

‘Plus d’une langue ‘ (More than one language)

‘Plus d’une langue’ is a mediation and training tool on language development in multilingual contexts for educators and parents of young children exposed to more than one language. The objective is to support the development of multilingual competencies in children who grow up with more than one language, thereby enabling them to benefit from the numerous advantages associated with early multilingualism.

Authors:

- Faustine Brunet, Graphic designer
- Sophie Kern, Researcher, DDL Laboratory (Lyon2-CNRS)
- Jean-Luc Vidalenc, Teacher

Context:

Today in France, around 20% of children grow up and begin to speak with more than one language. In priority neighbourhoods (urban policy areas), this figure reaches up to 80% of children. However, the specificity of language socialization based on a family language (sometimes two) that is (are) different from the language spoken in the society is often overlooked, especially in the educational context. It has been shown that competencies in the first language are essential for learning a second language, and that the attitudes, discourse, and practices of professionals impact the learning dynamics of children and family participation. Moreover, alarming signals indicate major educational deficiencies in this specific area. Successive reports ("The First 1000 Days," "Cultural Health" by S. Marinopoulos) draw attention to the psychosocial and cognitive risks associated with language development conditions. This project thus fits into this context to address this shortfall in early childhood environments in France, as well as in other countries where multilingualism is increasingly prevalent.

Materials:

The kit consists of a set of 17 cards that illustrate typical situations experienced by multilingual children, an explanatory booklet for further exploration, and cut-out shapes that, when distributed to participants, allow them to create a scene of multilingual language interaction.

The Cards:

Each card (A5 format, cardboard, easy to handle) depicts a typical situation that the children exposed to more than one language might encounter in their daily lives. The scene on the front of the card serves as a discussion starter, opens up questioning, and highlights an aspect of the issue. The graphical coding of languages is designed to decontextualize language interactions: the language of society and the languages spoken in the family. This terminology avoids specifying particular languages, allowing the kit to be used in other countries. On the back of the card, a brief description of the scene and a key message help to understand the stakes and facilitate discussions.

The Booklet:

In the booklet, each card is detailed with explanations and theoretical references to help mediation sessions. A glossary (words in bold in the booklet) explains important terms that might not be familiar to all professionals and parents.

The Cut-out Shapes:

These are distributed to participants, enabling them to create a scene of multilingual language interaction not represented by the 17 cards. This activity allows participants to share their experiences or raise new questions.

Audience:

The objectives are multiple, addressing both early childhood professionals (preschools, daycare centers, social centers, libraries, etc.) and parents. For parents, we hope that by the end of the initiative, they feel recognized in the complexity of their role in a multilingual context, better understand the role and place of each language in the child's development, and feel reassured about the legitimacy and importance of the family language in both school and the French language learning. For professionals, the goal is to develop a better understanding of the organization of languages around the child by gathering and listening to the situations presented by families; to acquire a foundational knowledge base provided by the mediator; and to develop mediation practices and attitudes toward parents and children, which can be applied daily within their respective structures.

Use :

In Mediation:

- **With a trained mediator:** The kit can be used directly with the cards. Users may choose freely, the mediator may distribute them randomly, or present the cards one by one to the group (10/15 people). Depending on the mediator's professional habits, spontaneous comments or questions (e.g., "What do you think of this scene? Have you ever experienced this situation? Are you familiar with this scenario?") or direct participant input can initiate discussion.
- **Without a mediator:** An education professional can use the kit independently. They should take time to review the booklet and gather information to be prepared to facilitate a mediation session, drawing on parents' testimonies and the key messages on the back of the cards.

In Training:

For language trainers who wish to integrate the plurality of the child's languages as a potential asset and engage parents and professionals in a resolutely multilingual approach, the "More than One Language!" kit serves as an initial training tool. The depicted scenes are all based on the real daily lives of multilingual families from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. These everyday situations are represented concretely to ensure everyone can easily relate.

With the cards distributed in small groups, trainees can work with questionnaires and preconceived notions to build new understandings and build new professional practices. These cards can also be used in role-playing exercises, where professionals practice addressing the topic and utilizing the various resources in the kit (cards, booklet, cut-out shapes).