

COMENIUS LANGUAGE ASSISTANTSHIPS

A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

FOR HOST SCHOOLS AND LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS

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CONTENTS

<u>1/ Introduction</u>	3
<u>2/ Comenius Language Assistantships – the background</u>	3
<u>3/ Good practice for host schools</u>	5
A/ Before the Language Assistant arrives	5
B/ Integration into the school	9
C/ Integration into the local community	11
D/ In and beyond the classroom	12
<u>4/ Good practice for Language Assistants</u>	17
A/ Before leaving for the Language Assistantship	17
B/ Integration into the school	20
C/ Integration into the local community	23
D/ In and beyond the classroom	25
<u>5/ Conclusion</u>	28
<u>ANNEX I - Accommodation</u>	30
<u>ANNEX II - Resources Language Assistants can bring</u>	32
<u>ANNEX III - Some ideas for activities</u>	33

1/ INTRODUCTION

1.1 On the purposes of the present Guide the term “**host school**” is used to mean any institution receiving a Comenius Language Assistant, including educational establishments for adults and specialist institutions.

1.2 Above all, this Guide is intended to be practical. It is based on the real experiences of Language Assistants, schools and National Agencies. A Comenius Language Assistantship is much more than what happens inside classrooms, and the Guide reflects that. We hope that it will help everybody concerned to get the maximum benefit from Comenius Language Assistantships.

1.3 The Guide begins with a general **overview** of the aims of the European Union’s COMENIUS measures and of Language Assistantships in particular.

1.4 The next section is aimed at **host schools**. It gives advice and suggestions on ways to give Language Assistants the opportunity to make a real contribution to the academic and social life of the school, and also to the local community. It shows how this process begins before the Language Assistant arrives. It also makes clear that Comenius Language Assistants are not simply there to help the school to do things it does already, but to add something new. Whether or not a Language Assistant’s mother tongue is on the host school’s normal curriculum, he or she can make a lasting contribution to the school’s life and to the linguistic and cultural awareness of its pupils. Common problems, and how schools can avoid or solve these, are also looked at.

1.5 The second half of the Guide is intended primarily for **Comenius Language Assistants**, and again it begins with all the things that can be done to prepare for the Language Assistantship. It gives advice on how to cope with the challenges of integration into the host school and of adapting to the various types of teaching situations a Language Assistant might encounter. It also deals with life outside the school.

1.6 There are three annexes. **Annex I** covers accommodation matters. **Annex II** consists of a list of resources Language Assistants could usefully bring with them from home. **Annex III** is a list of ideas for informal activities aimed at helping to motivate pupils to want to learn about the language and culture of the Language Assistant’s country. Most of these ideas are taken from suggestions by schools and Comenius Language Assistants themselves.

1.7 Some things this Guide is not. It does not attempt to cover matters that are already covered in detail in the Guidelines for Applicants. Neither does it seek to replace induction meetings - it can be no substitute for face to face contact and exchange of views. It does not include material specific to individual countries. That can be obtained from National Agencies.

1.8 For reasons of transparency we wanted to produce a single Guide for schools and for Language Assistants, so that each could see the advice being given to the other. **However, it is important to remember that the Guide is not a model applicable to all circumstances. Teachers and Comenius Language Assistants should not feel that they are failing if they are unable to implement all of the suggestions included. Neither should participants see the Guide as a declaration of rights to which they are entitled.**

2/ COMENIUS LANGUAGE ASSISTANTSHIPS – THE BACKGROUND

2.1 **SOCRATES** is the European Union’s programme in the field of education. The first phase of the SOCRATES programme began at 1995 and ended at 1999. The second phase of the programme covers the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2006. **COMENIUS** is the part of the SOCRATES programme which concerns the overall school education. The Language Assistantships are part of the Comenius Action 2.

2.2 The main objectives of the Comenius Language Assistantships are the following:

- to give to the assistants, who will be future language teachers, the opportunity **to enhance their knowledge of foreign languages**, of other countries and education systems, as well as to improve their teaching skills;
- to improve the language skills of the pupils at the host schools and increase both their motivation to learn languages and their interest in the assistant's country and culture.

2.3 The following are eligible to apply for a Comenius Language Assistantship grant:

- future teachers of an **official EU language** or Irish or Luxembourgeois, or one of the official languages of the participating EFTA/EEE countries or of the pre-accession countries as a foreign language;
- primary teachers who might be required to teach a foreign language in future;
- teachers who may be required to teach a non-language subject through a foreign language;
- persons holding or studying towards a qualification leading to a career as a foreign language teacher.

The Comenius Language Assistants are spending between three and eight months in a host school or in an other institution abroad. A grant is awarded in order to fund their subsistence expenses. The travel expenses are covered.

2.4 COMENIUS activities are managed by the Education and Culture Directorate-General of the European Commission with the help of National Agencies in the participating countries. Applications must be submitted directly to the National Agencies. The participating countries are those of the European Union and the European Economic Area, those associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe and also Cyprus, Malta and soon Turkey.

2.5 If citizens are to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the European Union, they must be able to communicate in as many European languages as possible. It is important that those languages, which tend to be the major means of communication in international dealings, are widely spoken and this is increasingly the case.

2.6 However, it is equally important, if cultural and linguistic diversity is to be maintained and if European citizens are to be able to take advantage in practice of their right to live and work anywhere in Europe, including in countries whose main languages are not widely taught, also to promote the less widely used and less taught languages of the EU. In all SOCRATES actions, priority is therefore given to projects involving less widely used and less taught languages.

2.7 **Comenius Language Assistantships** provide grants to students who have completed at least two years of a higher education course leading to a qualification as a language teacher, and who intend to take up that profession, in order to enable them to spend a period of between three and eight months working as Language Assistants in schools or adult educational establishments (though not at a higher education institution) in another European country.

2.8 Another key aspect of the Comenius Language Assistantships is that they introduce or reinforce a European dimension in the host school and community. Language Assistants raise learners' awareness of another European culture and help to break down prejudice. In contrast to most Language Assistants taking part in bilateral programmes, they are often speakers of languages not already taught in the host school. They therefore bring to the school and local community a linguistic and cultural resource, which they might not otherwise encounter. Their contribution can be especially important where both the Language Assistant and the partner institution are from a country whose main language is a less widely used one - such projects receive priority. While many Comenius Language Assistants will concentrate mainly on work in the classroom, there will often be opportunities to develop more unusual or innovative activities. Some ideas for these can be found in this Guide (see especially **Annex III**).

2.9 The fact that the Comenius Language Assistant's presence is the result of a European programme also provides tangible evidence to learners of the benefits and potential of the European Union, and may inspire them to seek out further information on how they, too, can participate in such programmes - National

Agencies can provide information on this. In addition, many Comenius Language Assistants are well informed about European issues and can help schools to develop pupils' knowledge of the reality of the European Union and to enhance their critical awareness of it, while combating inaccurate stereotypes.

2.10 Further details of all measures within SOCRATES, Guidelines for Applicants and application forms can be obtained from National Agencies. Information can also be found on the Commission's website at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/index_en.html

3/ GOOD PRACTICE FOR HOST SCHOOLS

With a Comenius Language Assistantship, at little cost to your school, you receive the services of a future language teacher who is also a native speaker of another language. Some of the opportunities this linguistic resource could offer your school are mentioned in this Guide.

You also add a whole new European dimension to your school community - a broader curriculum, livelier lessons, novel extra-curricular activities, as well as benefits in terms of staff training, activities for parents and your work with the local community.

Your school will need to invest some time and thought in your Language Assistantship project in order to make sure that it is as imaginative and fruitful as possible for everyone concerned. This section aims to guide you.

3A/ BEFORE THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANT ARRIVES

Checklist

Before applying for a Comenius Language Assistant:

- * **Discuss with all relevant staff**
- * **Draw up an outline of the Language Assistantship project**

Once the school has been allocated a Comenius Language Assistant:

- * **Make staff and pupils aware that he/she is to arrive and when**
- * **Appoint a supervisor**
- * **The supervisor must attend a meeting at the National Agency**
- * **Co-operate with any other institutions sharing the Language Assistant**
- * **Contact the Language Assistant by telephone as soon as possible**
- * **Draw up a draft timetable, consulting staff and the Language Assistant**
- * **The timetable is to be for 12-16 hours per week**
- * **Send the Language Assistant documentation on the school and local area**
- * **Suggest resource material the Language Assistant should bring**
- * **Help the Language Assistant with accommodation**
- * **Make sure the Language Assistant is insured for risks connected with work**
- * **Inform him/her about other advisable insurance**
- * **Clarify the legal position with regard to Language Assistants**
- * **Seek any other necessary advice from your National Agency**

Before applying for a Comenius Language Assistant:

Discuss with all relevant staff

3.1 Even before the application for a Comenius Language Assistant is made, there should be discussion among all interested members of staff on how the Language Assistant is to be used. The decision to apply should be a collaborative one and everyone involved should make sure they are aware of the aims and objectives of Comenius Language Assistantships. Remember that the work of Comenius Language Assistants should not be confined to the language classroom. There are many ways in which they can contribute to the teaching of other subjects and collaborate with non-language staff (see 3.70-3.73).

Draw up an outline of the Comenius Language Assistantship project

3.2 The application should express clearly what the school would like to do with the Comenius Language Assistant, especially the innovative aspects - the added value which the Language Assistantship will bring,

how the Language Assistant will contribute to language teaching in the school, links with the teaching of non-language subjects and links with other European programmes.

3.3 A broad outline of the Language Assistantship project should therefore be drawn up. Schools should ask themselves the following questions, which are explored in more detail below:

- Which subjects are to be involved?
- What additional arrangements need to be made for teaching the Language Assistant's mother tongue?
- Which teachers and classes will work with the Language Assistant (classes other than language classes should be included – see 3.70-3.73)?
- What special projects/visits/exchanges could the Comenius Language Assistant be involved in?
- In what ways can the project be linked with the local community, including with parents and with local enterprises?
- What resources will the school need to invest in the Language Assistantship to make it a success?
- Ideally, how long should the Language Assistantship be and at what time of the year would it be best for it to start? (It is sometimes easier to integrate the Language Assistant into the life of the school if he or she begins at the start of a school term.)
- What can be done to help the Language Assistant find accommodation? Will it be possible to provide him or her with free or cheap meals at the school canteen?

Once the school has been allocated a Comenius Language Assistant:

3.4 Once the school has found out that it is to receive a Comenius Language Assistant, the broad plan for the project needs to become more defined, in consultation with the Language Assistant. Preliminary work to prepare for his or her arrival can begin at once. The more comprehensive the preparations, the easier integration into the school and its way of life are likely to be.

Make staff and pupils aware that he/she is to arrive and when

3.5 One very important aspect is to ensure that **all staff** in the school is aware of the date of the Language Assistant's arrival, his or her name and what he or she will be doing. There are sometimes cases in which only one or two teachers at a school are aware that an application has been made, and the others are mystified at who the new arrival is and why he or she is there. This can be very demoralising for a Language Assistant and can also mean that opportunities are missed.

3.6 The fact that a Language Assistant is coming should also be explained to **pupils** before the Assistant arrives. It should be explained that, although the principal objective of the Comenius Language Assistantship is improved language learning, the Assistant would contribute much more widely, notably by working closely with teachers of other subjects. It is also useful to make **parents** aware at an early stage of the aims of the Comenius Language Assistantship and of what the Language Assistant will be doing.

Appoint a supervisor

3.7 Language Assistants need a principal point of contact in the school. **Schools must appoint a supervisor**, who will have lead responsibility for welcoming the Language Assistant and overseeing his or her integration into the school and local community. The supervisor will normally be a member of staff with whom the Language Assistant will be working, and with whom he or she can be expected to feel quickly at ease. In most cases, schools choose a language teacher who can contribute directly to the Comenius Language Assistant's development towards taking up that profession. However, this is not essential if other members of staff are better placed to take on the task. It is very important that communication between supervisor and Language Assistant be effective: there should always be a common language which both speak well, even if it is not the mother tongue of either.

The supervisor must attend a meeting at the National Agency

3.8 The supervisor should normally be the school's representative at the **preparation and co-ordinating meeting** organised for host schools by the SOCRATES National Agency in the country concerned. **Attendance at these is obligatory and expenses must be met by the school or relevant authority.** The supervisor should be aware that a certain amount of extra work is involved and should only accept the job if sure that he or she will be in a position to devote the necessary time and to help the Language Assistant where necessary.

Co-operate with any other institutions sharing the Language Assistant

3.9 In many cases, Comenius Language Assistants will work in a single school, but in certain circumstances may be shared between a maximum of three establishments. The importance of thorough preparation prior to a Language Assistant's arrival is even greater where the Language Assistant will be working in more than one school. Adequate co-ordination from an early stage between the institutions involved is crucial in order to ensure that Language Assistants are receiving the right balance of experience and that timetables are efficient and do not require the Language Assistant to make too many journeys between schools. (Schools should arrange to pay for any such journeys. The Language Assistant will usually meet daily travel expenses to and from his or her accommodation, although some schools help with this also.)

