

23 - Reflecting on your language support work

Aim: This tool offers guidance on keeping a record of your experiences of providing language support to refugees and your reflections on these experiences.

There are many reasons why you should reflect on your language support work. Critically reflecting on your own practice as part of your language support interactions with refugees is important in ensuring that you learn from what you are doing and that you develop your own skills and confidence over time. Among the reasons for regular reflection are the following:

- To regularly give yourself time to think about your language support work.
- To enable you to take individual and group needs into account in future sessions.
- To help you understand what works well and what doesn't work well.
- To identify your areas of strength and/or uncertainty.

This tool suggests ways in which you could carry out reflection, and how you might use the process in your future practice. You should also think about your own experiences as a learner as these may help you in this process.

Making a habit of keeping a record

1. Try to set aside 15 minutes after each language support session to reflect on how the activities worked and what progress refugees made.
2. Do not let problems or difficulties detract from what you did well.
3. Write quick notes in a diary or log. Your record can be in any form you like. You might prefer to create an audio or video diary using your mobile phone.
4. Note down points to remember when planning your next session with the same refugees or for the same activity with a different group.
5. Use all situations, however difficult they might be, as learning opportunities.
6. From time to time ask the refugees you work with what they think about the language support activities. Their comments can be very useful too.
7. If possible, talk through some of your reflections with other volunteers. It is very useful to share ideas about what has gone well and why – as well as coming up with ideas for improvement.

Some guidelines for keeping and using a record based on observations and actions

Group:

Observation:

Note differences in the group which impact on learning and /or interaction such as age, gender, previous education, literacy etc. (see also Tool 14 [Diversity in working groups](#)).

Action:

Try to adjust activities to the range of needs in the group.

Ambiance:

Observation:

Note how individuals cooperate, show tolerance, behave towards one another and to you.

Action:

Think about creating group rules in collaboration with the refugees. Think about how you can foster a positive atmosphere. If necessary get advice.

Participation and interaction:

Observation:

Note who is/is not participating, who seems bored or disengaged.

Action:

Adjust future activities to ensure that all refugees have the opportunity to participate. Make sure that instructions are clear. Check that there are no cultural constraints on participation. Be careful not to talk too much.

Understanding and communication difficulties:

Observation:

Note non-verbal signs of confusion or misunderstanding. Note how quickly/slowly the refugees respond to language stimuli, questions or tasks. Note any individuals who are constantly asking others for translation or help.

Action:

Speak more slowly and use simple language. Use repetition and emphasis in your own speech. Ask refugees in the group to translate for you if necessary. Break down activities into smaller tasks. Use pictures, mime or gesture to support understanding.

Reflective activity for volunteers

Work through the questions on the next page focusing on those that seem most relevant to you in your situation.

When you have finished thinking about the questions, decide whether it would be good to discuss anything with a colleague, another volunteer, a friend or family member etc.

Date		
Think about	Answers	Notes for the future
Topic, activity and resources		
What was the focus of the language support session? (scenario, words, expressions)		
What language support activities did you use?		
What resources did you use?		
What worked well? Why?		
What didn't work well? Why?		

Think about	Answers	Notes for the future
Group		
Who was in the group (names, ages, new people etc.)?		
How did individuals/the group react (enthusiasm, anxiety, concentration, comprehension etc.)		
Volunteer's views		
How much progress did they make (individually and as a group)?		
How did you feel after the session? Excited and satisfied or worried?		
What did you learn from the session (about these refugees, about the language etc.)?		
Will you make changes next time? What kinds of changes?		
Other points you thought of		

Example of a reflective log which may be used or adjusted for your needs

Log			
Name		Location	
Session date		Time	
Brief notes on who attended			
Topics covered/language practised			
Any issues/follow up action			
What worked well?			
Ideas to improve session next time			
What did I learn?			
What do I want to find out more about?			