WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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Target audience

- ❑ Pre-service teachers
    - o Primary teachers / Enseignants de l'école primaire

- ❑ In-service teachers
    - o Primary teachers/ Enseignants de l'école primaire

Itinerary
- ❑ Identity exploration / Exploration de l'identité

Abstract

This set of activities looks at the phenomenon of names. People tend not to think about their own name very often. They accept it at a very early stage of their life and usually never think about the meaning and connotation of the 'words' of the name, even though it might be one of the first pieces of information that other people learn about them. In the language-teaching context, names provide very interesting linguistic material, which may serve as a means of introducing cultural diversity and complexity. In these activities, students work with their own names, learn about different approaches to first names and different origins of surnames. Various social and cultural aspects of names are also discussed.

Rationale

This set of activities looks at the phenomenon of names. People tend not to think about their own name very often. They accept it at a very early stage of their life and usually never think about the meaning and connotation of the "words" of the name. Nevertheless, one's name is in a way one's most private possession. It might be, at the same time, one of the first pieces of information, along with their appearance, that people learn about each other. In the language-teaching context, names provide very interesting linguistic material, which may serve as a means of introducing cultural diversity and complexity.

In the first activity, students concentrate on their own name and look at it from a new perspective. How does it define them as a person? What does it say about the society they live in? What does it say about them personally? How do they perceive it? How might other people perceive it? How has it changed in time? Transforming one's own name should stir students' imagination and interest.

Activity Two presents different approaches to given names. It also encourages an intercultural view on one's first name. Students learn about various naming habits in different cultures; the reading is again personalised - using one's own name.

Activity Three concentrates on surnames in different societies. Students read about the historical development and origins of the most frequent types of surnames in Europe. It also discusses the phenomenon of changing names after marriage. Such discussions should help raise the students' social awareness through something as personal as their name.

Personal and social dimensions

- observing the linguistic and cultural diversity of contexts and individuals
- recognising and eroding stereotypical thinking in oneself

Professional dimensions

- being aware of the need for a new linguistic and cultural education capable of promoting plurilingualism and pluriculturalism
- appreciating the power of using names in teacher↔pupil communication

Notes for the teacher educator:

Activity Sheet One:

Students receive the worksheets. The tasks are to be answered in the boxes.

The individual tasks usually lead to a discussion in pairs or in the whole group. Students come to the conclusion that it is usually at school that children start to use their official name, when they hear the teacher use it, because before that people usually use nicknames and diminutives.

Preparing a poster and sharing it with the group helps the students to 're-meet' themselves and to see how they (even as future teachers) might be perceived by other people or even their future pupils.

Activity Sheet Two:

Students receive the worksheet. The tasks are to be answered in the boxes. Some of the points are to be discussed in pairs.

As a group, the students write various names on the board. The instructions can be changed as to the number of names each student writes on the board. The smaller number of students, the more names (three or four) they should write. This should allow for a brief frequency research, finding more about the frequency of borrowed names, traditional or fashion names etc.

The last activity should lead students to the conclusion that they (as teachers) do perceive names of their pupils on various levels, mostly unconsciously, sometimes even jump to conclusions about their pupils based only on the names. This activity can be accompanied with an example list of pupil's names including names typical for the majority of society as well as minorities, immigrant names, etc, typical for the particular society.

Possible answers: Just from the list of names a teacher can guess the number of girls and the number of boys in the class, social background (immigrant families). Sometimes teachers recognise names of their own friends or even names of people they don't like and subconsciously associate their feelings with the pupil (only because of the names), which leads to the so called Pygmalion effect or Golem effect.

Activity Sheet Three:

Students read texts in the worksheet and use the information to transform their own name into various shapes based on different habits in different societies. In the second part the students are to discuss in pairs and as a group the fact than in Slavic languages women's surnames take forms that suggest the idea of belonging or even being owned, which is often the cause of very interesting intra-cultural and intercultural discussions.

The class may be split to two groups, each preparing and later advocating a set of opinions for or against the idea.

As a follow up to many of the individual activities, students may be asked to search further sources (e.g. the internet) for more information/opinions on the topic and write short reports about their findings.