3.10 Each institution involved should designate a supervisor, but one person should be given overall responsibility. **All the supervisors involved should have regular contact with each other as well as with the Language Assistant both before and during the Language Assistantship.**

Contact the Language Assistant as soon as possible

3.11 Once the Comenius Language Assistant has been selected by the National Agency, and the school has received confirmation, **the school must - probably through the supervisor - contact the Language Assistant.** The earlier this is done and the more care the school takes to ensure that all the Language Assistant's questions are answered, the more confident and enthusiastic the Language Assistant will be about the forthcoming Language Assistantship. Such close contact also helps to reduce the possibility that the Language Assistant will withdraw from the Language Assistantship - such withdrawals have occasionally been a problem in the past, and although a replacement is usually found, vital time is lost when this occurs. Telephone, as well as mail (and if possible E-mail) contact is vital, in order to answer any questions the Language Assistant has and to get as much detailed information as possible on subjects such as:

- the extent and nature of the Language Assistant's teaching experience, if any;
- what he or she is hoping to gain from the Language Assistantship;
- the Language Assistant's preferences with regard to the subjects to be taught and the age range of the learners;
- any non-language skills or experience the Language Assistant would be prepared to put at the disposal of the school. For example, he or she may be trained in other subjects or be a talented sportsperson, musician, or actor;
- the level of his or her proficiency in the native language of the host country, and how the school might help to improve this, for example through arranging an intensive course on arrival, conversation exchanges with teachers, or evening classes locally;
- if the Language Assistant already speaks the local language, whether he or she would like to undertake part-time training or study in other subjects, formal or informal (e.g. evening classes), so that, if possible, the school can help arrange this;
- if the Language Assistant is not proficient in the local language, which languages he or she does speak, so that the school can if possible provide members of staff who can help with any necessary interpretation;
- his or her leisure interests, in order to provide information on what social and cultural possibilities are available within the local community.

3.12 The supervisor should give the Language Assistant his or her **private** telephone number in case further questions or difficulties arise. This is especially important in cases where the Language Assistant and the school have been matched just before or during the summer holidays.

Draw up a draft timetable, consulting staff and the Language Assistant

3.13 The work plan **must be fully agreed** between the Comenius Language Assistant and the host school(s). Following initial contact with the Language Assistant, it may be possible for the teaching staff involved to begin planning the Language Assistant's timetable, taking fully into account the information that the Language Assistant has given and ensuring that he or she is given as wide a range of experience as possible with different age groups and subject areas (see **Section 3D** for suggestions on this)

3.14 It is important to leave plenty of room for flexibility, and for the Language Assistantship to develop naturally. **The timetable will only be finalised after the Language Assistant's arrival, in direct consultation with him or her, and even then will be subject to change.** However, an early outline can be very helpful, even if it is only a broad idea of the languages and other subjects the Language Assistant will teach or assist with, and the number of hours he or she will do with each age group. In drawing this up, schools must respect the terms of Comenius Language Assistantships. It must be clear from the start that the Language Assistant is not a substitute teacher, or purely a resource for examination practice, although helping small groups to prepare for national examinations can be a legitimate part of the Language Assistant's role. **Remember also that the Language Assistant must be given an opportunity to teach his or her mother tongue. Language Assistants who do not get this opportunity have been asked to inform their National Agencies** (see 3.50 - 3.54, 4.57 for further details).

The timetable is to be for 12-16 hours per week

3.15 The Language Assistant should have between 12 and 16 hours of "school-based" work per week. This means contact hours, in other words time with learners, and any time spent on other work on behalf of the school, such as assisting with European projects or working with parents or the local community. Any regular timetabled duties such as managing language clubs or holding conversation classes should be included in the 12-16 hours, even if those activities take place at lunchtime or after school. However, time spent preparing lessons, whether on school premises or not, is not included.

3.16 The Language Assistant may work additional hours, if he or she agrees. He or she may also undertake paid work, in the school or outside it, provided this does not interfere with the Language Assistantship. It may be advantageous for the Language Assistant's working hours to be confined to four days a week, in order to allow study time - perhaps including observation of other lessons in the school, or private language studies - on the fifth day of the week.

Send the Language Assistant documentation on the school and local area

3.17 Schools should ensure Language Assistants are aware of exactly how to get to the school, which airport is most convenient, the timetables and fares for bus and train travel from the airport to the school, etc. As much relevant documentation as possible about the school and the surrounding area - for example on cost of living, etc. - should also be sent. An outline of the school curriculum and the place of languages within it, together with a general indication of what kind of levels of linguistic ability Language Assistants can expect from those they will be teaching, should always be sent. A calendar showing holiday dates is very important. Maps, basic tourist and cultural information and the timetables and routes of local public transport can also be useful. Only general information is necessary at this stage. More detailed information, such as textbooks or information on shops and entertainment in the host area can also be collected as a base for a "welcome pack" for the Language Assistant on arrival.

Suggest resource material the Language Assistant should bring

3.18 In addition, the school may wish to provide the Language Assistant with a list of resource material that it would be useful to bring. This is particularly important where authentic material in the Language Assistant's native language is not easy to find in the host country, as will often be the case if the Language

Assistant is from a country with a less widely used language. Examples of material that has been useful in the past are given in **Annex II**. Schools do, of course, need to remember that the Language Assistant will also need room in their luggage to bring personal belongings! If the Language Assistant is asked to incur significant expenditure on buying materials such as pre-recorded videos, etc. this **must** be reimbursed on arrival.

Help the Language Assistant with accommodation

3.19 It is also very important to discuss the Language Assistant's accommodation needs and how these might be met, given the fact that Language Assistants have only a very limited amount of money available to spend on rent. For many Language Assistants, this will be the single biggest worry they have about their forthcoming Language Assistantship, and any help the school can provide is likely to be very welcome.

3.20 At best, the school might be able to provide free or cheap accommodation for the duration of the Language Assistant's stay, although it should be borne in mind that Language Assistants' wishes will differ. Some will be delighted to stay with a family, if that option is offered, while others will want independence and seek to rent a flat or to share one with people their own age. In some countries it has often been possible for schools which are near a university to arrange for Language Assistants to rent a room in a student residence. At the very least, the school should ensure that the Language Assistant has somewhere to go temporarily on arrival, perhaps with a teacher's family or, if this is not possible, in a moderately-priced local hostel or hotel. It should also provide any information it can about the local accommodation market – level of rents, whether furnished accommodation is easily available, what utensils are usually provided and what the tenant must supply, legal provisions, etc. Advice on finding accommodation is in **Annex I**.

Make sure the Language Assistant is insured for risks connected with work

3.21 Insurance is a very important matter which has been subject to misunderstanding and occasionally led to problems in the past.

3.22 **The school must ensure that the Language Assistant is insured in the workplace, against accident and injuries to third parties, on the same basis as the rest of the school staff.** The school or relevant authority must meet the cost of this insurance. In some cases this may involve simply informing the relevant authority in local or national government of the Language Assistant's presence in the school. Where a school has its own separate insurance policy, the Language Assistant's name must be added. If the rest of the school staff is not covered by such insurance, the Language Assistant must be given clear advice on usual practice in the host country concerned.

Inform him/her about other advisable insurance

3.23 **It is the Language Assistant's responsibility to take out adequate insurance for personal possessions and against accident (including damage to third parties) outside the school. Language Assistants must also ensure that they have adequate health cover.** In some cases, particularly for Language Assistants who are resident in one EU country and doing their Language Assistantship in another, this will require no more than obtaining from the authorities in the Language Assistant's own country the form E111. This document allows any EU citizen, as well as those of some other countries, to benefit from the same statutory health provisions as citizens of the host country. However, additional health cover may be necessary if the full cost of any necessary treatment is to be reimbursed. Well before the Language Assistant's arrival, the school should ensure that the Language Assistant is fully informed about the health system in the host country and can take any necessary steps in good time.

Clarify the legal position with regard to Language Assistants

3.24 A related subject which schools must take into account is the law in their own country with regard to personnel other than fully qualified teachers taking responsibility for pupils' well being and safety. The National Agency can provide advice to schools about this. It may be necessary to clarify with the Education Ministry what the Language Assistant's status is in this regard, in particular if he or she is to take part in

activities or visits outside the school premises. Language Assistants should not take sole responsibility for leading groups of learners in such activities.

3.25 Schools must ensure that Language Assistants have fully understood their legal rights and responsibilities within the school, as well as any disciplinary codes to which they are subject.

Seek any necessary advice from the National Agency

3.26 Both before and during the Language Assistantship, the host school should not hesitate to seek advice from the National Agency in its country. Most National Agencies now have several years of experience of dealing with Language Assistantships and are likely to have encountered already many of the questions and problems the school may have.

3B/ INTEGRATION INTO THE SCHOOL

Checklist

- * **Meet and greet Language Assistant on arrival**
- * **Allow time to settle in to accommodation before going to the school**
- * **Guided tour of the school and introductions to staff**
- * **Arrange a structured induction period**
- * **Meeting with the supervisor at the end of the induction period**

3.27 Arriving in a new country at the start of a working visit is inevitably a stressful experience, but the host school can do much to ensure that the Language Assistant is able to settle in quickly. Above all, it should allow the Language Assistant sufficient time to adapt, and not expect him or her instantly to be at ease in what may at first be strange surroundings.

Meet and greet Language Assistant on arrival

3.28 Both the head teacher and the supervisor should ensure that they are available to greet the Language Assistant on arrival at the school. If possible, arrangements should be made to meet Language Assistants at the airport or railway station and give them a lift to their initial accommodation.

Allow time to settle in to accommodation before going to the school

3.29 It is never easy to absorb both a new personal environment and a new work environment at the same time. Many Language Assistants will prefer to be given a few days to get accustomed to their new accommodation and perhaps to have a look around before going to the school to meet the teachers and learners. Other might prefer to go to the school almost immediately. It should be clearly established with the Language Assistant on which dates he or she will be arriving in the local area, and also the first day in the school, which may be a couple of days later.

Guided tour of the school and introductions to staff and pupils

3.30 During the first couple of days at the school, the Language Assistant should be given a guided tour of the school and introduced to all of the staff he or she is likely to be in regular contact with during the stay, and also to all senior staff. It is always confusing to meet many new faces at once, and this process will be made easier if the Language Assistant is also given a directory of the school – if possible including photos – showing all of the teachers' names and jobs. Language Assistants should be invited to the first staff meeting after their arrival and to all subsequent ones. The Language Assistant is also likely to be in contact with secretaries, librarians, caretakers, etc. and should meet them as soon as possible.

3.31 The Language Assistant should be shown where to obtain classroom supplies such as books, chalk/board pens and paper, and where common facilities such as the staff room, photocopiers, coffee machines and noticeboards are found. He or she should have access to all the relevant teaching materials and textbooks used in the school. **Copies of textbooks should be provided free by the school** - Language Assistants have a very limited income and should not be expected to buy their own.

3.32 If the school has an internal magazine, it is a good idea for it to publish an interview with the Language Assistant. Ideally, this would coincide approximately with his or her arrival, so if possible it may be helpful to conduct the interview in advance by telephone or E-mail (further interviews can be conducted later, for example shortly before the Language Assistant's departure). If the school holds daily or weekly events at which staff and students are all present, as is the tradition in some countries, it may be useful for the head or a senior teacher briefly to introduce the Language Assistant at one of these occasions and to take the opportunity to explain why he or she is at the school and what he or she will be doing. This has the advantage of demonstrating that the new arrival is there with the authority of senior staff and must be respected in the same way as any other teacher, despite the fact that relations are in practice likely to become less formal. However, this sort of mass introduction can be intimidating for some Language Assistants and should only be done if the Language Assistant welcomes the idea. An alternative is to introduce the Language Assistant to each class in the school in turn. It is sometimes best with younger learners simply to introduce the Language Assistant at first as "a teacher from another country" rather than risk confusing the children and undermining the Language Assistant's authority by describing him or her as an Assistant or student teacher.

Arrange a structured induction period

3.33 The first two or three weeks of the Language Assistantship should be treated as an induction period during which the Language Assistant is not asked to take part in any teaching - the length of time and the activities involved may differ according to circumstances, such as how much previous teaching experience the Language Assistant has and the length of the Assistantship overall. This is the best way to help a Language Assistant to understand the life of the school and the context for the work he or she will be doing. Plenty of time should also be left for the Language Assistant to do all the tasks outside school, which are likely to be necessary in the first few days after arrival.

3.34 Experience has shown that Language Assistants who have been able during an induction period to participate to classes in subjects other than languages have often been motivated by the experience. This has helped to overcome any resistance they may initially feel to the idea of being involved later in the teaching of non-language classes (see 3.70 - 3.73).

3.35 The induction period can be used in observing lessons across the whole school curriculum and age range, as well as visiting local resources such as libraries or, where they exist, language-teaching centres. In cases where the Language Assistant does not speak the local language, part of the induction period might most usefully be spent following an intensive "survival" course. Particularly if the Language Assistant is short of teaching experience, it may be useful for the regular observation of lessons to continue beyond the induction period.

3.36 To obtain maximum benefit from an induction period, it is essential to give it some structure. For instance, the supervisor and the Language Assistant can draw up a timetable for lessons he or she will be expected to attend. Such observation should not be seen purely as a matter of passively sitting at the back of classroom. It may be useful to focus the Language Assistant's attention by asking him or her to pay particular attention to certain aspects of lessons, such as the way language teachers help ensure they are understood when speaking the language they are teaching or how discipline is maintained. Language Assistants can also to be asked to make a list of ways in which teaching in the host school differs from what they have experienced in their own country.

3.37 Teachers may wish to involve the Language Assistant in the lesson at some points. They should always make sure that learners know who the Language Assistant is and why he or she is there. It is essential for the supervisor to warn colleagues that the Language Assistant may ask permission to attend their lessons. Staff should make clear that they are interested in hearing about the Language Assistant's first impressions and that they will be glad to answer questions.

Meeting with the supervisor at the end of the induction period

3.38 At the end of the induction period, time should be set aside for a meeting between the supervisor and the Language Assistant, to finalise planning for the following period and so that the supervisor can do his or her best to allay any worries which may have arisen during the induction period. Two particular "personal" aspects supervisors should clarify with Language Assistants at around this stage are accommodation and finance. Has the Language Assistant found somewhere to live with which he or she is happy? Has payment of the grant arrived from the Language Assistant's own National Agency? This will normally be paid into a bank account in the Language Assistant's own country and he or she will then transfer funds to the host country.

