Trip to Japan

Context:

- The activity took place in the second class of the German section of the European School (ES) in Frankfurt. The ES are multicultural and multilingual institutions for children from all EU countries (www.esffm.org/en). The language of the section is German, but there are also bilingual/plurilingual children and children with many different home languages.

Reasons for choosing the activity:

- A newly arrived child, an eight-year-old girl, who had spent a year in Japan and attended a Japanese school, told her classmates about her experiences. As the children were very interested in the stories the young girl told, a two-week project was set up (→ meaningful language learning).

- The aim of the project was to raise children's awareness about Japan, Japanese culture and language and to welcome the girl, who had spent a year in a faraway country with a different culture and education system. Last, but not least, the girl's parents were given the opportunity to familiarize with the school, the class and were involved in their daughter's learning. This project illustrates how openness to different languages and cultures can become reality.

Description:

- The teacher and the children used the globe and map of the world in order to locate the position of Japan. The girl's parents were invited to the school and together with their daughter, they told the class about their experience of living in Japan. They showed a lot of pictures and brochures including examples of Japanese script, records of the language and music, and video sequences of Japanese dance. They talked about life in Japan and Japanese culture. They also brought Sushi, which the children tasted using chopsticks (→ holistic language learning).

- During the next two weeks, the children engaged in a range of activities through which they got into contact with the Japanese language and culture. They wrote their names and numbers using Japanese script; they played Sudoku and listened to Japanese music; they learned about Geishas and Samurai, imitated the Geisha fan Dance and sword movements; they made Koi Carp kites to celebrate Children's Day; they cooked rice balls and stamped passports that said they had visited Japan, etc. During all the activities, children had an opportunity to listen to recordings of the Japanese language; to actively use Japanese vocabulary; to use correct pronunciation of words and short sentences; to compare Chinese and Latin script (→ holistic language learning).

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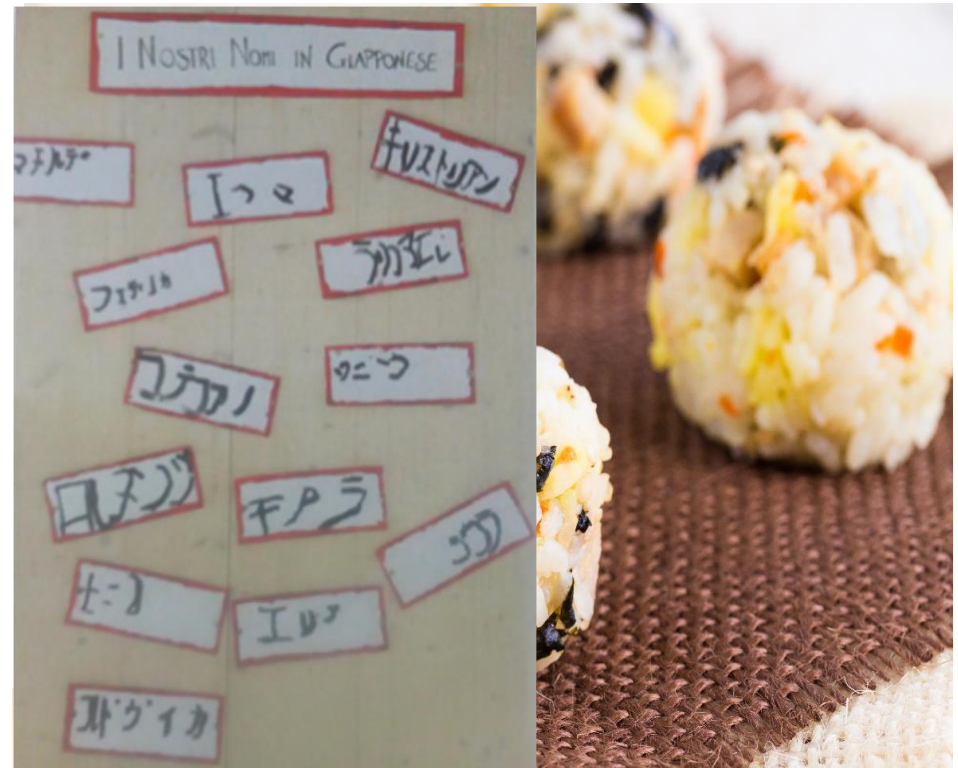
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Observation:

- Children were interested, motivated, actively engaged and came up with their own proposals for activities (→ active language learning), such as making a Japanese flag, painting geisha, making origami helmets and sticky rice balls. They learned that 'Hello Kitty', 'Pokemon' and 'Ninjago' originate from Japan.

One group wrote Japanese numbers, another painted Japanese pictures, the third one made Kirigami. They reacted very positively to the different cultural and linguistic aspects they had to deal with.

- The learning objectives of the project were fully achieved. Children chose samples of their work and put them into their personal portfolios.

- The newly arrived child became well-integrated in the class. Her reaction, as well the reaction of her parents, were very positive. She was no longer a newcomer. Now she was an experienced and appreciated member of the class. This informal contact contributed to a good relationship between the class teacher and the parents (→ holistic approach; continuous and coherent language learning).