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# AVIOR CASE STUDY REPORT - ESTONIA

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## Introduction

The project coordinator introduced teachers the AVIOR project, its goals and the importance of involving parents as underlying goal for the case study. Teachers remained in contact with the coordinator and several follow-up calls via skype took place to specify the case study focus and/or materials.

Eight teachers from two different educational institutions participated. The two educational institutions have a multilingual student body which means that there is a considerable amount (at least a quarter) of children whose home language is different than the language of instruction in institution. The educational institution in Tallinn has 11 groups of children out of which 2 practice language immersion approach and 46 staff members. The children can attend this institution until the age of 8. The educational institution in Tartu has 17 teachers and students can attend this institution until the age of 17. Both of these institution state multicultural element in their mission and/or statute.

## Case study process

There were four groups of children in which two teachers work together as a team. The use of materials involved nine parents in total with various levels of motivation and engagement.

### AVIOR materials used

Teachers were able to choose the materials they would like to use in working with parents in order to achieve their current objectives and considering the need and motivation of parents. The teacher expressed in the focus group that their goal is to select the bilingual materials as diverse as possible to support development of a wide range of skills: mathematical skills, reading and literacy. It has to be noted that the piloting of the bilingual materials took place during the time in which all materials were not completed in design which expected some preparation work by teachers.

- ▶ The following materials were chosen by various teachers:
- ▶ “Listen and act out: parts of the body”
- ▶ Bingo
- ▶ Finding words
- ▶ Combining pictures with words
- ▶ Comparisons (bigger-smaller)
- ▶ Chocolate cake in Hawaii

Some teachers reported it was challenging to recruit parents to use the bilingual materials although all teachers found some parents to engage in the study. Some mentioned they already have materials in their own mother tongue and were not interested in the bilingual materials offered. The goal for the parents was to spend more time with their children in the world of various languages as they expressed.

The material “Listen and do – parts of the body” Estonian-Russian translation was used by the parents (two different families) who had a six year old son and a seven year old daughter with a mother tongue Russian. Both of them knew the Estonian language a little bit and were able to use the Estonian language in instructing the child, too. Both parents went through the instruction of the material with the child by reading the instructions on how to complete the task. The same material already had been tested in the kindergarten, so it was familiar to the children. One family tested the materials in the premises of kindergarten after school hours, another family at home.

The parent deliberately paid attention that s/he would read the words at moderate pace and not too quickly. Since Estonian is not a mother tongue to either of the parents, s/he was not certain whether s/he reads the words correctly. For the child, the task was easy, and parents felt it was fun to do this activity with children. The parents liked the teaching material

especially because s/he saw how interesting and fun it was for the child. The parents found out that her/his child already understands Estonian to some extent, knows names of body parts in Estonian and can show them by educating this way the parent and in one family also a younger sibling.

This language game was somewhat difficult for the 6-year-old child as there were many unfamiliar words. According to the parent's opinion the pictures could have been more inspirational and modern. Bingo is not a difficult game, but parents felt that they also need to know all words in order to play the game. The seven year old girl expressed that she felt joy when she identified words she had learned in kindergarten and/or preschool and she felt excited to show this to her parents. The parent identified that the additional bonus was that this language game improves attentiveness. The parent learned what words the child already knows or does not know yet which facilitated a better understanding of academic process in kindergarten.

The materials were also tested among older group of school children at the ages of 7-9. The teachers who were teaching in this age group noted a good contact with the parents. In this age group, parents used the bilingual materials at home. The parents' overall impression of the selected teaching materials was positive. They saw it as additional activity to engage their children to spend time together. They did not demonstrate that they perceived it as a chance to develop their children's academic skills as such. At the same time, both teachers and parents were regretful that the bilingual materials were not entirely finished and designed for the testing period and they had to use undersigned materials printed on paper. The parent noted that throughout the process of using the bilingual material at home it came as a pleasant surprise to them that the child's foreign language skills were so good.

The children said they liked the materials, but they also commented on the appearance of materials: pictured could have been printed in color and they did not like the chosen pictures too much. Children did not like so much using test versions of materials and would have preferred ready-made games.

### Parent-teacher communication

According to some teachers, their communication with the child and the parent improved during the testing-period of teaching materials. Close cooperation with the parent was also appreciated by the teacher. In addition, the teacher carried out teaching activities with her 9-year-old daughter who is studying a foreign language for the first year. They used a task where the child had to combine the Russian word and the picture with the Estonian word. This task was easy for the student, but a teacher considered it an effective way of learning and providing a feeling of success and confidence recognizing the same words in the mother tongue of a child.

## Parents' response

The parental feedback on the teaching materials of combining pictures with words was that it was appropriate level for a seven-year-old girl who had just started learning a foreign language. A couple of pictures and words were left unlinked. The child liked the task, only the pictures could have been colored according her opinion. Using this material provided feedback to the parent on how much the child has acquired a foreign language just by observing surroundings.

The bilingual material of comparisons (bigger-smaller) enabled the child to complete the worksheet independently. Before starting, the parent discussed instructions orally. It is easy to compare objects with words but using symbols  $>$   $<$  was somewhat new to the child at first. When the parent explained the logic of using these symbols, there were no challenges to complete the task. The child experienced a success and was therefore satisfied with the exercise. The parent was delighted that a child can use mathematical symbols at the early age.

"Chocolate cake on Hawaii" was read as a bedtime story. The story was discussed afterwards. The parent explained to the children words that were unfamiliar. The kids enjoyed the story, repetitions in the story were fun for them but not so joyful for the parent. As the parent read it before nighttime, it wasn't possible to have a longer discussion. When it is read at another time of day, it provides a good opportunity to discuss further on what the children dreams about.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, although a bit hesitant at the beginning, the teachers came on board for testing new materials with parents rather quickly. They appreciated that there was a selection which enables them to exercise their professional autonomy to choose the appropriate material that fits in their working plan, curriculum and topics that they are currently discussing. The children, parents and teachers expect the materials to be attractive and relevant.

The parents appeared to be somewhat surprised to discover elements of their children perception and knowledge of the language that they were not aware of. Some parents extended the use of materials in a way that they did not expect at the beginning. Although neither party particularly mentioned the improvement or a new quality level in the school-home relationship as a consequence of the material piloting, it can be concluded that the frequency of contact between teacher and parent increased as did their conversation about the content and development of a child.