3.39 A regular time should be agreed with the Language Assistant for future meetings, which should be at least weekly (see 3.77 - 3.79). It may also be useful to discuss with the Language Assistant the form in which he or she will keep a record of the Language Assistantship (see 4.81 - 4.82)

3C/ INTEGRATION INTO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Checklist

- * **Invite the Language Assistant to social events**
- * **Provide information about leisure activities in the area**
- * **Help the Language Assistant make contact with others in the same situation**
- * **Offer help with administrative formalities**

3.40 In many cases, the host school is at first the only point of contact the Language Assistant has with the host community and host culture. Even if the school is a model of best practice in welcoming the assistant while he or she is on the premises, problems can arise outside school hours.

3.41 The worst is often loneliness. This can often be a problem for teachers newly posted to schools in unfamiliar areas of their own country. It can be far worse for a Language Assistant who comes from another culture and who may not speak the local language confidently. Reports show that a significant number of Language Assistants suffer from feelings of isolation at some point in their stay, although this is almost always temporary.

3.42 Supervisors also need to be conscious that Language Assistants are sometimes very young and in some cases, particularly if they are from a country where it is traditional to attend one's local university, may have very little experience of being away from home. Some may have never lived outside their parents' homes before, and can find independence rather daunting. On the other hand, they are not children and may not find it easy or appropriate to make friends among pupils, even older ones

3.43 Of course, many Language Assistants will be fiercely independent and require very little help in adapting to their new surroundings. But the supervisor, without trying to act as a replacement parent, should be available for those who do need practical guidance, or even just a friendly face to talk to.

Invite the Language Assistant to social events

3.44 There is a great deal teachers can do directly to alleviate initial loneliness, for example by occasionally inviting the Language Assistant to staff homes for meals, and by ensuring that he or she is included in any

collective social outings to restaurants, cinemas, etc. Indirect help can also be offered. It may well be that the Language Assistant has interests in common with some members of staff, especially if they are close in age. The supervisor can be helpful in bringing people together in this situation.

Provide information about leisure activities in the area

3.45 One way for Language Assistants to combine making friends and improving their linguistic skills is to join clubs or adult education classes, for example connected with a sporting or cultural interest. It can be difficult for a newcomer to find information about such possibilities and it is often useful for schools to collect information of this sort and include it in the Language Assistant's "welcome pack". It is also useful for schools to inform Language Assistants about where to find information about more informal social possibilities such as concerts, theatre, cinema etc.

Help the Language Assistant to make contact with others in the same situation

3.46 In an ideal world, in order to assist their linguistic development, Language Assistants would all have many friends of their own age among the local community and with whom they would speak the local language. In many cases, however, Language Assistants' social circle tends to include other young foreigners away from home. The National Agencies will have lists of Comenius Language Assistants working in the same area (and possibly also of Erasmus students from the Language Assistant's own country studying at a local university). In countries where National Language Assistantship programmes operate in addition to Comenius, schools themselves or the local educational administration will probably also be aware of other Language Assistants under those schemes. It is often very helpful for Language Assistants to have contact with those in a similar position with whom experiences can be compared and problems shared, and schools may be in a position to facilitate this.

Offer help with administrative formalities

3.47 Although serious problems in this area are rare, many Language Assistants who have not spent time in another European country before can experience confusion over administrative procedures, especially if they have difficulty speaking the local language. Sometimes one of the best appreciated ways in which a supervisor can help an Language Assistant is by accompanying him or her to perform necessary formalities such as registering with the police, with social security authorities and with a local doctor in countries where that is necessary. The Language Assistant may also need help with opening a bank account and, if he or she is living in a flat alone, with dealing with gas, electricity and telephone companies.

3D/ IN AND BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Checklist

- * Give the Language Assistant an opportunity to teach his or her mother tongue
- * Use the Language Assistant imaginatively
- * Involve the Language Assistant in developing teaching materials
- * Give the Language Assistant a wide variety of experiences
- * Consult the Language Assistant on timetable and in planning lessons
- * Use the Language Assistant as a cultural, as well as linguistic, resource
- * Use the Language Assistant with learners needing special support
- * Use the Language Assistant with high ability students
- * Make sure all learners have access to the Language Assistant
- * If a Language Assistant has an interest/ability in new technologies, use it
- * Use the Language Assistant outside language lessons
- * Link the Language Assistantship with the local community
- * Help the Language Assistant with any discipline problems
- * The supervisor and Language Assistant should hold weekly meetings
- * Encourage the Language Assistant to express ideas

3.48 To some extent, problems of integration and practicalities such as accommodation will present similar challenges for most Comenius Language Assistants. Regarding the work Language Assistants will do, it is, however, much more difficult to identify a set of common experiences. Language Assistants are entering many different types of host institution with different educational cultures and with learners of varying ages and abilities. Language Assistants themselves have different levels of teaching experience and confidence. Some will require help with basic teaching techniques, while others are capable of being very self-sufficient. Most are speakers, native or not, of languages that are already taught in the host school. Some are not.

3.49 The advice, which follows, could not possibly cover every situation, which might arise and is not intended to be in any way comprehensive. It seeks only to set out some general principles and to make some suggestions based on reports from previous Comenius Language Assistants and from National Agencies. Like the list in **Annex III**, it is intended as a starting point for ideas from Language Assistants and schools rather than a “handbook”.

Give the Language Assistant an opportunity to teach his or her mother tongue

3.50 For many learners, contact with the Comenius Language Assistant is the very first time they have come into contact with somebody from that linguistic and cultural background. This is often true even if the Language Assistant is from a larger participating country with a widely used language, and is even more likely to be the case if the Language Assistant’s language is a less widely used one.

3.51 This situation provides a very important educational opportunity to raise learners’ awareness (see also 4.57). **Schools are therefore required to ensure that each Comenius Language Assistant teaches his or her mother tongue** (preferably within normal school hours) even if this is at a very basic level.

3.52 This normally presents no problem if the Language Assistant’s mother tongue is already taught in the school. In some cases where it is not, and particularly if the school is subject by law to a centralised curriculum which leaves little time for additional subjects, imaginative solutions may need to be found. Language teaching can be incorporated into lessons on other school subjects. “Language clubs” (see **Annex III**) can be set up at lunchtimes or after school, with pupils throughout the school invited to attend. Project work on the Language Assistant’s country can also be organised, perhaps involving several school subjects, and in some cases the Language Assistantship can be linked to the preparation or the execution of a Comenius School Partnership Project with a school in the Language Assistant’s country.

3.53 At the same time, schools should remember that Comenius Language Assistants have normally been trained in the teaching of languages other than their own and may at first find it difficult to adapt to teaching their mother tongue, especially if little support in the way of text books, etc. is available. In some countries, learners at school do not study to any great extent the grammar of their own native language, so staff should not be shocked if Language Assistants do not always find grammatical explanations easy.

3.54 One problem for Language Assistants teaching less widely used languages has been that it has been difficult to obtain teaching materials and Language Assistants have had to produce everything themselves. The Commission’s “**Inventory of materials for the least widely used learnt and taught languages**” may be helpful. It is available from National Agencies.

Use the Language Assistant imaginatively

3.55 All schools are encouraged to ensure that the Language Assistant also plays a part in lessons other than traditional language lessons (see 3.70 - 3.73), and that in language lessons he or she provides a resource and performs a function that an ordinary teacher could not perform as well or as easily. Taking a large class of students through written grammar exercises, for example, is unlikely to be the best use for a Language Assistant. A list of some of the more original activities, which have been successful in the past, is included in

Annex III.

Involve the Language Assistant in developing teaching materials

3.56 Language Assistants should also be encouraged to develop their own teaching materials, as part of the training aspect of the Language Assistantship. If this task is undertaken in collaboration with language teachers, it can be particularly beneficial to both Language Assistant and institution. The Language Assistant can learn from the pedagogical experience of the teachers, and they in turn can take advantage of the availability of a native speaker as a resource, for example in checking colloquial language or in recording listening passages in the target language. Many of the materials thus produced will be of use to the school long after the Language Assistant has left.

Use the Language Assistant as a cultural, as well as linguistic, resource

3.57 Learners are much more likely to be motivated to learn a language if they are interested in the culture, and particularly the popular culture, which goes with it. Comenius Language Assistants should be given the opportunity to transmit that culture, and should be encouraged to use their imagination in devising ways of doing so. This can do much to combat stereotypes and to make learners aware of the diversity and complexity of Europe. This is especially important in the case of Language Assistants from countries with less widely used languages, who can introduce learners to ways of life they know little about. Many Language Assistants are also in a position to introduce students to regional cultures, and in some case to minority languages.

3.58 In most cases, of course, there is an overlap between linguistic and cultural classroom activities. To take a simple example, learners are more likely to remember the names of foods in the target language if they take part in an interactive activity involving a mock visit to a shop or restaurant or organise a party at which typical dishes are served, than if they are simply shown cards with pictures of food. Popular songs and games can be an effective tool for teaching vocabulary. Videos of real films or television programmes from the Language Assistant's country, used imaginatively, can be successful - some ideas are in **Annex III**. Language Assistants can also use significant historical events or folklore in their country as a basis for helping pupils to learn and practice language.

Give the Language Assistant a wide variety of experiences

3.59 Comenius Language Assistants should have contact with the widest possible range of learners in the school. In primary schools, this should include the youngest learners. Research shows that these are likely to be better able than older children to make quick progress in a foreign language, provided that the activities used are suitable. Working with young children also often provides an excellent opportunity for the Language Assistant to teach his or her mother tongue.

3.60 Ideally, Comenius Language Assistants will be given some experience in teaching whole classes alone - although the physical presence of a permanent teacher may be required by law in some countries - as well as in acting as a support teacher in such classes and in taking smaller groups within or outside a class. **Teachers should at all times be aware of what the Language Assistant is doing and what results are expected, just as they are for their own classes.** The Language Assistant in turn should always have a list of exactly which pupils are expected to attend any class or small group he or she is teaching.

Consult the Language Assistant on the timetable and in planning lessons

3.61 In determining the balance between the various types of activity, the Language Assistant's own wishes must be taken into account, along with the supervisor's and other teachers' judgement as to whether he or she is ready for whole-class teaching, given the Language Assistant's level of experience and confidence and the particular circumstances of the school. **Language Assistants should in any case always be involved in the planning of any lesson in which they are to take part, in whatever capacity.**

3.62 As a general rule, Language Assistants can be given a higher level of unsupervised responsibility as their stay in the school goes on.

Use the Language Assistant with learners needing special support

3.63 One of the stated priorities of Language Assistantships is to give extra help to those learners who are less advantaged and who need special support in learning foreign languages. There are many ways in which this can be approached, both within the main classroom with the Language Assistant acting as a support teacher, sitting with and helping the learners in question, and in separate withdrawal groups.

3.64 There are many reasons why some pupils may have more difficulty than others in learning a foreign language. If the problem is lack of motivation, simple contact with a native speaker can be an excellent stimulus. If learners have special educational needs, have learning difficulties, or are disabled, such contact will still be valuable in itself. But the Language Assistant cannot fairly be expected to help without detailed guidance from permanent teachers, and particularly from those specialising in dealing with such learners. He or she should only be left alone with such students, even in small groups, if the Language Assistant already knows them and what to expect from them, if the lesson has been carefully planned beforehand and provided that the Language Assistant is clearly willing and able to take on the task.

Use Language Assistant with higher ability students

3.65 Language Assistants can also be very useful for giving intensive extra practice to the higher ability students in a class. It is important in planning this sort of activity to ensure that the aims are clear - the classic conversation class, consisting in an unstructured chat between the Language Assistant and students, is useful from time to time but is likely to be dominated by one or two students and is unlikely to produce the best results if it is all the Language Assistant ever does with small groups. Again, some ideas can be found in **Annex III**.

Make sure all learners have access to the Language Assistant

3.66 All the learners in a class should have at least some opportunity to work with the Language Assistant. If he or she is seen to be monopolised by any particular group of learners, this can cause resentment. Frustration can also be created among more motivated pupils if they feel that their access to the Language Assistant is too strictly rationed or rigidly structured.

3.67 Many learners will approach the Language Assistant on their own initiative outside the classroom to seek further help or advice, but many host institutions have found it useful to include one or two periods per week in the Language Assistant's timetable which are outside normal school hours, at lunchtime or after school. At its simplest, this can involve the Language Assistant being available in a designated room for all learners who wish to ask for help with some work or just to come in for a chat in the foreign language.

If a Language Assistant has an interest/ability in new technologies, use it

3.68 Another area in which host institutions are encouraged to make the maximum possible use of Comenius Language Assistants is in the use of new educational technologies and the development of distance teaching. Language Assistants can play a very important role in helping learners to gain maximum benefit from new technology. Language Assistants can, for example, set up electronic links with institutions in their home country, help learners to produce word-processed and graphic material in the target language, and guide them to and help them to understand Internet sites in the target language.

3.69 Language Assistants can also help learners to make use of the European Schoolnet, a network of linked sites specifically aimed at schools and already using several languages, with more to be added in due course. This platform, which is currently being further developed with the support of the European Commission, is accessible via the address **www.eun.org**.

Use the Language Assistant outside language lessons

3.70 Many schools, which have received Comenius Language Assistants, have used them successfully in lessons that are not primarily language lessons. One general benefit of this is that it can help younger learners who have had little previous contact with foreigners to see the Language Assistant as a "normal"

adult with wide interests and knowledge rather than exclusively the representative of a foreign language and culture. More specifically, history and geography are obvious examples of areas where Language Assistants may be able to provide a useful input, especially but not exclusively in lessons concerning their own country. Language Assistants may have personal knowledge and interest in other academic subject areas or in art or sport. They can also be very useful in project work on issues such as the environment.

