

Creating an intercultural environment

Experiences and ideas provided by teachers working in schools throughout Ireland

The physical environment

- ❑ Maps or posters show the countries or flags represented by the school population. In many cases a large map is hung in the entrance area of the school. Ribbons or threads connect the countries of origin of pupils to the location of the school.
- ❑ A display of flags from different countries, sometimes with a photograph of the child on the flag
- ❑ The word 'welcome' is written on a poster, coloured paper etc. in the languages known by pupils in the school (including of course English and Irish). This may have the title 'We speak many languages here'.
- ❑ Notices throughout the school are representative of the languages spoken by the pupils
- ❑ Pupils make a map of their own country to hang in their classroom and give a short talk about that country
- ❑ Pictures, photographs, currency notes, postage stamps, front pages of newspapers etc. from different countries are used to make a display
- ❑ A display of national costumes or photographs illustrating them
- ❑ A discovery table with objects from all countries
- ❑ Projects produced by newcomer pupils are displayed in the corridors – religions, countries, cultural traditions etc.
- ❑ Current events, the World Cup for example, used as a basis for geography projects and pupils from the countries represented talk about their country
- ❑ Information about national days, holy days and holidays put on posters – e.g. Chinese New Year
- ❑ Art work and crafts of different ethnic origins displayed
- ❑ Photographs and displays of events that are important to the school are presented in a way that newcomers can understand – school tours, feast days, Halloween etc.
- ❑ For the main Irish festivals (Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick's Day, Halloween etc.) signs and information are put along the corridors in the different languages represented in the school
- ❑ Charts to show the numbers of pupils of different nationalities in the school
- ❑ Intercultural day with displays of work about other countries
- ❑ Posters about events for adults, parents etc. presented so that they can be understood by all
- ❑ Collection of postcards and holiday photographs from different places
- ❑ Photographs and recipes for foods from different countries
- ❑ Pictures of pupils surrounded by their handprints
- ❑ Books available on different cultural festivals, celebrations etc.
- ❑ Story books available about children in different cultures
- ❑ Photographic records
- ❑ Children's names are displayed and projects on 'Me'

In general the posters, displays, artwork, books etc. are used to show the colour and richness of difference but the basic 'sameness' of children from different cultures.

Activities that encourage interaction between native pupils and newcomers
The following activities, many of which are a natural part of the school day, are

consciously used to bring pupils together.

- Circle time
- Choir and singing
- Plays for small children based on material from class reader and drama for older pupils
- School tours
- Group art sessions
- Story time
- Projects on a range of mainstream topics (e.g. environment)
- Games and PE
- Cooking
- World dance day
- A buddy system for reading
- Concerts
- Introduction of newcomer pupils with a discussion about where they come from
- Study of different festivals with class groups
- Inviting newcomer pupils to bring an English-speaking friend to the language support class from time to time (using the buddy system)
- Language support teacher takes the mainstream class at regular intervals (e.g. once a week) and works on materials that will be followed up in language support in the following days. Subjects may be civics, racism, geography, SPHE topics
- Language support teacher takes a SPHE session in the mainstream class every few weeks and deals specifically with an issue of culture, difference, what it is to feel different etc.
- Pupils bring in party food on their birthdays
- Language support teacher joins in art or IT class looking at art and websites from around the world
- Story writing
- Book making
- Play time
- School band
- Majorettes
- Hurling and football matches
- Sponsored walks
- Participation in local festivals, parades etc.
- Story telling about school in different countries
- Creative movement sessions dealing with issues like exclusion/assimilation etc.
- Irish pupils helping teachers and newcomers with preparation for multicultural day
- International language day with words, songs, poems etc.
- Ecumenical prayer week used to include children from all religious backgrounds
- Inviting speakers from different countries to talk about different, relevant topics – e.g. landmines in Africa, racism in South Africa etc.
- Language support teacher taking mainstream class on a regular basis to reinforce that s/he is a ‘normal’ class teacher and so remove any possible stigma from being withdrawn for language support
- Seating newcomer pupils with native pupils
- Using assembly for presentations, songs, language, costumes, drama, stories from other countries
- Getting pupils playing together in school year or with board games for indoor breaks
- Community Games
- Swimming
- Irish dancing
- Deliberately using age-appropriate games for each class to bring children together
- Birthday parties – ensuring that the parents of newcomer pupils understand invitations etc.
- Language games
- Project World – native pupils finding out about the countries that newcomers are from
- Presentations about pupils’ interests, hobbies, families etc. (all pupils)

