

2016



Kopin
empowering communities

Il-Fanal Resource Pack for Teachers

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ABOUT KOPIN

KOPIN (VO ID No - VO/0200) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization based in Malta. Kopin (Koperazzjoni Internazzjonali) stands for international development cooperation and works in tandem with civil society organisations and NGOs in Malta, Europe, and Africa, on various projects aimed at raising awareness about the role of each individual as a global citizen, as well as the intrinsic values of the role, and to contribute towards the empowerment of developing communities. Through its projects and initiatives, Kopin seeks to reach various members of society ranging from school children and their families, to civil communities (including institutions within the respective communities) to national and international policy-makers. Kopin joins forces with its partners on different projects to connect people to each other, both directly and indirectly.¹

IL-FANAL PROJECT

Kopin has launched a project in December 2015 called Il-Fanal which is supported by Terre Des Hommes Netherlands (www.terredeshommes.nl). This project has been designed to address the psycho-social needs of children and their families who have experienced migration, especially forced migration, and who are in Maltese state schools. The main aim of this project was to provide these children with support/fun/creativity sessions. Besides the children, other persons connected with these children were also targeted: school-based teachers and psycho-social team received training and support on themes related to migration, cultural competency and refugee support; parents were offered informal support and information on cultural competency and orientation; and training to MEDE / DES Psycho-Social Team, including guidance teachers.

Kopin's project team was composed of staff, service providers and volunteers, all of which professionals in relevant fields such as counselling, pedagogy and project management. *Il-Fanal* allowed Kopin to provide activities, training and other support to almost 600 direct beneficiaries: to 280 students, 200 members of school staff including teachers and senior management teams in schools, 180 members of the Ministry's psycho-social team as well as a number of parents.

The aim of this short document is to provide teachers with ideas for support sessions with children to relieve their stress and to enhance their well-being through creativity, sensory activities and fun. Children were encouraged to express themselves non-verbally through a variety of creative media. Storytelling was also a main activity as it was found to be very powerful on the children's imagination and the spoken language and it was a good exercise to help the young students enhance their thinking and self-expression.

¹ For further details please visit www.kopin.org.

Psychologically even though children have been through situations that could be deemed stressful or traumatizing, most often the catharsis lies in the children narrating and telling their stories not only through words but in drawing and other media. The children also benefit from repeating their story in a group or to their teacher. The professional help for children in stressful situations therefore need not necessarily be therapy and pathologizing but narration and listening.

The intention of this booklet is for teachers to use it as a springboard to encourage them to come up with more strategies to address the diversity in their classroom: namely to continue to appreciate the diversity of the students in their class and to use this diversity to maximise learning and well-being of the children.

INTEGRATING DIVERSITY STRATEGIES INTO THE CLASSROOM

Below are some classroom activity suggestions to facilitate children's integration and sense of belonging and which can be implemented at any time. While the activities are described in a way that is not directly linked to a specific subject of the Maltese Curriculum, all of them can be used as motivators and foundations for specific subjects (e.g. the world cultural calendar could be used in mathematics by finding sums of celebrations/month, focus on a specific tradition and for multiplication see how many people in the world practice it how many times per day, for subtraction see how many people still sleep when others already celebrate, etc.). In this way the curriculum needs can be fulfilled and the children's interest in each other and the world is further fuelled.

Use materials which reflect the diversity within the classroom. When children see themselves reflected in classroom materials, they understand that they are valued, accepted and deemed important. This simple, yet deliberate, act can optimize their motivation. For example:

Story books and videos from different cultures;

A map with children's photos stuck over the countries they came from;

Asking children to draw and paint the flag or a symbol of their home country;

Creating a classroom 'family wall'

Writing a few words in different languages and sticking them to the wall.

Use language that demonstrates an acceptance of all cultures. Word choices indicate acceptance of and often determine behaviour in children. Choose words carefully and avoid those that can convey a negative connotation when none is intended. Be aware that you may, unintentionally, be referring to culture and race in a stereotypical manner. One specific example can be found under: <http://kidworldcitizen.org/2012/05/24/the-danger-of-a-single-story-and-teaching-kids-to-avoid-stereotypes>.