3.71 There are also various imaginative ways in which Language Assistants can be used to integrate a language element into lessons on other subjects. Research shows that one of the most effective ways for children to make progress in a foreign language is to receive lessons in other subjects given in that language. Pupils who attend multilingual schools, for example, often become fluent in several languages. The learning of a language by means of work on a School Partnership Project is specifically supported under Comenius Action 1.1.

3.72 Any school can use a Comenius Language Assistant to offer its own pupils a taste of such benefits, even if this simply means introducing a few words of vocabulary connected with the subject of the lesson. But there are more sophisticated techniques which can be used especially where the Language Assistant's mother tongue is on the school curriculum or where he or she is a very fluent speaker of another language which is on that curriculum. Some ideas are in **Annex III**.

3.73 In addition, an Internet web site partly funded by the European Commission and devoted to the multilingual teaching of all subjects can be found at <http://www.euroclit.net>. This includes a materials bank and a chat facility for teachers to swap ideas. If you do not have access to the Internet, you can obtain the Euroclit bulletin from the Euroclit Secretariat at Bezuidenhoutseweg 253, 2594 AM DEN HAAG, Netherlands, Tel + 31 70 381 4448, fax + 31 70 383 1958.

Link the Language Assistantship with the local community

3.74 In the past, some schools and Language Assistants have found very rewarding ways of using the Language Assistantship to work with the local community. Some Language Assistants, in collaboration with local companies, have organised exhibitions on aspects of their country of origin or offered food tastings. It is also sometimes possible to collaborate with local radio stations to produce a short programme about the Language Assistant and the Assistantship. Pupils can also be involved in events such as these. Other Language Assistants, often those whose mother tongue is a less widely-used language, have offered classes open to local people as well as to pupils, parents and teachers.

Help the Language Assistant with any discipline problems

3.75 One point, which emerges strongly in the final reports submitted by Comenius Language Assistants, is that the nature of Language Assistants' relationship with pupils is likely to differ greatly between countries and between host establishments. In all cases, Language Assistants should be carefully briefed by the supervisor on the school's disciplinary policies and the limits on acceptable behaviour. In some countries, for example, teachers and even head teachers are addressed by pupils and colleagues using their first name, while in others such informality would be unacceptable. Obviously, any adult's relationship with primary pupils is likely to be conditioned to some extent by the large age difference, but even here, it should be clear to the pupils that, while the Language Assistant is not just another teacher, he or she must be obeyed and respected.

3.76 This balance is even more difficult to achieve in secondary schools. Most learners will be motivated by contact with the Language Assistant, will want that contact to continue and will understand that an informal relationship can only be maintained if it is not abused. Very few Comenius Language Assistants have reported serious and continuous discipline problems, but if they do complain of these, or the supervisor or other teachers suspect that they are occurring, schools should take action immediately. Wherever possible, this should be done in consultation with Language Assistants, who should normally be advised on how to deal with the problem themselves rather than have it taken completely out of their hands. Just like any young teacher, Language Assistants' confidence can be severely affected by pupil misbehaviour, but also by

the feeling that the solution to it is outside their control and consists merely of a senior teacher coming into the class to shout at the pupils.

The supervisor and Language Assistant should hold weekly meetings

3.77 On the same note, it is worth underlining again that it is vital that informal but regular evaluation meetings are held with the supervisor, in order to exchange ideas and assess progress, to help solve any problems, to discuss the work programme for the period ahead and, if necessary, to amend the Language Assistant's timetable. These sessions can also be used to help assess whether the school itself is achieving the goals, which it set for the Language Assistantship project.

Encourage the Language Assistant to express ideas

3.78 These meetings also provide an opportunity for creative thinking. While Comenius Language Assistants will clearly benefit from being part of an institution full of experienced teachers and with a different educational culture from their home country, schools can also learn from Comenius Language Assistants. Many of them, after all, are wholly or partly trained teachers in their own right and while the enthusiasm of youth may sometimes lead to a certain naiveté, an outsider encountering a school for the first time can bring an original approach which can be very useful, especially if the supervisor helps to channel and refine that thinking.

3.79 In many cases, Language Assistants will have the confidence to make suggestions directly to all the teachers with whom they work, but in others they may fear rejection or feel that it is not their role. The weekly meeting therefore provides an opportunity for the supervisor to encourage the Language Assistant to put forward and discuss his or her own pedagogical ideas.

4/ GOOD PRACTICE FOR LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS

By taking part in a Comenius Language Assistantship you can gain a wealth of experience that is valuable for your future teaching career and beyond. You'll be able to add a new language to your repertoire, (and/or improve one that you speak already) and develop your teaching skills, whilst living and working abroad.

Your Language Assistantship gives you an opportunity to use your creativity to the full in teaching your language and culture in language lessons, in non-language lessons, in extra-curricular activities and in the wider community.

You will need to invest some time and thought in your Language Assistantship to make sure that it give you the experiences that you want. This section aims to help you do that.

4A/ BEFORE LEAVING FOR THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANTSHIP

Checklist

- * **Contact your host school**
- * **Make a list of the information you need**
- * **Get your supervisor's contact details**
- * **Make sure the dates of the Language Assistantship are clear**
- * **Agree an outline timetable**
- * **Make sure the timetable is for 12-16 hours**
- * **Make sure you will have the chance to teach your mother tongue**
- * **Collect resource materials to take with you**
- * **Understand the host education system**
- * **Learn the language**
- * **Investigate the possibility of obtaining student status**
- * **If visas, etc. are necessary, apply for them early**

- * **Make travel arrangements in plenty of time**
- * **If you are taking your car, know the law**
- * **Get insurance**
- * **If your National Agency organises an information meeting, go to it**

Contact your host school

4.1 Preparation, by both the host school and the Language Assistant, is vital to ensuring that a Language Assistantship goes smoothly from the start. Contact by telephone (and/or E-mail) as well as by letter is necessary. In most cases the school will contact you first, but if this does not happen within a couple of weeks, you should take the initiative.

Make a list of the information you need

4.2 Perhaps the first step for a prospective Language Assistant is to make a comprehensive list of things you need to know before leaving. This list can be drawn up even before your first contact with the host school and updated as new questions occur to you. Obviously, you will want to be as fully informed as possible about the school itself, but there are also likely to be many other general questions about the host community. In many cases, the school will send you much of the information you require, but if it does not do this spontaneously, do not hesitate to ask. You can also seek information from the host country or region's official representations in your country (embassy, consulate, tourist office etc).

Get your supervisor's contact details

4.3 Once you are in contact with the school, make sure that you have the name and contact details of the person, often a language teacher, who will be supervising your Language Assistantship. In cases where you will be working in more than one school, you may want a contact in each. However, it should be clear that one institution, and one supervisor, has overall responsibility. If the supervisor is willing, you should obtain a private telephone number so that you can reach him or her outside school hours, or during the summer holidays which often immediately precede the beginning of Language Assistantships.

Make sure the dates of the Language Assistantship are clear

4.4 There is a number of things which need to be discussed before you leave. Basic practicalities such as the date of arrival and departure, as well as the dates of starting and finishing the Language Assistantship itself, must be clear. Where possible, schools will arrange for someone to meet Language Assistants at the airport or station.

Agree an outline timetable

4.5 Both parties should also agree on the outline of the Language Assistant's timetable. This may be merely an indication of approximately how many hours will be spent doing which type of activities with which age groups, rather than a detailed weekly plan. In any case, flexibility is essential if the Language Assistantship is to be used creatively. It should be clear that what is drawn up at this stage is only provisional and may be modified later.

4.6 The Language Assistant must be fully consulted on his or her timetable, and you should not be afraid to put your point of view. It is very important at an early stage to let the school know if you have particular preferences or particular skills which may be useful, for example in sport, music, drama or art. Remember, however, that you may not be able to have exactly the timetable you would like and that the education system in the destination country may be very different from your own.

Make sure the timetable is for 12-16 hours

4.7 Nevertheless, there are two things that you can and should insist on. The first is that the timetable should be for between **12 and 16 hours** every week, unless you are willing to do more. This includes time with learners, whether within or outside normal school hours, and any time spent on other work on behalf

of the school, such as assisting with European projects or working with parents or the local community.
Preparation of lessons is not included.

4.8 Many Language Assistants enjoy their work so much that they are prepared to take on additional duties. However, you should not agree to do any extra hours at this stage, until you have been in the school for a while and have a better idea of what is involved.

Make sure you will have the chance to teach your mother tongue

4.9 The second element on which Language Assistants should be firm is that, although in many cases you will also be teaching other languages and subjects, **you are entitled to spend at least some of your contact hours teaching your mother tongue, even if it is not normally taught at the host school.** This is true whatever your native language: plurilingualism is a key objective of COMENIUS, and all Language Assistants can help transmit the message that all languages, not just those spoken most widely, are of value to learners.

4.10 Remember that in some host countries there are official curricula, which schools must follow, and this can make it difficult to schedule classes in subjects not on those curricula. But various solutions have been found in the past, including introducing an element of simple language teaching into lessons on other school subjects such as geography or history, often where these cover the Language Assistant's own country. Some Language Assistants have also offered classes in their native language at lunchtime or outside school hours, which interested pupils (and sometimes parents and teachers, too) attend. Such classes should be counted as part of your normal contact hours. It may also be possible to co-operate with several teachers to organise project work on your country, and in some cases to connect the Language Assistantship with either the preparation or the execution of a Project in the framework of the Comenius 1 School Partnerships with a school in your country. **If the school refuses to accept your right to teach your mother tongue, please contact either your home National Agency or the host one.**

Collect resource materials to take with you

4.11 You should also discuss with the host school what teaching materials you should bring with you. These may differ according to the teaching you will be doing, the ages of the learners involved, etc. If your own native language is already on the curriculum, the school may already have available material such as tourist brochures, transport timetables, newspapers and videos and may ask you to bring more specialised items. If your language is not usually taught in the school, it may have little or nothing of its own available. A list of things which have proved useful in the past is at **Annex II**. If you are asked to spend any significant sums of money on materials, you should confirm before buying anything that the school is willing to reimburse you. Keep all receipts.

Understand the host education system

4.12 In order to prepare properly for the Language Assistantship, it will be useful for you to do some reading in advance about the education system in the receiving country. Ask the host school to send you any relevant documents. It may be worthwhile to visit your local educational bookshop, where comparative studies may be available. Information on national education systems can also be found through the "Eurydice" European database, which has a comprehensive Internet site at <http://www.eurydice.org/> or can be contacted at 240 avenue Louise, B-1050 Brussels, Tel. +32-2-600.53.53, Fax. +32-2-600.53.63.

Learn the language

4.13 Reports from Language Assistants often stress the enormous benefit of beginning **before departure** to improve your linguistic knowledge. If you are going to a country or region whose main language you do not speak fluently, you should spend some time studying the basics, if possible by attending a class or if not by using self-teaching materials, which are available for all European languages, often in the form of interactive CD-ROMs as well as on paper. If a minority language (for example Basque, Irish etc.) is widely spoken in the region you will be going to, it is also useful to learn at least a few phrases of that. It may be worthwhile

asking your host school if it can help arrange for you, shortly after your arrival, a period of intensive language learning, perhaps as part of your induction period (see 4.32).

Investigate the possibility of obtaining student status

4.14 Indeed, if you want to enrol in any kind of educational activity (linguistic or otherwise) during your Language Assistantship (see 4.45-4.50), it is advisable to research the possibilities and make arrangements before departure, in so far as is possible. This is especially true if you wish to register at a university in the host country. Even if you are not going to a university town, distance learning arrangements are sometimes possible. As well as allowing you to pursue your studies, this may give you student status and access to the discounts and advantages that go with it. In some countries (for example Belgium and Spain) student status can sometimes be obtained by following a certain number of hours of language lessons in official institutions other than universities. Other Language Assistants may be able to obtain student status by registering (or remaining registered) at a university or other institution in their own country and getting an international student card. Please note that while Language Assistants are encouraged to undertake studies, the Language Assistantship must at all times take priority if, for example, there is a clash of timetables.

If visas, etc. are necessary, apply for them early

4.15 Within the EU and European Economic Area (EEA = EU + Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) citizens of EU/EEA member countries can move freely without visas (but see 4.21 for medical formalities and 4.53/4.54 for formalities which may be necessary on arrival). **Visas are likely to be required for all Language Assistants going to or coming from a non-EU/EEA country.** In some cases medical certificates may also be required. If you are one of these Language Assistants, as soon as you have been notified of your destination, you should contact the relevant country's embassy or consulate in your home country for information and application forms. Applications may take two months or longer to process. If you have particular difficulties, contact your National Agency. **Please note, however, that while problems are unlikely provided you act in good time, the granting of visas is at the discretion of national immigration authorities.**

Make travel arrangements in plenty of time

4.16 If you are going to be travelling to your host country by air, or certain high-speed trains, you should book your return ticket as soon as possible, as the cheaper offers often sell out quickly. Your own National Agency will meet your travel costs from European Commission funds, but you are expected to ensure that you get the cheapest possible tickets and will be asked to explain should you be unable to do so. Keep all tickets and receipts.

4.17 Before booking any tickets, speak with your future supervisor to ensure that the route you have chosen is convenient and economical. For example, a direct flight to a regional airport may at first appear more expensive than flying to a capital city but in some countries domestic train fares to the final destination may be high.

If you are taking your car, know the law

4.18 Some Language Assistants may decide to drive to their destinations. Again, the costs will be reimbursed. Well before your journey, check the host country's rules on importing cars for personal use. In most cases, few formalities are necessary for stays of less than a year by EU citizens in other EU countries. Existing registration plates can usually be retained and existing driving licences are valid. But in all cases, and in particular where a non-EU country is involved, you should check with the relevant embassy or consulate in your country. You must also ensure that your car is covered by insurance valid in the host country.

