
- To know how to communicate in a foreign language;
- Awareness of cultural differences;
- Young people to feel comfortable in a non-threatening environment and not feel judged by their peers;
- Tolerance, openness towards new ideas, interactivity;
- Social communication skills;
- Open mind towards different cultures;
- Skills in more than one language (mediator);
- Respect towards the differences, patience and tolerance;
- Flexibility necessary for adaptation of the approach towards specific needs;
- Adequate preparation, including knowledge about relevant cultures, ready tools for dealing with potential conflict situations;
- Psychological skills;
- Appropriate work materials;
- Integration skills;
- Pinpointing common starting points and organizing inclusion activities;
- Organising workshops and exhibitions (culinary, artistic, etc.) for promoting cultures;
- Cultural events and meetings;
- Language integration;
- Make sure that participants feel comfortable;
- People need to be educated and informed about different cultures and social differences;
- Conflict management;
- Cultural programme;
- Lessons focused on sociology, politics and mutual understanding;
- Respect for linguistic and cultural diversity;
- Holistic and global approach towards classrooms;
- Comparison among cultures;

- Knowledge of different habits and lifestyles;
- Importance of cognitive and affective dimension;
- Civic education;
- Motivation from educators staff;
- By sharing experiences;
- Getting to know more about habits / traditions of other cultures;
- Talking about migrants' norms and host country's norms and traditions and discussing the differences;
- Empathy. To be able to take the place of the other;
- Open mind to understand different cultures and, therefore, different points of view, beliefs, etc.

5. Language and cultural barriers affecting the level of the social integration

Nearly the totality of answers (96 positive versus 2 negative ones) is in accordance to the fact that language and cultural barriers do affect the way of how people interact socially.

As follows are the several points of view expressed, as regards to both causes and consequences on the impact of language and cultural barriers in social interactions.

- Those barriers have negative effects on people's behaviors and led them to isolation;
- Foreign people don't feel themselves comfortable to share their culture, due to the existing lack of comprehension, and lack of opportunities from the locals;
- They feel stressful, not comfortable and move around;
- Without communication, misunderstandings emerge in everyday life;
- If the immigrants can't speak the local language, they become introvert, lonely, depressed and it's difficult to them to make new friends;
- There are many stereotypes which influence people's way of thinking. Often stereotyping can encourage bullying behaviour that children carry into adulthood;
- They create circumstances for misunderstanding of the people in need of social integration which often causes hostility in certain groups from the host society;
- The host society lacks sufficient information about the conflict in the Middle East and issues related to the Islam as a religion. Consequently, for me, the lack of adequate knowledge of the "others", the reasons behind their situation, problems and needs is the main obstacle for a successful social integration of immigrants in Bulgaria;
- The language barriers hinder the main integration instrument – the communication;
- The cultural barriers limit the participation of the immigrant in different social activities;
- Such barriers hinder the communication which can easily lead to isolation and marginalization, activate stereotypes and provoke acts of discrimination;
- They obstruct the social inclusion;
- The impossibility to express and defend your position is a main barrier both for people seeking integration and for the host society;
- Impossibility to solve basic problems in the field of education, health care, social services, etc.;
- People tend to gravitate towards their own and stick to what is familiar to them;
- Communication problems can make them "stick with their own". They may feel uncomfortable outside their own culture/environment;

- The cultural differences may cause high interest if presented appropriately. And on the contrary, when there is no common point of interest and communication, the barriers may lead to alienation and stigmatization;
- risk of marginalization and distrust towards diversity;
- More difficult access to information and services , difficult to build interpersonal networks;
- Limits in mutual understanding, risk of conflict;
- If you don't speak the language of the host country you cannot participate and integrate in society;
- Living isolated and not knowing anything about the culture and traditions of the host country makes finding a job more difficult;
- Not speaking the language of the country means less self-confidence and dependence on family members (usually migrant wives dependent on husbands);
- Language is crucial to be able to interact with others. You can not be fully integrated in society if you are not able to communicate by yourself;
- Culture affects the way we interact with our environment. Our social integration depends on how different our culture is with the hosting country's culture. It also depends on our ability to adapt and our flexibility;
- Inadequate knowledge of local language can prevent immigrants' academic performance and their vocational rehabilitation;
- These barriers can lead to social exclusion;
- Can lead to ghetto neighborhoods.

6. Negative consequences from the existing barriers in communication between children with different cultural backgrounds

Opinions on negative effects arising from intercultural communication barriers between children are rather congregated on the risk of social exclusion (83), on problems in the learning process (79), on difficulties in making friends (73) and on lack of self-esteem (63).

