

# D2.4 Technical Report on the Child interview study

CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON  
INCLUSION AT SCHOOL

EDITORS: GIULIA PASTORI, VALENTINA PAGANI &  
ALICE SOPHIE SARCINELLI



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **ISOTIS consortium** aims to understand early and persistent social and educational inequalities in Europe and to provide recommendations and tools for policy and practice that can help to tackle them. In WP2, a large-scale structured interview study among parents from socioeconomically and culturally disadvantaged communities was conducted, combined with smaller scale qualitative in-depth interviews with subsamples of these parents. The qualitative in-depth Children study presented in this Technical Report is the third empirical effort carried out in WP2 in 2018-2019, involving children in pre- and primary school settings and informal after-school contexts in areas characterized by high cultural diversity and social inequality in seven European countries: the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, and Poland. The study was designed to complement the quantitative survey and the qualitative study involving parents, to enable better understanding of experiences, perceptions and opinions of young children from native-born low income families, and families with ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds regarding inclusion and well-being at school.

Coherently set within the general framework of ISOTIS, the theoretical and methodological framework that guided the conceptualization of the study design relied on a number of pillars: Children's Rights and the paradigm of the «Research *With* and *For* Children»; the Participatory Research Framework in connection to Education *Through* Democracy and the Active Citizenship Framework; Social Inclusion and Well-Being as key topics regarding children's participation.

The ISOTIS Children Study aimed at exploring children's perspectives on inclusion and well-being at school and at identifying facilitating positive elements at school within social, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, what children identified as quality indicators of school inclusiveness and their suggestions to make school more welcoming and inclusive. The study elicited children's views on inclusion and well-being at school, and beyond this, the study explored a form of education through democracy, examining how a supportive democratic learning environment can be created.

In the first part (PART A) of this report we present and discuss the theoretical and methodological frameworks and the core concept of the study (Chap. 1), the characteristics of the research participants, sampling criteria, and the overview of the national studies and the international study (Chap. 2); the research strategies and instruments, the organizational guidelines, the possible options for local adaptations, the overall multi-method approach developed by the University of Milan-Bicocca team, also examined through pilot studies in Italy and Greece, provided to partners in the form of a Manual (Chap. 3); the extensive ethical considerations, considering the young age of the research participants (3-6, 8-11 and 11-14 years old children) and the delicate topics of the study (Chap. 4); the data coding and analysis framework for the national and international studies (Chap. 5).

In the second part (PART B), the national country reports illustrate the state of the art of the study in each country (Chap. 6-12). Some studies provide already first tentative results from the data analysis, which is still on-going and will end by July 2019.

The international content analysis, based on a data set for each group of children and comparing

the results in the different target groups and countries, will refer to a) the main themes and proposals raised by children; b) the methodological and ethical challenges encountered in conducting the study; c) the implementation experience of the children's proposals; d) the impact of the research process on children, on teachers and their professional development, and on the context.

Overall, the study intends to provide new perspectives and valuable ideas to inform policy-makers, as well as a critical reflection and suggestions on methodological and ethical aspects of doing research *with* and *for children*, to enhance inclusive environments through children's active participation and to empower children in their roles as democratic citizens (e.g., Dürr, 2005; Himmelmann, 2001; Johnny, 2005; Osler, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 2006).

# **PART A. THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY**

# Chapter 1. Framework, aims and research questions

Giulia Pastori, Valentina Pagani & Alice Sophie Sarcinelli (University of Milano-Bicocca)

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The **ISOTIS consortium** aims to understand early and persistent social and educational inequalities in Europe and to provide recommendations and tools for policy and practice that can help to tackle them. Specifically, in WP2 the focus is:

“To examine the resources, experiences and perspectives of a number of significant disadvantaged groups in Europe as related to the preschool and primary school system and the local system of support services, a large scale structured interview study among parents was conducted, combined with smaller scale qualitative in-depth interviews with subsamples of parents and children. The proposed studies involve a number of significant disadvantaged groups: (1) second and third generation Turkish immigrant families living in England, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway; (2) second and third generation North-African immigrant families in France, Italy, and the Netherlands; (3) Romani families living in the Czech Republic, Greece and Portugal; and (4) low-income and low educated native working class families living at the same sites. [...] The interviews will examine children’s and parents’ experiences with inclusiveness and educational effectiveness. The interviews will also address the cultural and linguistic resources of the families, their values and ambitions, and the educational decisions they make. Finally, the interviews will examine the well-being of parents and children” (ISOTIS DoA, p.5).

The ISOTIS qualitative in-depth study with children is the third of three empirical studies carried out in WP2 involving children in pre- and primary school settings and in informal after-school contexts in areas characterized by high cultural diversity and social inequality in seven European countries (the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway and Poland) in 2018-2019. It was designed to complement the quantitative survey and the qualitative study involving parents, to enable better understanding of the experiences, perceptions and opinions of young children from native-born low income families, and families with ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds regarding inclusion and well-being at school.

The study intended to provide new perspectives and valuable ideas to inform policy-makers, as well as methodological suggestions to make research with and for children, to enhance inclusive environments through active participation of children and to empower children in their roles as democratic citizens (e.g., Dürr, 2005; Himmelmann, 2001; Johnny, 2005; Osler, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 2006).

## 1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Coherently set within the general framework of ISOTIS, the theoretical and methodological framework that guided the conceptualization of the study design relied on the following pillars:

- Children's Rights and the paradigm of the «Research With and For Children».
- The Participatory Research Framework in connection to the Education Through Democracy and the Active Citizenship Frameworks.
- Social Inclusion and Well-Being as key topics for children's participation.

### 1.2.1 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE PARADIGM OF THE «RESEARCH WITH AND FOR CHILDREN»

The relevance of children's perspectives in the field of research has become well established in the field of the human sciences due to relevant cultural and scientific developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shedding new light on the image of the Child and Childhood.

The first reference is to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989; 197 countries) that collected and crowned the demands of a broad cultural and political movement that developed during the twentieth century, giving it new impetus. The Convention established the inviolable rights granted to children of any age, gender, origin and social status, and among others the right to participate and the right to freedom of expression:

- art. 12: Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child;
- art. 13: The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

The second reference is to the contribution of several pedagogical and research frameworks, among others:

- Socio-Constructivist Early Childhood Pedagogy that promoted a new concept of the 'competent child' actively engaged in cognitive and socio-emotional learning experiences, but also in decision making and participation experiences (Malaguzzi, 1994; Clark & Moss 2001; Mantovani, 2007; Bogatic et al., 2017);
- the Anthropology and Sociology of Childhood (Qvortrup, 1987; Corsaro, 1997; Hunleth, 2011; Palaiologou, 2012; Sarcinelli, 2015) that has long recognized children as competent actors and reliable informants on their life (O'Keane, 2008);
- Students'/Children's Voice Theory that acknowledges how children's perspectives are essential to understand their lives from their unique viewpoint, especially in educational and school contexts where they represent one of the main groups of stakeholders (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Grion & Cook-Sather, 2013; Fielding, 2004, 2012; Pastori & Pagani 2016).

In these fields of research and educational practice, there has been an important shift from a research paradigm focusing almost exclusively on children as mere research objects to a research paradigm that involves children as collaborators in the educational process and in the research process. Childhood studies have claimed the capacity for children to be researchers, and children have evolved from being 'positioned' as mere objects, or, at most, subjects of research, to being research partners that can actively and meaningfully cooperate and co-construct along with researchers (Bessell, 2015).

A shift from an exclusive idea of research on children to an idea that includes research with children (Barker & Weller 2003) has occurred; as well as from a perspective of study on children to the consideration of children's perspective on the social world (Sommer, Samuelsson, Hundeide, 2010).

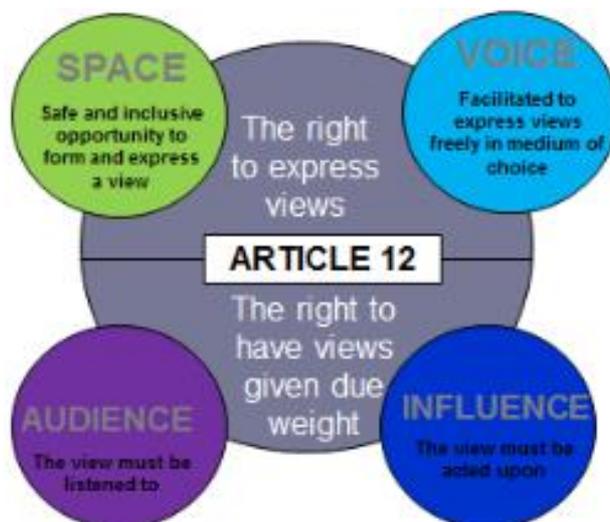
In the pedagogical field in particular, it was highlighted that the paradigm shift requires not only an idea of research with children, but also specific attention to the educational impact and the priority of children's well-being in participating in research. The studies undertaken must address issues of interest to children, of which they have experience, using methods of involvement strictly appropriate to the cognitive, emotional and social skills of children. Therefore, not only is there talk of "research with" children, but also of a "research for children" (Mayall, 2003; Mortari, 2009).

### 1.2.2 THE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH FRAMEWORK IN CONNECTION TO THE EDUCATION THROUGH DEMOCRACY AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FRAMEWORK

Within both the children's rights and the research *with* and *for* children frameworks, it is crucial that *giving voice* to children is not enough (Davis, 2008; Komulainen, 2007; Mayall, 1994; Mortari & Mazzoni, 2010; Sarcinelli, 2015: p.6). Also illustrated by Welty and Lundy (2013; Lundy, 2007), to truly listen to children's perspectives and to allow children to have meaningful experience within research, it is essential to take their ideas into account and let them experience how their voices can influence the contexts they live in. Four separate factors require consideration (Figure 1.1):

- **Space:** 'creating an opportunity for involvement – a space in which children are encouraged to express their views' (Welty & Lundy, 2013:2);
- **Voice:** recognizing children's many languages and using as many ways of listening as possible to ensure that children have the opportunity to explore and represent their perspectives in their own terms (Moskal & Tyrrell, 2015);
- **Audience:** ensuring children that their views are listened to by adults, especially by those who make decisions;
- **Influence:** ensuring that children's views are not only heard, but that they are taken seriously and, whenever possible, acted upon.

Figure 1.1 *Four factors allowing the involvement of children.* Source: Welty & Lundy (2013)



According to these statements, the research model outlined as the most appropriate is participatory and transformative (Mooney & Blackburn, 2002), which integrates listening to opinions and a phase of constructive work, proactive and that transforms the context or object under consideration, in the case of our research, pre- and primary school.

This research model is similar in terms of values and the way in which participants are activated regarding the forms of *democratic education* and *active citizenship*, that have been highly valued since early childhood (OECD - Starting Strong, 2017).

The transformative and participatory research process becomes an opportunity for the research participants to be actively and meaningfully engaged, experience citizenship, agency and, to all effects, it can represent a democratic education experience (Gollob et. al., 2010; Dürr, 2005).

The threefold definition of democratic education (Gollob et. al., 2010) helps in connecting the participatory research approach to democratic education:

- education *about* democracy regards deep understanding of what democracy is and what it requires from each citizen;
- education *for* democracy is to learn how to participate and exercise one's democratic rights;
- education *through* democracy takes place in supportive, democratic learning environments.

Based on this definition, several scholars have pointed out (e.g. Dürr, 2005; Himmelmann, 2001; Johnny, 2005; Osler & Starkey, 1998; Osler, 2000) that the value of encouraging children – especially in school environments – to explore, develop and express their own values and opinions (while listening to and respecting other people's points of view), and involving them in decision-making means recognizing their competence and their rights, and implies providing opportunities for children's active participation and co-responsibility, thus, empowering them for their future role as citizens through direct experience of democracy as a way of life.

This study elicited children's views on inclusion and well-being at school and, beyond this, it was meant to explore how the research could result in a form of education *through* democracy, offering a supportive democratic learning environment. This not only gives 'voice', but allows children to collaborate in decision making, which in turn renders them active social actors who are responsible for their environment, albeit in a manner proportional to their psychological maturity. Participatory research - as in Dewey (1916) - is 'practice and experience-based' active citizenship that instills the values, rights and duties that characterize democratic life.

At the educational level, therefore, the promotion of this form of research appeared to be a desirable objective in order to promote school contexts that are deeply rooted in democratic values, inclusive, attentive to the well-being of all children and to the specific and unique perspective they offer on their own experience, regarding school and society.

It was also considered that in contexts of social distress and marginalization, like the ones in which the ISOTIS qualitative study involving children mainly took place, such an approach could be an important catalyst for social inclusion – 'social inclusion' intended as 'making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society' (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003:VIII) .

Moreover, the guiding principles of participatory and transformative research are coherent and reinforce a socio-constructivist and active teaching approach, promoting a collaborative social and relational climate, respectful of different points of view, all salient factors in the improvement of children's learning and school motivation (see also Aguiar et al., 2018 - Deliverable 4.3; Aguiar et al., 2017 - Deliverable 4.2).

In line with this theoretical framework, the ISOTIS study explored children's ideas on how inclusion, acceptance and respect for differences manifest in their classrooms and schools.. Children's proposals about what could be done to make their school (more) welcoming and inclusive for each child were elicited and some of their ideas were implemented, so that the children could have a tangible experience of democratic life (Welty & Lundy, 2013) and develop their skills and awareness as knowledgeable, responsible and active citizens in their communities (UN, 1989).

### 1.2.3 SOCIAL INCLUSION & WELL BEING AS KEY TOPICS TO INVOLVE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Coherent with the general research questions and purposes of the ISOTIS project, the qualitative study with children focused on children's ideas and proposals for change on inclusion and well-being in the school context.

Inclusion and well-being are two closely interconnected concepts in theoretical models. Inclusion has been conceptualized as a four-step process including well-being (Rosenthal and Levy, 2010):

1. Inclusion as **acknowledging differences**: a precondition for promoting inclusion is recognizing and drawing attention to social and cultural differences;
2. Inclusion as **valuing differences**: diversity should not only be recognized, but also appreciated as a value (Salamanca Statement; UNESCO, 1994);

3. Inclusion as **acceptance**: only when differences are recognized and valued, all forms of social and cultural diversity can be accepted;
4. Inclusion as **well-being**: the recognition, appreciation, valorization, and acceptance of diversity are key preconditions for promoting well-being.

The concept of well-being has been defined as the opportunity to feel that “one’s perceptions and experiences do matter” (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007:45); it “requires that basic needs are met, that individuals have a sense of purpose, that they feel able to achieve important personal goals and participate in society. It is enhanced by conditions that include supportive personal relationships [and] strong and inclusive communities” (Newton, 2007:1; see also ISOTIS Deliverables 4.1. and 4.2).

The value of eliciting children’s viewpoints and their active involvement in the ISOTIS qualitative study is particularly meaningful in reference to the focus on inclusion and well-being in the education system for several reasons.

At a basic but paramount level, though such topics are delicate and require an attentive ethical consideration when dealing with children (see Chapter 4), they are relevant to children. It has been acknowledged that they affect children’s personal experience within the school, the family, the neighbourhood they live in, and the wider society, starting from the early years (Rayna & Brougère, 2014).