Get insurance

4.19 In most cases, your host school or the responsible authority in the host country will insure you against accident or injury to third parties caused in the course of your work. Check the position with your host school to make sure that this is being arranged. If it is not, contact your National Agency for advice.

4.20 In all cases, **you are yourself responsible for obtaining insurance for your personal possessions and against accident or damage to yourself or third parties outside the school premises. Make sure that such cover is valid in your destination country.**

4.21 **You will also need to consider carefully your position with regard to medical cover.** If you are an EU citizen, then in all EU countries and a few non-EU countries you should benefit from state health programmes, although you will need, well before your departure, **to contact the relevant authorities in your home country** for information on this and to obtain the E111 form which will prove your entitlement to state treatment. Note that in most countries, even in the EU, this entitles you only to **partial** reimbursement of medical costs, and that in practice there can be delays and difficulties in obtaining that reimbursement. Additional insurance is advisable. Extra insurance is also required for repatriation in the case of serious illness or accident, and we recommend you obtain this. Language Assistants going to or coming from non-EU countries will in many cases need to arrange all of their health insurance privately. One relatively cheap possibility may be long-term travel insurance policies available via travel agents, but always make absolutely sure that these are valid in the destination country and cover you for working visits as well as holidays. If you need further advice on health insurance, contact in the first place your National Agency.

If your National Agency organises an information meeting, go to it

4.22 Many National Agencies organise preparation meetings for Language Assistants before they depart. Do not miss this opportunity to get any extra information you need and to meet other new Language Assistants as well as Assistants from previous years who will be able to tell you what to expect. If you are unable to attend, ask your National Agency for copies of any written information distributed at the meeting and if possible for the contact details of a former Language Assistant who went to the same host country as you will be going to. (NB. **All** National Agencies hold **compulsory** induction meetings for Language Assistants recently arrived in their host country - see 4.51)

4B/ INTEGRATION INTO THE SCHOOL

Checklist

- * **Respect cultural and educational differences**
- * **Introduce yourself to all staff**
- * **Understand teachers are sometimes very busy**
- * **Use the induction period to think carefully about the Language Assistantship**
- * **Offer to help teachers during the induction period**
- * **Offer to help with extra-curricular activities - sport, clubs etc.**
- * **Meeting with your supervisor at the end of the induction period**
- * **If you have problems, speak to your supervisor first**

4.23 Schools tend to be very complex institutions with a way of life of their own, and it often takes some time to get used to new school even when it is in one's own country and within a system with which one has grown up. It is all the more challenging when the educational culture itself is also different.

4.24 It is therefore not unusual for Comenius Language Assistants to feel a little disorientated at first, especially if they arrive at a time when the school term is already in progress. You will need time to adapt to the host school and vice-versa. Do not be despondent if things do not go smoothly at first. However, integration is usually a very quick process and it is very rare for Language Assistants to experience lasting problems in feeling comfortable in the host institution.

Respect cultural and educational differences

4.25 Possibly the most important thing to bear in mind at all times, and especially during the early stages of the Language Assistantship, is that practice in the host school may be very different from that in schools in your own country. A wise Language Assistant will observe and be sensitive to these differences without making value judgements. Remember that institutions can be managed and pupils can learn in many different ways. The examples of potential differences given below are some of the most common, but there can be many others.

4.26 Relationships between members of staff and between staff and pupils may be more or less formal than you have been used to. Pedagogical principles may also be very different and may at first appear rather shocking if you have been trained in another country, especially given that most Language Assistants' training is very recent. For example, in some educational systems, classroom work tends to involve groups of learners working together. In others, the teacher usually addresses the whole class throughout the lesson. This type of difference can be particularly evident in language lessons, where another aspect, which differs between countries, is the emphasis that is put on oral as opposed to written work. Within oral work, the emphasis on effective communication compared to that given to speaking "correctly" may vary. In some systems there will be frequent use of translation exercises. In others these will never be done.

4.27 Some educational systems use a great deal of testing and sometimes rank learners in order of success. In others, this is less common. The level of freedom teachers have to determine the content of their lessons also varies. Sometimes the national curriculum is very detailed, in other cases only broad outlines are set down.

4.28 Attitudes to discipline differ. In some countries, most schools require pupils to wear uniforms. The principle behind this is not an authoritarian one, but one of equality between pupils from different income groups. Sometimes a certain level of talk in classrooms tends to be accepted, while elsewhere silence is required. In certain systems, older pupils tend to be allowed to smoke during breaks, while in others this can lead to permanent expulsion from the school.

4.29 The role of teachers in upholding discipline also varies. In some systems, all teachers have equal responsibility and must look after pupils during breaks, sometimes according to a rota system. In others, specialist staff are employed for this and a normal teacher is responsible only within the classroom. Older pupils may also play a role in maintaining order.

Introduce yourself to all staff

4.30 Normally your supervisor or head teacher will introduce you to most of the school's staff soon after your arrival. But in cases where this does not happen, do what you can yourself to ensure that you are known to everybody, both teachers and other staff such as secretaries and caretakers. You should do this even if you are not a fluent speaker of the language of the host country, but bear in mind that some of your new colleagues may find it difficult to communicate with you. Do not expect them to do all the work in getting to know you.

Understand teachers are sometimes very busy

4.31 You will probably have many questions to ask about the management of the school and will be eager to speak with teachers about the kind of work you will be doing with their classes. Do not be discouraged if they do not have the time to talk to you immediately. Choose a moment when they are relaxing rather than one in the middle of a hectic school day. It may also be worth making a list of what you need to know and asking your supervisor if he or she would be able to organise, and attend, a short meeting with each of the teachers you will initially be working with.

Use the induction period to think carefully about the Language Assistantship

4.32 In most cases, before you are asked to begin your regular timetable, the school will organise an induction period of at least a couple of weeks, during which you will not take an active teaching role but will get to know the life of the school by observing lessons and other activities. But this does not mean

sitting passively at the back of the class. Your supervisor may suggest some points to consider. But even if not, you should use this time to assess the differences between the host school and your own school and the schools you have visited during your training. Taking notes may help you to concentrate and make it easier to report back to your supervisor later.

4.33 Make sure you see a wide variety of lessons. Think about how to motivate learners of different ages and levels, especially if you are not used to teaching the age group you are observing – primary school children, for example, will be very easy to motivate for a short while through the use of games and songs, but will have a short attention span. Older learners may need convincing intellectually that what they are doing is useful, but once this is achieved will work autonomously. The key question to ask yourself at this stage - and indeed throughout the Language Assistantship - is what contribution you can make to pupils' learning and to the life of the school and local community. Remember that what you have to offer, especially knowledge of languages not normally taught in the school, is of great value and that you are there not to do what teachers do already but to add a new dimension.

Offer to help teachers during the induction period

4.34 The induction period will normally be organised to some extent for you, but you should always ensure that you speak personally to all teachers whose lessons you wish to observe, in order to ask their permission and to ask if there is any way you can make yourself useful in the lesson, for example by sitting with and helping a particular group of learners.

Offer to help with extra-curricular activities - sport, clubs etc.

4.35 In some schools, a great deal of activity goes on outside formal lessons, and busy teachers are often delighted to have extra help, for example with school sport or with producing school drama or musical events, which are very common in some countries. Such assistance will gain you goodwill and will also enable you to have a better insight into the culture of the host country, both educationally and more generally. In some cases it may also be an opportunity to meet pupils' parents.

Meeting with your supervisor at the end of the induction period

4.36 It is essential to set aside time at the end of the induction period for a meeting with your supervisor. You should prepare before this meeting a list of questions you wish to ask and points you want to make. If as a result of the induction period you have any new ideas on classes or activities with which you would like to be involved, now is a good time to say so. If you are having any difficulties with accommodation or other personal matters, seek advice.

4.37 Do not be afraid to speak frankly, but tactfully, about any problems you have noticed or about differences between what you have seen and schools in your own country. Comenius Language Assistants should always be aware of their own relative inexperience and accept that teachers in the host school are likely to have many years of accumulated knowledge and practical experience of what works and what does not for their learners. You can learn a great deal from these teachers. But they can also learn from you, and if you are tactful, most teachers will be willing to allow you to experiment with your own ideas.

4.38 A regular time should be agreed with the supervisor for future meetings, which should be at least weekly. It may also be useful at this stage to discuss the form in which you will keep a record of the Language Assistantship (see 4.81 - 4.82).

If you have problems, speak to your supervisor first

4.39 This happens very rarely, but if at any stage in the Language Assistantship you are unhappy about something or feel that you are not being treated correctly by the host school, first speak tactfully and in confidence to your supervisor. If this does not lead to a solution, contact the National Agency in the host country and explain the problem. If you still feel that the situation has not been resolved, speak to someone at your own National Agency.

4C/ INTEGRATION INTO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Checklist

- * **Be aware of cultural and religious differences**
- * **Try to use the local language wherever possible**
- * **Find out about language classes or exchanges**
- * **Consider joining a local club or evening class**
- * **Do not miss the induction meeting**
- * **Ask the host National Agency for a list of other Comenius Language Assistants**
- * **Complete all necessary formalities (police, health, etc.)**
- * **Consider contacting the local newspaper**

4.40 While you will be spending much of your time at the host school or doing things connected with the school, a Language Assistantship is also an opportunity to experience more widely the culture of another country. During a relatively short stay, it can sometimes be difficult to integrate fully into the life of the community around you, especially in large international cities. If you spend much of your free time with other foreigners, there is no reason to feel that is any kind of failure. However, there is a number of ways in which you can increase your chances of meeting local people and of making progress in the local language.

Be aware of cultural and religious differences

4.41 It is very likely that if you are doing your Language Assistantship in a country which you have not visited for an extended period before, you will for a while feel a little culturally disorientated and be unsure what behaviour is expected of you. But if you are open and treat differences with your own culture as an opportunity to learn rather than as a threat, you should soon begin to feel more at ease. Remember that it is more normal in some cultures than in others for people to begin conversations in public places such as cafés or shops and that in some places it is unusual to be invited to people's homes unless you are a close friend. What may appear as either coldness or over-friendliness to you may be quite normal in the host culture. Other traditions may also be very different. For example, one point, which can lead to embarrassment, is that in some countries it is normal to drink quite large amounts of alcohol over a meal or during an evening out. In others more than a couple of glasses will be regarded as bad behaviour and could lead to not being invited next time.

4.42 Remember also that while animated discussion on serious issues such as politics and religion can in some circumstances be interesting and informative for all concerned, you should not risk offending your hosts by bringing up such matters at an inappropriate time or place. Different cultures have different customs in this respect. And you should always avoid being over-critical - remember that your own country and culture is no better (or worse) than the host one.

Try to use the local language wherever possible

4.43 Even if you are not fluent in the language of the host country, practice as much as you can. For example, always try to begin conversations in shops, etc. in the local language. You may find that many people you meet try to help you by using your own language or another language you can understand. But where possible, explain politely that you prefer to speak the local language at least part of the time. Do not be discouraged if at first you have difficulty in understanding or if the language is spoken differently from how you are used to. In many regions of Europe local dialects can at first seem very strong, but it is normally possible to "acclimatise" fairly quickly.

4.44 It is also very useful to watch television in the language you are trying to learn, especially news programmes where the pictures or your knowledge of current events give you a good grasp of the general

context. Films, whether at the cinema or on the television, which have a soundtrack in a language you know well but subtitles in the local language, can also be very useful.

Find out about language classes or exchanges

4.45 The best way to make progress is usually through a combination of immersion in the language and more structured learning. In many countries, local authorities, universities or Chambers of Commerce run free or very cheap classes in the home language.

4.46 Private language schools may also be an option, particularly but not exclusively in countries with more widely used languages. But be aware that standards and costs vary widely and, before enrolling, take advice from your supervisor or from acquaintances who have already followed classes.

4.47 A cheaper and often very convenient option is an exchange, whereby you teach your partner your language for a few hours a week, and he or she teaches you the local language. Obviously, teachers at the host school are ideal partners for this, but may not have the time. An alternative exchange partner may be an older pupil, but you should take care in this situation not to create jealousies among other learners who may see your spending time with one individual as favouritism. If you cannot find a partner through the host school, you could try putting an advertisement on a university or other local notice board.

4.48 If you already have a reasonably good command of the language you are learning, the exchange can take the form of simple conversation. But if you are a beginner, you will need to ask your partner to provide more structured practice, perhaps using a textbook.

Consider joining a local club or evening class

4.49 In your host school, you may find yourself giving classes in other subjects using your mother tongue or another language foreign to the learners involved. This is a good way for them to learn languages. In the same way, learning to do something while using the target language is a good way for you to improve your own linguistic skills. In many towns and cities, and even some smaller communities, there are opportunities to join informal evening classes and clubs in art, photography, local history, creative writing, cooking, wine tasting and many other subjects. If there is a university near your host school, it may accept non-examination students, at little or no cost, to attend on an informal basis lectures and classes offered to full-time students.

4.50 This can also bring you together with local people with interests similar to yours. In some countries, evening classes tend to lead to considerable social contact.

The best source for information on evening classes will depend on the country - it may be the town hall, public library, or university - but teachers at your school will probably be able to point you in the right direction.

Do not miss the induction meeting

4.51 All Comenius Language Assistants will be invited to an induction meeting by the National Agency in the host country. In most cases, this will be soon after your arrival, although the fact that Language Assistants do not all arrive at the same time of year can mean the meeting is not until well after the earliest arrivals have begun their work. **You are required to attend this meeting, and your school is required to give you the necessary time off.** Your own National Agency will reimburse your travel expenses. If you arrive in the host country after the induction meeting has already been held, contact the host National Agency and ask them to send you any documentation available.