Additionally, other impacts are pointed out as regards to this complexity, such as:

- Hostility towards the host society;
- Potential discriminatory attitude from teachers, social workers, etc.;
- All the above may lead to permanent changes in the character which may hinder the children lead a normal life in the society;
- Verbal aggressiveness;
- Insecurity.

7. Do you think it is useful for language teachers and educators to have adequate language learning materials for social inclusion from early age?

Almost the totality of the participants (96 against 2) defend the importance of teachers and educators having proper language learning materials for social inclusion from early age.

8. Five priority topics to be developed in the learning materials according to the relevance of each item

According to the relevance given by the respondents to each item, the five priority topics selected are:

- Family
- School life
- Cultural and traditional celebrations
- Games
- House

9. Five priority objects to be developed in the learning materials according to the relevance of each item:

According to the relevance given to each item by the participants, the five priority objects selected are:

- Numbers
- Animals
- Parts of human body
- Colours
- Seasons, months, days

10. Language games considered appropriate for working with young children

There is a generalized acceptance of the main language games identified in the questionnaires as for being proper for dealing with young children. This is rather evident with the answers' frequencies on the different items:

- Motion games with music (84)
- Board games (75)
- Colouring books (72)
- Puzzles (66)
- Memory cards (51)
- Card games (47)
- Language dices (43)
- Domino (32).

Furthermore, other language games were also acknowledged for their adequateness as work tools with children, namely, songs, interactive games, role-plays and sports games combining physical activity with language learning.

11. Local traditional fairy tales appropriate to be developed as comic books for children

Hereby there is a list of traditional fairy tales identified by the participants in each of the six countries where questionnaires were applied. They believe that these are stories rather adequate for being developed as comic books for children.

BULGARIA

- Tales of Peter Sly (Приказки за Хитър Петър)
- The three brothers and the golden apple (Тримата братя и златната ябълка)
- Sick carries healthy (Болен здрав носи)
- Unborn girl (Неродена мома)

- Working Bear (Работна мецана)
- Kuma Lisa and Ezhko Bezhko (Кума Лиса и Ежко Бежко)
- Grandpa pulls turnip (Дядо вади ряпа)
- Kose Bose (Коце Боце)
- Dragon wedding (Змейова сватба)
- Tale of woe (Приказка за неволята)
- Bulgarian folk tales (Български народни приказки)
- The seven kids (Седемте козлета) (what is the meaning and symbolism of different animals in different cultures)
- Tales of animals from the collections of Nikolay Raynov (Приказки за животни от сборниците на Николай Райнов)

CYPRUS

- "Once upon a time in Cyprus" Costas Papageorgiou collection of fairy tales
- "Fairy tales of a storyteller Grandfather" George Theophanous
- "Kalomira, a fairy tale from Cyprus"
- "The Koutalou"
- "The shoemaker and the king"
- "The old man and the three sisters"
- "The wooden cup"
- "The captain and his godchild".

ITALY

- Little Red Riding Hood
- The three little pigs
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs
- Pinocchio
- Hansel and Gretel
- Little Thumb
- The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly
- Traditional stories about animal world
- The snow queen
- The wolf and the seven little goats
- The magic beans
- The Little Prince
- Puss in Boots

NETHERLANDS

- Little Red Riding Hood
- Hansel and Gretel
- Snow White
- Tom Thumb
- Cinderella.

PORTUGAL

- Snow White

- Little Red Riding Hood,
- Sleeping Beauty,
- Pinocchio,
- Jack and the Beanstalk (“João, pé de feijão”)

SPAIN

- Any of the traditional fairy tales known by children all around the world;
- Children show more interest towards what they already know than to completely new ones.

CONCLUSION

Altogether, the results above reflect the convergence of the several specialized institutions that took part in this inquiry exercise, given their expertise and significant experience in such a sensitive issue as immigration and difficulties arising from the need of both adults and children to become part of their host countries and communities without having their origin identity, culture and beliefs threatened.

Furthermore, these conclusions also conciliate with the pedagogical recommendations of the specialized partners of the WelComm project in terms of education methods specially targeted to children, whose levels of both concentration and apprehension are strongly linked, most of the times, to the attractiveness of methodologies used with such a challenging target group, specially as regards to challenges associated with dealing with a well succeeded adaptation and integration in children’s host communities at such a critical stage of life for their present and future endeavors.