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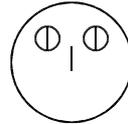
Activity Sheet One: Names

Timing: 60 minutes

*Write your name
in capital letters,
handwrite your name,
sign your name.*

Does your name have any meaning?

Is your name easily translatable to English? If so, what would it be in English?

Do you like your name? ☺ , ☺ or ☹

Read:

We distinguish a surname (last name, family name) that usually refers to the family of the bearer, and given names (first name, middle name, Christian name) that a person is given at birth. When introducing oneself, it is customary in most corners of Europe to say first one's given name and then to add the family name. Therefore *John Smith* comes from the Smith family and was given the name John at birth. There are countries in the world, however, where this is not the case, like Hungary or China. In Hungary, for example, a person's name would read *Varga Péter* rather than *Péter Varga* (shoemaker) as would be expected from the majority of Europeans.

Write your name in the 'first name-surname' shape and then in the 'surname-first name' shape. How do you feel about the difference?

Read:

'… Nicknames are good. All my friends call me Sting. My wife calls me Sting. Even my children know I am Sting. When you are born and your parents give you your name, they do not know you. But if your friends and colleagues give you a name – they know you and the name suits you…'[1]

Think through the following questions and discuss them with your partner.:

- ☞ How does it feel to see your name written or hear it said?
- ☞ Who was the first person in your life to address you
  with the official version of your name?
- ☞ Do you have a nickname? How did you earn it?
- ☞ Does your name say anything about you?
  Does it show which country you come from?
- ☞ What would make you change your name?
- ☞ Do you agree with Sting, that parents do not know you when they name you
  and therefore the name they give you does not really 'suit' you?

Prepare a poster about yourself that will characterise you via your names.
You may or may not include your official (passport) name, first name, middle name, last name, shortened versions, how you like other people to address you, the nicknames you have had, your mother's maiden name (if you know it…), variants of your first name in the languages you speak, ways in which you will be addressed in the future…

(Re-) Introduce yourself to the group by presenting the poster.

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[1] Sting said those words in a 21-minute interview that was on Czech Television (ČT1) on Wednesday, October 24, 2001 at 21:50. It was a talk show "Na plovárně se Stingem".

Activity Sheet Two: Given names

Timing: 100 minutes

Read

In South Africa, the common practice was that the first son was named after the paternal grandfather (the father's father), the second was named after the maternal grandfather (the mother's father) and the third son was named after his own father. If the woman gave birth to a daughter she was named after the maternal grandmother, the second after the paternal grandmother and the third daughter after her own mother. So in many cases it was only the seventh child about whose name the parents were to make a decision.

What would your first name be if these rules were followed in your name-giving?

In Vietnam, on the other hand, people never named their child with name of an older relative, in order to show respect to that person. This applied even when that person had passed away, because people wanted his or her soul to be restful. Therefore, no one would have called his or her name again.

Would you have the same first name as you have if the Vietnamese tradition were universally accepted?

In Russia, the father's name is usually reflected in a person's middle name –ic, -evic or -ovic is added to the father's name to form the son's middle name, while -evna or -ovna forms the daughter's middle names. In the light of this, we may presume that *Anton Pavlovic Cechov*'s father's name was Pavel (Paul) or that *Vladimir Iljic Lenin*'s father's name was Ilja.
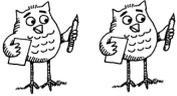
What might your name look like with a middle name formed in this way?

Do you know any variants of your name in other languages? (For example: Peter, Péter, Petr, Pierre, Piotr …).

Are there any variants of the name in your language? (For example: William, Will, Bill…).

Share your answers to the previous activities with your partner.

Think through the following questions and discuss them with your partner.:

- ☞ *Give three names (in any language) that you particularly like.*
- ☞ *Do you keep traditions when naming a child in your family?*
  Why did your parents choose the name they did for you?
- ☞ *In what aspects would you be a different person if your parents had chosen a different name for you?*
- ☞ *What names do you want to give to your own children?*
- ☞ *How does it influence a person when they carry a reference to their father in their name? Does it say anything about the society?*

Think of two of your best friends. Write their given names on the board/poster. When everybody has done this, look at the frequency of individual names. Which name is the most frequent? Is it a traditional name? A borrowed and/or trendy one? Are there any interesting/foreign ones?