At the research level, it can be observed that very few studies have encompassed young children’s perspectives on and understandings of inclusion (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009; Mahbub, 2008). In this sense, this study offers an interesting contribution in a seldom-explored field with respect to how to talk with children about these issues, without the focus of ‘measuring’ identification or acculturation processes regarding the perception of discrimination (studies in the field of social psychology). The aim is to enter children’s ‘*direct experience*’, in order to reflect with children on what they consider to be factors of well-being or discomfort in the school context.

At a policy level, it can be observed that children are still not enough involved and allowed to express their viewpoints on social inclusion. Social inclusion has become a key issue in the academic debate across disciplines and an inescapable priority for the worldwide political agenda, especially in the field of education (UNESCO 2005, 2013, 2014; OECD 2018a, 2018b). Research on the impact of exclusion and discrimination on children and childhood demonstrates that ‘*the challenge of future inequalities can only be met through child policies for social inclusion*’ (Cook et al., 2018:16). Children are attributed a central role in the social inclusion policy agenda, yet most initiatives to implement this agenda ‘*were and are still designed, delivered and evaluated by adults*’ (Hill et al., 2004).

This has been highlighted in recent studies such as the one commissioned by the European Commission to the European Social Policy Network (ESPN, 2017), on the national policies of 35 states regarding the implementation of the Recommendation on *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (EC 2013). The Recommendation, that sets out to define a common European Framework for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and for promoting child well-being, includes three main pillars. The third one relates to policies to support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sports and cultural activities, and *to promote children’s participation in decision-making in areas that affect their lives*. Overall, the study demonstrated there has been little change in most countries since 2013.

Against this background, the ISOTIS Child study, recognizing this gap, aimed at eliciting children's voices on inclusion and well-being in reference to the school context.

### 1.3 THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodological framework and the selected research strategies and instruments (see Chapter 3) were developed through an extensive literature review and three pilot studies conducted by the Italian team during the 2017-2018 school year:

- one study was conducted with a class of 22 children aged between 3 and 5, in a preschool in the province of Bergamo;
- one study was conducted with a class of 26 children aged between 10 and 11 in a primary school in the province of Lodi;
- one study was conducted with a group of 15 11-14 year-olds in an after-school space run by a social cooperative (Cooperativa Arte Spazio), based in Milan;
- one study was conducted by the Greek team as part of Task 4.3.

The methodological framework refers to two main approaches:

- participatory methodology (O'Kane, 2008);
- a multi-method approach (Clark & Moss, 2001).

#### 1.3.1 PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As highlighted in the theoretical framework (see Par. 1.2), children were involved in the research process as co-constructors and co-researchers in reflecting on the quality of their (pre)school contexts, on well-being at (pre)school and in proposing innovations.

Following the principles suggested by Lundy (Lundy, 2007; Welty & Lundy, 2013), the methodological proposal was meant to:

- promote a safe environment where children were encouraged to express their views, feeling that they were being heard and never judged;
- recognize children's many languages, adopting a multi-method approach that used many ways of listening and enabled diverse opportunities for expression;
- give voice to children's experiences, and let them be (pro)active.

In this regard, a critical and reflective stance (Flewitt, 2005) was adopted, considering both: 1) children's participation in the research and 2) the implementation of their proposals:

**Children's participation.** Specific attention was dedicated to balancing children's right to participate with the need to ensure a worthwhile and positive experience, adjusting the adult's and children's roles according to children's ages and competences. As Mortari (2009) points out, the now well-established value and right of children's participation in research does not mean

children's participation at any cost (Wyness 2013. Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Rather, research should aim at offering a positive, meaningful and significant experience to the children involved. The level of children's participation in the research process should be connected to opportunities to grow and learn from the participatory experience and be aligned with the children's competence, motivations and interests.

**Implementation of children's proposals.** The methodological choice to ask all of the children (in various age groups and contexts) their suggestions to make their school more welcoming presented a major challenge. As Mooney and Blackburn (2002:25) pointed out, "asking children what they think, but taking it no further will send a message that there is little real interest in their view". It was necessary to recognize that there was no guarantee that all their proposals would actually be implemented. However, following Welty & Lundy (2013), as an adequate alternative, the researchers were advised to:

- let children know how their views would be taken into account (e.g., being part of the ISOTIS reports and other scientific publications);
- try to implement the most feasible proposals (e.g., in the formal contexts, a document about welcoming newcomers in the educational policy plan of the school). If the children's suggestions were not feasible, further brainstorming and/or supporting them in redesigning some of their ideas in a more implementable way could be carried out;
- give visibility to all of their proposals, presenting the ideas to other classes, groups, teachers and organizing a final event when children could illustrate their ideas and the artefacts produced.

### 1.3.2 A MULTI-METHOD APPROACH

While the initial construction of the research-partnership with the children was mainly an ethnographic participant observation or, as in Corsaro (1997/2018), a *peripheral observation*, sharing time with children during daily life, many different methods and techniques were proposed, such as focus groups, circle-time discussions, art-based and manipulative activities, virtual photo tours and digital product making.

This choice not only met the need for triangulation, but also provided a richer and more comprehensive picture of children's viewpoints, recognizing children's many languages (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998) and ensuring that each child had the opportunity to explore and represent their perspective in their own terms.

The study had to adopt a common framework and a common set of strategies and instruments needed for a cross-cultural study and comparison, yet they were proposed as flexible and adaptable based on:

- the specific objectives of National teams given the presence of different target groups (e.g. Roma, Low-Income, Moroccan);
- the specific culture of schooling and inclusion in each country;
- the specific culture of childhood in the different target groups;
- the different developmental stages of the children;

- the different contexts involved (formal and informal).

The mainstays of the proposed methodological approach were similar across the different age groups and countries for both formal and informal contexts, in terms of methods, languages, and tools. But national teams were invited to adapt and customize activities or parts of them to better take into account the peculiarities of each site and to investigate specific topics and themes most relevant to their context/target group. Any eventual adjustments or additions proposed by partners have been shared and discussed with the international team also in order to see if they might be relevant and useful to other national teams as well.

## 1.4 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The ISOTIS children's study aimed at exploring children's perspectives on inclusion and well-being at school and at identifying facilitating positive elements at school within cultural, religious and linguistic differences.

More precisely, the goal was to allow children to express their perspectives about:

- what they thought about differences (at cultural, somatic, linguistic, socio-economic status);
- their social and cultural identity and their school context in terms of inclusion;
- what they identified as quality indicators of school inclusiveness;
- what they proposed to make their school more welcoming and inclusive.

The final objectives of the study were to:

- explore if/how the school supported inclusion, acknowledging and valuing diversity;
- understand what elements contributed to children's well-being at school;
- explore children's views on their (cultural) identity;
- elicit children's proposals to make their school (more) inclusive;
- implement some proposals;
- offer a critical analysis of the methodological issues related to accessing children's viewpoints, especially regarding sensitive issues such as inclusion.

## Chapter 2. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

Giulia Pastori, Valentina Pagani & Alice Sophie Sarcinelli (University of Milano-Bicocca)

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Seven countries participated in the Children Study: The Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, and Poland.

The selected countries presented relevant variations at several levels (such as national income, educational structure, welfare and support systems) and presented three different target groups within the ISOTIS project (native low-income groups, indigenous ethnic-cultural minority groups such as Romani people, and immigrant linguistic minority groups). Table 2.1 provides an overview of the countries involved and their corresponding target groups.

The variety of target groups contributed to making the Children Study more interesting, but it also implied an increased level of complexity in the international data analysis phase. Therefore, even though some classes/groups also featuring children with disabilities had been included in the sample and those pupils' ideas/experiences/proposals about how to make school more inclusive had been welcomed, we decided not to address this level of diversity directly (albeit interesting and valuable) since it would have broadened our focus too much.

### 2.2 LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES AND ACCESSING THEIR WORLD

The study was conducted in (pre)school and after-school social contexts, but not in family environments<sup>1</sup>.

This choice was carefully examined, considering the strong points and limitations of the different options, in relation to the time for the project, the age of the subjects (aged 3-5 and 9-14) and the research purposes.

On the one hand, we had to consider several ethical issues related to research with children within the family context (Beliard & Eidelman 2008). For instance, privacy issues in the family context did not only pertain to 'anonymity', but also to family relationships and the roles of parents and children, which are also culture-related, where it would have been crucial to negotiate with the parents how to interview a child. Therefore it would have required a much longer time to recruit subjects and conduct the study, and limited the range of research strategies and instruments.

On the other hand, we observed that the school context would require renouncing exclusively selected children from the ISOTIS target groups, since schools are usually characterized by an

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to the environment where the children were met, it makes an exception the study conducted in England (see Chapter 7), where the bilingual Turkish and English researcher, Pinar Kolakali, was already in contact with several families with a Turkish background living in London, involved in a previous study.

ethnic-cultural mix (and, for ethical reasons, the researchers respected the unity of the group in the classes involved and avoided separating the children for the sole purpose of research). This setting allowed for more options in terms of research techniques, providing a space where conversations with children (e.g. circle-time sessions) usually take place. They are frequently part of the pedagogical approach and the daily routines, and the children share activities and social relationships with their peers and adults (Tertoolen et al., 2016).

In the research groups with children aged 9 to 14, we also decided to involve informal extra-school contexts (such as youth centers, spaces for recreational activities and study support, etc.), to meet them in more neutral settings compared to school, where we assumed the topics of inclusion and well-being at school could be addressed by the children in a freer, more spontaneous way, allowing for comparison between formal and informal contexts.

## 2.3 RESEARCH SITES AND SAMPLING

To ensure validity, relevance, and comparability of the study, we considered that the ideal sample in each country should include:

- two preschool classes (3-6-year-olds);
- two primary school classes (9-10-year-olds);
- one group of children in an informal context (10-16-year-olds).

This proposal was discussed thoroughly with the national teams during the meeting in Milan in June 2018. Different countries reported some concerns regarding the feasibility of the study due to possible difficulties in making contact in all the sites and the contexts suggested and in carrying out all of the activities.

Therefore, it was suggested to conduct the Children Study in only one site per country and to evaluate the possibility and the feasibility of involving all three contexts (i.e., preschool, primary school, informal contexts) country by country.

One country (Italy) conducted the study in all three contexts; the others, instead, focused their efforts only on some of these contexts. All the national teams completed the data collection phase, with the sole exception of Norway. Here, due to a long and challenging process to get approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and the subsequent long-term negotiations with the municipality involved, the process of collecting data has not started yet.

Overall, as shown in Table 2.1, 300/330 children (specifically, 120/130 pre-schoolers, 145/155 primary school students, and 47 children attending after-school programs) and 29/31 professionals (among whom 25/27 were teachers) in 14 different contexts participated in the international study.

Table 2.1 Overview of the target groups, sites and contexts involved

COUNTRY	TARGET GROUP	CONTEXT TYPE	SITE(S)		NUMBER OF PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED	PARTICIPANTS NUMBER AND AGE OF CHILDREN INVOLVED	DIVISION IN GROUPS (IF ANY)
			AGE	CITY/AREA			
Czech Republic	Romani	Formal, Primary School	6-10	Brno	2 (+2)	43 (8/9 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 (class 3.B)</li> <li>• 22 (class 3.C)</li> </ul>
		Formal, Primary School	6-11	Ústí nad Labem	2	41 (9/10-10/11 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 (class 5.B)</li> <li>• 23 (class 4.C)</li> </ul>
England	Low-income	Home environment	4-6	London	-	25-30	No
Germany	Immigrant background	Formal, Preschool	1-6	Berlin	1 (+1)	10 (4-6 years old)	No
Greece	Romani	Formal, Preschool	3-6	municipality of Aghia Varvara	2	22 (4-5 years old)	2 groups of 11 children
		Informal, After-school program	9-14	municipality of Aghia Varvara	1	8 (9-13 years old)	No
		Informal, After-school program	9-14	municipality of Athens	2	8 (8-13 years old)	No
Italy	Immigrant background	Formal, Preschool	3-6	Milan	2	33 (4-5 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 4-year old children;</li> <li>• 11 5-year old children</li> </ul>
		Formal, Primary school	6-10	Milan	2	22 (10-11 years old)	No
		Informal, After-school program	9-14	Milan	3	31 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 9-10 year old children;</li> </ul>

							• 21 10-14 year old children
<b>Norway</b>	Immigrant background	Formal, Pre-school	3-6	Urban area in a county in South East Norway	2-3*	20 (3-6 years old)	To be Considered*
		Formal, Primary school	10	Urban area in a county in South East Norway	1-2*	20-30* (10 years old)	To be Considered*
<b>Poland</b>	Low-income	Formal, Pre-school	3-6	Warsaw, Żoliborz	3	13 (4-6 years old)	NO
		Formal, Primary school	6-15	Warsaw, Praga Północ	2	15 (8-10 years old)	NO

## Chapter 3. SELECTED RESEARCH STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

Giulia Pastori, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli & Valentina Pagani (University of Milano-Bicocca)

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The methodology for Children Study was developed by the University of Milan Bicocca team (Dr Giulia Pastori, Dr. Valentina Pagani, Dr. Alice Sophie Sarcinelli), piloted in Italy by the Italian team and then discussed and approved by the WP2 Children Study team at the meeting and training session hosted in Milan in June 2018. The Children Study Manual, designed by the Italian team, was used for further pilot study in Greece (Dr. Kompiadou, Hellenic Open University). An amended and further elaborated Manual, provided in September 2018, was used by the national teams to conduct Children Study from the start of the empirical field work in October 2018.

### 3.2 DOCUMENTATION

The documentation of the research process consisted of:

- images/pictures/visual materials (intended as a stimulus and not data);
- verbal data (i.e., children's verbalizations, transcripts of focus group/circle-time dialogues, students' written work).

National teams were asked to transcribe (verbatim in the original language and only the most significant excerpts translated into English):

- children's verbalizations;
- written comments/productions and discussions during circle-time;
- focus groups;
- one-to-one conversations.

#### 3.2.1 AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING

Country teams were strongly urged to always have an audio recorder at hand and/or video record during all steps of the research process, as well as recording spontaneous conversations and other significant moments after having asked children for permission. If some children did not consent, researchers were asked to take notes of these episodes.

#### 3.2.2 MATERIALS PRODUCED BY THE CHILDREN

Researchers were invited either to take the materials produced by children (drawings, letters, posters etc.) or leave them with the children after having photographed them.

### 3.2.3 VERBALIZATION

During all activities that consisted of drawing and realizing artefacts, researchers were invited to systematically ask the children to describe their products (especially young children who were not able to write), to take note and/or record their explanations.

The aim was:

- to respect and guarantee the authenticity of children's perspective;
- to be able to interpret materials that could be difficult to analyse and interpret otherwise;
- to gather further research material.

## 3.3 PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF CHILDREN STUDY

The methodological approach adopted took into consideration a wide range of issues prior to the organisation and conducting of the field work. These issues were part of the manual and on-going consultations via Skype meetings and emails. An addendum was provided in mid-November after the feedback received from the first country teams that started the fieldwork. A general meeting was held in the middle of fieldwork period during the annual ISOTIS Meeting in Milan in December, 2018.

### 3.3.1 CUSTOMIZATION

The approach of the research protocol was to provide a manual with general guidelines and specific research techniques and activities for each of the three contexts:

- preschool;
- primary school;
- informal contexts.

