

ICT-facilitated parent interventions to support families with young children in linguistically diverse contexts

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION, USING
THE ISOTIS VIRTUAL LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT

EDITORS: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Mareike Trauernicht, Juliane Schünke, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, & Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků



ICT-facilitated parent interventions to support families with young children in linguistically diverse contexts

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION, USING THE ISOTIS VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

EDITORS: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Mareike Trauernicht, Juliane Schünke, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, & Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků

Document Identifier

Report on the development and implementation of the Virtual Learning Environment model supporting parenting and children's first language learning

Version

1.0

Date Due

M33

Submission date

30 September 2019

Work Package

WP3 Family Support to Increase Educational Equality

Lead Beneficiary

UO

AUTHORS

Chapter 1: Katharina Ereky-Stevens

Chapter 2: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Eleanor Brock

Chapter 3: Mareike Trauernicht, Juliane Schünke, Yvonne Anders

Chapter 4: Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, Giulia Pastori

Chapter 5: Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků

Chapter 6: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Mirjam Pardis

CHANGE LOG

Version	Date	Amended by	Changes
1.0	30 September 2019		

PARTNERS INVOLVED

Number	Partner name	Country	People involved
2	University of Oxford	UK	Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Edward Melhuish Eleanor Brock
6	Freie Universität Berlin	DE	Yvonne Anders, Mareike Trauernicht, Juliane Schünke, Eda Topac
7	University of Milano-Bicocca	IT	Giulia Pastori, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, Valentina Pagani, Donata Ripamonti, Irene Capelli, Caterina Falcone, Stefania Sharley, Sara Martino, Giulia Pipitone
15	International Step by Step Association	NL	Stansilav Daniel, Mihaela Ionescu, Aljosa Rudas
16	Wise & Munro	NL	Mirjam Pardijs
17	Masarykova Univerzita	CZ	Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the European Commission for funding the project ISOTIS “Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society”.

We would like to thank the Italian ISOTIS team (Giulia Pastori, Andrea Mangiatordi, Valentina Pagani, Leonardo Menegola) for their work in developing the VLE and the support given to us during designing content for the digital platform and during implementation, when making use of its functions together with practitioners, parents and children.

We would also like to thank the staff members of all institutions involved in this research:

England: We thank the members of the Leicestershire family learning team that is part of Leicestershire Adult Learning Service for their participation in this study, which involved spending time in many group discussions, sharing experiences and ideas, providing us with feedback, and real commitment to try out some of the ideas and resources we had developed.

Germany: We thank the local coordinator, parent tutor, and all participating parents of the *Rucksack* programme involved in this study who generously spent their time and experiences with us and who were willing to try out new tools to foster change and development. We also thank the interviewed field experts and parents for sharing their experiences and knowledge with us in the exploratory phase of the project.

Italy: We would like to gratefully thank the school involved in the research, all the teachers who participated in the study and the school Director who accepted to join the project. We also dedicate our special thanks to all parents and children who participated in the phases of work, dedicating time and efforts and sharing their views and knowledge.

Czech Republic: We thank the management of the Ostrava City Library for close cooperation over a year, we thank the librarians and practitioners who actively took part in the co-design implementation phase, and we thank the participating Community Centre, especially Carmen Crown without which the access to low threshold families would not be possible.

Last but not least we thank all parents and children involved in the exploratory and co-design phase, and during implementation and evaluation. We are extremely grateful for the opportunities that were given to us to learn more about families’ experiences. It was a privilege to be part of very engaging group discussions, and a particular privilege to be allowed to participate in course sessions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ISOTIS project addresses issues arising in culturally and linguistically diverse societies, which propose challenges for Europe's education systems. Changes are needed, with frameworks and approaches that positively address cultural and linguistic diversity, and professionals with competencies to interact in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context. For parent- and family- support systems, approaches are required that respond to the needs of families who face the task of integrating their heritage culture and language background with the cultural and linguistic context they are living in. ISOTIS (WP3) collected research evidence and expert knowledge on the best practices in supporting families of disadvantaged groups, including those with other cultural and language backgrounds, in providing stimulating home learning environments. This report brings together the work done to develop and test ICT-facilitated interventions for parents and professionals working with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse contexts in four countries in Europe. Across all four contexts, the focus of the interventions is on families managing and making best use of the several languages and language resources present in their life in supporting child development and learning.

