

# Inclusive curricula, pedagogies, and social climate interventions

INTEGRATIVE REPORT

CECÍLIA AGUIAR & GIULIA PASTORI



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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This integrative report presents a summary of the findings obtained within the ISOTIS Work Package (WP) 4, across four main tasks: (1) a literature review on curriculum, pedagogy, and social climate interventions tackling inequalities; (2) an inventory and analysis of promising and effective curriculum, pedagogy, and/or school social climate interventions; (3) case studies of promising curriculum, pedagogy, and social climate interventions; and (4) a design-based approach model to promote multilingualism and curricula innovation.

In this final report, we deepen our discussion of the meaning and implications of the main findings on curriculum, pedagogy, and school social climate interventions tackling social and educational inequalities. Importantly, we add to previous work by incorporating and discussing the implications of relevant findings from additional Work Packages focusing on the perspectives of families (WP2), on family support programs (WP3), on staff perspectives and professional development approaches (WP5), as well as interagency coordination (WP6).

Based on such findings, we formulate a set of recommendations for educational policy and practice addressing, for example, the need to:

- Support every child's right to use and learn his/her heritage language;
- Act upon the socio-emotional dimension of languages;
- Build on partnerships and professionalism to design culturally sensitive and contextually-appropriate policies supporting heritage languages;
- Support teachers in embedding cooperative learning into the curriculum;
- Design emergent intercultural and multilingual curricula in the context of inclusive group norms;
- Move beyond individual professional development approaches;
- Support schools in using empowering family involvement approaches;
- Build on children as drivers of change, promoting their active role;
- Overcome teachers' resistance to the use of ICT;
- Invest on infrastructures and provide easy-to-use and accessible cross-platform and interoperable digital tools;
- Use multilingual tools in monolingual schools and build multilingual inclusive learning communities.

Overall, findings suggest the need for programmatic policies that act upon (vs. react to) challenges associated with multiculturalism and all types of diversity. Such action requires a preventive stance within schools and education systems to support belongingness and the development of positive identities for all. To this effect, strategic, broad, and enduring partnerships are needed, which means that teachers cannot be left alone to address inequalities and students, families, and communities should be supported in engaging in meaningful dialogue toward developing a shared vision of inclusive classrooms and schools in each community.

Certain that one size does not fit all, and aware of differences between and within European countries, our recommendations can and should be enacted in different ways, depending on the specificities, needs, and resources of each context.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The **ISOTIS consortium** aimed to understand and contribute to solutions on how Europe may tackle early and persistent social and educational inequalities. Acknowledging the role of schools and classrooms as important levels of analysis and intervention to reach this ambitious goal, the ISOTIS consortium specifically designed Work Package (WP4) to understand how to design and implement curricula, pedagogies, and school social climate interventions that effectively tackle social and educational inequalities and promote inclusiveness and belongingness.

### 2.1 ISOTIS WORK PACKAGE 4 GOALS

As proposed to the European Commission (Description of Action; DoA, 2016), the ISOTIS consortium WP4 addressed curriculum and pedagogy development in early childhood education and care settings and primary schools. We aimed to identify approaches to curriculum and pedagogy that could support “both academic learning and the development of skills needed for life-long learning and optimal participation in the 21st century” (DoA, 2016, p. 39). Relatedly, we formulated four **main objectives**:

1. “To describe the state of the art in the reduction of educational and social inequalities through curriculum approaches, educational practices, and social climate interventions, defining and critically discussing key concepts in this domain.
2. To conduct an inventory and review of potentially promising interventions, approaches, programs, and projects aiming to reduce educational inequalities through curriculum design and implementation, classroom practices, and/or school social climate (....).
3. To describe the key features of successful interventions, approaches, programs or projects aiming to reduce educational inequalities through curriculum design and implementation, classroom practices, and/or school social climate (...).
4. To develop a prototype ICT-based curriculum intervention, to facilitate the development of multicultural identities in ECEC and primary school, to sustain the development of multilingual and plurilingual competences, and to foster socio-emotional skills connected to an inclusive approach to diversities in the early years.” (DoA, 2016, p. 39).

### 2.2 ISOTIS WORK PACKAGE 4 TASKS

To address the WP4 objectives, we proposed four main tasks, progressing from a broad overview of the field and ongoing efforts to a detailed examination and, ultimately, design of school and classroom-based interventions tackling social and educational inequalities.

#### 2.1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND SOCIAL CLIMATE INTERVENTIONS TACKLING INEQUALITIES

To address the first objective, we conducted a short literature review, early on, “to document the main current trends and challenges in curriculum approaches, educational practices, and social climate interventions aiming to tackle educational and social inequalities in both centre-based early childhood education and primary education” (**D4.1**, Aguiar et al., 2017, p. 5). This review

proposed definitions of main concepts to establish a common language and support shared understanding within WP4 and, importantly, described the theoretical framework that would guide and support subsequent work within WP4, while also informing decision making regarding WP2 and WP5 stakeholder surveys.

