

Bonus material 6.2. Language environment

It is a good idea for parents to consider their child's language environment as early as they can in order to utilise its strengths in a best possible way. The language environment refers to all the places and situations where a child has an opportunity to be in touch with his or her parents' languages. The language environment you create for your child will form the basis of how he/she learns. By introducing the language in a wide-ranging and varying way, you will allow your child to pick up every aspect of the language, and the culture which comes with it, and have fun while doing it. Below are some examples which constitute the most vital areas in terms of language development.

Firstly, speak to both sides of the family and ensure that they are involved and on board in supporting your child's bilingualism. You are not alone in trying to bring your language and culture to your child and every little helps – from either side. For example, encourage others to speak in the minority language if possible and ask them to give you the freedom to speak to your child in your native tongue even if those around you are speaking the community language. Also, try to establish links with other families who speak the same language. By doing this, your child will be able to be in different environments with people who speak the same language, thus normalising it and allowing them to develop a stronger understanding. This is an important factor, as languages are best picked up through social interaction.

As mentioned above, language clubs and classes can also help immensely, as children learn through playing with their peers. Beyond this, enrolling your child in a foreign-language kindergarten will mean that they receive more exposure to the second language than they would if they began their education in the community language. However, make sure you discuss the latter point in great detail with your spouse before deciding if this is the right path for your family. This should not become a negative or stressful situation, as the child will pick up on this. For example, if the long commute to the kindergarten is causing stress or trouble, your child may end up associating this negativity and stress with the language.

Culture is closely related to the encouraging and maintaining of a child's multicultural and multilingual identity. You can achieve this by placing emphasis on the traditions and celebrations observed in your own country, as well as telling stories and traditional fables to entertain your child. This will make them feel more involved and part of your culture, and when they go to the expatriate parent's home country everything will seem more familiar. To reinforce this point, make sure you actively talk about what happens in your own culture and its history – especially aspects that are very different to the community in which you live. Finally, be proud of your culture and language, no matter the situation. If you do this, your child will also feel the same.