Applying the bio-ecological systems model of personal development (1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) to this context demonstrates that to explore and address questions related to children's language experiences and language development in multi-lingual contexts, proximal processes in the child's immediate environments (micro-systems), as well as broader issues such as language ideologies of all social agents, and beliefs about how to support child learning have to be taken into account. The construct of global competence is of significance for the studies presented in this report. Education towards global competence has been recognised as essential to help develop more inclusive societies (OECD, 2018). The foundations of global competence are value for cultural diversity, the promotion of cultural awareness and respectful interactions in increasingly diverse societies. Within this framework, the importance of professionals' attitudes and practices with culturally diverse populations has been highlighted, with a focus on professionals' multi-cultural beliefs and multi-cultural skills. In the context of early interventions, the construct of cultural sensitivity has been identified as essential in supporting professionals to respectfully interact with culturally diverse families. The construct recognises that in order to incorporate their practices in unfamiliar contexts of diverse values and beliefs, professionals need to assess their beliefs, practices and values in relation to those of the families they are working with (Gardiner & French, 2011). For the studies presented in this report, beliefs about multi-lingualism and strategies to support children's multi-lingual development are of particular importance. Multi-lingualism is viewed as a resource, with potential benefits for individuals and society (Council of the European Union, 2014).

In this report we present and discuss design, implementation, and findings of the ISOTIS design-based research studies carried out in four European countries: England, Germany, Italy, and the Czech Republic. The work was predominately carried out in cooperation with community services offering support to families and parents, and in one case in the context of the school. Cooperating practitioners were community workers, public librarians, family learning/parent tutors, and teachers. The focus was on supporting families with language backgrounds other than the school language and children at preschool/early school age. Participating parents were part of the local

community, and users of services offered by the participating institution/organisation. Intervention activities focussed on multiculturalism and multilingualism, and promoting heritage language and culture in linguistically and culturally complex contexts.

A main component of interventions in all four contexts was the use of technology (the ISOTIS virtual learning environment; <https://vle.isotis.org/>) to address some of the difficult issues arising in parent support (particularly in diverse contexts), and to stimulate and empower stakeholders in multilingual and multicultural environments. Involving stakeholders in co-creative processes, and building on their cultural and linguistic resources were key design principles, and reflected the ISOTIS aims to increase engagement and empowerment of stakeholders, and contribute to enriched and intercultural curriculum and programme development (Pastori et al., 2019b). A design-based research approach was employed (Pastori et al., 2019b). An essential part of this task was to co-create content for the ISOTIS VLE (Pastori, Mangiatordi, & Pagani, 2019a, b) – a virtual learning tool to support professionals in dealing with diversity – and to test the tool when implementing interventions which make use of the VLE. Implementation was accompanied by ongoing documentation and evaluation.

To conclude, this report presents some key messages which address design and implementation, and focus on characteristics which we identified as those that most shaped our interventions: organisational support; practitioners' professional experience, knowledge, motivation and skills; parents' time motivation, skills and openness to share their experiences; participants' access to ICT and ICT confidence and skills, and a digital platform that is attractive and user-friendly. Key messages are followed up by recommendations for practice which guide some considerations regarding the political environment needed to facilitate the success of interventions aiming to support parents in bringing up their children in multi-lingual environments.

Key messages

1. The organisation plays an important role in the success of an intervention, especially if it is complex and relies on the involvement of different stakeholders (e.g. parents, children, teachers). Across our four sites, we found significant differences in how organisations got involved in the interventions, and how much resources, support and leadership was offered to those practitioners who were planning and delivering the interventions. Relatedly, we found differences in practitioners' motivation, knowledge and skills to get involved in design and implementation, and in the use of the ISOTIS VLE.
2. All organisations expressed recognition of the value of heritage culture and language. Yet a focus on actively supporting heritage language maintenance and bilingual child development was either relatively new in our participating interventions, or not at all part of their usual parent support work.
3. Children's skills, their enjoyment of activities, and their motivation to participate can play an important role in facilitating parent involvement. The preschool has the potential to play an important role in sharing documentation which enables parents to see their children in 'action'.
4. Most parents want their children to learn and maintain the heritage language as well as to learn

the language of instruction. Finding the resources needed to support these dual language goals can be difficult for parents, yet parents receive little support in this task. Many parents report challenges they face in particular related to children's heritage language learning, and (over time) a tendency to prioritise learning of the language of instruction.