Importantly, we proposed to focus on *curriculum*, defined as “knowledge, skills and values that children are meant to attain” (Sylva, Pastori, Lerkkanen, Ereky-Stevens, & Slot, 2016); *pedagogy*, defined as “the practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching” (Sylva et al., 2016); and *school social climate*, by focusing on respect for diversity, connectedness and engagement, and social support (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013).

Consistent with the overall conceptual framework of the ISOTIS Consortium (DoA, 2016), we elected the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), multicultural education (Banks, 2015), and multiculturalism as a policy (Berry, 1984, 2013), as key conceptual frameworks informing our methods, analytical approach, and discussions. Subsequently, we prioritized intercultural contact and culture maintenance and support (Berry, 2013) as key dimensions to efforts aiming to promote inclusiveness and belongingness. Further, we chose to focus on language support as both a pillar of the student’s cultural heritage, intercultural communication (Berry, 2013), and educational success (OECD, 2016).

### **2.1.2 INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF PROMISING AND EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND/OR SCHOOL SOCIAL CLIMATE INTERVENTIONS**

To address the second objective, “we identified, described, and critically analysed 78 promising interventions from eight European countries to target social and educational inequalities through the curriculum, pedagogy, and school social climate (Aguiar, et al., 2017). Specifically, we conducted an inventory of promising interventions, within the classroom and school microsystems, aiming to promote educational equality and belongingness in immigrant, Roma, and low-income children attending early childhood and primary education provision in the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal. Target groups were selected based on the persistent educational disadvantages and increased risk of social exclusion they experience, while selected countries represented different geographical areas, national income levels, education systems, welfare regimes, and integration policies” (D4.2, Aguiar, Silva, et al., 2017, p. 10).

### **2.1.3 CASE STUDIES OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND SOCIAL CLIMATE INTERVENTIONS**

To address the third objective, we conducted seven in-depth case studies of curriculum, pedagogy, and/or social climate interventions ongoing in seven European countries. Again, selected countries represented distinct geographic regions, diverse in their income levels, research traditions, education and welfare systems, and immigration policies: England, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal (D4.3, Aguiar & Silva, 2018).

In our analysis, we focused on the key success features and facilitators of promising interventions, tackling educational inequalities through curriculum design and implementation, classroom practices, and/or school social climate, in early childhood education and in primary school, aiming to strengthen the existing knowledge base on potential transferable solutions for promoting

inclusiveness and belongingness across European classrooms and schools. We defined *success features* as the characteristics, processes, strategies, and conditions that are intrinsic to the design of the intervention and are key in producing the desired outcomes. We defined *facilitators* as (mostly external) factors or conditions that support implementation processes or assist in reaching the intended outcomes. Further, we analysed the obstacles experienced within selected interventions, describing and analysing potential solutions. Importantly, we formulated guidelines for subsequent work on a design-based approach to promote multilingualism and curricula innovation.

### 2.1.4 A DESIGN-BASED APPROACH MODEL TO PROMOTE MULTILINGUALISM AND CURRICULA INNOVATION

To address the fourth objective, we conducted designed-based interventions, enhanced by the use of a Virtual Learning Environment (D.4.4, Pastori et al., 2019, Section A) in Early Childhood Education and Care and primary school classrooms (age range 4 -12ys) in four countries (Italy, the Czech Republic, Greece, and Portugal) with the aim to increase and innovate curricula and teaching approaches regarding multilingualism, cultural diversity, social justice and human rights. Task 4 (D.4.4, Pastori et al., 2019, Section B) was conducted in synergy with Task 3.4 (D3.4, Ereky-Stevens et al., 2019) and 5.4 (D5.4, Slot et al., 2019), and a common theoretical and methodological framework was adopted, drawing valuable guiding principles and key successful components for the interventions from the previous tasks.

Within the general theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, the study adopted a *positive socio-constructivist approach* focused on including family cultural and linguistic resources, promoting the agency and active participation of all participants, meaningful and rich communication, as well as the use of ICT (the VLE) to enhance communication and learning processes. The Global Competence framework represented the main underlying content framework, encompassing several dimensions and pedagogical approaches, such as Human Rights and Social Justice Education, Intercultural Competence and Education, Multilingual and Language Awareness Education, Critical Pedagogy and Multicultural Citizenship Education, strongly connected to reflective and active teaching methods.

