



Language Support for Migrants *A Council of Europe Toolkit*

Tool 16 - Taking account of diversity when providing language support for migrants

Aim: To offer guidance on managing and taking advantage of differences among learners within a group when providing language support.

The impact of diversity on a learning group

There are some differences within groups which may have a direct influence on the language learning support you provide. For example, in the checklist in Tool 17, items 2, 3, 4 and 5 all refer to having existing knowledge or skills. Learners with previous experience of formal learning, particularly language learning, will have valuable learning strategies that they can apply to the new challenge. If they are given a form to fill in, they will realise that they don't need to understand every word to make some sense of it. They may well use their phone or a dictionary to help them find the meaning of any new words and they may also feel less self-conscious or anxious about asking for help.

In such cases, it may be necessary to identify learning activities at different levels of difficulty in order to deal with a range of skills and levels of confidence in a group. Learners with some prior experience in (language) learning are often keen to make quick progress and will try to use new words and phrases, whereas learners with little or no previous experience of formal education and/or language learning will need more time, help and opportunities for repetition.

There are some differences in diverse groups which do not have a direct impact on language learning but may nevertheless influence behaviour or lead to different attitudes towards working together in a group. These factors may influence your decisions about how you divide individuals into sub-groups for particular activities, or what you ask individual members of the group to do.

Difference is not a problem. You can exploit it

Differences are not an obstacle to working and learning together. For example, differences can be used effectively to get stronger participants to support those who have more difficulty learning. By establishing a supportive environment, you can get everybody to contribute to this support according to their individual abilities. For example, a learner who seems to be facing a very big language-learning challenge may be able to draw pictures very well. Another may enjoy singing.

Some suggestions

Look at the suggestions below for working with diverse and mixed groups. Consider which suggestions would be relevant in your situation and how you could apply them.

Suggestions	✓
<p>1. Encourage learners to recognise and build on the things they have in common: learners will all be fluent in at least one language. During their journey, they have had to manage situations without necessarily being able to use much of the languages needed. They will all have valuable past experiences and skills, which can be used to learn the new language. You can also suggest that they try the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • producing a language self-portrait (see also: Tool 50 - <i>Plurilingual portrait: a reflective task for migrants</i>) • using nonverbal means (gestures, mime, use of objects and pictures etc.) 	
<p>2. Use the skills of some learners to support others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of getting learners to work in pairs so that someone who already has a little ability in the new language can work with someone who is new to the language. • Ask learners to give each other feedback focusing on the positive, for example on what their peers have been able to do in the language. 	
<p>3. Make sure that everyone learns something new:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce something new: for some learners, this may be one word, for others a sentence, and for others an expression. Show learners that communication can be effective with just one word. For example, 'sorry?' can convey meaning just as well as 'I'm sorry but would you mind repeating that?' • Help everybody to see and hear what they have learned, for example by summarizing the language points focused on during the session. 	
<p>4. If you have a group where some learners are at beginner or elementary level in the language being learned and others are more advanced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you can sometimes group the more advanced learners and the elementary level learners together and give them different tasks to do • at other times, especially if they share another language, you can pair elementary learners with more advanced learners so that the advanced learners can provide help, including in their shared language, as well as encouragement. • you can monitor the work of the different groups and pairs by moving around the class answering questions and checking that they have understood the activity and are working well together. 	
<p>5. If you have a group of younger learners or young children, or a mixed group involving learners of very different ages you may also need to give different age-groups different activities and different resources.</p>	
<p>6. <u>Create a purposeful, relaxing, learning environment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share some information about yourself. • Encourage real, meaningful communication between the learners and yourself. • Ask them how they like to be addressed, check the pronunciation of their names and use the names they prefer. 	
<p>Your own ideas and experiences:</p>	

A note on different learning preferences

People may have preferences about how they like to learn, particularly if they have had previous experience of formal learning. For example, some people may prefer to hear an instruction, others to read it on the board and others to follow instructions in a diagram. Using a wide range of different activities and resources will maximise the impact of learning opportunities, help to engage people in learning, and reduce any possible barriers.

Using the Toolkit to plan

This toolkit offers a variety of approaches which will help you to choose activities. See the section called *Preparing and planning language support*.