The format provided was meant to be partly adapted and customized by each national team taking into account the peculiarities of each site, in order to address the most relevant themes/topics for the specific target group or given the specific characteristics of the context. Further steps could also be added by national teams based on their specific objectives and target groups, while maintaining certain common elements in order to guarantee cross-country comparability.

### 3.3.2 TIMING

A guiding principle was to realize the different steps within a quite short, continuous and not too fragmented time-frame, especially in the preschool context: since very young children are more likely to forget the previous steps, there was a possibility that the activity could lose its coherence

and significance. The activities were organized on different days and an approximate duration was indicated in the Children Study Manual (see Par. 3.4). Nonetheless, each country team was invited to negotiate the time frame and the duration of each activity with the professionals of each context.

### **3.3.3 NUMBER OF RESEARCHERS INVOLVED**

The number of researchers depended on the context and on the activity. Some of the activities planned during the study required a higher number of researchers (such as the child-led tour or interviews in the informal context), but in other cases, the kind of activity and context required fewer researchers. For instance, in preschool contexts, because of the children's need for time to familiarize with the researchers, it was indicated to avoid the presence of too many researchers at the same time and to have the main teacher be present with the researchers at all times in order to make the children feel at ease.

### **3.3.4 POSSIBLE ADAPTATIONS IN PRESENCE OF ILLITERATE CHILDREN**

In the presence of illiterate children, researchers were asked to adapt the design of those activities that required the ability to write by letting children:

- draw (rather than write) and then explain the meaning of their drawings to the researchers;
- respond orally while the researchers recorded their responses or wrote them down;
- (for children with a different language background) write in their mother tongue.

### **3.3.5 SYNERGIES WITH VLE**

The Children Study lead by country teams involved in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) tasks of the ISOTIS project (Tasks 3.4, 4.4 and 5.4) could be customized in order to combine the Children Study and the VLE tasks (see Chapters 6 and 10).

## **3.4 THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

The research protocol adopted aimed at exploring four different dimensions:

1. identity;
2. children's views and experiences on inclusion;
3. well-being at school;
4. children's proposals.

Table 3.1 gives an overview of the research protocol in the three contexts. We will then illustrate in detail the research protocol for each context.

Table 3.1 *Overview of the dimension addressed*

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION OF THE DIMENSION	ACTIVITIES WHICH ADDRESSED THE DIMENSIONS		
		FORMAL 9-10	FORMAL 3-6	INFORMAL
<b>Identity</b>	Cultural, linguistic, social and somatic identity of each child	Identity card	Identity card	Icebreaker activity; Autobiography
<b>Children's views and experiences on inclusion</b>	If/how the school supported inclusion, acknowledging and valuing diversity at different levels: a) cultural diversity; b) linguistic diversity; c) social inequalities	Focus-group	Circle-time	Video-cued focus group; Autobiography
<b>Well-being at school</b>	a) Elements that contributed to making children 'feel good', accepted and included at school; b) Elements that undermined children's well-being at school	Suns and clouds	Suns and clouds	Video-cued focus group; Autobiography
<b>Proposals</b>	Children's proposals to make their school more inclusive and welcoming for each child	'Inclusion first aid kit'	'Inclusion first aid kit'	Message to the authorities

### 3.4.1 THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL FOR THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CONTEXT (9-10 YEARS)

Table 3.2 offers an overview of the steps and activities, which are described in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 3.2 *Overview of the activities proposed in the formal context (9-10 years)*

DAY	STEP AND DURATION	ACTIVITIES	DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
<b>Day(s) 0</b>	Step 0	Field observation + presentation of the research and collection of informed consents	Discourses and practices on inclusion and acknowledging diversity

<b>Day 1</b>	Step 1 1h/1h30	Letter and focus-group	Children's views and experiences on inclusion
<b>Day 2</b>	Step 2A 1h/1h30	Identity card	Identity
<b>Day 3</b>	Step 2B 1h/1h30	Sun & Clouds	Well-being at school
<b>Outputs</b>	'Inclusion first kit', Identity cards of the class		

### 3.4.1.1 Day(s) 0

#### Step 0

The preliminary step required before getting started with the activities consisted of at least one day of field observations (see Appendix A).

Objectives of step 0 were:

- to allow children to get to know researchers and to understand how the researchers' role differed from the teachers' role (i.e., researchers as genuinely interested in their experiences and points of view, who saw children as experts and didn't have any evaluative goal);
- to present the work and ask children to sign the informed consent (see Chapter 4) and explain the importance to audio recording: researchers explained that they would record to avoid writing all the time (which was tiring and would take time), but that nobody else would hear the recording;
- to allow researchers to know the context better and gather some relevant information about children, teaching methods and inclusion strategies already implemented. This information enabled researchers to better adapt and customize the research process taking into account the peculiarities of each site.

**Observation approach.** Step 0 consisted of observing the context without interfering too much (non-participant observation), whereas the option was left open for interacting with children (participant observation):

- when children asked the observer questions, the observer could answer them;
- if the children initiated an interesting conversation with each other, the observer could evaluate if and how to intervene with (direct and indirect) questions and/or follow ups. The observer had to refrain from intervening immediately to let the natural flow of the conversation between children develop spontaneously. Instead, he/she could intervene

when it seemed that the topic had been exhausted and no further relevant information would be raised spontaneously.

#### 3.4.1.2 Day 1

##### Step 1: LETTER AND FOCUS GROUP

A letter from a researcher in another country (see Appendix B) was used as a trigger to engage children in reflecting on and discussing (through audio recorded focus groups circle-time discussions) their school experience regarding inclusion, well-being, and acknowledging and respecting differences. The letter was meant to activate children both at cognitive (their opinions and ideas about inclusion at school) and socio-emotional levels (their experience of inclusion at school). This kind of stimulus was chosen because it offered:

- an engaging story;
- real situations raising indirect questions;
- characters and situations that children could relate to;
- authenticity: the sender was not a child, but children were protagonists of the episodes told in the letter and the sender was a researcher.

The letter was divided into thematic sections and some possible questions for the children on each section were provided (see Appendix B). The customization of the letter by each country team enabled addressing specific themes and topics relevant to each context.

In the light of the experience of the pilot studies conducted in an Italian primary school, it was suggested that researchers would split the class into two (or more) smaller groups (6-10 children each) and simultaneously conduct separate focus group interviews with each group. This measure was meant to ensure better conditions to encourage and support children's expression, guaranteeing each child adequate time to speak and avoiding excessive waiting. The method suggested was the following:

- the researcher read the letter section by section;
- after reading the first section, he/she stopped and asked some questions to elicit children's spontaneous ideas on that passage of the letter and stimulated debate among children through a focus group;
- when the researcher thought that a topic had been exhausted and further discussion would yield little new information, he/she would move on reading the next section of the letter.

### 3.4.1.3 Day 2

#### Step 2A: IDENTITY CARDS

Step 2 was based on the pretext of the letter presented in Step 1 (and the interest the sender of the letter expressed in knowing more about their experience, see Box 3.1), so the researchers involved children in introducing themselves and their school. The goal of Step 2A was to investigate more deeply what children think and how they represent their identity, as well as to get some information about their aspirations.

##### Box 3.1 *Example of the how to introduce Step 2A*

[Valentina] sent us a letter and told us about the school she visited. She was also very curious about you and your school. We should write a reply to her message, shouldn't we?

Let's start by telling her something more about yourself.

Step 2A consisted of a 'special identity card' (see Appendix C) to fill out including :

- a space where they could draw their own portrait;
- a space to briefly present/describe him/herself;
- three common questions to be investigated by all national teams in order to guarantee cross-country comparability:
  - *what would you like to be when you grow up?*
  - *if I could change something about myself, I would change...*
  - *if I hear the word school, I think of...*

The format provided could be partly adapted and customized by each national team in order to address most relevant themes/topics for the specific target group. Some possible elements to be included were:

- What languages do I speak/know (in the case of multilingualism);
- My favourite dish;
- Where were your parents/grandparents born?
- What is your superpower?

The conclusion of step 2A was to display the ID cards on a class billboard. The following optional follow-up of the activity was proposed to the country teams:

- national teams were free to add further steps to this activity according to their specific objectives and target groups. E.g. for multilingualism, it was possible to add the activity "These are my languages" (Children were given a figure of the body and asked to colour it with their languages. For each language, they had to choose a different colour. They were then asked to explain why they chose the colours they did and why they placed them where they did);

- a second possibility was to ask children to write the most special thing of theirs on a post-it and to hang both their ID card and the post-it of the special aspect of them on a poster that collected all of the special aspects of the class.

### Step 2B: SUN AND CLOUDS

While Step 2A addressed the issue of children’s identity, Step 2B focused on their experience at school and specifically on what made them feel good (or not) at school. It was suggested that researchers introduce this activity in reference to the letter (see Box 3.2).

#### Box 3.2 *Example of the how to introduce Step 2B*

After introducing yourselves, now we can tell [Valentina] something about your school. Let’s think about what makes you feel good and what does not make you feel good at school.

Step 2B consisted in giving children 3 to 5 yellow suns and 3 to 5 grey clouds cut from cardboard (Pimlott-Wilson, 2012) where they wrote (or drew):

- on the suns: elements (spaces, activities, people...) that made them feel good and that they thought would give [Valentina] an understanding of what the nicest things are about their school in their opinion;
- on the clouds: elements (spaces, activities, people...) that did not make them feel good in their school contexts.

Each sun and cloud also included a brief explanation regarding why that element made them feel good or not good. All of the suns and the clouds identified by children were displayed on a billboard. It was suggested that the researchers show children the similarities/differences in what made them feel good or not good at school and then hold a brief discussion to further elicit the children’s ideas and comments.

#### 3.4.1.4 Day 2

### Step 3: INCLUSION FIRST AID KIT

Step 3 built upon the viewpoints that emerged in Step 2B about what children liked or did not like about their school. Step 3 consisted in involving students in eliciting some proposals to make their school (more) welcoming for each child. To do so, the researchers were invited to divide the class into small groups (4-6 children each). Each group had to choose one of the characters/scenarios presented in the letter. It was suggested that researchers ask children to imagine what they would propose and what materials they would prepare to make those children feel good in their school (see Box 3.3).

#### Box 3.3 *Example of the how to introduce Step 3*

(focusing on multilingualism) In her letter, [Valentina] told us about Fatima’s story. Imagine that a child like Fatima, who does not speak [COUNTRY LANGUAGE], arrives at your school. What could you do to make her feel welcomed and at ease?

The research protocol established letting groups work separately for about 1h30-2h. A plenary session following this first moment let each group present the materials developed to the class and the researchers. The research protocol provided researchers with some examples of possible materials/tools that could be included in the 'first aid kit' based on the example of a Children Study focusing on multilingualism (see Box 3.4).

*Box 3.4 Examples provided to the researchers in the manual*

Some materials/tools that can be included in the 'first aid kit' could be:

- a multilingual (possibly digital) book presenting a basic multilingual vocabulary/phrasebook (e.g., 'My name is...', 'Could I go to the toilet, please?'...) and some pictures/videos of key-places so as to not feel 'lost' in the new school (e.g., the classroom, the bathroom, the canteen...) and captions (also audio-recorded in the digital version) in different languages (the ones spoken by children and/or their families);
- songs in different languages to make school more attentive to multilingualism.

The materials/tools to be developed depended on the ideas proposed by children. Therefore, researchers were informed that the materials and time required could vary considerably from class to class and depending on the medium selected (drawing, writing, pictures, videos...).

Researchers were invited to make different materials and tools (e.g., cameras, video-cameras, tablets, billboards...) available to children to support the elaboration of children's ideas.

In this case, the presence of at least two researchers was highly recommended to support the groups better. For instance, if a group decided to take pictures of some key places to help the newcomers not feel 'lost' in the new school, a researcher accompanied them around the school, while the other remained in the class with the other groups.

It was suggested that the researchers invite the teachers to organize follow-up activities after the research was completed (e.g. children could present and propose their inclusion kit to other classes and – acting as researchers themselves – collect ideas, comments and further proposals from children of other classes).

#### 3.4.1.5 Day 4 (optional)

The task leaders suggested that the national teams share the first inclusion kits that each school produced through the ISOTIS Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)<sup>2</sup> to be presented to other

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<sup>2</sup> In the ISOTIS project, namely in WP3,4 and 5, a transferable prototype of a digital platform was developed, piloted and evaluated, which provided a Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) for parents (WP3), for teachers and classrooms (WP4) and for (para)professionals in family support, care and education (WP5). The aims of the ISOTIS VLE were to contribute to: - a wider implementation of effective support for parents and families with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (D3.4 – Task leader England; involved countries: Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany), focusing on activities to support engagement with the multiple language and cultural resources present in the lives of families with diverse backgrounds; - increasing and innovating inclusive and effective curricula and pedagogies in early childhood and primary education (D4.4 – Task leader Italy; involved countries: the Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal), focusing on curricular activities to support multilingual development in early childhood and primary education; and competence building and professional development of key social agents such as (pre)school teachers and other (para)professionals in extra-curricular programs (D5.4 – Task leader The Netherlands; participating countries Portugal, Italy, France) focusing on professional development.

schools as a sort of restitution of the research to the children. Another suggestion given was to twin some classes so that children could write a letter to the other class.

### 3.4.2 THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL FOR THE PRESCHOOL CONTEXT (3-6 YEARS)

The research protocol for younger children (see Table 3.3 for an overview) was substantially similar to the one described for older ones. Of course, language use and approach had to be adapted to children's different developmental stage. Especially considering the young age of the children involved, the national teams were encouraged to adapt the activities and/or methodologies to the characteristics of the children and the specific contexts. In particular, during all the activities that consisted of drawing and realizing artefacts, researchers were strongly encouraged to systematically ask the children to describe orally their products (especially young children who were not able to write) and to take notes and/or record their explanations.

Table 3.3 *Overview of the activities proposed in the preschool context (3-6 years)*

DAY	STEP AND DURATION	ACTIVITIES	DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
<b>Day(s) 0</b>	Step 0	Field observation + presentation of the research and collection of informed consent	Discourses and practices on inclusion and acknowledging diversity
<b>Day 1</b>	Step 1A 1h	Circle-time OR Child-led tour + 'Inclusion first aid kit'/brainstorming	Children's views and experiences on inclusion + Proposals
<b>Day 2</b>	Step 1B 1h30/2h	'Inclusion first aid kit'/implementation	Proposals
<b>Day 3</b>	Step 2A 1h/1h30	Identity card	Identity
	Step 2B 1h/1h30	Sun & Clouds	Well-being at school
<b>Outputs</b>		'Inclusion first kit', Identity cards of the class	

In the following paragraphs, only the aspects of each activity that significantly differed between the two age groups will be described.

### 3.4.2.1 Day(s) 0

#### Step 0

In addition to what was specified for older students, researchers were strongly encouraged to spend at least 2-3 days in the classroom: literature and pilot studies have shown that this is even more crucial when conducting research with younger children.

Objectives of a longer observation period were to:

- let the children feel at ease with the researchers;
- lay the foundations for engaging them in expressing their perspectives and sharing their ideas;
- let the researchers know the context better and adjust the proposal to the characteristics of the children involved;
- negotiate activities with the teachers that could provide useful information and/or make suggestions to render the activities proposed more effective and tailored to the specific features of their class.

