

18 - Preparing an environment for offering language support

Aim: To offer practical advice about organising space and providing resources for language support sessions.

It is important not to worry if nothing at all is available: you can support language learning effectively by just explaining, miming and acting out different words and expressions. Depending on the context, however, it is useful to consider the following recommendations.

The Learning environment

- Try to find a space that is well lit. Make it as welcoming as you can and encourage everyone to help keep it clean and tidy. You can also discuss some shared rules with the participants on the use of the learning space.
- Give the space intercultural and plurilingual feel by allowing participants to make use of their languages to support their own and each other's learning and displaying information about refugees' home countries, and the host country etc.

Resources

- Collect a range of resources such as maps, photos, posters, music, videos of the host country and pictures of numbers, letters and words to support practice of vocabulary in the new language.
- If no wall board is available, try to get a small, portable board to write and draw on.
- Prepare a collection of simple real-world items (realia) such as public transport tickets and timetables, maps, leaflets from relevant local service providers, packaging and labels, job adverts, newspapers and other objects from home as these can aid comprehension and make language practice more interesting, meaningful and realistic. In addition, collect and use a variety of photos and pictures cut out of magazines and stuck on card. If several volunteers are working together you can build up a shared set of these resources.
- Especially if an internet connection is available, smartphones, laptops, and other portable devices can help refugees to become more independent learners. They can take photos of signs, public transport, notices, buildings etc. that interest them, and look them up on the internet if necessary, and practise language between sessions.
- If available, a printer or photocopier is very useful to print out worksheets, handouts, local information, etc.

Stationery

- Try to make sure each refugee has a pen or pencil and a notebook (an additional small one for recording new vocabulary would be very useful, too).
- If no stationery is available, refugees can use recycled paper and a stapler.
- Post-it notes, scissors and glue can also be very useful for various activities.
- Lined paper is good for refugees who are new to writing or who are beginners in the script of the host country.

- Large sheets of paper are good for posters made during group brainstorming, for mind maps and spider-grams, and for sharing ideas.
- If available, different coloured pens can be helpful for highlighting different topics.
- Use Blu-Tack or sticky tape to display and share work done on the walls.