The VLE interventions promoted a strengths-based curriculum concept and pedagogical approaches based on the resources of all stakeholders, including children and families with diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and social class backgrounds; built on the implementation of *equity pedagogies*, proposing a socio-constructivist approach and cooperative learning strategies to promote meaningful learning, enrich socio-emotional interactions with cognitive acquisitions, foster the acquisition of democratic citizenship values, skills and competences, and the sense of agency in taking action. The activities involved play and *experiential learning*, *interpersonal relationships* and children's enjoyment and creativity were promoted *by actively involving children in decision making and sharing their resources*, also in the early years at the preschool level, allowing them to share personal stories, information about their country of origin and their first language. *Guided reflection* about the experiences on multicultural awareness, language awareness, socio-economic equity, and human rights, stereotypes and discrimination, was conducted during and after the activities. All interventions included activities aimed at valuing and giving visibility to all languages (and cultures) co-existing in the classroom/school, especially first languages, following the Language

awareness/awakening guidelines.

Teachers were involved in a closely collaborative research process, following several phases from the exploration of the context, co-design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The process was aimed at building teacher collaboration, reinforcing teacher knowledge, values, beliefs, and commitment to children's (and families') respectful inclusion, viewing themselves as *agents of change* towards inclusion and social justice. In some interventions, it was also possible to enhance communication with parents, conveying information regarding school life, children's school activities, and experiences, and providing textual and visual documentation through multimedia and multilingual communication system embedded in the ISOTIS VLE. Parents were also involved in selected classroom/school activities (i.e., exhibitions and performances), sharing personal and traditional stories in their home language at school, revealing their language competences.

The ISOTIS VLE, developed, implemented, and evaluated in the interventions, was designed following the Universal Design for Learning principles. Based on an Open Source tool (Moodle), the platform can be described as a system of Web 2.0 communication, teaching, and learning tools, characterized by a multiplicity of functions able to enhance the communicative and educational experience. It included an organized collection of resources (theoretical insights, videos, observation guidelines), experiences (guidelines for action and activities), and tools (Open Source software and applications connected to the activities), within a modular structure. The VLE prototypes for activities, called 'learning experiences', were designed following a socio-constructivist and research-oriented approach.

A key feature of the VLE to make it accessible, was the multilingual interface and the production of content in many languages, including most of the languages of the research participants, to value all languages. Language accessibility was enabled also by the integration of embedded digital tools to support multilingualism and accessibility within the VLE platform: a character, a robot-bee named Beeba, acted as the linguistic and accessibility mediator in the VLE, providing essential services (e.g., selection of the interface language of the VLE; text-to-speech synthesis in multiple languages; a multi-layout virtual keyboard to facilitate writing in different alphabets; a translation system to support users in reading and writing). The VLE offered an interactive arena, a technologically evolved teaching and communication setting for collaborative work. Teachers had the opportunity to explore and to use it with children, parents, and/or other teachers, in the classroom and the school.

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we present an integrated discussion on the main results across ISOTIS WP4 tasks while also combining selected findings from extant ISOTIS work on the perspectives of families and children (WP2), family support programs (WP3), staff perspectives and professional development (WP5), as well as interagency coordination (WP6). Importantly, we highlight both coherent findings across multiple WPs (focusing on different levels of analysis) as well as potential tensions within the body of evidence produced by the ISOTIS Consortium, and, subsequently, discuss key recommendations for practice and policy.

## 3.1 SUPPORT HERITAGES LANGUAGES

### 3.1.1 FINDINGS

A limited number of interventions tackling social and educational inequalities within early childhood education and primary education schools in the European countries involved in WP4 explicitly acknowledged and supported the heritage languages of immigrant or ethnic minority children (see **D4.2**, Aguiar, Silva, et al., 2017). Limited support for heritage languages was also found in family support programs analysed within ISOTIS (see **D3.2**, Cadima Nata, Anders, & Evangelou, 2017; **D3.3**, Cohen, Trauernicht et al., 2018). As stated in **D4.2** (Aguiar, Silva, et al., 2017, p. 57), *“multicultural policies support the maintenance and development of heritage cultures and languages (Berry, 1984, 2013) as well as intercultural communication. By neglecting the value of children’s heritage languages and cultures, interventions possibly hinder their potential to support the development of secure identities in minority or immigrant students and, thus, their potential to positively impact students’ sense of belonging at school and their psychological and social adaptation (Berry, 2013; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013). Further, the failure to value and support children’s heritage language and culture conveys messages on the implicit value of minority languages (and cultures). These messages threaten efforts to ensure equal status among all students, a central premise of the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2011), thus hindering the potential of these interventions to reduce discriminatory attitudes among majority native students.”*

Importantly, parents and children across ISOTIS studies valued the experience of respect for their heritage languages (e.g., **D3.3**, Cohen, Trauernicht et al., 2018; **D4.4**, Pastori et al., 2019; **D2.4**, Pastori et al., 2019) and practitioners and other stakeholders identified heritage language support as a success feature of promising and effective interventions tackling inequalities (e.g., **D4.3**, Aguiar et al., 2018). In the Children’s Study (**D2.4**, Pastori et al., 2019; and **D2.5**, Pastori et al., 2019), children considered the valorisation of the mother tongue as a crucial factor promoting well-being and inclusion at school, since the early years. Importantly, children viewed the prohibition of speaking in one’s heritage language as a factor that strongly undermines children’s well-being in the school environment; in addition, the absence of heritage language, culture, religion, and food was seen as a negative aspect in the long-term and their enhancement was present in children’s proposals in all contexts (**D2.5**, Pastori et al., 2019, Children’s Study).