### 3.4.2.2 Day 1

#### Step 1A: CIRCLE-TIME or CHILD-LED TOUR + 'INCLUSION FIRST AID KIT'/BRAINSTORMING

Addressing concrete issues that younger children can relate to was necessary in order to get access to preschoolers' perspectives. In order to recognize and respect children's many languages and diverse preferences for expression, the research protocol provided two options to engage them in this first step of the study. Each team were invited to choose the option they considered most effective and adequate according to the characteristics of the class observed in Step 0 (e.g. if children involved were used to group discussion).

#### Option 1: CIRCLE TIME

Option 1 foresaw involving children in a circle-time discussion about how to welcome new children that would start preschool the following year. Researchers were invited to decide whether to conduct the circle-time with the whole class or in smaller groups (6-8 children), depending on the characteristics and composition of the class and on how much children were used to discussing and sharing their ideas in plenary moments. If working in smaller groups, the presence of at least two researchers was requested.

Each national team was encouraged to customize the introduction provided (see Box 3.5) according to their target groups and the particular characteristics of the classes involved.

#### Box 3.5 *Example of the how to introduce the circle-time discussion*

Next year new children will start preschool. These new children won't know their new teachers, their classmates and the spaces at your school.

Optional: (focusing on multilingualism) Maybe they won't even speak [Italian].  
How can we help them to feel comfortable with us?

Following children's leads, researchers asked them to imagine what they could propose and what materials they could prepare to welcome these children and make them feel comfortable in their school (brainstorming).

### Option 2: CHILD-LED TOUR

Option 2 was especially for those contexts where children were more used to showing rather than discussing. It involved children (individually or in small groups) in an audio-recorded child-led tour rather than in a circle-time discussion.

This option consisted of asking children to take the researchers on a tour in their preschool to collect some information/materials to present their school to newcomers. The act of walking and leading allowed the children to talk freely in an enthusiastic way about their experience in their environment (Clark, 2017). A suggestion given to the researchers was to stimulate children during the tour to think about what the newcomers would like or not like about their school, if they would have a good time, and what they could do to make them feel welcome.

### 3.4.2.3 Day 2

#### Step 1B: 'INCLUSION FIRST AID KIT'/IMPLEMENTATION

Step 2 built upon ideas and proposals elicited in Step 1. Step 2 was substantially similar to step 3 in the primary school context: it consisted of asking children to create some products/materials that could contribute to make the newly arrived children feel good. The materials/tools developed depended on the ideas proposed by children. Since the materials and time required could vary considerably from class to class and depending on the medium selected (drawing, writing, pictures, videos...), Step 2 needed the presence of at least two researchers to better support the groups.

### 3.4.2.4 Day 3

Step 3A and 3B echoed the discussion in Step 1. These two steps consisted of inviting the children to introduce themselves to the new children who would arrive the following year and provide them with information about their new school.

#### Step 3A: IDENTITY CARDS

Step 3A consisted in a 'special ID card' to introduce themselves (see Appendix C and Box 3.6).

Box 3.5 *Example of the how to introduce Step 3A*

Next year new children will start preschool. These new children won't know anything about our school. Introduce yourselves so they will have some friends when they start preschool.

Each 'special identity card' included:

- a space to draw their portrait;
- a space to write their name (if necessary with teachers/researchers' support);
- a space to indicate their age;
- a space to draw what they would like to be when they grew up.

Each national team was invited to partially adapt and customize the format provided in order to address themes/topics that were more relevant for their specific target groups. Some possible elements to include were: their favourite dish, their first day at preschool, their language portrait, their family. The class ID cards were displayed on a billboard.

An option provided in the research protocol was to let each child present his/her own most special characteristic.

### Step 3B: SUN AND CLOUDS

Step 3B consisted of asking children to draw what made feel them good or not good at preschool (see Box 3.6).

#### Box 3.6 *Example of the how to introduce Step 3B*

After introducing yourselves, we could say something about your school to the children who will arrive next year. Let's think about what makes you feel good and what does not make you feel good at school.

Step 3B provided children with yellow suns and grey clouds cut from cardboard (Pimlott-Wilson, 2012) where they could draw:

- on the suns (max ) five elements (spaces, activities, people...) that made them feel good and that they thought would give the new children an understanding of the nicest things about their school in their opinion;
- on the clouds (max) five elements (spaces, activities, people...) that did not make them feel good in their school contexts that they thought the new children should be aware of.

The researchers were encouraged to invite the children to explain individually what they had chosen to draw and why, while they were completing the task. The drawings and the subsequent audio recorded verbalizations contributed to eliciting children's perspectives on and experiences in their school.

All the suns and clouds identified by children were then displayed on a billboard. It was suggested that the researchers show children the similarities and differences about what made them feel good or not good at school. An option suggested to the researchers: a brief discussion to elicit further ideas and comments from the children.

### 3.4.3 THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL FOR THE INFORMAL AFTER-SCHOOL CONTEXT (9-14 YEARS)

In the light of the pilot study conducted, each activity included ice-breaker/facilitating activities to ease the workload for the children, fuel their interest and engagement as well as make the process feel less ‘academic’ (see Table 3.4 for an overview).

Table 3. 4 Overview of the activities proposed in the informal after-school context (9-14 years)

DAY	STEP AND DURATION	ACTIVITIES	DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
<b>Day(s) 0</b>	Step 0	Field observation + presentation of the research and collection of informed consents	Discourses and practices on inclusion and acknowledging diversity
<b>Day 1</b>	Step 1A 45min	Presentation of the research + Ice-breaker activity*	Identity
	Step 1B 1h30	“Do I feel good at school? A video-cued focus group” + Introduction to Step 2	Children’s views and experiences on inclusion + well-being at school
<b>Day 2</b>	Step 2A 30-45min	Warm-up activity*	Identity + Children’s views and experiences on inclusion + well-being at school
	Step 2B 1h30/2h	My school autobiography	
<b>Day 3</b>	Step 3A 30min	Warm-up activity*	Proposals
	Step 3B 1h30/2h	“Feeling better at school: a message to the authorities”	
<b>Day 4</b>	Step 4	Restitution	
<b>Outputs</b>		Autobiography, Message to the authorities	

In the following paragraphs, only the aspects of each activity that significantly differed between the two age groups will be described.

### 3.4.3.1 Day(s) 0

#### Step 0

Step 0 consisted of a day of field observations in the formal context.

### 3.4.3.2 Day 1

#### Step 1A: PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH + ICE-BREAKER ACTIVITY

Step 1A consisted of presenting the research goals to the children (see Box 3.7).

##### Box 3.7 *Example of how to present the study provided to the researchers*

We are researchers at the [NAME OF THE UNIVERSITY] in [NAME OF THE CITY]. At the moment, we are working on a project called ISOTIS, and with other colleagues around Europe, meeting students about your age to know what they think about their school. Specifically, we are interested in knowing, despite the many different backgrounds you may have, what makes you feel good and welcomed (or not) at school considering also your origins/unique characteristics... and your approach (i.e., the researchers are genuinely interested in their experiences and points of view, seeing children as experts, without any evaluative goal...). On this occasion, the researchers presented the work and asked children to sign the informed consent (see Chapter 4).

Following the presentation, the task leaders proposed to use an ice-breaker activity (see Box 3.8). The goal of this activity was to get to know the children better, enabling them to introduce themselves and share a piece of their identity that may not be “obvious” to others. The research protocol suggested to use another ice-breaker activity if researchers thought that children would feel more comfortable.

##### Box 3.8 *Example of an ice-breaker activity suggested for Step 1A*

**Name of the activity:** Lost on a deserted island

**Steps of the activity:** Before starting the activity, the researchers marked off space (e.g. with tape) in the room which was presented to the children as an island. Children were asked to go to the ‘island’ one by one, where they had to present themselves to the inhabitants of the island using this written cue (each child was given a sheet of paper with a prompt):

‘My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am from \_\_\_\_\_. I am \_\_\_\_\_, but I am not \_\_\_\_\_. One thing you cannot tell just by looking at me is \_\_\_\_\_. This is important for me to tell you because \_\_\_\_\_. If I were stranded on an island the one thing (it can be an object, but also something symbolic) that truly represents me and that I would want to take with me is \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.’

Researchers were invited to introduce the prompt by modelling it themselves (e.g., ‘My name is Sophie and I am from Italy. I am Italian, but I don’t speak loudly...’). Moreover, they were encouraged to explain that participants had to complete the prompt to whatever degree they were comfortable with and encouraged to say what was important to them. Afterwards, they invited students to go to the “island” one by one and make their statement.

Afterwards, it was suggested to the researchers to divide the children into smaller groups and ask each group to work together to improve their chances of survival by deciding together how each one could contribute (e.g., using the various objects/talents they had taken with them on the island; sending an SOS message in several languages by combining the various languages the group knew, etc).

### Step 1B: VIDEO-CUED FOCUS GROUP

Step 1B consisted in engaging children and researchers in a dialogue on the following topics:

- if and to what extent their school was inclusive;
- if and to what extent their school acknowledged and valued diversity;
- elements that contributed to children’s well-being at school;
- (cultural) identity.

The suggested introduction to this activity was a short clip used as stimulus or indirect question to provoke a dialogue among the children on the topic considered most relevant by the national team in their context. For instance, to let children focus their attention on themes related to multiculturalism and multilingualism, a clip (for instance, from 1’19” to 4’04”) from the short film ‘Immersion’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6Y0HAjLKYI>) was suggested.

To stimulate the discussion on the clip, the researchers were invited to begin with a “warming-up” discussion, using guiding questions like “Who has ever experienced (example of a situation shown in the clip)?”. This moment was followed by a more traditional video or audio taped “focus-group” conducted using guiding questions.

To end Day 1, the researchers were encouraged to present the activity for the following day which consisted in the preparation of a “creative autobiography” of their school life that could take the form of a drawing, a photo-story, a written autobiography, a series of pictures with explanations etc..

The researchers were invited to ask if the children needed some specific materials that they could bring on Day 2 and they invited the children to bring pictures/objects and/or to send pictures by email to the researchers who could print them.

#### 3.4.3.3 Day 2

### Step 2A: WARMING-UP ACTIVITY

A warming-up experience was suggested before proposing the activity ‘My school autobiography’. The warming-up consisted of dividing children in small groups to share experiences of inclusion of diverse people that happened in their school (e.g. give some examples and recall the video-clip presented in Step 1). Each group had to choose one experience and mime it. The other groups had to try to figure out what was happening and to whom the experience referred.

## Step 2B: MY SCHOOL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Step 2B consisted of inviting children to focus on their school experience as a whole and create their school-autobiography or photo-story supported by the researchers and the professionals in the informal context. A list indicating topics to be included in the autobiography was meant to guide the children (see Box 3.9).

### Box 3.9 *List of topics that could be included in the autobiography*

- This is me
- My first day at school
- What make me feel good at school
- What does not make me feel good at school
- The school I would like...
- When I grow-up...

Children not at ease with writing or drawing were free to choose another way to present their school-autobiography (e.g. record an oral message, write in their native language etc.). Moreover, children were invited to share their experiences during an individual moment through informal conversation (more informal than an unstructured interview). At the end of the day 2, children were also free to share their school autobiographies with the group.

### 3.4.3.4 Day 3

## Step 3A: WARMING-UP ACTIVITY

The researchers were suggested to make a recap of the activities conducted during the previous days and to elicit information, experiences or comments from the children. The warming-up activity suggested for step 3A (see Box 3.10) served as a debriefing of the 'research journey' they had shared and helped researchers to collect some feedback about the activities proposed.

### Box 3.10 *Example of a warm-up activity suggested for Step 3A*

**Name of the activity:** The line

**Steps of the activity:** The researcher drew a line on the floor (for instance, using duct tape), explaining that they would say sentences about the activities they had shared and children had to move closer to the line depending on the level of agreement (e.g. on the line if they totally agreed, very far from the line if they did not agree at all). Examples of sentences:

- I loved the activity "XXX";
- I felt embarrassed in sharing personal experiences with the group;
- I found the clip boring;

- I was surprised by an experience shared by someone else;
- I found something I had in common with some of my peers thanks to the activities;
- I found it difficult to realize the activity “XXX”;
- I shared a personal experience that I had never shared before;

As an optional step, to evaluate the effectiveness and appreciation of the activities, the researchers were suggested to indicate the corners of the room representing an activity that has been carried out. When the researchers said “Go”, the children ran to the corner representing the activity that they:

- loved the most;
- disliked;
- found difficult;
- found fun.

### Step 3A: MESSAGE TO THE AUTHORITIES

Step 3B consisted of inviting children to prepare a message for the authorities with a list of proposals in the form of an artistic message. The children involved in the activity had to choose:

- the form of the message (a letter, a song, a video clip, a drawing, a photo-story etc.);
- whether the message was produced individually, in pairs or in a small group.

When possible and if the children wanted, the message could be sent to municipal authorities.

Finally, the researchers were encouraged to thank the children by offering a small present (e.g. in the pilot we brought pizza and focaccia for everybody).

#### 3.4.3.5 Day 4 (optional)

### Step 4: PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

The researchers were encouraged to return to the school to present the results of the international research and, more precisely, some of the experiences shared and the messages produced by children in other informal contexts.

A suggestion was given to twin some informal contexts so that children could send each other comments on the messages produced by the other group of children.

On these occasions, researchers were encouraged to collect further comments from the children and their reactions to other countries’ different school autobiographies.

## 3.5 METHODOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES TO CONDUCT ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

### 3.5.1 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CIRCLE-TIME AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH CHILDREN

The methodological framework of the circle-time and focus group discussions with children we

drew upon is inspired by the approaches of Gibson (2012), Morgan et al. (2002), and Pastori (2017).

The researchers were suggested the following:

- to make sure they shared and explained the rules of the focus group to the teachers/social workers and ask them not to take part in the discussion, especially to avoid comments on what the children said (e.g., to be merely a co-facilitator). Researchers were also invited to give a role to the teacher (e.g., taking notes on the blackboard, etc.);
- to take care in setting the scene: small arrangements could contribute to create a welcoming, relaxed climate, supporting children's participation and mutual exchanges (for instance, very quiet/shy children would be best seated opposite the facilitator to enable them to receive more encouraging eye contact without being singled out), and making the implicit structures and assumptions that the school environment entailed (for instance, sitting in a circle, even on the floor) less prominent;
- to bear in mind that the researcher (in his/her role of facilitator) must be the first to respect the rules and adopt a neutral and listening stance about the themes addressed to support and guarantee a non-evaluative climate;
- to be aware that what mattered for children was not necessarily what mattered for adults. Researchers needed to make sure not to impose their views or try to orient the conversation implicitly. They also had to tolerate that children might wander off for a while and wait for the good moment to bring them back to the topic by asking a question.
- to inform children they were interested in their thoughts, recognizing them as 'experts' about their school;
- to use child-friendly, age-appropriate language;
- to use first names to encourage children to see adults in a more informal relationship than with teachers and to reduce the typical hierarchical adult-child relationship (especially in primary school) they were used to;
- to establish some ground rules at the beginning of the session to both set boundaries and clarify expectations:
  - everyone gets a chance to speak;
  - speaks one at a time (to enforce this rule more effectively, researchers told children that only who holds a specific object – a ball, a seashell, a wand... - could speak);
  - there is no right or wrong answers;
  - each opinion is equally valuable and must be respected and must not be judged (no teasing or making fun);
  - even different, opposite opinions can coexist since the aim is not to reach a consensus but to give voice to every perspective.
- to make sure that the rules of the game were respected without adopting an authoritarian stance;
- to avoid interfering too much in the discussion. His/her participation was meant to:
  - help the discussion go on if the silence lasted for too long or if the discussion came to a deadlock (by using reflective statements, summary statements of different viewpoints on the same subject and/or asking if anyone had a different opinion);
  - help if the discussion went off-topic for too long (going back to the subject);
  - help pupils who had difficulties in expressing themselves or organizing their thoughts (by synthesizing their statement saying something like "If I understood you correctly, you meant that...") or pupils who felt very insecure (by

acknowledging their feelings, praise for engagement generously, giving a positive feedback to a statement or eliciting the opinion of children who were not speaking).