Diversify class excursions and guest speakers. Make sure that field trips do not reflect only one culture. Remember that children need events which help to connect them to the community. This is best done by highlighting the variety of cultures, professions, beliefs, perspectives, etc. within our society. Excursions may be an opportunity to also show links to the children's cultural, religious, etc. identity. This helps children to see themselves and their culture valued in the community and helps overcoming ideas of 'otherness'. The same considerations are to be done with regards to guest speakers.

Celebrate the world cultural calendar. Efforts can be made to allow the contributions of many cultures to be shared throughout the year and not only the traditional ones at specific times during the year. Keep in mind that each culture has its own beliefs, customs, rituals, religions, and business and academic achievements that make it both unique and great. Create the space to celebrate all this diversity. Calendars can be found online (e.g. here: <https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-rochest>).

Invite parents to your classroom to share various aspects of their lives, culture, or religion with your class. Allowing parents to share information, experiences and stories will send a clear message to all that you value their differences and view them as an asset for your learning community. In addition, this sharing will also have the benefit of broadening and deepening mutual understandings with you, the family, and the child.

Make sure that the child understands the rules of the classroom. Become aware of the assumed rules: rules we take for granted but which may not be familiar with the child. Children need to know what is required of them. Keep in mind that if a child does not know some rules in the classroom, it can very easily become a basis for exclusion and stigma. If a child is misbehaving teachers need to understand the reason behind the misbehaviour. Remember there is always a reason for any action we do, whether good or bad.

Encourage the building of a group identity based on the appreciation of diversity. The group identity is crucial for any classroom. Even the most homogeneous classroom can end up with children building walls between themselves, as a healthy group culture is failed to be nurtured. One way to build a group identity based on appreciation of diversity is e.g. through games and songs that children invent together by combining different languages and games from their home culture. These songs can then be appreciated as unique to this place and foster satisfaction and improve the group's self-esteem.

Give room for encounters with first languages and communities of the class. Make space for one hour a week that is dedicated to one culture: its language, games, songs, traditions, arts, animals, etc. These themes can also be included in the English, Maltese and Mathematics classes. This activity helps to show appreciation for the cultural background of that child that forms an integral part of the child's identity and it allows the group/class to get to know more of the beauty of other traditions. It is a good opportunity to encourage and facilitate the involvement of the child – and possibly the parents – by asking each child to bring items which represent their experiences, culture, family traditions, etc. which are unique to their country of origin.

Create an identity map for each child: Visualize identity dimensions of children by choosing at least 5 different dimensions. These can include their role in family, their role in school, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, hobbies, and skills.

Be “curious” about the individual identity of each child: Remember that, for example, a child is not simply “Syrian”: Syria is a country and that child comes from a specific region, its ancestors may have been living there for centuries, but may have rites, traditions and languages that differ from most other families in Syria. It is very much like saying that we are Maltese but this may feel impersonal: we come from Gozo, or from Marsaxlokk, we may hear the ocean every day, or the car mechanic below our apartment, speak Maltese, English, or both... The more we know about the child and the way it relates to its ‘old’ and its ‘new’ home, the better we can understand its needs. This in turn helps us to balance out personalities and needs in the classroom to the social, cognitive and emotional benefit of all children.

Help the class feel like one big family: Here experiences of similarities (importantly: not in culture, but in experiencing the world, e.g. in experiences of emotions, sensory experiences, games, songs, etc.) are crucial to make the children feel safe in the group and build a group culture of support, rather than competition, segregation, or even verbal, or non-verbal aggression. It needs careful and reflected preparation to ensure there will not be group dynamics that are to the disadvantage of the shy and quiet children. All games should avoid competition, should involve the whole group and should enable experiences of discovery and self-efficacy.

STORY IDEA: CAN BE NARRATED OVER THREE SESSIONS

The idea behind using the story is based on the understanding that children interact very easily with stories and fairy tales that relate the fantasy world to the real world. A story provides the space for relaxation, reflection and, when combined with painting/drawing/modelling, it becomes also a means of non-verbal processing. All stories can be used as door openers for creative tasks by addressing one episode out of the story. They are also opportunities to reflect how the emotions described in the story made the children feel and from there relate to their personal experiences, fears, wishes, reflections...