Extant research has shown that heritage language support is associated with positive identity development (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006); increased well-being, mental health, and school achievement (Berry et al., 2006; Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Bond, 2008); and positive outcomes in the language of instruction (Edele & Stanat, 2016). Therefore, our findings highlight a priority for further development of existing educational practices and policies tackling inequalities.

Future developments regarding practices and policies focusing on heritage language support in early childhood education and primary schools should, however, also account for additional findings highlighting potential tensions, namely those deriving from staff beliefs. For example, while staff working in formal and informal education settings generally supported multiculturalism, endorsement for multilingualism (a specific component of multiculturalism) was lower (see **D5.3**, Slot, Romijn, Cadima, Nata, & Wysłowska, 2018). Relatedly, while staff’s general self-efficacy

was high, reported self-efficacy regarding multiculturalism and multilingualism issues was lower (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018). These findings are consistent with research showing that support for multiculturalism varies in principle and practice, that is, when multiculturalism is presented to host society majorities in more abstract (vs. concrete) terms it triggers fewer perceptions of threat to the national identity and culture (Yogeeswaran & Dagupta, 2014). Multilingualism is a key component of multicultural policies (Berry, 1984) and can be seen as a more concrete strategy of implementing multiculturalism, which could then be seen as more threatening and thus gathering less support among staff.

Importantly, the monolingualism of the curriculum and teaching practices is pervasive, due to weak political endorsement and limited economic investments in many countries, and the lack of information at hand for teachers and of specific (pre- and in-service) professional development opportunities on the topic. The innovation of the curriculum and the educational practices in reference to multilingualism and intercultural education represent a challenge for teachers, who feel low skilled and under pressure in adding any new subjects to the regular curriculum (D4.4, Pastori et al., 2019).

### 3.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

**Support every child's right to use and learn his/her heritage language.** Our findings suggest that education settings and systems across European countries must find multiple ways to explicitly and systematically value and support heritage languages, also making use of ICTs as a source for multilingual tools and contents that can support monolingual teachers' practice. Such efforts are central to multicultural policies aiming to support cultural diversity (Berry, 1984, 2013). Heritage language support may address a vast array of goals, including (but not limited to):

- acknowledging all heritage languages (i.e., making them visible within school communities);
- respecting and welcoming the use of heritage languages within school interactions and activities, supporting informal learning and promoting positive attitudes towards their use;
- raising the status of minority languages as resources for learning and teaching within the school and the community;
- promoting the development of school mission statements that acknowledge the benefits of valuing and legitimizing the use of heritage languages and make the role of the school in supporting heritage languages explicit;
- supporting early and systematic exposure to heritage languages in informal settings, including in the home and in the community (e.g., facilitating access to resources such as books in the heritage languages);
- supporting the emergence of formal structures within the community to support heritage language education;
- supporting the institutionalization of high-quality heritage language education within the community (see Kagan, Carreira, & Chik, 2017).

While heritage language support is consistent with Articles 29 and 30 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), a recent analysis of 42 education systems in Europe suggests that only 13 support teaching of heritage languages and, importantly, learning the heritage language at school is seldom a right (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). European countries should, therefore, move beyond prevalent monolingual paradigms (Busch,

2011) and endorse policies that value, respect, and support every child's right to use and learn his/her heritage language. Importantly, such policies should also consider meta-analytic evidence on the benefits of bilingual education over submersion (i.e., using the language of instruction only) programs for language minority children in Europe (Reljić, Ferring, & Martin, 2015). Relatedly, the Council of Europe has argued for building on and expanding all children's language repertoires, including the language of the home, as the basis for plurilingual and intercultural education (Beacco, Byram, Cavalli, Coste, Cuenat, Goullier, & Panthier, 2016).