### 3.5.2 TECHNIQUES AND METHODOLOGY FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSIONS WITH CHILDREN

The researchers were given methodological suggestions on indirect techniques to conduct conversations with children (see point C) and to stimulate and sustain the exchange within the group, fostering a climate in which each child:

- felt free to express his/her ideas;
- felt ensured/had the opportunity to get their say;
- knew that every opinion was valuable and that there were no right or wrong answers;
- knew that reaching a consensus was not the aim, and that every opinion had to be respected.

It was suggested that focus group conversations should take place after explaining to children what they would do and introducing the rules of the 'setting' that would guide the conversation.

Further techniques that were provided to the researchers to facilitate the discussion were the following:

- adopting open questions rather than closed one;
- mirroring or reflecting: offering back, essentially repeating verbatim or in the researcher's own words, the key substance of what children said, building on it and encouraging further exploration;
- problematizing: encouraging children to think and explain the reason for what they said, using WHY and HOW questions;
- proposing and extending to the group an individual child's questions and affirmations: "John asked/said XXX... What do you think about this?" to let information 'circulate' within the group.

Interventions that do not help the development of the discussion were highlighted:

- prompting: 'putting words into children's mouth'
- forcing children to reach a consensus;
- providing judgments (both positive – 'That's right, good!' – or negative – 'That's not how it works...') that make children think that there are right and wrong answers and, consequently, hindering or influencing their expression;
- correcting children's answers (both in terms of content or sentence-structure).

At the end of the conversation, an appropriate debriefing with praise and thanks was advised.

### 3.5.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO COLLABORATE WITH SCHOOLS/TEACHERS

It was suggested that researchers asked teachers:

- for advice about how to form the groups. Teachers, knowing their class (social relationships, individual skills, origins, and social background of each student...), could provide useful suggestions to create balanced groups that could work effectively and make each child feel comfortable;
- to refrain from supervising group work too closely in order to make the children feel freer to express their ideas and feelings.

To foster a fruitful collaboration with schools/teachers, researchers were suggested to:

- ensure them that they would be provided with (a copy of) all the materials gathered. This way, they would receive something related to the research (as symbolic 'remuneration' of all the time they had given to the researchers) and they could continue to work further on those issues with their class;
- take time to explain the research process in detail, that the researcher's role is different than that of the teacher and to agree upon a role that the teachers could assume in order not to interfere with the research process, while supporting the researchers (e.g. video-taping the research process).

The researchers were strongly encouraged to evaluate and negotiate with the teachers whether to co-conduct the activities or what role the teacher should have. Co-conducting certain activities could be an advantage (especially in preschools, where it was important to provide a familiar environment with trusted adults and the presence of 'strangers' could be intimidating and inhibit the children's responses) or present an obstacle (especially with those primary school teachers who wanted to direct their pupil's answers). For instance, the researchers were seriously recommended to involve the teacher in leading the circle-time, especially if the group had difficulties in respecting the rules of a circle-time discussion. When this was not possible, the researchers were strongly encouraged to ask the teacher to make sure that the children respected the rules, while the researcher focused on conducting the discussion.

## Chapter 4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The national teams were asked to guarantee respect of (1) the European General Data Protection Regulation (Reg. EU 2016/679) applied across the European Union (including the United Kingdom); (2) relevant national legal and ethical requirements; (3) that the standards described in the ISOTIS data management were fully met during this task.

In reference to the involvement of young children as research participants and the delicate topics addressed by the study, several ethical issues were considered in the methodological framework and in the research process.

Four main levels of ethics were addressed and cautiously considered:

- Aims and benefits;
- Informed consent;
- Privacy and confidentiality;
- Data collection, storage and use of the data.

### 4.2 AIMS AND BENEFITS

The impact that participation in the research may have had on children in terms of potential harm and possible benefits was considered.

The questions of children's participation and the notion of children's voices have been critically addressed and deconstructed (Komulainen, 2007; Lewis, 2010). Research with children, especially with very young ones, gives rise to major ethical concerns, highlighting the inherent risks of oversimplification, hypocrisy, manipulation, or of practices that are more formal than substantive (Atweh & Burton, 1995; Einarsdóttir, 2007); Fielding, 2004; Palaiologou, 2012, 2014). Notwithstanding that children's voices need to find a way to be expressed and heard, these issues were taken into account, especially considering the very delicate issues addressed by the study such as inclusiveness, well-being and respect for diversity (Bittencourt Ribeiro, 2017).

The ethical questions that we addressed in designing the research methods regarded the positive involvement of young children in exploring and discussing inclusion/exclusion in school contexts characterized by cultural diversity and social inequalities; the addressing of these issues in a sensitive yet meaningful way to children and the alignment of the research questions and methodology with the children's competence, motivations and interests.

In terms of protecting the children, researchers were asked to make sure to avoid asking direct questions that might disturb them and to interrupt any situation or conversation that troubled them.

In terms of age adaptation, researchers were asked to use age appropriate language and approaches (methods, languages, and tools were adapted for two school settings during the entire research process).

### 4.3 INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was required from all participants. The national teams were asked to

- ask for authorization from school principals and teachers;
- ask for written consent from parents/caregivers and, if possible, provide them with an oral explanation about the research, allowing time to answer their questions
- about the accessibility of the consent form. Partners were asked to develop strategies to make sure that parents fully understood, especially concerning functionally low literate subjects. In this case, there was the possibility for audio recorded consent instead of written consent.
- provide children with an oral explanation about the research using age appropriate language with question time, stressing more than once that they were free to participate and to quit whenever they wanted.

Regarding the children, thorough examination was dedicated to how researchers could guarantee that children were fully informed, provide them a genuine choice whether to participate, ensure them that they had the option to choose not to participate.

During the study, the children's consent was seen as an on-going process, renegotiated verbally at each stage of the research, enabling children to withdraw at any time.

During a first stage, careful consideration was given to the use of age appropriate language and visual images to easily give the children access to information about the research, so they could ask questions and understand their involvement.

The researchers were requested that the explanation be followed by either verbal consent or written informed consent from the children (adapted with visual images). A model of a written informed consent for children was provided by the Italian team (see Appendix D).

In case of non-participating children, all teams were asked to pay attention to provide significant activities for those children who did not wish to participate in the research (or only in specific activities) or whose parents did not sign the consent form. It was considered important that these children did not feel 'excluded' and that they were offered something engaging to do while other children were taking part in the research. The children were then invited to show what they had created to their classmates afterwards.

It was suggested that alternative activities be planned and designed by the researchers and teachers together, to best tailor them for the non-participating children.

### 4.4 PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The ISOTIS consortium exerted strict data protection measures using approved and secure data systems at the participating institutions that follow the national and international regulations.<sup>3</sup> The personal data collected within the Child study was anonymised and coded and only the main coordinator(s) of the specific study have access to personal information that enables contacting participants for the collection of follow-up data. The teams have undertaken special measures to protect the identities of the informants.

It was requested that privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants be guaranteed whenever possible. The national teams had to:

- explain to the children the reasons for anonymizing the research participants;
- avoid tracing children across the activities, since the class was the main unit of analysis;
- anonymize children's names after data collection;
- ensure respect for the legislation of each country regarding research ethics (e.g., asking children to avoid taking pictures of people according to each country's legislation on privacy).

In order to respect children's privacy and the confidentiality of the children participating in the research and to ensure they were fully and appropriately informed, the researchers were encouraged to pay attention throughout the whole research process to how much information children wanted to reveal or share, without forcing them.

The researchers had to explain to the children the reasons for anonymizing the research participants in publications, encouraging them to choose their own pseudonyms.

Confidentiality was explained in terms that the children understood. Researchers had also to take into consideration issues around safeguarding and protecting the children that could require a breach in the confidentiality (for example, children confiding being subjected to violence). Prior to commencing the study, the researchers had to plan how any safeguarding issues would be dealt with.

With regard to the country studies involving low-income children, it was decided to avoid asking about the families' socioeconomic status (SES). The country teams had to have an approximate idea of how many children belonged to low-income families in the school.

Conducting a preliminary interview or conversation with the school principal and/or teachers/educators was suggested in order to gather this information indirectly, avoiding asking children about their parents' income. For instance, some indicators that could be explored with teachers/educators could regard how many children in their class/group

- couldn't afford materials/school trips/after-school activities;
- lived in public housing;
- had scarce access to learning materials and experiences, including books or computers.

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<sup>3</sup> The Data Management Plan of ISOTIS (Deliverable D8.4, updated version April 2019) describes the data handling and data protection of all studies within ISOTIS in detail, including the current Child study, following the GDPR.

## 4.5 COORDINATION OF DATA COLLECTION, STORAGE AND USE

The overall coordination of the Children Study was undertaken by the University of Milan-Bicocca. Dr. Giulia Pastori, Dr. Valentina Pagani and Dr. Alice Sophie Sarcinelli were responsible for the design of the methodology of the study and the overall coordination of the implementation of the study in 6 countries. Consultations with all involved partners were conducted during the preparatory phase, two meetings were organized to discuss the methodology of the study and the approach to analytical strategies. The Italian team has been in constant contact with the partners participating in the study and with leaders of the WP2.

About data collection and storage, in ISOTIS it is the responsibility of the national partners who conducted the research to handle the data according to the research ethics protocol of their home institution and the ISOTIS Data Management Plan. Similarly, the data storage is handled by the consortium partners in their institutional (or national) data repositories in accordance with the national research ethics standards and procedures and the ISOTIS DMP.

The country teams, therefore, were invited to organize and manage delocalized storage in each university; however, they were free to opt to store at Utrecht university if they considered it provided safer conditions.

Data collection and fieldwork feedback reports was completed for almost all the participant countries between October 2018 and March 2019. Norway should start data collection in May after a long process to obtain approval from national and local authorities (see Chapter 2). The analysis of the data should be finished by the end of June.

### 4.5.1 DATA FROM INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS, OBSERVATIONS

Anonymized research data from interviews, focus groups, observations (not including videos or pictures) are to be stored using secure servers to be agreed on for a minimum retention period of 10 years after publication.

Following the Consortium Agreement and the ISOTIS Data Management Plan, all ISOTIS partners are granted unconditional access to the anonymized data of their own countries. Access to the anonymized data from other countries will be granted based on approval and a publication plan and in close collaboration with the countries in question. In addition, the anonymized research data will be made available for reuse by other researchers after the ISOTIS project is completed, in line with the open access policy of the European Union.

### 4.5.2 AUDIO, VIDEO AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Audio recordings, video recordings, pictures, user-generated contents (e.g. drawings by children), of children and teachers were asked to be collected and used only after explicit consent by all participants (teachers, parents and children).

Concerning the storage of audio recordings:

- they were to be stored during the first phase;

- once transcribed, audio recordings had to be destroyed. Transcription was required as soon as possible in order to destroy the original material

Anonymization was guaranteed by erasing names from all transcripts; if required by participants, faces in pictures or videos were blurred.

The documentation was collected for research purposes: final reports and publications will be available on Open Access Journals as requested by EU regulation for Horizon 2020 projects.

## Chapter 5. DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

Giulia Pastori, Valentina Pagani & Alice Sophie Sarcinelli (University of Milano-Bicocca)

### 5.1 DATA FOR CODING AND ANALYSIS

Following Joseph Tobin's methodological approach (Tobin & Hsueh 2007), images, pictures, or other visual materials that researchers (and practitioners) provided for stimulating children's participation in conversations and focus groups, or images, pictures, and other visual materials that were produced by children, followed by conversations on the products, were intended as *stimuli* and not data to be coded, analyzed and interpreted.

Coding and analysis were focused only on verbal data, while visual data could be used to support and document the analysis.

### 5.2 TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION INTO IN ENGLISH

National teams were asked to transcribe verbatim and in the original language:

- children's verbalizations;
- children's written work and productions;
- dialogues during circle times and focus groups;
- one-to-one conversations;
- dialogues during everyday interactions with children and between children relevant to the research.

With regard to the last point, researchers were advised to constantly take field notes as a rich source of information on the context and on children's experiences and perspectives.

Only selected excerpts from the texts transcribed will be translated into English as part of the country and cross-country data analysis.

### 5.3 DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The type of data collected by the national teams allows for in-depth analysis of the full verbal material, but this type of analysis will be considered by the national teams individually and depends on the available skills and resources. At the international comparative level, the analysis of verbal data is realized through a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis 1998; Braun and Clarke 2006). The thematic analysis of qualitative data includes several steps and considerations and

these were addressed at the WP2 Children Study meeting in Milan (Dec 2018).

Two main levels of the data analysis are considered:

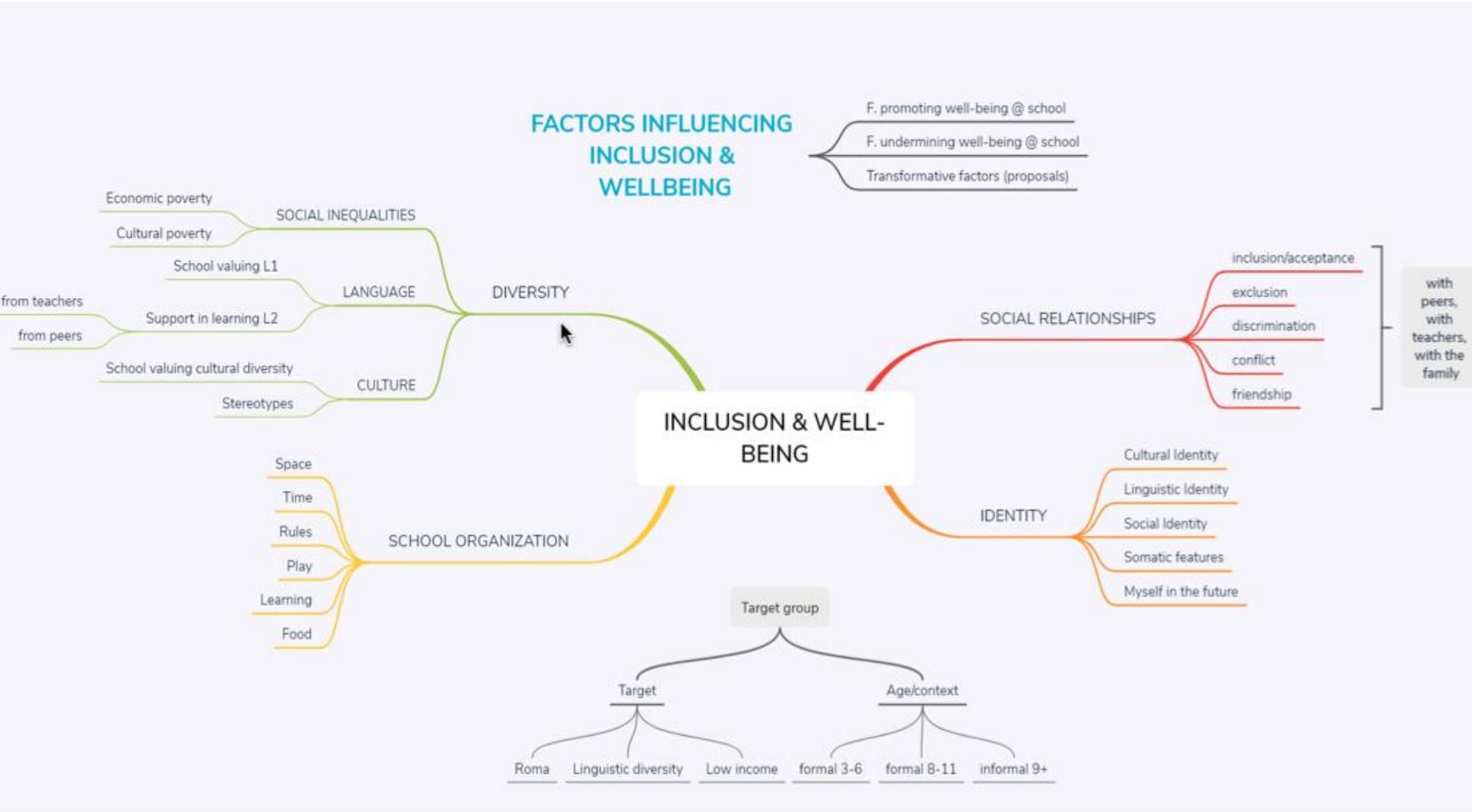
1. **national level:** each country team analyses the national data set as a single case and provides thematic analysis, contextualizing the data analysis within the specific characteristics of the setting/s where the research was conducted, preserving the ecological validity of the data interpretation and analysis.
2. **international level:** a comparative analysis will be performed by target groups, settings and children's age after national analyses have been completed.