The following animal story provides a base which allows the children to link it up to their own personal story, albeit unconsciously. In this story, the main character is the lion, but this can be replaced by any other migrating animal and you can be given any other name gender, etc. Moreover, the background of the story does not represent any one specific culture and neither is the lion described in its specific gender (it is referred to as ‘it’: the lion child), so that any child can identify easily with it.



STORY SESSION 1

INTENTION / GOALS

- Who is the little lion (or the other animal of choice)? This question brings out the different perspectives of identity (e.g. it is the child of lion Mama lion and Papa lion; it is the fastest of the small lions; it is brown-yellow, with round ears and a beautiful brown pattern on his back and tail).

- Where does the lion live? What does his home look like, smell like, feel like, etc. Which member of family/friend is with the lion? What are they playing at? How fast do they run? Where does it go to rest? Are they laughing? Teasing? Hiding? Why do they like it there?
- What makes the little lion happy, sad, angry or afraid? What does it do when it feels this way? (e.g. when afraid, it goes next to mama lion, when angry it goes for a run, when happy it plays with the other lions).

STORY COULD LOOK LIKE

The name of the little lion is 'Som'. It lives with the other lions in a very beautiful place, called the Savannah, with lots of space to run in and green trees to rest under, lakes with fresh water to splash in, etc. All the lions know each other: they know that Som is the child of..., it has a black spot on his right ear, he likes playing hide and seek ..., etc. The little lion is happy: it likes to sleep in the shade of a big tree with lots of birds in it and to drink water on hot summer days, it likes to play with the other lions and it runs faster than any of them. It is afraid when he sees snakes, plastic bags and hunters but luckily there was always his special place to hide/rest/ flower to smell and then he would feel calmer/ stronger/ braver once again.

STORY SESSION 2

INTENTION / GOALS

- Talking about reasons why the lion had to leave its home
- Reflecting about different 'new' homes and situations e.g. playing with unknown lions that play different games which he doesn't understand; food he never ate; everything smells and sounds different and new...
- Discussing the learning of new things / getting to know new things ... How does the lion feel?

HOW THE STORY COULD LOOK LIKE

Very early one morning, the little lion one day was woken up by a rumbling sound and the shaking of the earth. In the distance, the lions saw a herd of elephants and these were running towards them. The lions knew that the elephants were escaping from something terrible and dangerous. The older lions decided to leave their home very quickly so that they could be able to escape whatever danger was coming. The little lion was still very sleepy: it was not afraid and it was also very curious about this adventure. Along the journey while they were moving away from the danger, one of its little lion friends got lost: Som could not find it anywhere. This made Som feel very very very sad that it cried for a very long time. It was also afraid that its friend would not find its way back to the group again. But after three days, Som was happy again: its friend had found the group and they could play together again. Som and its friend and their families were now living in a totally different place: they now had to learn to do different things: there were mountains now and it missed

running in the open spaces but it learned to climb up the mountains very well and fast. When they were in the jungle it couldn't run, or climb fast on mountains and therefore it learned to hide itself so well that none of its friend could find it ...

STORY SESSION 3

INTENTION / GOALS

- Lion arriving in his new home
- Feelings of curiosity, discomfort, fear, sadness, excitement, etc.
- What makes me happy? What do I wish for? What do I plan for my future?

HOW THE STORY COULD LOOK LIKE

The little lion arrives in the new place and the new 'normal life' starts. Lots of things are very new:

The water tastes different, the flowers have different colours and shapes, the grass and soil smells different. The little lion likes the new things. But sometimes memories of the old home/s with the water and the trees come to its mind and the little lion misses its 'old home/s'. But it thinks: 'Here, I can just do what I liked to do at home, but I will only have do things differently...Some things are not the same, so it is not possible to e.g. lay under its favourite tree. What can I do? I find another tree, or a special patch of grass

But there is one thing it cannot understand. There are other lions here that it never saw. They look at it but they do not talk or play with it. They seem to be afraid of the little lion. It finds this confusing. It asks itself: 'What can I do so they are not afraid of me?' I can just wait. Usually waiting helps with almost everything. 'What do I wish to do in this new place?' (I can learn how to play the games the other lions play here.) 'What do I wish to have?' I can find a special rock to climb where no other lions come.)