5. Our interventions put emphasis on paying attention to how families think and feel about their languages, and how they use their languages at home. Parents appreciated opportunities for reflection and the sharing of experiences concerning these issues, and for practitioners those moments were also important opportunities for learning.

6. Yet, parent motivation to engage with our interventions were not predominantly driven by wishes to address goals related to support for heritage language learning. Many parents wanted to learn more about the school system and supporting child learning in school, and were highly motivated to do what schools expect from them.

7. Documentation that reflects experiences and activities at home can be very valuable; it has much potential to stimulate and support reflection and learning in parent groups, and to strengthen communication and partnerships between home and educational institutions. Yet, creating such rich resources is not an easy task. Parents need opportunities to practice, and ongoing support by experienced practitioners in producing such resources. Creating and sharing rich documentation also relies on respectful and trustful relationships.

8. Observations of implementation showed that parents appreciate hands-on activities and opportunities to actively practice strategies to support child learning. Yet, Practitioners were more confident in working with parents towards supporting child learning of literacy skills in general, or in literacy skills in the school language, than on working towards goals of bilingual development or in teaching strategies parents could use at home to support heritage language maintenance.

Recommendations addressing intervention design

1. Design parent support which expresses recognition of the value of heritage language and culture.
2. Within organisations, develop a clear vision of the intervention, its aims and its implementation, and a strategy of leadership.
3. Provide practitioners with sufficient resources including training, time for planning and preparation, time to build networks and ensure collaboration with other institutions, time for face-to-face contact with parents, and a climate of collaboration where all members support each other, reflect on their practice, share good practices, and are aligned in their mission.
4. Select qualified staff with sensitivity for multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism, who are able to relate to parents and create trustful relationships.
5. Ensure parents experience recognition of the value of heritage language learning and multi-lingual development from the side of the school too. Build close links to those educational institutions which the children are attending, and make plans for collaborative work, which ensure that everyone involved is aligned to the mission of the intervention.

6. Seek new ways in which children, through their own involvement with the aims and activities of interventions, can motivate and guide parent involvement.
7. Design resources which invite reflection and the sharing of experiences, and make sure that documentation of experiences is an integral part of activities.
8. Design resources and plan activities which help parents to learn and practice how to make best use of the several languages present in the families' homes when interacting in everyday routines.

Recommendations addressing intervention implementation

1. Provide ample of opportunities for reflection and the sharing of experiences. Show respect and pay attention to how families with diverse language backgrounds think and feel about, and how they use their languages at home.
2. Make a conscious effort to help parents to make decision about their language choices, and make sure they are well informed, and informed in a balanced way about the benefits and challenges of multi-lingual development.
3. Provide parents with choice, and support those choices in helping parents work towards their aims. Set learning goals. When planning home activities, spend time planning language use for each activity, wherever possible allowing for all languages. Provide opportunities for hands-on activities and the practicing of strategies parents can use to support multi-lingual development and language maintenance at home.
4. Aim for rich and meaningful documentation of home learning activities and language experiences. Support parents in creating these materials. Use this documentation to stimulate reflection and learning, and create ways to share rich documentations of families' language (and cultural) resources and practices with educational institutions children are attending.
5. Ensure that collaborations with educational institutions are based on a shared mission, with shared understanding and trust between each partner involved, and all partners contributing towards exchanges.