Occasions that bring parents together to increase understanding

- ❑ Explaining invitations to school concert to encourage parents to attend
- ❑ Newcomer parents encouraged to attend coffee mornings
- ❑ Introducing parents of newcomers to one another to encourage communication
- ❑ Meetings with principal, class teacher, and language support teacher
- ❑ Social nights in refugee/dispersal center
- ❑ Encouraging interaction between parents waiting in yard to collect children
- ❑ Home school liaison teacher arranges language classes for parents
- ❑ Home school liaison teacher runs short courses on different topics throughout the year for parents
- ❑ Home school liaison teacher organises a project which is done by newcomer mothers and children on their own country, food, families etc. This is presented in the school at the end of the year
- ❑ Attendance of parents at Pre-Confirmation sessions etc.
- ❑ Night courses for parents – IT, cookery, art and craft, aromatherapy – attended by parents from all cultural groups (good attendance by parents of newcomers)
- ❑ One World Day – food, clothes, paintings, drama etc. from different countries
- ❑ World Book Day
- ❑ Cake sales
- ❑ Open day
- ❑ Graduation day for 6th class
- ❑ Pupils write play and parents of pupils from school and other nearby schools are invited to the performance
- ❑ Language support teacher and home school liaison teacher have a regular time each week when they meet parents in the language support room for one hour

- ❑ Language classes for parents provided free of charge for 1.5 hours per week
- ❑ English classes for newcomer parents
- ❑ Cookery classes for all parents takes place once per week
- ❑ Breakfast club
- ❑ Home school liaison officer arranges speakers each week specifically for parents to attend (e.g. speech therapist talking about speech problems)
- ❑ Supervision of activities by parents
- ❑ Cookery demonstrations
- ❑ Availability of parents' room as a meeting point
- ❑ Ethos committee made up of parents from different cultural groups/nationalities
- ❑ Parents invited to talk in different classes
- ❑ Parent/toddler groups meet weekly
- ❑ Parent Association meetings
- ❑ Party, e.g. at Christmas, for parents and pupils together

NOTE: A number of teachers highlighted the need to make invitations, notices of events etc. as clear as possible to those parents who have little English.

Activities that support communication between teachers/school and parents

- ❑ Parent teacher meetings
- ❑ Clear enrolment procedures and forms
- ❑ Pictorial report forms (see IILT Teachers' Manual)
- ❑ All school events – carol service, plays etc.
- ❑ Invitations to parents to work in the classroom
- ❑ Meeting arranged with representative group from Muslim community and new Muslim parents
- ❑ Visit to Mosque arranged by school followed by lunch at Mosque
- ❑ Picture-based booklet with school times, schedules and routines
- ❑ Parents invited to send/bring in information about their culture and country

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ 'Flavours of the World' event organized by parents who cook their traditional dishes and teachers and parents enjoy an evening together ❑ Home school liaison teacher ❑ Teachers making enough time to speak to parents who cannot communicate rapidly ❑ Presence of language support teacher at school occasions ❑ Principal and teachers have been invited to visit pupils' homes ❑ Meetings to get parents involved in their children's work ❑ Open afternoon once a month for parents to view their children's work and discuss progress with language support teacher ❑ Local librarian requested to provide information session on how to use the library ❑ Information booklets about the school translated into the parents' language ❑ Availability of language support teacher to meet parents informally – open door ❑ School notes explained by language support teacher or with supplementary notes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Language support teacher meets and greets parents dropping and collecting children ❑ Regular meetings for newcomer parents with class teachers and language support teachers together ❑ Language support teacher shows European Language Portfolios to parents and comments on children's work ❑ Bulletins for parents at regular intervals on all aspects of school activity ❑ Language support room is often the first and main point of contact with the school ❑ School newsletter is used in language support class as a resource and explained to children so that they can tell their parents ❑ Sometimes interpreters are necessary to support communication ❑ Regular informal meetings are valuable to inform parents gradually about education, their child's progress and what is expected by the school ❑ Notes sent home outlining the work being done with the pupil ❑ Newspaper/novels for parents in different languages available from language support teacher |
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