Ask the host National Agency for a list of other Comenius Language Assistants

4.52 Even if you are lucky enough to make friends with local people, there are likely to be times when you want to compare notes or discuss common problems with people in the same situation as yourself. If the induction meeting does not take place immediately, the National Agency in the host country will be able to

put you in contact with other Comenius Language Assistants working close to you. In the past, some groups of Language Assistants have set up networks to share teaching materials, and even worked together to create Internet sites. A general chat site will soon be open to all Language Assistants, accessible through www.euroclit.net (click on "forum").

Complete all necessary formalities (police, health, etc.)

4.53 In every country, there will be some formalities to complete on or soon after arrival. Make sure you know what is necessary, as there may be differences between countries. In some, for example, you should register with a generalist doctor when you arrive, in order to be eligible to receive treatment when you need it. In some countries you will need to register with local police or at the town hall.

4.54 While you will not usually have to pay national taxes on your Comenius grant, it is possible in some countries that you will be asked to pay certain local taxes, particularly if you rent a flat in your own name. Any such payments will often be at a reduced rate. Even if you do not have to pay, you may be required in some countries to make a declaration or to provide documentation establishing your exemption. Another point you may want to clarify if you are going to or come from a non-EU country is the law on accepting paid work in addition to the Language Assistantship. If you do take such work, your duties as a Comenius Language Assistant must always take priority over any other commitments.

Consider contacting the local media

4.55 It may be worth contacting the local newspaper (or asking the school to do so), particularly if it is a small publication, although even larger regional newspapers often have specific sections dedicated to particular towns or villages. The local press is often short of news, and would be delighted to interview you. Local television or radio stations may also be interested. Several previous Language Assistants have found this a very good way of making the community in general aware of their arrival. The resulting article can also be very useful in terms of attracting the attention of local people and enterprises with whom you may later wish to collaborate in organising activities for your students. If an interview is arranged, take some time beforehand to prepare the message you want to communicate.

4D/ IN AND BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Checklist

- * **Teaching your mother tongue needs determination and planning**
- * **Aim for informality but ensure respect**
- * **Plan all lessons thoroughly, with the teacher if possible**
- * **Speak mainly the language you are teaching**
- * **Speak clearly but usually at normal speed**
- * **"Grade" your language**
- * **Discuss with teachers how you should correct learners' mistakes**
- * **Gain as much experience as possible with different types of class**
- * **Suggest activities and materials**
- * **Try not to be limited to the traditional classroom**
- * **If you have discipline problems, speak to your supervisor**
- * **Every week, evaluate with the supervisor what you have achieved**
- * **Keep a file on your Language Assistantship**

4.56 This section does not attempt to provide advice on particular activities - a list of suggestions, which have proved useful in the past, is at **Annex III** - but gives some general hints on classroom techniques. In applying these ideas, it is important also to consider cultural and educational differences and not to enter into conflict with the policy of the host school. (See also **4.25-4.29**) Some of the advice, which follows, is relevant to all situations and all types of lesson or activity. Some deals specifically with language teaching. Most applies whether you are teaching your mother tongue or a second language.

Teaching your mother tongue needs determination and planning

4.57 When teaching your mother tongue, remember that speaking a language perfectly does not make you a perfect teacher! You may well need to work hard at it, especially if it is not normally on the school curriculum and all your learners are beginners. But Language Assistants who introduce a new language into a school usually find the results especially rewarding, provided they have a coherent strategy from the start and do not expect miracles. If it is difficult to find teaching materials for the language concerned, see if you can adapt ideas from materials in other languages or share thoughts with other Language Assistants from your country (see also 3.54). Textbooks, particularly simple reading books, aimed at very young children who are native speakers of the Language Assistant's language can often be used, with some adaptation, to teach that language as a foreign language to slightly older children in the host country. To encourage attendance at voluntary lessons, arrange for participants (learners, teachers and/or parents) to receive a "diploma" from the school. If you encounter scepticism from learners or teachers, debate with them and try to persuade them that teaching your mother tongue, even if it is a less widely spoken language, is of benefit. Some of the arguments you can use are:

- learners' general linguistic and cultural awareness can be developed by learning about a new country and language from a real representative of that country;
- it is never possible truly to understand an individual and his/her culture unless you have some knowledge of that person's language;
- truly to learn about Europe, learners need to understand even its smaller countries and linguistic communities;
- the more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn more;
- many languages share lexical or structural similarities (e.g. Danish/Swedish/Norwegian, German/Dutch, Polish/Russian Portuguese / Italian/Spanish/French/Romanian) so learning a little of one may help understanding of others;
- speaking English and French is fairly common. A little knowledge of something more unusual can be an advantage in the job market.

4.58 When you are teaching a language that is not your first, remember that you do not need to speak it perfectly to teach it well. Creativity and good planning are more important.

4.59 Some Comenius Language Assistants will spend much of their time teaching non-language subjects. This, too, will be challenging, but will give you the opportunity to experiment and acquire new skills, as well as to give learners a different cultural perspective on the subject involved.

Aim for informality but ensure respect

4.60 Language Assistants usually have a relationship with pupils, which is different from that of a teacher. Pupils should always feel that they can approach the Language Assistant informally, but also that he or she is a full member of staff and cannot be disobeyed.

4.61 Your initial contact with pupils will be very important in determining the nature of your longer-term relationship with them. It is better to begin relatively formally and then relax than to do everything possible to "be friends" straight away. Bear in mind, when you are working with pupils within a lesson led by a teacher, that you may later need to handle the same learners on your own and so be able to demonstrate a certain authority. Avoid appearing amused at misbehaviour and never do anything that may undermine the teacher's authority.

4.62 In many cases, as the Language Assistantship goes on, with older pupils in particular there will be a clear difference between your relationship with them in the classroom and outside it. The latter may be a relationship of equals, but in the classroom it should be clear that, although the atmosphere is informal, you are in charge. You should also take care that if you socialise with certain older pupils, you are not perceived to favour them in class.

Plan and evaluate all lessons thoroughly, with the teacher if possible

4.63 Ideally, all lessons in which you are to take part will be carefully planned in collaboration with the teacher, with a written lesson plan setting out which of you is to do what. In reality, this will not always be possible. But you should always try to speak to the teacher before the lesson and to have a clear idea in your mind what the aim of the lesson is and what your role will be.

4.64 Afterwards, again ideally with the teacher, you should evaluate how successful you were in achieving your own aims within the lesson and discuss what might be done differently next time.

Speak mainly the language you are teaching

4.65 In some schools, language teachers may themselves use only the target language in lessons. In others, they will also use the learners' mother tongue. You will need to discuss this with teachers, but it is generally preferable for you, at least when you are in a language classroom and particularly if you are with another teacher who can speak to the learners in their own language, to speak only the language being taught, whether or not it is your mother tongue. Learners will then understand from the start that if they want your help, they must use the target language. Nevertheless, it can sometimes be easier (for example if you are alone with a group of beginners) to translate some items of vocabulary or grammatical explanation into the learners' own language – the most important thing is to draw a clear line between circumstances where use of the target language is required and those where learners' mother tongue is permissible.

4.66 If you are mainly teaching your mother tongue, and that is a language being learnt by most pupils in the school, you should also try to use it as much as possible when you are involved in teaching other subjects and when you are outside the classroom altogether.

Speak clearly, but usually at normal speed

4.67 When you are teaching your mother tongue or another language you know very well, you should always speak as clearly as possible but ensure that learners (except perhaps absolute beginners) get plenty of exposure to speech at normal or near normal speed and to your normal vocabulary. After all, one reason you are there is to provide realistic experience of dealing with a native or fluent speaker. Even if learners have difficulty at first, they will usually gradually become accustomed to the Language Assistant's voice and speech patterns.

Grade your language

4.68 However, it is necessary to "grade" the language used depending on the situation. If you are giving instructions or explaining a detailed point to learners, they will need to understand more or less every word. You should therefore speak more slowly and avoid using complicated constructions or vocabulary. At first, this may require some advance planning, but quickly becomes second nature. In other situations where learners only need to understand the gist of what you are saying, it is appropriate to speak more naturally. Indeed that can often be a useful global comprehension exercise.

Discuss with teachers how you should correct learners' mistakes

4.69 One sensitive issue where there may be significant differences between host schools is policy on correcting learners' mistakes. Many teachers will tend towards the "modern" view that too much correction, in particular of oral language, can discourage learners from communicating, and thus be counter-productive. In particular, learners should only be corrected while they are speaking if it is clear they are searching for a word. Otherwise, correction should be done once they have finished. If a conversation is taking place between several learners, the teacher should listen and make notes, and then afterwards correct only the three or four most frequent or most serious errors. Learners will not in any case remember any more and any further correction will be wasted.

4.70 Other teachers will have a more traditional view and argue that learners should get used as early as possible to speaking correctly, or errors will become habitual and impossible to correct later.

4.71 Matters such as this should always be discussed with teachers and the Language Assistant - while free to put his or her own point of view diplomatically and in private - should respect their wishes and the policy of the school

Gain as much experience as possible with different types of class

4.72 If the Language Assistantship is to be of the maximum benefit to your development as a teacher, you will need to gain as wide a variety of experience as you can. If, a few weeks into the Language Assistantship, you do not feel this is happening or you think of new ways in which you can be useful to the school, speak to your supervisor. Try to get experience with different subjects, with learners of a wide range of ages, with small groups and, as you become more confident, with whole classes. It is often worthwhile, too, to continue observing other teachers' classes throughout the Language Assistantship, and not only during the induction period – your view of the way they do things may develop as you become more experienced in teaching in the school

Suggest activities and materials

4.73 As has already been mentioned, teachers often have very little time for longer term planning. One way in which Language Assistants can be enormously helpful is by suggesting activities that can be done in the classroom and offering to help teachers by preparing resource materials. This can also be a very good way of playing a positive role in non-language lessons and ensuring that teachers are aware of the extra potential you have to offer. In addition to source materials you may have brought with you (see **Annex II**), you may be able to obtain prepared teaching packs and other useful things from your own country or region's embassy/consulate/cultural institute/tourist office in the host country.

Try not to be limited to the traditional classroom

4.74 Obviously, much of your work will take place in traditional classrooms. But there are other opportunities. Open formats such as language clubs are possible, where pupils come voluntarily at lunchtime and after school for activities such as reading, playing games or watching videos. The Language Assistant acts as a resource, helping where necessary. You may also be able to use the school premises to provide classes - in languages or other subjects you know well - for parents, teachers and the general public.

4.75 Within or outside the framework of European programmes, Language Assistants can help create and develop links between the host community and their own local area, sometimes in collaboration with businesses or local authorities. The Internet is often very helpful for this.

4.76 Discuss these matters with your supervisor. The school may well have had experience in the past, which you can draw on.

If you have discipline problems, speak to your supervisor

4.77 If you do have problems with discipline with certain pupils, do not shout or lose your temper. Do not feel that you have failed in any way. You may well find that you are not the only one who has had difficulties with the pupils concerned.

4.78 However, do not let the problem get out of hand. Take action early. Wherever possible, do not leave the solution to the problem entirely to others. Even if the easiest thing is to call in a senior teacher to restore order, that may only be a short-term solution. Instead, seek advice from your supervisor or the class teacher and with their help, work out a strategy for dealing with the problem.

Every week, evaluate with the supervisor what you have achieved

4.79 You should have weekly, timetabled meetings with your supervisor, perhaps at a time when both of you have a gap in your teaching schedule. These discussions need not be long, but they should enable you to bring the supervisor up to date on what you have done during the previous week, what you have

achieved and where you feel more work on your part may be necessary. You should also discuss your timetable for the following week and suggest any changes. Agree with your supervisor two or three points on which to concentrate during the following week's work.

4.80 You should not hesitate to speak frankly with the supervisor about any problems you may be experiencing either inside or outside the school.

Keep a file on your Language Assistantship

4.81 You should keep a simple record of your Language Assistantship, with copies of all your weekly timetables and lesson plans where you have them, as well as any observations on learner behaviour, cultural and educational differences between the host country and your own etc. This will be of personal value to you as a record of your progress and will also help you to fill in the (obligatory) report on your Language Assistantship.

4.82 You should also keep at least two copies of any resource materials you prepare, one set to remain with the school after your departure, the other for you to take home. It may prove very useful in the future, whether to show to potential employers as proof of your talents or to be used in the classroom in your subsequent career. Your National Agency may also ask you to supply copies of materials to pass on to future Language Assistants, particularly if you have been teaching a less widely used language for which materials are difficult to find.

5/ CONCLUSION

5.1 The first few years of Comenius Language Assistantships have shown that they have great potential to improve the quality of language teaching, increase the variety of languages being taught at all levels, and redress the balance between the most and the least taught and used languages. In so doing it can benefit the host school and the learners who will be taught by the Comenius Language Assistant during his or her career, as well as the Comenius Language Assistant himself or herself.

5.2 Reports from host schools and Language Assistants show that the vast majority of individual Comenius Language Assistantships have been a great success. That has been achieved thanks to enormous efforts from all parties concerned. Each Language Assistantship is different. For example, Language Assistants teaching their mother tongue in a school where it is not on the curriculum and where every learner is a beginner face a different challenge from Language Assistants teaching learners who have been learning a language for some time and who may be studying for public examinations at fairly advanced levels. But whatever the situation, Language Assistants and host schools who invest hard work and imagination invariably find the experience of taking part in a Comenius Language Assistantship immensely rewarding.

5.3 The European Commission hopes that this Guide will allow Comenius Language Assistants and host schools to benefit from the accumulated wisdom and experience of those who have gone before them. However, the Commission does not want to stifle the creativity of participants, which has been and will continue to be the Comenius Language Assistantship scheme's greatest asset.

5.4 Future Comenius Language Assistantships will present new opportunities which are not covered here. The Guide covers mostly practices and activities that have already been successfully implemented since the beginning of assistantships under the Lingua scheme in 1995. Schools and Language Assistants taking part will continue to be imaginative and innovative and are certain to come up with many new ideas which will make Language Assistantships even more successful in the future.