**Act upon the socio-emotional dimension of languages.** The social-emotional dimension of languages is often underestimated in school. The use and appreciation of languages are dependent on emotions and ideas linked to personal, family, and social life. Languages have a social image that places them hierarchically and gives them greater or lesser social, local, and global prestige. The school curriculum defines and legitimizes the use and study of the languages. In schools, these social representations are sometimes unknowingly reflected, and children's multiple linguistic profiles cannot be expressed. Explicitly acknowledging the legitimacy of all languages in the small multilingual community of the class can positively affect social climate, increasing the sense of belonging of all children, encouraging children who are usually silent and less involved in class discussions or in collaborative activities, to become involved and dynamic, expressing their desire to share their history and the language or languages spoken in the family; further, it can facilitate the adaptation of newly arrived children with a different cultural and linguistic background, who do not speak the language of instruction, to show their competence in their mother tongue, enhancing their social image in front of their new classmates, thus increasing their self esteem (D4.4, Pastori et al., 2019). Teachers and school communities need support to become aware of how they can promote positive attitudes towards all the languages (and cultures) as equal, deconstructing stereotypes and power relations, and to become aware of how their attitudes towards languages influence children's attitudes.

**Build on partnerships and professionalism to design culturally sensitive and contextually-appropriate policies supporting heritage languages.** Importantly, heritage language support policies and practices should be developed in the context of an open dialogue and shared decision making with families and communities (to ensure an empowerment approach is adopted; see D4.3, Silva, Martins, & Aguiar, 2018) and in collaboration with children, who can propose concrete and effective strategies and practices (D2.5, Pastori et al., 2019). And, importantly, they should be delivered with high-levels of competence built on strong continuous professional development (see D4.3, Anders & Ballaschk; D5.2, Slot, Romijn, & Wysłowska, 2017; D5.3, Slot et al., 2018). Therefore, European countries should prioritize professional development, school-wide, and community approaches that support heritage languages in ways that enhance positive identities, belongingness, and empowerment, while recognizing the evidence base on the benefits of bilingual (see Baker, Basaraba, & Polanco, 2016) and plurilingual education (Beacco et al., 2016). Further, it is relevant to reinforce the importance given to a socio-linguistic approach in school curricula and pedagogy, guiding teachers in considering their crucial role in fostering positive emotions and ideas about all the languages present in the class, positively affecting children's relationships with their language repertoire and their cultural heritage (D4.4, Pastori et al., 2019).

**Support the concurrent learning of the language of instruction.** Education settings and systems across European countries should also ensure the provision of early and strong (i.e.,

both explicit and implicit) support for the language of instruction, in accordance with families' expectations (e.g., **D3.3**, Cohen, Trauernicht et al., 2018) and language minority children's needs (Stanat, Becker, Baumert, Lüdtke, & Eckhardt, 2012). Indeed, learning the language of instruction is key to multicultural policies aiming to strengthen intercultural communication (Berry, 1984, 2013).

## 3.2 SUPPORT POSITIVE CONTACT

### 3.2.1 FINDINGS

As a policy, multiculturalism aims to enhance mutual acceptance and to improve the quality of intercultural relations among all groups and communities. Encouraging positive intercultural contact is, thus, central to multicultural policies. However, our findings (**D4.2**, Aguiar, Silva, et al., 2017) suggest that few interventions tackling social and educational inequalities in the European countries involved in WP4 explicitly used cooperative learning or did so within heterogeneous groups. Cooperative learning within heterogeneous groups meets the conditions under which contact can result in prejudice reduction and promote mutual acceptance in diverse societies: equal status, common goals and positive interdependence, and institutional support, namely through norms and laws prohibiting discrimination and supporting intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2011). Cooperative learning models are consistent with inclusive education principles that build on diversity as a value (UNESCO, 2005). Further, cooperative learning is considered an active (vs. passive) approach to promote positive attitudes and relations among diverse groups (Bigler, 1999). Therefore, cooperative learning is considered an equity pedagogy, a key dimension of multicultural education (Banks, 2015), and has been associated with increased social skills and academic achievement for all children, as well as decreased prejudice and discrimination (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017; Pfeifer, Brown, & Juvonen, 2007).

Importantly, while we found support for cooperative learning from children, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders within case studies and the VLE interventions (**D4.4**, Pastori et al., 2019; **D4.3**, Aguiar et al., 2018), we also found evidence of the need to strengthen teachers' knowledge and skills needed to design and implement high-quality cooperative learning strategies (**D4.4**, Pastori et al., 2019). Relatedly, we also found evidence of limited use of multicultural education activities (**D4.2**, Aguiar, Silva, et al., 2017), although their use was considered a success feature of promising and effective interventions by key stakeholders (**D4.3**, Aguiar & Silva, 2018).

### 3.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

**Support teachers in embedding cooperative learning into the curriculum.** Our findings suggest that education settings and systems across European countries must ensure that positive contact is a key dimension of intervention policies and practices aiming to tackle social and educational inequalities. Cooperative learning structures within heterogeneous groups should, thus, become a regular feature within school and classroom practices, particularly in highly diverse settings. To this effect, while high-quality teacher training and continuous professional development on the implementation of cooperative learning approaches is necessary, it should be complemented with education structures and processes that support teachers in embedding cooperative learning into the curriculum and finding the time for its implementation (see Baloche

& Brody, 2017; Buchs, Filippou, Pulfrey, & Volpé, 2017). In addition, schools should find ways to support positive contact activities within the community.