A preliminary phase to thematic analysis is data coding.

In order to connect the first national level and the second international level of analysis, a common coding system was created, instead of separate coding trees for each country. Starting from common points based on the research questions, the coding tree has four main thematic codes (diversity, school organization, social relationships, identity), several sub-codes and over-codes (namely, factors influencing inclusion and well-being) (see Figure 5.1). The coding system was meant to be a common scheme of themes but flexible and open to variations and additional sub-codes proposed by the partners to address particular, locally emerging themes. Moreover, with regard to the different target groups (low income, Romani and immigrant children), not all of the codes were meant to be used by all the teams.

Using common software to support data codification was considered, but since different national teams used different software packages (i.e., AtlasTi, Nvivo), this solution did not seem feasible.

Figure 5.1 Coding tree



## CONCLUSIONS

The Children Study is still on-going and is now in its analysis phase. In most countries, research teams are working on the transcription of the collected data for codification and analysis; in one of them (Norway), data collection will be conducted in May 2019. National and international content analysis, based on a data set for each group of children and comparison of the results in the different countries will be carried out by July.

In this technical report it is therefore not possible to present real conclusions, but it is possible to outline some main data analysis trends and reflections that have emerged from the work done to date, documented in the country reports, and consistent with the initial research questions.

The international comparative analysis, both concerning the collected data and the research process, will mainly focus on four aspects:

1. the themes proposed by the children regarding the school context, inclusion, and their proposals for change;
2. reflections and themes concerning the methodological challenges and the ethical dimension of research with children;
3. the actual implementation of the children's proposals in the studied contexts and the feedbacks collected on the work from the research participants (children, teachers or other professionals);
4. the educational effects on children and teachers involved in the research.

From the **methodological point of view**, the study offers an interesting contribution in a seldom-explored field with respect to how to talk with children about delicate issues as inclusion and respect for social and cultural differences. In the ISOTIS Children Study, the focus was not to 'measure' identification or acculturation processes regarding the perception of discrimination (as is done in studies in the field of social psychology), but to enter into children's '*direct experience*', in order to reflect with children on what they considered to be factors of well-being or discomfort in the school context.

One of the main methodological challenges was to elaborate a research protocol that would enable researchers to truly listen to children, that is, "taking full account of what they tell us" (Roberts, 2000, p. 225):

As Helen Roberts argues,

"It is clear that listening to children, hearing children, and acting on what children say are three very different activities, although they are frequently elided as if they were not (...). There have always been people who have listened, sometimes there have been people who have heard, and perhaps less often, those who have acted wisely on what children have to say" (2000, p. 238).

The research protocol we developed tried to meet the challenge of listening to children, hearing them and acting on what they said. In this sense, it was based on the idea that the research proposals needed to be adapted to the children according to their age and the context. For these

reasons, different kinds of stimuli were provided in order to reach the same objectives and answer the same research questions (see Chap. 3, Table 3.1). For instance, the stimuli for pre-schoolers needed to be very direct and concrete, whereas for teenagers the stimuli were more indirect, such as a letter from a researcher (formal context, see Par. 3.3.1.2) or clips from a movie (indirect context, see Par. 3.3.3.2).

Not only were different kinds of stimuli included in the research protocol, but it was crucial to provide a methodology with a high level of flexibility and customization, yet maintaining common elements across ages, target groups and countries. To guarantee this process of customization, a main pillar of the methodological approach was the observation of the context (step 0, see paragraph 3.3.1.1) and the negotiation with the professionals involved.

Given the variability of adults' ideas about children's ability (Garnier, 1995) and local pedagogical orientations, this preliminary step not only aimed at letting the children (and professionals) get to know the researchers and the research process, but also allowed the researchers to familiarize with the context, in particular with:

- the professionals' ideas about children, children's roles in the school life and in the learning experiences and children's ability to participate;
- the professionals' local pedagogical culture to listen to children and ask them for proposals.

These characteristics regarding each context were crucial variables that researchers had to take into consideration in order to define the ways, techniques and times required for the involvement of children in a research process characterized by a high level of **direct participation**. Including children in a process of research, participation and reflection on the school context and proposing changes, required careful evaluation of the techniques and the time needed to avoid hastily evaluating children as incapable or not yet mature enough to participate. The negotiation of the research protocol and the timing with the professionals was thus a key point in the preparation of the fieldwork.

**Ethical challenges** were also significant in our research process, especially with regard to children's ages and the topics addressed (Bittencourt Ribeiro, 2017).

A key point of the theoretical and methodological framework that was a good choice was to adopt a positive and constructive stance in the research approach involving children, aiming at improving their critical analysis of their experiences at school and at improving the school context itself, avoiding focusing only on the negative aspects.

The children had the opportunity to talk about themselves and also to share painful experiences in and out of school. This self-revelation was not an end in itself and was not put in the spotlight by the researchers as the main object of research, but was welcomed within a path of constructive and positive work regarding the analysis of resources and the possibilities for improving the context.

In connection to this point, from the point of view of the **impact on children**, it is possible to say that proposals for school innovations and their implementation augmented the participation and enthusiasm of the children involved (as has emerged in several country chapters, see chapter DE, IT, PL), confirming the necessity to include these transformative and applicative aspects in research with children. Appendix E shows a first draft analysis of children's proposals, to give an

overview according to the coding tree that will be adopted for a more detailed analysis.

Of course, in this kind of research model, it is crucial to consider how much the context will allow for implementation of at least part of the children's proposals. In some countries a lack of time (like in the Czech Republic) represented an obstacle for implementing proposals. However, in general, it was very important that researchers and teachers or educators were attuned to the values and aims that inspired this research practice, and that all social actors involved were sensitized to offer concrete experiences of context transformation. It has to be part of the research agreement settled beforehand with professionals. At the same time, the feasibility of the proposals should be weighed with the children themselves, helping them identify the right interlocutors at different levels (from the class teacher, the entire teaching staff and the principal, to local or national administrative levels). Children needed help in recognizing and discriminating among these different levels.

This participatory and transformative research experience can have great educational value and models *democratic life practice* in a 'child-friendly' form in the school context, anchored to children's everyday experience. As stated in the first Chapter, the participatory and transformative research model is a form of education *through* democracy (Gollob et al, 2010), or, as in Dewey (1916), a 'practice and experience-based' active citizenship, offering a supportive democratic learning environment, which not only gives 'voice', but allows children to collaborate in decision making which in turn renders them active social actors who are responsible for their environment, albeit in a manner proportional to their psychological maturity.

The guiding principles of participatory and transformative research are coherent and reinforce a socio-constructivist and active teaching approach, promoting a collaborative social and relational climate, respectful of different points of view, all salient factors in the improvement of children's learning and school motivation. But it is possible to say that they represent a step forward in children's participation, as they embrace the possibility for children to be full-fledged protagonist of the school environment, not only in the learning experiences but in the whole life of the school.

In relation to this, two further levels of analysis and reflection can be developed.

The first level concerns the effects not only on children but on the professional development for teachers. We believe that an interesting result to analyse in international research is the educational impact that this research experience has had on teachers or educators who have collaborated or at least witnessed the research work, as far as it was possible to detect in the short-term by the research teams. In all the countries where the study has already been conducted, the teachers or educators have shown amazement and appreciation for the ability shown by children, even very young ones, to participate in the research. They were generally surprised that children were able to carry out activities like the ones proposed by the research protocol, such as working in groups or formulating their opinions, **being proactive** (CZ, IT). In brief, the research experience allowed teachers and educators to think about and probably reconsider their ideas about children, their potential and recognize that they were underestimating the children's abilities to give their opinions, evaluate the school and make proposals.

In few cases teachers had some critical comments on the activities (for example in Greece, preschool teachers considered some activities too abstract), but most teachers were likely to increment the activities involving children's participation and to extend them to other classes (like in IT, CZ)

**The second level regarded the political-educational dimension.** The promotion of these forms of research appears to be a desirable objective in order to promote school contexts that are deeply rooted in democratic values, inclusive, attentive to the well-being of all children and the specific and unique perspective they offer on their own experience, regarding school and society. Research in education has always aimed to combine the cognitive and training objectives of the subjects involved in the research, which is even more relevant when the participants are children. Promoting forms of participatory research with children (and with their teachers and educators) can allow effective combining cognitive and training objectives.

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# PART B. COUNTRY REPORTS

## Chapter 6. THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Lenka Kissová and Jana Obrovská (Masaryk University)

### Abstract

In this case study, we focus on the activities conducted as part of the WP2 Task 2.5 “Children Study” within the larger ISOTIS project in the Czech Republic. The study consisted of three activities focusing on the views of children on inclusion and wellbeing in the school environment. Activities were conducted in four classrooms attended by approximately 80 children in two primary schools at two sites. While the classrooms at the Brno site were attended by 20-30% of pupils with minority ethnic background with only a low percentage of Romani pupils, the two classrooms in Ústí nad Labem included higher percentages (40% on average) of pupils with a Romani background. In this technical report, we reflect on data collected during the exploratory and implementation phases of this study. We present a detailed characterization of the context, participants and methodological as well as ethical issues we dealt with. At the end, we outline only tentative results of the study as the thorough analysis will follow in the final report.

**Keywords:** ethnically minor pupils; Romani pupils; children’s views on inclusion; Czech Republic; ISOTIS project

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this report, we focus on activities conducted within the Work Package 2 Task 2.5 activity of the ISOTIS project called “Children Study” in the Czech Republic. The Children Study was part of the larger WP2 study focusing on “Resources, experiences, aspirations and support needs of families in disadvantaged communities”. While other studies in this work package focused primarily on the views and perspectives of parents from socially disadvantaged families, the main actors of the Children Study were children from ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged communities, their peers and teachers within the classroom environment.

The Children’s Study aimed at exploring children’s perspectives on facilitating elements (resilience factors) to feel good at school. The goal was to allow children of the selected sites to express their perspectives about:

- what they think about differences (at cultural, somatic, linguistic, socio-economical etc. level), about their social and cultural identity and about their school context in terms of inclusion;
- what they identify as quality indicators of school inclusiveness;
- what they propose to make their school more welcoming and inclusive.

(Children Study Manual, 2018)

## 6.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITES

### 6.2.1 SELECTION OF THE SITES

We selected two schools in two sites in Czech Republic, in the cities of Brno and Ústí nad Labem. These sites were selected in line with the general selection criteria defined for the whole ISOTIS project: urban areas with ethnically diverse populations but different social policies. Brno and Ústí nad Labem both have relatively high percentages of people with a minority background and both host the biggest populations of the Roma minority, which was one of the target groups for Czech Republic in the ISOTIS project. The criterion of increased ethnic diversity was crucial as the Czech society is predominantly ethnically homogeneous (the population of minority background constitutes less than 5%). There were two sub-teams within Masaryk University working on the Children Study in these two different sites who firstly contacted the two selected schools in these respective cities. Even though the first meeting with the school directors at the beginning of 2018 were very “smooth”, cooperation with the school in Brno (School 1) soon became complicated with regard to the informed consents (see below, Ethical considerations). The collaboration with School 2 in Ústí nad Labem was very successful as ISOTIS researchers cooperated with this specific school on many projects in the past, and what is very important, this school has a good reputation as a “community” school which encourages Roma pupils’ ethnic self-awareness and pride. In the Czech context, this approach is still very rare.

### 6.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITES

**School 1** located in the Brno inner-city comprises approximately 20-30% pupils from ethnic minorities per classroom. We selected this school as it is a typical urban school with slightly higher number of pupils with minority background. The school neighbourhood is affluent as it is located in the middle of Brno historic city center; however, the streets inhabited mainly by socio-economically disadvantaged families are not so far away from here. This localization brings the specific social mixture of pupils which is characteristic for his school. The “typicality” of this particular school resonates also with regard to the way diversity is or is not addressed. Although diversity among pupils is apparent and visible once you enter the school corridors, the school’s image is rather neutral or ‘color blind’ in this regard. There are no clear signs of the presence of diverse pupils on the school websites, notice boards or the walls. However, the school is indeed attended by pupils with Roma, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Moldavian or other backgrounds. In this particular school, we visited classrooms on the primary level of education; in the spring 2018 two classrooms from the second grade, in autumn 2018 and spring 2019 the same classrooms in the third grade. Pupils were 8 to 9 years old on average. Concerning the character of the different projects the school is involved in and the level of support measures targeted on the pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as many ethnic minority pupils are categorized as SEND, the school can be perceived as average - the teachers work often together with teaching assistants and the school provides out of class-tutoring aimed on pupils with low performance in any subject. This tutoring is facilitated by the Faculty of Education as many tutors are pre-service teachers from the teacher education programme. The school states Dalton plan

principles in the School Education Programme, which is an official school-level curriculum document. However, it is not very often applied in the first grades on the primary level. The same is true regarding the multicultural education which is a cross-sectional topic in the Czech curriculum system, however again much more applied on the lower-secondary level than on the primary.