ANNEX I

ACCOMMODATION

(i) Many Language Assistants find that accommodation is the question, which most worries them before departure. It will never be easy to find suitable accommodation at a suitable price in some destinations, particularly major cities. However, there is much you can do to improve your chances of finding something appropriate and this Annex is devoted to helping you with some general advice. In some cases, accommodation is arranged before departure, while in others Language Assistants find accommodation after arrival.

(ii) For some fortunate Language Assistants, host schools are able to provide or arrange accommodation at a cheap rate, sometimes within the school premises. Bear in mind, however, that if you have no car, the school is a long way from the centre of a town and public transport is not good, this can be a bit isolated outside school hours. In other cases Language Assistants arriving can take over accommodation from previous Language Assistants – if this is offered to you, establish before leaving what will be provided and what you need to take/buy on the spot in terms of linen cutlery, etc. However, it is not always possible for schools to provide accommodation and you should not expect to be so lucky. **What you are entitled to expect from schools is help in finding a temporary place to stay on arrival** - a hostel, cheap hotel or room in a family house or flat - and advice and assistance with regard to somewhere longer term. For any kind of accommodation arrangement, if you are asked to sign any documents seek advice from your supervisor, especially if you are not fluent in the language of the host country. Particularly in large cities, it is advisable to take someone with you when you go to view accommodation, for security as well as for linguistic reasons.

Living with a family

(iii) Many Comenius Language Assistants in the past have lived with a family, often that of a teacher at the host school, throughout their stay and have found this an excellent way of having close contact with the host community and of improving their language skills. If you are offered a room in a family house, think carefully before saying no - remember when thinking about accommodation that the Comenius grant will not allow you to afford a luxurious flat on your own. Living in a family will usually ensure comfort and security at a reasonable cost, which might compensate for any feeling of loss of independence.

(iv) But be absolutely sure before accepting that you have agreed with the hosts the exact terms on which you will stay. What contribution to household expenses is expected from you? Are meals included? Will you be able to use the kitchen? Will you have access to a telephone (you will normally have to pay for your own calls)? Will you be able to invite friends to your room? Will you be expected to be home at a certain time in the evenings? In some cases, Language Assistants have come to arrangements with the host family to give language lessons or to help look after children or with housework in return for free or cheaper accommodation. But again, the exact terms need to be clear from the start. Even if everything does appear to be clear and the terms acceptable, it may well be advisable to agree with the host that the first month will be a trial period after which either party can end the arrangement.

Student residences

(v) Another advantageous form of accommodation sometimes offered to Language Assistants in larger towns and cities is student residences, although in many countries this is rarely possible. If such an offer is made it is usually much better value than anything you are likely to find on the private rented market, while at the same time offering you the same independence you would have living in a flat. Such residences are also often near city centres, where it can be difficult or impossible to find other accommodation. Again, however, you need to be absolutely sure of the terms before you accept a university room. Will you have a room on your own? Will meals be provided? If not, will you have access to university restaurants? If you move out, will you be liable for the fees for your whole scheduled stay?

Sharing flats and houses

(vi) Many Language Assistants live in flats and houses shared with other people, usually of around the same age. Normally, each person has a bedroom and everybody shares the kitchen, bathroom and sometimes a communal living room. In some countries, such as the UK, this is very common amongst the native population, both students and young employed people. In other countries, young people tend to live alone in studio flats. Each has advantages.

(vii) Sharing is cheaper; usually gives access to more space and can be a good way of making friends. But the experience of living in shared accommodation often requires tolerance and a spirit of compromise on all sides and adapting can be difficult for those used to living either alone or in the family home. Just as for any other type of accommodation, ensure that you have understood the terms before accepting, in particular the size of the room you will have, whether electricity and gas bills are included in the rent, and if not, how much they are likely to be. You will want to find out the length of the daily journey to the host school, and the cost, as well as to be satisfied that the house or flat is in a secure area. Finally, you should also ensure that you can leave without unreasonable financial loss if you are not happy.

(viii) Sometimes flat shares are arranged by the school or through a local university before the Language Assistant arrives, although more usually Language Assistants find them themselves by replying to advertisements in local newspapers or on noticeboards in student cafeterias. It is a good idea to ensure that you have met the people with whom you will be sharing before definite acceptance!

(ix) Obviously, if you do share accommodation, it can be particularly beneficial in terms of linguistic skills and cultural experience to do so with native speakers of the language of the host country. But that can sometimes be difficult to arrange, especially in countries where flat sharing is less common and there are not many local people looking for or offering this kind of accommodation. In some cases, if you are going to work in a large town, the school or the host country's SOCRATES National Agency may be in a position to put you in touch with Comenius Language Assistants from your own or other countries who will be working in schools near to yours. You may be able to agree with them to look for accommodation together.

Living alone

(x) Of course, in some cases, those Comenius Language Assistants who so wish are able to find small flats in which to live alone, particularly in smaller towns where costs are lower. Just as for any other type of accommodation, it is wise before accepting to think carefully and to ensure that you have full information on the commitment you are taking on. One fundamental matter is whether the flat will be let furnished or unfurnished. Be aware that in some places furnished flats can be very difficult to find.

(xi) In most countries (there are some exceptions), you should not normally pay an agency any money to find you a flat - this is sometimes illegal and agents are permitted to receive commission only from the landlord. Before signing any contract carefully work out your budget, bearing in mind that you will probably want to keep some money for socialising and travelling. Make sure that you are signing a contract covering only the period you will need the flat. In some countries, it is normal for renting contracts to run for several years, with very high financial penalties for tenants who want to cancel the contract early. Seek advice from your supervisor to make sure any arrangements to pay a deposit comply with the law of the country. In some countries this money should be paid into a bank account to which neither you nor the owner has access without the other's agreement, in others the deposit is paid directly to the landlord and he or she returns it when you leave. When you move in, ask the landlord to draw up an inventory for you both to sign, to avoid disputes over missing items or damage.

ANNEX II

RESOURCES LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS CAN BRING

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list but merely to give some ideas. Language Assistants and host schools should discuss together before the Language Assistantship what the Language Assistant might be able to bring.

photos of family and home area	letters from learners in a school in the Language Assistant's country
tape recordings of friends and family talking about "a typical day in my life"	a few packets of sweets from the Language Assistants country (for primary schools)
maps of home town or city	
tourist brochures for the Language Assistant's home area	
postcards	
posters	
calendars	
cuttings from local and national newspapers, particularly with: - job or accommodation advertisements; - theatre and cinema programmes - horoscopes	
magazines and comics aimed at the age groups to be taught - those including questionnaires are particularly useful	
tapes of pop and traditional songs - preferably with the lyrics typed out	
board games	
transport timetables and route maps	
videos of films, television news, weather forecasts and advertisements	
tapes of radio news, weather forecasts and advertisements	
pages from mail order catalogues	
restaurant menus	
typical recipes	
children's imitation coins in Euros and/or the Language Assistant's national currency	
the timetable from a school in the Language Assistant's country	

ANNEX III

SOME IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES

Again this annex is not intended to be exhaustive. Each suggestion is meant to be a starting point for further thought rather than to serve as a lesson plan. Activities are divided into various sections, but these are not definitive. Some of the suggestions can be adapted for different levels and for older or younger children.

These are informal though effective activities, which are easier for a teacher to manage if a Language Assistant is involved as a language resource and to share supervision of learners divided into groups. Most are suitable whether Language Assistants are teaching their mother tongue or another language in which they are confident. A few can be done in the learners' mother tongue, with the Language Assistant's input being mainly cultural.

Exercises commonly found in text-books are not included.

PART ONE - IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

ALL AGES

Mystery board

This is mainly for Language Assistants introducing a new language into the school. To create interest in your language, try pinning up on a prominent noticeboard in the school a new thing from your country (pictures, short vocabulary lists, recipes, travel tickets, newspaper articles) every day for couple of weeks. Say nothing to learners, then once enough curiosity has been aroused, announce the start of lessons in the language: "if you want to know more, come to Room x at time x". Maintain the noticeboard even after the lessons have started.

Calendar

(For beginners) A calendar in the Language Assistant's language is pinned up. At the beginning of each lesson, learners must say the date in the target language.

Bingo

Teach numbers up to 10 or 100 and then give pupils a bingo card with a random selection on or ask them to choose five numbers and write them down. Say numbers one by one in random order. Each time a learner has the number you say on his/her card, he/she crosses it out. The first learner who has crossed out all his or her numbers is the winner and must shout "bingo" (or a word in the target language).

Also works for the alphabet.

Interviews

Teacher interviews the Language Assistant about an aspect of his or her life. Learners fill in a multiple-choice worksheet. (NB this requires careful preparation.) The interview can also be taped or videoed for practice of particular language points or for further use in later classes.

Learners can also interview the Language Assistant. For more advanced classes the Language Assistant can remain silent unless the learners' questions are correctly formed.

Role plays

Teacher and Language Assistant can demonstrate together either structured dialogues or more informal role plays, before learners are asked to try. Role plays can be often be based on authentic material that Language Assistants can supply, such as street maps (asking directions) transport timetables or tourist brochures

(asking for information) etc. Language Assistants can also do role plays with learners, for example of telephone conversations in which learners have to obtain information

Drama

It may also be possible, either in class as an extra-curricula activity, to produce full plays or extracts of plays in the target language, whether these are based on established works or created by the learners themselves. This can be a very effective boost to language learning.

Memory test

The class teacher or Language Assistant shows a picture for ten seconds, after which learners try to recall as much as possible. The Language Assistant asks questions to help the learners e.g. how many people were in the picture? Was there a dog?

Shopping list

Learners are given a shopping list and are asked to make a list of the shops they need to go to. They then pretend to go into the shops and ask for what they need, with the Language Assistant playing the role of the shopkeeper each time. If some real or simulated money from the Language Assistant's country (or euros) is available, this can be used to pay.

Supermarket alphabet

Start by saying "I went to the supermarket today and I bought some apples". First learner must repeat and then add something beginning with 'b', next learner must repeat what the first one has said and add something with 'c', and so on until the end of the alphabet. This can be played in smaller groups as a competitive game – when a learner cannot remember correctly all the items bought, he or she is out, until only one person is left. If several people are still in by the time you reach 'z' begin again at 'a', so that the next person has to remember 27 items, and so on.

Vocabulary bank

A selection of new vocabulary (not too much at once) which has come up in lessons, with a translation or picture and perhaps some examples of use, is first displayed for a week on card around the room, then stored in a revision box learners can consult.

Songs

There are many ways songs can be used as listening comprehension. Writing out the lyrics with words blanked out for learners to fill in is a useful one. This is even more effective if learners are asked to guess the missing words from the context of the rest of the lyrics, before they actually hear the song.

Quiz

At the end of your Language Assistantship, hold a quiz about your country and language, either in each individual class, or if it can be arranged with all learners of a particular age group whom you have taught. Provide small prizes for the winners.

ESPECIALLY PRIMARY SCHOOLS¹

Colouring

¹ Language Assistants teaching English, French, German, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, Dutch or Norwegian to primary and pre-primary children may find more ideas and materials in the "Transfer Teachers' Handbook" and associated activity packs, published in 2000 by Centre Régional de Documentation Pédagogique des Pays de la Loire (CNDP), France. This project was funded by Lingua Action A (Co-operation programs for teacher training). More details from Arlene NEUKIRCHNER, Paedagogische Akademie, Dr Gschmeidlerstr.22-30, A-3500 KREMS, Tel/fax + 43 2732 83591, E-mail aneuk@paedak-krems.ac.at, or from Catherine HILLMAN, IUFM, rue d'Acier, F-49100 ANGERS, Tel/fax + 33 2 31 90 08 85.

Young children can be given an outline picture to colour in according to simple instructions from the Language Assistant.

What's in my bag?

A number of items, for which learners have previously learnt the vocabulary, are put into a bag held by the Language Assistant. Learners can feel the bag and have to guess what is in it.

Displays

The class makes a display of information and material about the Language Assistant's home country, if possible to be shown in a communal area such as a school corridor or hall. Food can also be prepared.

Find your partner

Give half the class a picture each and the other half a word or phrase corresponding to the pictures. Each has to find his or her partner and then each pair displays their word and picture to the class. As a follow-up each learner receives a sheet with the pictures in one column and the words in the other, and has to match them all correctly.

Performing songs and nursery rhymes

The Language Assistant teaches the class to sing a simple song, which they can be asked to perform at a school occasion or for parents.

Teddy will teach you today

With very young children, bring in a teddy bear or similar toy and say "Teddy will teach you today, but he only speaks language x".

Puppet shows

Language Assistant can create characters using simple glove puppets available in toy shops and get children to make up the stories. If they are complete beginners in the target language, this can be done in their own language and the Language Assistant can then "perform" the dialogue in both the children's language and the target one, teaching vocabulary on the way.

Animals

Bring in a selection of pictures of animals. Ask the children questions: "which animal is biggest/smallest/cuddly/frightening/your favourite etc". Depending on the level the children have in the target language, the questions can be either in the target language or in their own language. If the latter, tell them when they have answered: "That animal is called a x in my language" then at the end call out all the names of the animals and get the children to show you, which picture corresponds. Finally, point at the pictures and get them to give you the names. This exercise can be adapted to other lexical groups (foods, clothes, etc).

Noises

Language Assistant imitates various noises (e.g. animals, weather) or brings a tape with sound effects, and learners have to identify them.

Fairy stories

Make sure the fairy story is well known in the host country, or arrange with another teacher for him or her to tell it in the children's own language. Then tell it in the target language. Pin up or give out pictures relating to the story, which children have to put in order. Then get them to role play parts, if their level is high enough.