**Design emergent intercultural and multilingual curricula in the context of inclusive group norms.** Multicultural activities require careful planning and implementation in order to preclude reinforcement of stereotypes (see Killen, Rutland, & Ruck, 2011; Pfeifer et al., 2007). However, interventions addressing knowledge about minority groups as well as knowledge about prejudice, democratic values, and cultural diversity may lead to reduced prejudice and social inequalities, if implemented in the context of “a positive inclusive group norm... that discourages social exclusion” (Killen et al., 2011, p. 18). We propose approaches to the innovation of curriculum and of educational practices that acknowledge the centrality of children’s experience as a starting point to create intercultural dialogue and shared knowledge on cultures and languages in educational and school settings, from the early years, ensuring they are meaningful to children and close to their life. Therefore, we propose it is essential to carefully build “emergent intercultural and multilingual curricula” (see **D4.4**, Pastori et al., 2019), valuing the resources (including language repertoires) and everyday experiences of all children in each group or classroom, as they emerge in their cultural microsystems (Vélez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, Vizcarrondo-Opppenheimer, Vega-Molina, & García Coll, 2017). Such approaches may help convey meaningful (i.e., non-stereotypical) information about both minority and majority groups as they experience life in multicultural settings, thus supporting intercultural competence.

### 3.3 SUPPORT FAMILY AND (SCHOOL) COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

#### 3.3.1 FINDINGS

A significant proportion of interventions tackling social and educational inequalities within early childhood education and primary education schools in the European countries involved in WP4 did not explicitly support parental involvement (**D4.2**, Aguiar, Silva, et al., 2017), even though it was consistently recognized as a success feature or a facilitator within promising interventions and curriculum innovation efforts (**D4.3**, Aguiar & Silva, 2018; **D4.4**, Pastori et al., 2019). Importantly, while we found evidence of the use of a vast array of family involvement approaches (see **D4.3**, Aguiar & Silva, 2018), bidirectional communication approaches and family participation in decision-making processes were not implemented systematically (**D4.2**, Aguiar, Silva, et al., 2017).

Additional findings across ISOTIS studies support the importance of family involvement approaches, including positive associations between the frequency of (informal) intercultural contact with other (majority) families within the school and frequency of shared book reading at home (**D2.5**, Ferreira, Silva, Neves, Guichard, & Aguiar, 2019) and parental educational aspirations (**D2.5**, Petrogiannis, Aguiar, & Obrovská, 2019). Importantly, and consistent with extant research (Santiago, Garbacz, Beattie, & Moore, 2016), we also found evidence regarding the key role of trust in ensuring frequent and high-quality interactions and relationships between families and professionals within schools (**D4.3**, Aguiar & Silva, 2018) and other community services (**D3.3**, Cohen, Trauernicht et al., 2018).

Importantly, despite the centrality of classroom processes, WP4 case studies of promising interventions at the school level (see **D4.3**, Aguiar et al., 2018) resulted in the identification of

success features and facilitators at multiple levels of the system, including microsystemic classroom positive interactions and participatory practices (see also **D4.4**, Pastori et al., 2019), mesosystemic involvement of expert consultants to support pedagogical staff, and exosystemic mobilization of institutional networks. The role of inclusive school cultures also emerged as a relevant success feature and facilitator.

### 3.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

**Move beyond individual professional development approaches.** The number of supports identified within the mesosystem and exosystem clearly suggest the need to move beyond the classroom and beyond the school itself to ensure the design and implementation of high-quality, sustainable, context-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and cost-efficient interventions likely to reduce social and educational inequalities. Such evidence highlights the contextualized nature of classroom and school interventions and the need to *team around the teacher and his/her classroom*, ensuring that teachers and other practitioners are not alone in tackling profound and persistent inequalities and are continuously supported through high-quality team development and supervision as well as resources made available by relevant agencies and institutional networks (see **D6.2**, Barnes et al., 2018). If such a vast array of multilevel supports is needed for succeeding in reducing inequalities through classroom and school interventions, conventional professional development focusing on individual teachers and practitioners is not likely to produce meaningful and sustainable changes in school practices. Therefore, comprehensive, contextualized, and continuous team development that empowers all actors is likely needed. Such an approach is consistent with the need to support the development of a shared vision for each school, cultivating an inclusive culture that permeates routines, discourse, and processes, effectively embedding belongingness into the school's blueprint and creating positive contexts for learning and teaching (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017).