**School 2.** The school is situated on the fringe of the agglomeration of Ústí nad Labem with a direct connection to the biggest highway in Czech Republic. The school comprises approximately 40% of Roma pupils per classroom on average, however there was a higher number of Roma pupils in one classroom involved in the Children Study (70%), while there were about 30% of Roma pupils in the second classroom. These were third to fifth graders on the primary school level, being 9 to 11 years old. School 2 is an ethnically mixed school with a relatively high percentage of pupils with Roma background and an extraordinary level of support measures targeted on this specific minority group. The commonly used languages at this school are Czech, Roma and the so called Roma “ethnolect”, the mixture of Czech and Roma languages which is widely used in many Roma families living in Czech Republic. The school is involved in different social projects provided by different actors (state, NGOs etc.), such as “Colorful planet”, “Integra Jam”, “Between Fences Festival”, “Supporting Competences, Literacy, and Executive Skills of Pupils from a Socio-Economically Disadvantaged and Culturally Different Environment” etc.. The names of these projects refer to the proactive stance of the school director as well as the teachers to deal with the issues diversity represents in their daily teaching practice. The principal got the Alice Garrigue Masaryk Award for Human Rights because under her leadership the school has been succeeding in inclusive education.

### 6.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**School 1.** We started to cooperate with two novice teachers (one male, one female) in spring 2018. The female teacher started her maternity leave at the end of the school year (June 2018) and therefore we continued with another teacher who became the class teacher of one of the involved classes (2.C). However, this new teacher was injured and left the classroom for two months. For this period (September-November 2018), he was represented by another teacher who used to work in this very same classroom as a pedagogical assistant in the school year 2017/2018.

In the second classroom (2.B), we cooperated with one male novice teacher. In the spring 2018, there was one pedagogical assistant primarily assigned to a pupil with Ukrainian background who was diagnosed with ADHD. The two main male novice class teachers were recommended for the project by the school director at the beginning of our activity in early 2018.

We stress the gender of these teachers as it is not very common that a male teacher works at primary school in the Czech context. We perceived both these teachers as very enthusiastic, cooperative and willing. We also appreciated that they were more or less fresh graduates from the teacher education programme as this was promising with regard to their digital competences in relation to the WP4.4 VLE activity. All of these teachers were of majority ethnic background.

**School 2.** We cooperated with two teachers. The main teacher of the class 4.B uses many different teaching methods (frontal teaching, group work, peer work, games etc.). She uses many active teaching methods so pupils do not sit only in the banks, but they move all around the classroom and often sit on the carpet in the back of the classroom. Discussion is a crucial method used by the teacher – pupils are definitely not only passive receivers of information, they are actively encouraged to think about different topics, share their feelings and ideas. Pupils who are slower have enough time to come up with solutions of different tasks. The second main teacher of the class 3.A also uses many different teaching methods, however the frontal teaching is the most prevailing. Despite that, the teacher encourages pupils to stretch or even dance the class dance. Unfortunately, the classroom is not very spacious and there is not a carpet on the floor. Several working groups were established in this classroom. These groups had different names and pupils could move from one group to another during the year with regard to difficulties they faced when dealing with specific curricular themes or tasks. Discussions are important part of the group work and pupils love to present their opinions. The smarter pupils help their slower mates if they have finished their work. We cooperated with two teachers. The main teacher of the class 4.B uses many different teaching methods (frontal teaching, group work, peer work, games etc.). She uses many active teaching methods so pupils do not sit only in the banks, but they move all around the classroom and often sit on the carpet in the back of the classroom. Discussion is a crucial method used by the teacher – pupils are definitely not only passive receivers of information, they are actively encouraged to think about different topics, share their feelings and ideas. Pupils who are slower have enough time to come up with solutions of different tasks. The second main teacher of the class 3.A also uses many different teaching methods, however the frontal teaching is the most prevailing. Despite that, the teacher encourages pupils to stretch or even dance the class dance. Unfortunately, the classroom is not very spacious and there is not a carpet on the floor. Several working groups were established in this classroom. These groups had different names and pupils could move from one group to another during the year with regard to difficulties they faced when dealing with specific curricular themes or tasks. Discussions are important part of the group work and pupils love to present their opinions. The smarter pupils help their slower mates if they have finished their work.

### 6.3 PHASES OF WORK

At both schools, we started with the exploratory phase in spring 2018, continued by the Children Study activities in autumn 2018 and later with the VLE co-design phase starting in December 2018. The time flow was a dynamically evolving aspect of the process with regard to the complex developments concerning the informed consents and privacy policy for the WP4.4 VLE activity - e.g., we wanted to start with the co-design phase of the VLE activities much earlier, however, as the legislative documents were not prepared yet and the structure as well as the content of the VLE web-page were still a work in progress, we had to shift the start of this phase to the late months of the years 2018 which we were not happy about. We are worried about the current tight schedule of the overall process.

## 6.4 METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 6.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

We did not face any specific challenges/restrictions regarding the timing of the Children Study activities. In discussion with teachers, we estimated 2 lessons per activity as needed for their conduction and this time frame was followed by the researchers successfully. Although we stated 5 lesson per month as the maximum time spent by researchers in the classrooms in the informed consents signed by parents, we faced some objections by a parent at the School 1 who complained about “loosing” too much time in some subjects due to the research project. Therefore, we decided to conduct just 1 Children Study activity per month to cope with the parents’ worries.

The mistrust of some parents at School 1 was also stimuli for the adaptation of the sequence of the Children Study activities. We did not conduct them precisely in line with the sequence proposed in the Children Study Manual. As some of the School 1 parents were cautious about collecting the audio-recordings of interviews with children which should follow the activity based on the Letter we decided to shift the activity to the last place (we started with Identity Card & Sun and Clouds, continued with Inclusive first aid kit and finished with Focus groups with pupils based on the letter). As a result, we had to restructure not only the sequence but also the continuity of all three proposed activities in the Manual. At the School 2, the timing of activities proposed in the Children Study Manual was followed without substantial changes.

Regarding the roles teachers played during the Children Study activities, there were not any role conflicts or unexpected reactions. From the beginning of our research cooperation, teachers knew that within the Children Study they would give us detailed feedback to proposed activities; suggest specific adaptations with regard to the context of their classrooms, however, while conducting the activities in their classrooms, they would take the role of passive observers rather than active leaders. Thus, e.g. focus groups with pupils based on the Letter activity were conducted even without the presence of the teachers. They only recommended to researchers the optimal composition of the groups to facilitate the discussion easily. On the other hand, they were prepared to play much active role during the designing as well as conduction of the WP4.4 VLE activities.

Regarding the requests from teachers to specific adaptations of the Children Study activities, we mention several examples:

#### School 1:

- reduction of the number of suns and clouds (5 of each per pupil is too much, it takes too long to cut them out for pupils + they hardly think about 3 pros and cons, 5 would be even more difficult to think about)
- adaptation of the Inclusive first aid kit – all children in the class work on the same task – they try to help Lin or Luka who don’t speak Czech creating some inclusive aid
- adaptation of the letter for the Czech context – we changed Fatima coming from Morocco for Lin coming from Vietnam in 3.B and Luka coming for Croatia in the class 3.C (it is more in accordance with the Czech context)

- in the discussion following the letter we changed the situation with Ramadan for the situation in which two Muslim boys do not eat pork meat in the school dining room together with other kids.

#### School 2:

- to adapt the “Sound and Clouds” activity to older pupils. For the kids in fourth and fifth grade at the elementary school the images of suns and clouds seemed to be childish. So, the motive should be adapted to the children age.
- it would be helpful if kids had a list of features they should comment on (say positive/negative things about: teachers, subjects, peers, physical space, etc.). Kids did not know what to comment on.
- adapt the letter to the age of children. Pupils in fourth and fifth grade had some difficulties with understanding and remembering some of the information from the letter. Make the content of the letter more simple.
- adapt the situations presented in the letter to the class context. For instance, in one of the classes it was easier to pupils to imagine the situation as they used to have a Vietnamese classmate in the past. In the other classroom kids faced difficulties with imagining the situation with a non-speaking kids in the class. And so, kids changed topics.
- consider the context of the class (digital literacy, age, etc.) regarding the use of digital technologies. Some kids were too excited about using the tablet so they did not work on the activity (first aid kit) and were searching online or taking pictures.

The biggest challenge in doing research with children is always the amount of time spent with them together in the classrooms, especially if the main topic of the research deals with everyday identities, performing differences etc. The younger the children are, the more serious this imperative becomes. Although we spent some time observing the classrooms during the Exploratory phase of this project (May-June 2018), it was still not enough to know the classroom very well and to be able to trace the peer-relation patterns and interpret what was seen with relative ease. On the other hand, as this research design combines the basic and applied research approaches, we are confident enough to claim that we were able to familiarize with the children well enough to gain their trust and respect during the course of all activities. The restricted time we spent in the classrooms had also an impact on the exploitation of data from informal situations. Unfortunately, we relied mostly on the data gathered during the formal situations, as we did not have many opportunities to spend time with the pupils informally, e.g. during the breaks. However, as especially ethnographers would know, the informal situations can be much richer source of data than the formal ones.

#### 6.4.2 ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

With regard to the Ethical challenges we faced during this research, we would like to differentiate between the formal and the processual ethics in the research. The formal level of research ethics

of the Children Study became extremely complicated at the School 1 in Brno.

The class teacher and our gatekeeper from the class 2.C involved at School 1 did not communicate properly the main information about our research project to parents. Therefore, some of them rejected to sign the informed consent forms and one father complained to the Ethical Committee of Masaryk University. In May 2018, we had a meeting with small group of parents who did not want to sign the consent forms. Some of them required specific modifications of the consent form and we also established together a rule that they will be informed at least one week before each activity will be conducted in the classroom about the planned activities and the data to be collected. After many consultations with lawyers from the Ethical Committee of Masaryk University, we submitted the final informed consent forms to these parents during parents meeting held in September 2018. All of them gave us their approval with the exception of one father from the second classroom who was not in line with the inclusive character of the ISOTIS project because he does not want to take part in any kind of project supporting the Roma children. Finally, he agreed with the participation of his daughter under the condition that no data would be collected about her during the activities.

Regarding the processual ethics which is negotiated with research participants on everyday basis, we faced some obstacles in involvement of ethnically minor pupils during the focus groups. Although one of the aims of the study was to give voice to children as they are often overlooked by the mainstream research, ethnically “other” children were rather silent during the group interviews and they were not very enthusiastic about sharing their experiences about the country of origin or their cultural habits with the class even during the other Children Study activities. This was interpreted by the teacher of class 2.C as a possible effect of the former teacher’s approach - he supposed that these pupils stayed rather shy when being asked about something, than saying something wrong as some of them were still not fluent in Czech language.

The research ethics in collaboration with our teacher participants was not an issue for us at all. As was already mentioned, they were very friendly and cooperative and we did not face any ethical challenges or sensitive issues we would be afraid of sharing with them.

## 6.5 FINDINGS

### 6.5.1 FACTORS PROMOTING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

One of the main facilitators promoting well-being at school is the **teacher**. At the School 1, both male teachers have been named as positive aspects of kids' presence at school. Pupils labelled them as good teachers they like. In one of the after-activity reflections, one girl said she did not like about the school the fact the teacher would be leaving. According to some kids, bad teachers are the reason why kids leave the school.

Another positive aspect of being at school kids identified is **friends**. The fact they can spend time with their friends in classroom or in after school activities is a strong facilitator. In this regard, kids evaluate positively the after-school clubs where they can play with others and meet new kids.

The third set of facilitators refers to the **curriculum subjects**. Significant number of pupils name as a promoting factor physical education because they can move instead of sitting all the time;

creative education (namely painting) because they learn how to draw and paint, they can create products; music education because they can sing.

Also, another facilitating factor kids name is **breaks**. They associate it with free time they can spend playing and talking to their friends, eating and not studying.

Finally, a small number of pupils named **school environment** as a positive facilitator. To them, big rooms and nicely decorated school hallways and classrooms evoke positive emotions.

### 6.5.2 FACTORS UNDERMINING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

When asked about what kids associate with school, majority of children identified the process of **teaching/ learning** (in the Czech language, there is only one term for both). Part of them associates learning with negative characteristics. These kids connect it to boredom, testing, bad grades. They do not like exams because they are nervous and fear of bad grades. According to some kids, they spend too much time at school learning difficult things. They have to wake up early, they have to sit long hours (some say their backs hurt) and they do not have time for example to read other than text books.

In this regard, as well as in the previous section, kids name also particular **subjects** they do not like (like the Czech language or Maths which they consider difficult).

Another set of negative features kids associate with school refers to their **peers**. For example, some do not like when other kids shout, when they mock others or when they are rude. Some kids add they do not like fights.

In both cases though, kids faced difficulties explaining the reasons why they like or dislike aspects they wrote down. They are able to indicate what makes them feel good or bad at school but when they are asked about justification, majority of them cannot explain why they feel that way.

### 6.5.3 CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS

Unfortunately, kids faced difficulties formulating suggestions and proposals for potential positive change. Also, as the majority of undermining factors referred to the content of curriculum, kids would prefer to cancel subjects or make them easier. They would also prefer not having stressful exams at all.

When it comes to negatives related to kids' behaviour, for instance in case of fights or conflicts, some pupils suggested talking things out together with the teacher or to call parents into the school.

Some suggestions emerged during the first aid kit activity when kids were asked to think about a hypothetical situation in which a new non-Czech speaker kid would arrive to their classroom. Besides dictionaries, with some assistance, they suggested distributing bilingual signs around the school. These labels would include important rooms and places around the school, facilitating thus the orientation to potential new kids.

During or after the activity we have not implemented the idea of written signs. First of all, it was because of time constraints we faced. We spent the time dedicated to the activity (90 minutes)

facilitating students' ideas and trying to guide them through the activity. Also, much time was spent on producing the items, transforming the ideas into tangible articles. However, teachers sounded optimistic about making the idea real. They suggested to propose it in a larger activity involving several classes within different grades of students. In their opinions, it would be a useful collective activity in which the entire school could participate.

#### 6.5.4 EDUCATIONAL/FORMATIVE IMPACT

First, teachers at the School 1 evaluated positively the theme of multilingualism the activities focus at. According to them, they have not yet included the topic into the class curriculum. Except for English which is compulsory to teach at elementary schools, kids at public schools do not learn other languages so early at the beginning of their education. Besides, they all (the first teacher who has left for maternity leave, teacher's assistant and both teachers we cooperate with) declared they do not include multilingualism into the teaching systematically. Even though multilingualism is one of the themes required in the national education policy, teachers within 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade do not work with such topics. According to them, there is not enough space for it because the schedule is tight and topics they must cover consume almost the entire space they have.

Second, professionals, in our case teachers, were very positive and surprised about what they found out about pupils in their classrooms. The teacher in 3.B (School 1) was surprised for instance about different languages some of the kids spoke. He did not know some of his kids' background (for instance about a Slovak parent) or about languages kids spoke or learned to speak. For the teacher in 3.C (School 1) this classroom was new and it was his first year with these particular pupils. Therefore, to him all the activities we conducted with kids brought some new information about the kids. Besides his personal involvement in everyday teaching, the Children Study activities assisted him in knowing his students better (in particular their backgrounds, languages they spoke, opinions and communication skills). In this regard, the Identity card activity was useful and evaluated positively.

Third, teachers evaluated positively the finding that kids did have some difficulties explaining their opinions and with working in groups. During the Suns & Clouds and First aid kit activities, teachers realised these limitations and expressed the interest to develop these skills further and so to work with children in order to improve these yet underdeveloped skills.

In focus groups, pupils admitted that usually they did not learn about different cultures and did not discuss these topics either. As already mentioned, kids were not used to work in groups and they were not usually asked to reason their opinions. And thus, according to teachers, it might have been useful to kids to try to formulate opinions and provide some reasoning. Also, trying to cooperate while preparing the First aid kit was very useful too as they were required to formulate ideas together, to share tablets, to practice some task division and so on.