ESPECIALLY SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND ADULTS

Quiet correction

Learners are divided into groups and given an activity to perform, for example putting a series of comic strip pictures in the correct order, although any group oral activity is suitable. All discussion must be in the target language. Language Assistant circulates between groups asking questions and quietly correcting language mistakes.

Group presentations

Class is split into groups of three or four and given/asked to choose a subject for a presentation of ten minutes or so in the target language. Ideally, the subjects should involve some research in library/via Internet. They can be connected to what is currently being taught in other parts of the curriculum. Groups work together over three or four lessons, with the Language Assistant acting as a facilitator, before each group gives its presentation to the rest of the class, using overhead projectors, photographs, etc. Presentations can be recorded on cassette or video.

Newspaper article reconstruction

The Language Assistant finds a short article - no more than 200 words if possible - from a newspaper in his or her native language. The article will preferably be a general interest item narrating an unusual event or a crime story. Learners are divided into small groups. The Language Assistant writes on the board ten important words from the article, in the order they occur. Using those as a clue, learners are given ten minutes to work out what the article is about and to try to reconstruct it, speaking and writing only the target language, while the Language Assistant circulates helping and correcting. A member of each group is then asked to report to the class. Language Assistant writes five more words from the article inserting them into the correct place in the order, and the groups are asked if they have changed their minds or want to add anything. Then the class is given the whole article to compare with their guesses.

Other newspaper activities

- Matching headlines to articles;
- Giving learners an article without a headline and getting them to suggest one;
- Transposing headlines into normal language (works well in English and other languages where headlines do not follow normal grammatical rules);
- Giving learners an article with the paragraphs in the wrong order and getting them to rearrange it correctly;
- Comparing a newspaper in the target language with one from learners' own country (especially effective if each paper has articles about the same European or international news items);
- A newsboard with a regularly updated selection of articles (news, features, cartoons etc) from newspapers and magazines in the Language Assistant's language.

Radio news

The Language Assistant listens to a radio news programme in the target language and makes a list of the items covered, changing the order. Learners, working in groups, play the role of news editors and have to decide a suitable order while the teacher and Language Assistant circulate helping them. They then listen to the programme to see if they agreed with the real editor, and after listening a couple more times rewrite the script for the programme. The teacher and Language Assistant both circulate as they are doing this, and then each group in turn leaves the room with the Language Assistant and the tape recorder to record their script, taking the opportunity for detailed corrections, while the teacher does other work with the rest of the class. Finally, the class listens to all the scripts. (This activity may take more than one lesson)

What's my job?

One learner is given a piece of paper with a profession written on it. Others ask closed (yes/no) questions e.g. "do you work indoors or outdoors?" to find out what the job is. The learner who guesses correctly is then given another piece of paper with the name of a job on it, and answers questions in turn. This sort of activity can be done with the class divided into smaller groups if the Language Assistant and teacher both monitor and help.

Job interview role plays

Many variations on this theme are possible. All need to be prepared well with vocabulary, etc. and can be preceded by the filling in of application forms – real ones if these are obtainable from a local company or employment service. For example, students can be asked to apply for interesting jobs (astronaut, head of the United Nations, European Commissioner, football manager). Those playing interviewer and interviewee can be given characteristics e.g. nervous, arrogant, aggressive. This can also be done as a more serious exercise with older pupils and can include a discussion on employment or be linked with a career lesson in their own language.

Who am I?

Each learner is given a sticker with a famous personality's name on it, and puts it on their forehead so that everyone else but themselves can see it. They then have to find out who they are by asking closed ("yes/no") question (e.g. Am I a man? Am I dead? Am I a film star?).

Charades

Write some words on different pieces of paper, give one to each learner and divide them into two or more groups. One person in the first group has to mime the word and his colleagues have to guess the word. If they can't, the next group gets a chance to guess it. Each group has a number of turns until all the words have been done, and they get one point for each correct guess. This can also be done with higher level groups by using description instead of mime.

Poems

Ask learners to list 5 words each they particularly associate with their town or school. Put the resulting list on the board. Then ask them to write a poem, alone or in groups. They are not obliged to use the words on the board but most will do so.

Poetry reconstruction

Read a poem, preferably one with rhymes, to the class, then divide them into groups and give them the poem cut up into small sections. They have to put it together again in the right order. Alternatively, leave out the last word in every other line and get them to try to remember what it was – the fact that it will rhyme with the line before will help them.

Grammar/vocabulary/spelling betting

After the class has done a piece of work, either oral or written, the class teacher or Language Assistant picks out common mistakes they have made. On a piece of paper with three columns, he or she then puts a correct version of each target word/construction in one column (chosen at random) and two wrong versions in the other two. Learners are put in groups of three or four and told each group has 100 euros. The Language Assistant asks them to place bets of up to 50 euros on what they think is the correct answer from the first set of three possibilities. Groups discuss for one minute, using only the target language or they are fined 10 euros. Each must then say what it thinks the correct answer is and how much it wants to bet. Those who are right win the amount they bet, those who are wrong lose the same amount. The same procedure is followed for all the other sets of three. The group with the most money at the end is the winner.

Do it yourself vocabulary

Give each learner a complex text in the target language at above their normal level. Ask them to read it and ask general questions on the gist. Do not give any vocabulary explanation, but give out a translation in their

own language with certain words highlighted. Learners must find the translation of those words in the target language, using the first text as their source.

Categories

Give out a table with a number of categories e.g. animal, part of the body, food, profession etc. Then choose a letter – each learner has to find a word beginning with that letter for each category. One point for each.

Yes/no game

A learner volunteers to answer questions from the rest of the class. He or she must not use the equivalent in the target language of the words “yes” or “no”. Once he or she does use one of these words, the person who asked the question takes over as the respondent. This game can also be played in groups.

Liar

Learners ask each other or the teacher and/or Language Assistant a short series of questions (3-6) about their life, interests etc. The respondent must answer all of them truthfully except one. Group must then discuss and guess which answer was untrue.

Home made trivia quiz

The class is divided into groups, each of which must prepare ten questions under a particular subject area. Can be either things like sport, pop music, films or school subject areas like chemistry, geography, history. In the latter case, integration with classes in these subjects may be possible.

Blank screen

The Language Assistant plays a short video passage - 30 seconds or so - several times with the screen blanked out. He or she then asks questions to encourage the class to guess, in detail, what the picture on the screen would have shown during the passage e.g. what type of people, how they are dressed, their body language, the room or landscape. Learners then see the video and compare with their guesses.

Tell me what happened

Learners sit in pairs with one facing the screen and one facing away. A short passage - a couple of minutes - of video is played and the learners who have not seen it, but have heard the soundtrack, have one minute to ask their partners “yes/no” questions to find out as much as possible about what happened.

“Dubbing”

Learners are shown a short video dialogue - 30 seconds - in their own language and then are divided into small groups who, without translating word for word, write and perform it in the target language. The Language Assistant circulates making suggestions and correcting.

PART TWO - BEYOND THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Some of the activities described below take place in lessons on subjects other than languages. Many involve going outside the confines of the school, either physically or via communication links.

Language club

The Language Assistant can set up a club which pupils (and possibly teachers and parents) attend voluntarily at lunchtime or after school. This can take many forms and cover any or all languages, whether they are usually taught in the school or not. The Language Assistant can give lessons in his or her mother tongue, especially if that is not on the normal curriculum. Self-teaching materials, books, videos and games can be provided and members encouraged to ask the Language Assistant for help in using them. Pupils, under the direction of the Language Assistant, can teach parents and teachers languages they have been learning during school time.

TV/video club

If the school is lucky enough to have satellite television or access to a good range of videos in foreign languages, the Language Assistant can set up a film/television club for pupils to watch (suitable) programmes from his or her home country.

Section of a lesson in a foreign language

The Language Assistant introduces the theme of the lesson (on any subject) using the foreign language, and asks for questions and ideas, before the subject teacher takes over. Or the Language Assistant takes small groups for a few minutes each, and encourages them to discuss the subject of the lesson in the target language.

Information gap

Learners in a lesson on any subject are given a task for which they require certain information, which the Language Assistant has. The end product may be in learners' native language or in the target language, but the Language Assistant answers questions only if asked in the target language. (Using this type of technique effectively requires close collaboration with the subject teacher.)

Hear in one language tell in another

Following a history or geography lesson with some connection to the Language Assistant's home country, given in the learners' own language, learners are asked to choose an element of the topic covered on which either they give a talk for one minute or write a one page essay in the target language. The Language Assistant helps and corrects mistakes. Alternatively, the Language Assistant gives the lesson in the target language (and if possible hands out some written material in that language) and learners do the exercise in their own language. These exercises, and many possible variations upon them, allow language and other lessons to be combined and simulate the situation in which people, especially at work, need to receive information in one language and disseminate it in another. This is in practice a much more commonly needed skill than word for word translation.

Historical comparisons

After the class has had a history lesson on a particular period in their country, the Language Assistant gives the next lesson describing the same period in his or her own country. Learners can be given a simple worksheet to fill in, perhaps with multiple choice questions.

Language day

Language Assistant stays with one class for its whole school day and helps in all lessons, speaking only the target language. This needs to be carefully planned with all the teachers involved and is more successful if the Language Assistant always has information the learners need.

School/class newspaper

The school or class produces a newspaper in one or more foreign languages, on events in the school, local area or nationally. It may be possible to obtain assistance from the local newspaper to produce this professionally. The results can be distributed to pupils, parents, and more widely in the local area, perhaps with vocabulary lists or even full translations of the articles to help readers. They can also be put on the Internet. Crosswords and language games can also be included.

Video diary

If the school has a video camera and the Language Assistant has contacts with a school in his or her home country, a small group of learners can make a video diary of a day in the life of their school and swap it with one made by the other school. This need not necessarily be done wholly in the Language Assistant's mother tongue if learners are not sufficiently proficient in that language, although it will be useful to introduce an

element of it. (If a swap of such videos with the other school can be arranged, each school can use mainly its own language and treat the activity as a comprehension one.)

Tourist video

Older learners can make a video “advertisement”, with the Language Assistant’s help, for their local area. If possible this can be sent to pupils at a school in the Language Assistant’s country, who can then ask questions by E-mail or letter. Again, this need not be done wholly in the Language Assistant’s mother tongue.

Internet

If the school has access to the Internet, the Language Assistant can research web sites in his/her native language and draw up an exercise where learners have to fill in a questionnaire for which the answers can be found from those sites. Learners are given the site addresses and the questionnaire, which they complete with the Language Assistant helping as necessary. This can be done in small groups, with learners taking turns to leave the main lesson.

E-mail

E-mail links can be set up with a class in a school in the Language Assistant’s own country, perhaps one that he or she attended as a pupil. Small groups of learners can be withdrawn from the main lesson at a set time each week to exchange messages with their counterparts. If E-mail links are not possible, ordinary post can also be used.

Find a penpal/webpal

As a development of the above, the Language Assistant can help learners to set up a “matching agency” to match them with counterparts in his or her own country according to age, interests, etc. If this is done by computer, it can also be a useful practical exercise in programming skills

Opinion poll

Learners, as part of an exercise in a non-language class, make up questionnaires in their own language on a particular theme e.g. travel, should smoking be allowed on public transport, how do you get to work, what is your favourite food/pastime, views on Europe etc. They then go out into the community collecting answers. The questionnaire is then translated into the Language Assistant’s language – by the learners if their level is good enough - and sent by E-mail or post to a school in the Language Assistants’ country, where pupils use the same questionnaire in their own community. (If those pupils too have produced a questionnaire, they can be exchanged and each group can translate the other’s questionnaire). The results in the two countries are then compared.

Book week

Arrange with a local bookstore a week of books in the Language Assistant’s language or about his/her country, with the Language Assistant present at certain times to speak with customers. An informal reception with food from the Language Assistant’s country can be organised in parallel and local personalities invited.

European Union week

European Commission Offices (in EU countries) and Delegations (outside the EU), which are found in all national capitals, can supply a wealth of printed material, videos, etc. on European themes. This is often also available from local information points and can be used as a basis for an exhibition for pupils, parents and the local community. The exhibition can also include learners’ own work (essays, projects, videos, newspapers, etc.) produced with the Language Assistant’s help.

Country week

A series of activities can be organised over a week or longer, all connected to the Language Assistant's home country. Traditional food can be offered in the school canteen or in cookery lessons. The Language Assistant can help pupils and/or parents to organise activities on cultural themes from his or her home country, such as cooking, wine, music, dance, theatre and film. This type of activity can be especially effective around the time of festivals like Christmas, when traditional celebrations from the Language Assistant's home country can be introduced into the school.

It can also be taken outside the school, with activities or a display in a local public library, cultural centre or other community building.

Story book

Learners write stories in foreign language(s) - there is no need to worry too much about spelling and grammar - which are then "published" in a book. If the school, or the Language Assistant, has contacts with schools in other countries, the book can be sent to them or swapped for one they have themselves produced. Learners can then exchange comments, by letter or E-mail, about the stories.

Art/poetry/short story competition

Pupils are invited to enter a competition, judged by the Language Assistant and inspired by his or her country. The best work wins a prize. (It may even be possible to arrange with a local travel agent and/or the Language Assistant's contacts at home for the winner to receive a journey to the Language Assistant's country). This idea can be extended to parents and the local community, with advertisements placed in public buildings, supermarkets, etc.

Business project

A project can be set up to demonstrate to learners the real importance of languages in business. This is particularly fruitful if done in cooperation with a local business, which has frequent contact with a country where the Language Assistant's mother tongue, or another language he or she knows, is spoken. If the school curriculum includes business studies or economics, subject teachers can be involved along with the Language Assistant, and the target language introduced into lessons on these subjects. Activities might include practising writing business letters in the target language, E-mail contact with businesses in the target country, making a video in the target language about the local business, comparing business practice in the two countries, etc.