**Support schools in using empowering family involvement approaches.** Prioritize Considering its positive effects on children's school achievement (see Fan & Chen, 2001), our findings suggest that there is room for further development of family involvement practices within school interventions and practices. With extensive literature available to support change toward high-quality family involvement and family-school relationships (see Epstein, 2011; Sheldon & Turner-Vorbeck, 2019), it is important that schools become aware and make frequent use of a vast array of family involvement strategies available to them, prioritizing contextually appropriate bidirectional communication strategies (also through ICT use; see **D4.4**, Pastori et al., 2019), organizing culturally-sensitive informal events likely to promote intercultural contact among families, and enabling family participation in decision making. These strategies may facilitate parents' knowledge about activities and life experienced by children in the school, which is usually unknown to parents, especially those with an immigrant background, who have a different school experience in their country of origin. These priorities are central to developing and maintaining reciprocal and trusting relationships (that further strengthen family involvement and child outcomes; Santiago et al., 2016). Both perceived influence on school decisions and school identification predict parent-school trust (Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009) and should, therefore, be addressed. In addition, parent participation in school decisions may also facilitate design and implementation of context-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and empowering interventions while also helping identify and mobilize valuable family and community resources.

## 3.4 BUILDING ON ICT AND MEDIA RESOURCES TO FOSTER MULTILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

### 3.4.1 FINDINGS

In today's world, ICT tools are acknowledged as a key component to innovate school learning and communication environments (OECD, 2017). Besides, the collaboration between teachers, schools, parents, and communities is crucial to foster digital literacy in all children, empowering an active and ethical digital generation, and ensuring children's well-being in a digital world (OECD, 2019).

Overall the ISOTIS Virtual Learning Environment interventions' monitoring and evaluation showed difficulties in engaging teachers and parents with the digital platform, due to personal rejection beliefs, low skills and limited motivation to use ICT. These difficulties hindered the full integration of the platform in the school contexts, both in working and communicating with children and parents. However, monitoring and evaluation also showed that the research participants viewed the potential of using ICT with children and in parent-teacher communication. The VLE - and ICT in general – was acknowledged as an important asset for teaching and learning processes, as well as for enhancing the social climate, thanks to the power of ICT to engage children and increase their participation, motivation, and interest in all the activities, including typical academic activities such as reading and writing. Children demonstrated highly positive attitudes towards the VLE and worked as the main promoters of its use, both with teachers and parents. This highlighted a big gap in interest and skills regarding the use of the VLE between children and adults. The VLE allowed children the possibility to expand the teaching-learning and communicating time outside the boundaries of school timetables, especially for disadvantaged students.

The availability of an ample inventory of activities to potentially use in class with accessible audio-visual and multilingual content were appreciated by teachers as a grounded and at-hand source of knowledge and inspiration for innovation. The multilingual features of the VLE, all the tools and contents provided to read, write, speak, and listen in multiple languages, despite implementation difficulties, were highly appreciated and boosted children's interest and curiosity towards the many languages spoken in the class, enhancing the social climate. Especially within monolingual schools, where teachers did not speak other than the language of instruction, the VLE revealed a powerful symbolic value and played a key role, as a multilingual digital tool, providing visibility to languages and legitimating them in the public arena of the class/school.

This approach generated new behavioural modalities among children, within the school context. Children progressively manifested naturalness in expressing their language skills and their curiosity about those of their classmates, revealing a hidden, submerged reality, of which teachers seemed to be unaware and which they discovered and felt amazed about, overcoming persistent concerns about children using their mother tongues at school. In most cases, the enhancement of mother tongues encouraged children who were usually silent and less involved in class discussions or in collaborative activities, to become involved and dynamic, expressing their desire to share their history.

The multilingual, multimedia digital support integrated into the platform also revealed the great potential in improving communication and bi-directional exchange between family and school, in increasing communication within and between groups of children, teachers, and parents, while also involving professionals who typically have more distal roles (i.e., school directors). The social-communication tool embedded in the platform - designed to overcome linguistic barriers and to offer valid alternatives to writing - allowed the exchange of messages in written, video, and audio-recorded form, the upload of pictures, and direct drawing in the message area. It featured multilingual support to communicate in different languages, thus encouraging the exchange of audio, visual, and multilingual documentation and messages between all the stakeholders. The VLE represented an environment to build a *multilingual learning community*.

### 3.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering these positive remarks and the challenges encountered in the implementation of the ISOTIS VLE, our findings suggest that there is room for further development of digital tools and platforms, for the implementation of interventions to encourage ICT integration in school environments, and for enhancing curriculum and practice innovation in the multilingual and intercultural field. We highlight some key-points.

**Overcoming teachers' resistance and low ICT skills.** Considering the resistance demonstrated by teachers in using ICT (across-countries), it is important to invest in professional development aiming to make teachers aware of the potential of the use of ICT with children and parents, and to foster their digital competence.