Imagine a following situation: You are a teacher now. It is August 31 and tomorrow is the first day of school. You are about to meet a new class. What you now read is a list of names of your new pupils.

Classroom discussion: What can you tell about the class just from the list of names? Can you predict anything about their social behaviour?

Activity Sheet Three: Surnames

Timing: 45 minutes

Read the texts and answer the questions:

Most probably it was the Chinese who first started using a system of family names (hereditary surnames). We know that they were using them around 2800 B.C.

In Europe, one of the most complex systems of names (including family names and nicknames) was developed by the Romans. With the fall of their Empire, hereditary surnames fell out of fashion and only much later, along with the need to distinguish more and more people of the same name living in a village, bynames appeared (surnames not inherited, but chosen to describe an individual). Bynames show up all over Europe in four basic categories:

- ❖ <u>patronymic</u> – byname that identifies a person's father
- ❖ <u>locative</u> – byname that identifies where a person lives or was born.
- ❖ <u>occupational</u> – byname that identifies a person's occupation.
- ❖ <u>nickname</u> – byname that describes a distinguishing feature of a person (physical appearance, personality, dress). Typically, these are not chosen by the bearer of the nickname, but by family, friends, neighbours, or enemies!

Does your surname fall into any of these categories?

After 1500 the custom of using a hereditary surname started to spread. Many people would take their byname and turn it into the family surname by passing it on their children. If the patronymic suffix -sen identified the father, *Jan Hendricksen* (son of Hendrick) would not name his son *Cornelius Jansen* (son of Jan), but establish a hereditary family surname by calling his son *Cornelius Hendricksen*. Similar patterns existed elsewhere in Europe, as in the Swedish surname Andersson, son of Anders, and the Spanish surname Fernandez, son of Fernando. In Irish Gaelic, *Mac* originally meant "son" and *Ó* would mean "grandson", and so names like *Ian Mac Henry* or *Michael O Donald* developed.

In some countries in Europe, the patronymic is still in use in some way. In Iceland, there are no hereditary surnames at all. People's last names are based their father's name; *-son* being the suffix for a son and *-dóttir* the suffix for a daughter.

What would your name look like if you were born in Iceland?

In Hungary, the patronymic suffix for sons is/was *-fi*. The unmarked patronymic (meaning no suffices) was also frequently used and so Zoltán, son of Pál (Paul) could be (due to the inverted name order…) *Pálfi Zoltán*, as well as *Pál Zoltán*.

What might your name look like if you had lived in Hungary at that time?

Match the name on t

Thomas Mac Donald   Pálfi János

Daniel Alfredson	an Irishman
	a Hungarian
Roman Sergeievich Soskin	a Russian
	an Icelander
son of Pál (Paul)	son of Alfred
son of Sergei	

Read:

In many cultures it is customary for a woman to take her husband's name, when she marries. And so Miss *Joan Smith* becomes Mrs *Joan Hardy* when she marries Mr *William Hardy*. However, in Slavic languages the wife's surname takes a "slightly" different form from her husband's. In Czech, for example, the general rule is to add *-ová* to the man's surname to create the feminine form. The suffix originates from the possessive case and is in a way a Czech version of the English possessive *'s*. Therefore Miss *Lenka Kovářová* is the daughter of Mr *Marek Kovář* (blacksmith) and Mrs *Irena Kovářová*.

What would your mother's name look like if it followed the Czech rules?
If her name does to follow them, write it without the suffix.

Think through the following questions and discuss them with your partner:

- ☞ How does it influence a person when they carry the reference to their father in their name? Does it define them in any way? What does it tell you about the society?
- ☞ Do you think it adequate for women/men to take their spouses' surnames?
- ☞ Do your find it common/insulting that women's forms of surnames in some societies/cultures suggest the idea of being owned?

Share the most interesting points with the whole group.