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5.2 SUPPORT FOR MULTILINGUALISM

MŠ, ZŠ, VČ

In addition to learning Czech as a second language and contact with Czech-speaking peers, **literacy in one's first language** is also very important for children learning Czech. Knowledge of their first language is crucial for the child's overall development. The child can acquire new knowledge much better if they are able to combine it with the knowledge and skills acquired in their first language.

MULTILINGUALISM:

- Prevents the social exclusion of children whose first language differs from that of the majority of society.
- Allows children to take root better in a new environment.
- Strengthens the child's identity and self-confidence.
- Develops language skills and cross-language thinking.
- Enables the preservation of cultural heritage (e.g. traditions, fairy tales, feelings of community belonging...).

Multilingual pupils use their languages for different purposes and in communication with different people (the first language in the family at home, the second in the wider society, at school, etc.), which also affects their vocabulary, level of proficiency and language preferences. Knowledge of the first language is not only beneficial to these children, but is usually also necessary for them to communicate with their family members. Without knowledge of their first language, they will manage at school, but they may have serious problems communicating with their parents of family members, leading to problems with upbringing and behaviour. It is therefore crucial for the school to cooperate with parents – both to find the best way to teach the Czech, but also to maintain and further develop the child's first language skills.

WE RECOMMEND:

- Do not try to cut children away from their first language – they risk losing their identity. Offer children plenty of opportunities to expand their use of their first language (a first-language children's group, visits to the country of origin, etc.).
- Raising children in your family's language is very important because this can be the only way you communicate with them in a language in which you feel confident.
- Teachers should not advise parents to speak only Czech with their children at home, as children could learn bad habits from parents without sufficient knowledge of Czech: incorrect phrases, pronunciation, etc. At the same time, this loses them the opportunity to develop in their native language.
- Establish home language rules that suit you.
- Develop first language skills, not only spoken, but also reading and writing.

It is important to have suitable conditions for children to use their family language in kindergartens and schools. It is very beneficial for language learning if the children come to realise its value outside of the family environment. This enhances the language awareness of all stakeholders, the linguistic diversity and informal use of all languages. Talk to the staff of the educational institutions your children attend and find out how they approach multilingualism. The staff will certainly be happy to hear your opinion on the matter, as well as information about your culture and traditions.

At school, those children whose family members have been able to spend time with them, tell them stories or talk to them in a way that has developed the vocabulary in their first language have a much better chance of learning the language of instruction and succeeding overall. Children’s knowledge and skills are transferable from the first language taught at home to the language used at school.

Useful links:

The magazine for multilingual children and multicultural education “Kamarádi”
Translation dictionaries can be used to follow professional terminology in the first language
https://multilingual-families.com/
https://www.inkluzivniskola.cz/vicejazycnost

- Cummins, J .: Education of Multilingual Pupils. If it exists, it is possible: inspiration for educating children with a different mother language. META celebrates its 15th anniversary, pp. 183–190. Prague 2021.