**Dedicating time and implementing experiential interventions. Platforms** such as the VLE can be cornerstones in innovating educational and communication practices within school systems. However, to successfully implement them, *dedicated time* is needed so that professionals and parents can familiarize themselves with the adopted digital tools, explore functions at their own pace, and integrate their use in practice, through experiential forms of training and research-action activities.

**Building on children as drivers of change.** Children's curiosity, interest, and motivation to use ICT tools, both in the classroom and at home, with peers, teachers, and parents, should be considered in interventions aimed at integrating ICT in the school environment and at providing professional development to teachers. Children can play a key role in facilitating teachers' and parents' engagement and can be drivers for change.

**Providing easy-to-use and accessible digital tools.** In addition to much needed professional development, it is also important to develop simple, easy-to-use and accessible digital tools suited to school contexts, to lower the skill requirements and favour an active, gratifying and autonomous use of teachers, maximizing user-friendliness.

**Providing cross-platform and interoperable digital tools.** In order to address the variability of the devices in use (smartphones, tablets, computers with different operating systems) it is important to favour the adoption of widely supported standard technologies. Novel standards such as WebRTC proved to be convenient, yet problematic on devices that did not support them. Progressive web apps represent a promising solution, as they are supported by all major platforms.

Regarding the interoperability of the tools, it is crucial to invest in providing solutions that can be easily integrated into existing local eco-systems. As many learning and communication apps and tools are already available, as well as workflows and habits are well established, it is important to provide contents that can be accessed through a dedicated platform, but also shared through messaging systems and incorporated into other (learning) content management systems.

**Investing on infrastructure.** Findings also highlighted that the poor technical equipment of the schools represents a major obstacle to enhance digitally empowered learning and communication experiences, requiring concrete investments.

**Providing concrete suggestions for enactment while encouraging reflection on beliefs, attitudes, and values.** A successful feature of the ISOTIS VLE was the integration of different types of resources (videos, observation cases and guidelines, narratives, research-based information, guidelines for action and activities, multimedia documentation of implemented activities). These different types of resources were selected in order to balance the provision of inspiring and concrete guidelines for practice and easy hands-on information on complex topics, with the provision of materials that could stimulate a reflective stance on beliefs, attitudes, values and an observative stance on practices. We propose that multi-modal sets of resources can be promising solutions to build digital banks aimed at fostering curriculum and education practice innovation and at promoting teachers' professional development.

**Providing 'live resource banks'.** The ISOTIS VLE set the base for a resource bank, that professionals appreciated. It is crucial, especially when addressing challenging issues in society and education, such as inequality, social justice, multilingualism, cultural diversity, and inclusion, that repositories are dynamic, up-to-date, constantly evolving, hosting monitored high-quality contents to support continuous professional development, finding effective and sustainable strategies to develop them.

**Multilingual tools in monolingual schools. Building multilingual inclusive learning communities.** The VLE intervention demonstrated great potential for using a multilingual and multimedia digital support in school contexts where teachers, even when interested and motivated to foster intercultural and multilingual awareness and sensitivity, can feel discouraged due to the complexity of the multilingual scenarios in their classrooms, particularly in the context of lack of knowledge and skills. Digital tools and contents can provide support and can represent powerful tools to give visibility to all languages and legitimate their use in the school context; they can work as a trigger for children (and parents) to start sharing their knowledge and experiences with languages, connecting and bridging children's home and school linguistic and cultural experience, and promoting positive attitudes and ideas regarding all languages and cultures as equal. We also suggest developing the possibilities offered by social, multimedia, and multilingual digital supports, both in reference to technical improvements and to strategies for implementation, as tools that can support the creation of multilingual and multicultural communities.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Overall, findings across ISOTIS studies, namely studies focusing on classroom and school interventions aiming to reduce social and educational inequalities, suggest the need for programmatic policies that act upon (vs. react to) challenges associated with multiculturalism and all types of diversity. Such action (vs. reaction) requires a preventive stance within schools and education systems to support belongingness and the development of positive identities for all. To this effect, strategic, broad, and enduring partnerships are needed, which means that teachers cannot be left alone to address inequalities and students, families, and communities should be supported in engaging in meaningful dialogue toward developing a shared vision of inclusive classrooms and schools in each community.

The extent of support for culture maintenance (and positive social identities) and contact among diverse groups of students, were at the forefront of our analyses and our efforts to test innovation in curricula, pedagogy, and school. Grounded in solid theory, these two dimensions offer one systematic lens to inform the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions aiming to support equity and inclusion. Certain that one size does not fit all, and aware of differences between and within European countries, our recommendations can and should be enacted in different ways, depending on the specificities, needs, and resources of each context.

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