Recommendations addressing the ISOTIS VLE

An integral part of all interventions was the involvement the ISOTIS VLE. What participants valued most about the platform were the materials that were audio-visual and attractive to parents, didactic and focusing on teaching content, and stimulating shared reflections. Practitioners appreciated the potential of the platform as a resource to help their planning, with the opportunity to collect more ideas and share good practices within the team, the multi-lingual potential of the platform, and the potential to facilitate communication, collaboration and networking. Yet, regarding the use of the VLE, it became clear that some parents managed better and were more motivated than others in accessing the platform and engaging with it. Many challenges were met, pointing towards the need of additional resources and important improvements needed to realise the potential of the VLE. In addition, children's involvement with the platform was found to be an important factor in either hindering or facilitating parent engagement with the platform. Finally, using the platform during sessions with parents had an effect on the use of time and the pedagogical approach. Some adjustments were needed, and on some instances, this created tensions.

1. Resources: Ensure practitioners have sufficient time, training and ongoing support to engage with the platform and add to its resources. Plan time to ensure parents have sufficient opportunities to engage with the tool, while supported by practitioners. Ensure parents and practitioners have the material resources to access the platform reliably and without losing valuable time (e.g. stable internet connection, appropriate screen to share content with groups of parents, personal devices for parents to use at home).
2. Platform improvements: Ensure the tool is attractive and user-friendly and is well aligned with the ICT skills and confidence practitioners and parents have. Base improvements on careful considerations of how parents are already using ICT in their day-to-day life, and how the use of digital technology to support parent interventions can best match (or be integrated with) the tools that they choose to use and the ways in which they use them. Ensure all digital functions work reliably on all devices available to users (e.g. an interface that works with a smartphone). Improve communication tools the platform offers. Improve the multi-lingual functions of the platform.
3. Consider and plan for the supportive role children can play in facilitating parent engagement with the platform. Consider at the same time, that especially parents with younger children are hesitant about using ICT to support their children's learning, which can create tensions and work against parent motivation to engage with a digital platform.
4. Consider the role of the platform and engagement with it during face-to-face time with parents, and plan in advance how to combine and balance (independent) parent work on the platform with a pedagogy that focuses on hands-on activities and collaborative group learning.
5. Ensure parents have opportunities to learn to engage with the platform and its functions/tools, and opportunities to gain the confidence, motivations and skills needed to explore and use the VLE independently at home.

Policy implications

Our summary of findings and recommendations towards practice help to guide considerations regarding the political environment needed to facilitate the success of interventions aiming to support parents in bringing up their children in multi-lingual environments.

First, a policy agenda and clear political commitment is needed at national and regional level. Individual parent support organisations cannot work on their own; they have to be embedded in a wider political and institutional culture that respects and pays attention to language beliefs and language practices in families with diverse language backgrounds, and supports maintenance of heritage cultures and languages. This needs to be demonstrated by policy documents and frameworks, public announcements, and (long-term) financial support for initiatives at all levels which work towards shared aims related education in multi-lingual contexts.

Collaborations and networks need to be activated and sustained – particularly those between local organisations that provide parent education and support, and educational institutions children are attending. Teaching and learning resources need to be developed to support practitioners and parents working in multi-lingual contexts. Skilled and competent practitioners are needed, and they need sufficient resources and continuous support. Good practices need to

be identified and shared, and the effectiveness of interventions needs to be monitored and evaluated.

References

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. ([ISBN 0-674-22457-4](#))
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.) *Handbook of child development: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development*, 6th ed., pp.793 – 828. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Council of the European Union. (2014). *Conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competencies*. Education, youth, culture and sports council meetings, Brussels, 2014.
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf
- Gardiner, E., French, C. (2011). The relevance of cultural sensitivity in early intervention. *Exceptional Education International*, 21, pp.34-49.
- OECD (2018) Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world. The OECD PISA global competence framework. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/Handbook-PISA-2018-Global-Competence.pdf>
- Pastori, G., Mangiatordi, A., Pagani, V. (2019a). Tackling language and cultural barriers in superdiverse environments. The ISOTIS multilingual Virtual Learning and Communicating Environment for parental support, curriculum innovation and professional development. EECERA conference presentation, Thessaloniki, 21-23 August 2019.
- Pastori, G., Mangiatordi, A., Pagani, V. (2019b). The ISOTIS Virtual Learning Environment. The cross-WP theoretical and methodological framework and features of the VLE. ISOTIS report D4.4a: submitted to Brussels



This project has received funding from the
European Union's Horizon 2020
research and innovation programme
under grant agreement No. 727069