Sometimes the little lion is sad: 'I miss my grandparents'... 'I miss their cuddles.' ...Do I wish to meet them soon?

IDEAS FOR SENSORY ACTIVITIES

Children experience and discover the world around them through their senses. They can be helped to become aware of their body: The body is familiar to them: it is a home, shelter and tool. Sensory experiences connect the child to itself and ground it in the group. Games targeting all different senses may include tasting, smelling, touching, balance, etc. Some ideas are outlined below:



SMELL

SMELL AND GUESS

Children smell bags with different content (cinnamon sticks, ginger, coffee, garlic, etc.). They are asked to match the smell to flash-cards.

TOUCH

GUESS WHO...

A child is blind-folded (only children that volunteer for it) and is asked to try to identify any one of the children by touching hair, face, ears, etc.

BALANCE

SMALL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Different small activities can be combined to e.g. warm up in the morning:

Walk on line (e.g. on a long sticky tape on floor); balance ball on head, or hand, etc. and walk; jump backwards on one foot (on line, or in circle), etc.

TASTE

TASTE AND GUESS

Game works same as Smell and Guess, but students are blindfolded while they are tasting. Again, only those who volunteer are blindfolded.

HEARING

SILENT TREASURER

One child sits blindfolded (only children who volunteer for it) on the floor with its item called a 'treasure' (e.g. a pretty stone, or a flower, etc.) half a meter away from it. All other children stand in a circle around the child and one after the other, each child is called silently by the teacher. The child who has been chosen tries to steal the treasure silently so the blindfolded child does not hear anything. If the "treasure"-child hears the "snatching" child it points straight at the sound it has heard. If it has guessed right then it goes back to its place in the circle and another volunteer becomes the guessing child.

IDEAS FOR CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Creative activities can involve a number of senses and challenge both fine and gross motor skills: miming (e.g. emotions, or animals and guessing them); painting (e.g. painting stories, or group paintings); drawing (e.g. drawing own ideas/memories); modelling (e.g. modelling homes, families, etc.).

One material which was used during the project was a very large blanket. During any activity when the blanket was being used, the request is for all children to stay on the blanket and, more important, they were asked to take care that everyone was “on board”. This was the together time and it was conducive in fostering a sense of respect and interest in one another. The Blanket can also (when but into a circle) be used as a parachute to play games, hide under, build one big tent together, etc.



FINAL REMARKS

The suggestions made in this document are based on the expertise, training, exchanges, and practical experiences of the inter-disciplinary project team. Given the diverse socio-cultural background and experiences of the children participating in this project, strategies were developed to address the whole child. These strategies were based on the understanding that the targeted children may have experienced adverse situations that may put anyone experiencing them into strong distress; that the children would have had to part from their socio-cultural embedding in their home country, leaving behind family members, pets, friends, etc. While empathically acknowledging these experiences the project team developed the materials with the intention to move beyond the perception of the migrant child as primarily vulnerable, and/or traumatized. Within the project the general understanding of the effects trauma can have on a child were informed by the work of R. Papadopoulos² who acknowledges neutral and positive effects of trauma, besides negative ones³. The intention of the project team therefore was to enable experiences that help children appreciate their own and each other's strengths through experiences of their resilience and self-efficacy.

Another focus was to help children (and their teachers) to appreciate the richness of diverse cultures, languages, abilities, experiences in the classroom and see them as an asset, rather than a burden. An appreciative attitude towards and use of the different skills, viewpoints and experiences of the children helps children accept their own and others differentness. This in turn may help to establish a healthy class culture contributing to friendships, trust, fun, healing, positive learning experiences and the children's integration into their new environment.

² Renos K Papadopoulos, PhD, is professor at the University of Essex, consultant clinical psychologist at the Tavistock Clinic, training and supervising Jungian psychoanalyst, and systemic family psychotherapist. As consultant to the United Nations and other organisations, he has worked with refugees and other survivors of political violence in many countries. He is the director of the Masters and PhD programmes in Refugee Care that are offered jointly by the University of Essex and the Tavistock Clinic.

³ "Refugees and psychological trauma: psychosocial perspectives" Prof. Renos Papadopoulos, 2006, www.ncb.org.uk/arc

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