## Chapter 7. ENGLAND

Pinar Kolançali and Edward Melhuish (University of Oxford)

### Abstract

This qualitative Children Study is carried out as part of the Task 2.5 of the ISOTIS project to investigate the impact of perceived linguistic and cultural identities of minority children on their well-being and language acquisition. In total 17 children being raised in bilingual environments (Turkish and English) between the ages of 4 and 6 have taken part, so far, in the semi-structured interviews carried out in the home environment of children. During the interviews, the children were asked to identify their feelings when speaking their home language and the language of the school environment in different situations by using a facial expression card. Following the initial answers of children, the researcher posed supporting questions to enhance the information provided by the interviewees. The interviews are currently ongoing, and the total sample of children aimed at is 25-30. The children are from families with differing socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds within the Turkish community in London. The preliminary findings suggest that older children are more competent in talking about their linguistic and cultural identities. Many children connected their identity-related experiences or feelings to particular individuals or locations. Some children expressed more profound feelings towards their linguistic or cultural identities. These feelings are, in most cases, triggered by discussions at home or encounters at school. Negative feelings towards the home culture or language (Turkish) are related to attempts to refrain from using the language and children's experiences of discomfort in using the home language in some situations. The report provides more in-depth information on the methodology, the results and the discussion of the study. The implementation of the research is discussed in relation to ethical issues encountered during the fieldwork.

**Keywords:** minority children; bilingualism; cultural and linguistic identities of children; interviewing young pupils; England; ISOTIS project

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This report is prepared for the Children Study carried out in England for the Task 2.5 of the ISOTIS project. The study is designed by the authors in line with the theoretical framework and study guidelines provided by the ISOTIS Children Study manual. The study is ongoing and started from January 2019 onwards. The aim of this qualitative study is to understand the impact of how positive and negative elements in perceived linguistic and cultural identities of minority children influence their well-being and language acquisition. For this research inquiry, the main researcher interviewed 17 bilingual children at their homes in London. The children are raised at least by one minority parent with a Turkish background. The families come from differing socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (e.g. ethnic, religious and migration-history related differences). The main focus of this study is to understand the relationship between the language identities of children

and their language acquisition and use.

## 7.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITE

### 7.2.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

London was chosen as the main research site of this study as in many aspects it is different to the rest of the UK. It is the most populous city, with a high proportion of young people, more ethnic diversity, higher levels of education, less unemployment, and higher incomes than in any other region in England. It also has the highest costs of living, and there is wide variation of families' socio-economic circumstances. Another driving reason for the choice of London was the fact that approximately 90% of the population with Turkish background (an estimated 300,000-350,000) living in the UK lives in London, particularly the North and North-Est of London. Turkish is one of the six largest language groups in London. Furthermore, London has been one of the main research sites for the ISOTIS project, where the research connections have already been made.

The Turkish-speaking community in the UK is mainly from three ethnicities, namely Turkish, Kurdish, and Turkish Cypriot. Among these ethnic groups, the majority is the Turkish people with a number of 83,116 residents according to the 2011 Census in the Britain (15% of the population of England and Wales according to 2011 Census). The Kurdish population follows this group with a number of 40,339 residents (%0.7 of the population of England and Wales according to 2011 Census). Finally, the smallest group among them is the Turkish Cypriots with 15,891 people living in the UK (%0.2 of the population of England and Wales according to 2011 Census). These groups are mostly populated in the boroughs of North London such as Enfield, Haringey and Hackney. The majority of the Turkish-speaking community is Alawite/Alevi (name endorsed by the Shia community in Turkey), who mostly have Kurdish origins (Enneli, Modood & Bradley, 2005).

### 7.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The study focuses on the sample of four- to six-years old Turkish-English speaking bilingual/bicultural children in London. A group of children were first recruited through the parents, who participated in the ISOTIS survey. The parents, who have four- to six-year-old children and participated in the ISOTIS survey were asked if they wish to be contacted again at the end of the interview. If they agreed, they received an invitation letter on the study. The parents, who have shown interest in the research, received a follow-up call for further information and eligibility check. The eligibility criteria are set as having Turkish as one of the spoken languages at home and the index child having no history of language related or developmental problems. The parents of eligible children are asked to arrange a visit at home. The families are mostly from low-income backgrounds with years of education varying from 5 to 18 years. The languages spoken at home differ. The majority of the parents use Turkish in their daily life (97%), whereas a minority of the parents use English in their daily life (10%). A substantial number of parents (23%) reported to use a language other than Turkish or English (e.g. Kurdish, Zazaki, Bulgarian). See Appendix B for the demographic information of the families and the use of languages in combination.

### 7.3 METHODOLOGY

An experimental pictorial method is used for this assessment (e.g. Jean, 2011), as it facilitates the inquisition process with children (Greig & Taylor, 1999). The literature shows that preschool-aged children are capable of answering open-ended questions as much as older children although their answers are usually shorter and less detailed (Hershkowitz, Lamb, Orbach, Katz, & Horowitz, 2012). In fact, the research on forensic interviews shows that children are more likely to give inaccurate information when they are inquired with close-ended questions (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Abbott, 2007). For these reasons' children are interviewed using open ended questions following the multiple-choice questions on facial expressions depicting their emotions.

The Children Study has been carried out after the completion of the language tests at the end of the second home visit. By the time the researcher visited children for the interview, the children were already accustomed to spending time with her, which eased the interview process for both parties. The children were interviewed on their language attitudes in three different contexts (school, home, playground) with different actors (scenario 1: home – mother, scenario 2: school – teacher, scenario 3: playground – (1) Turkish and (2) English peer). These contexts and actors are chosen as they are the primary sources of language interaction for children. The contexts involved both private and public spaces as the language preference and use by bilingual children tend to differ in these settings (Jean, 2011). The protagonist child in the pictures are prepared for both genders to maximize the similarity between the protagonist in the picture and the participating child. Before the start of the interview questions, the child is introduced to the task as in the following:

*“You know that I do speak Turkish and English like you do. Now, me and you will talk about our languages. I will show you some pictures and ask you how you feel about speaking Turkish and English. We can always give a break whenever you want and play games or do anything else. The child is first introduced to facial expression labels (see Figure 7.1) and they are asked to identify these facial expressions as in the following: “You see three faces in this card. I want to ask you what you think of them. (Pointing at the first facial expression on the card) What kind of face is this?”*

Following to that, the child is introduced to the facial expressions first to obtain information on the feelings that are attributed by children to each expression on the card. This provides time for children to prepare themselves for the forthcoming questions and it provides the researcher an initial context to make a meaning of the answers given by the children. Following to this introduction the children are interviewed on their language use, which is followed by their language attitudes in each context. First, they are introduced to the context with a picture (see Figure 7.2) as in the following:

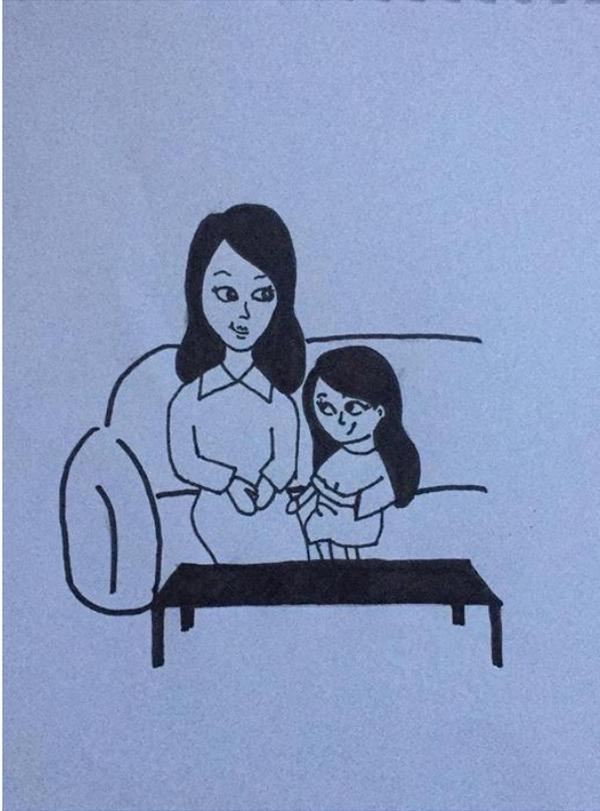
*“This picture is drawn for you and it shows you talking about your day with your mother. Do you speak Turkish or English?”. If the child indicates only one language over the other they are asked the following question: “Why do you use X but not Y?”. Following to their answer they are asked how they feel about speaking Turkish and English in that context by using the facial expression card (see Figure 7.2): “Okay now looking at this card can you tell me how you feel when you speak Turkish at home? Can you show me the face?”*

Figure 7.1 First picture



After the introduction the child is asked to indicate how would they feel in the scene depicted in the picture by pointing at one of the faces in the picture below. After the child points at a face, they are asked to explain their reasons with prompting questions such as: *“Tell me what makes you feel like that (pointing to the positive emotional expression on the visual stimulus) when you speak in Turkish at home?”*. In order to support children to elaborate on their answers a set of prompt questions are asked such as *“What do you mean”* and *“Tell me a bit more”*. The children are voice recorded during this task and additional observational information is recorded in the fieldwork notes. After the completion of the first context, the child is given a break and provided colouring material and other entertaining games. The methodology of the task will be piloted with 4- to 6-year-old Turkish-English speaking children before the start of the study.

Figure 7.2 Second picture



*Note:* The pictures are prepared for the purposes of this study.

## 7.4 METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the important methodological challenges faced in this study was the content validity. In order to ensure this, the initial question on children's attitudes towards a language represented by the facial expressions will be compared to the answers given for the open-ended questions. For instance, if the child picks the neutral expression to define their feelings towards a language and explain their feelings in speaking a language with a non-neutral emotional expression in the open-ended question, the latter will be considered to define their emotional attitude towards the language.

Another limitation to this study was the nature of conducting interviews with children. The research shows that children understand how and why questions better as they grow older (Malloy, Orbach, Lamb, & Walker, 2017). Although there is evidence for the effective use of how and why questions in evaluative contexts (Lyon, Scurich, Choi, Handmaker, & Blank, 2012), it has not been shown how bilingual children respond to this type of questions. Hence, the language skills of children might influence their comprehension of and responsivity to the questions in the interview.

On ethical issues, a few instances raised concern during fieldwork, although, the ethical codes have been followed. Following the approval by the Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee and Fieldwork Safety Office, the main researcher started the interviews with children in accordance with Oxford University Ethical Guidelines (CUREC 2018). In some cases, children

have had hard time separating from the researcher. In these moments, the main researcher observed that the children have developed emotional attachment towards the researcher and experienced distress when they were told that the visits came to an end. These moments are important to reflect to ensure that the research does not affect the well-being of children, who participated in the study.

In order to minimise the effects of such instances, the researcher made sure to be attentive to children's needs and ensured that the children enjoy their time with the researcher by regularly checking how they feel and reminding that they can stop the task at any time. Similarly, the participating children were informed on the procedures in the beginning of each day and their parents were provided detailed information on the study and the researcher to prepare their children before the home visits.

## 7.5 FINDINGS

### 7.5.1 FACTORS RELATED TO WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

In few instances, the participating children talked about either negative or positive feelings that were related to their experiences with cultural and linguistic identities. The negative experiences with linguistic identities were related to the need/wish to speak a language when the other one is required/expected.

Interviewer: (In Turkish) Would you like to speak Turkish at school?

Child #14: (In Turkish) I want to speak in Turkish with my friends at school, but I feel embarrassed and when I feel embarrassed I get confused.

Interviewer: (In Turkish) Why don't you speak English at home?

Child #18: (In Turkish) Because it's bad...because my dad might get angry with me...when my brother's friend comes over and my brother speaks English my dad tells him to speak Turkish not English...because it's a good thing because my dad doesn't want him to learn English when he grows up.

Interviewer: (In Turkish) Do you speak English with your friends at all?

Child #18: (In Turkish) I do in my room and I hide it from my dad.

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. .  
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Child #18: I feel sad when talk to Ms XXX (her teacher) because my dad doesn't want me to learn English so that I don't go after the English people.

There is similar information gathered from another child with a neutral connotation, although the way that the child deals with the situation can be perceived as a negative experience.

Interviewer: (In English) Why do only speak in English with your (Turkish) friend?

Child #21: (In English) because if I do speak Turkish everyone will look at us and say now we know you guys are Turkish, because we want to keep it secret because the entire school is English. Interviewer: what happens if they know this?

Child #21: They would tell our friends that we are Turkish

Interviewer: Is this a bad thing?

Child #21: No, we just want to keep it secret.

Interviewer: does this upset you?

Child #21: nope. My friends want to keep it secret (why) I don't know she is strange sometimes.... I like speaking Turkish because I know a lot of words that are Turkish, but I don't know a lot of words that are English. Sometimes I forget some words in Turkish.

Another preliminary finding on children's experiences with their identity is linked with their perception of racial features and discrimination.

Child #26: I speak English at school, I like speaking Turkish too but still I speak English because it's an English school and some of my friends don't like me and they treat me badly.

Interviewer: Why?

Child #26: Because I'm new (vague: either refers to English or the school) and they don't like me because I'm brunette and their skin is a little white, I don't know what it is, but I feel very sad.

Similarly another child expresses her identity with confusion:

Child #35: I don't know what kind of skin I got...I don't know if I'm English because I was born here, so I'm English not Turkish, I'm learning Turkish (looks at her skin) Is it an English type of skin?

Interviewer: Your skin? What about Turkish type of skin?

Child #35: my mum's skin, it is darker

Interviewer: Do you think you have it?

Child #35: I don't know if I have it, I need to see it under the daylight...(looks at her skin) I've got light skin! I'm an English person!

Interviewer: So you don't feel Turkish at all? I think you are half Turkish?

Child #35: Yes

Interviewer: But you don't feel Turkish? Why?

Child #35: I don't know...

These findings suggest that children are well aware of their cultural and linguistic identities by the age of five. Their experiences with culture and languages are related to the attitudes of their families and the encounters they have at school with their friends. In most of the cases, children go through difficult situations and the way that they make meaning out of these situations determine their perception of their identity. More information needs to be gathered to make a

reliable generalisation of children's experiences.

## Chapter 8. GERMANY

Yvonne Anders and Itala Ballaschk (Freie Universität Berlin)

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### Abstract

The present study aims at exploring children's perspectives on facilitating elements (resilience factors) to feel good at school within differences. The goal was to allow children of the selected sites to express their perspective about what they think about differences (at cultural, somatic, linguistic, socio-economic etc. level), about their social and cultural identity and about their school context in terms of inclusion, what they identify as quality indicators of school inclusiveness and what they propose to make their school more welcoming and inclusive. The present case study took place from 12.02.-15.02.2019 in a day care setting with a high proportion of children and families with an immigrant background. The day care setting is located in a Berlin district with a high proportion of families with an immigrant background. Eight out of 10 children participating in the study had a migration background. As factors that influence wellbeing described the children that there is a selection of freely accessible play possibilities and materials for creative design. In addition, the children are always enthusiastic about the outdoor facilities and the freely accessible movement space very much. It is interesting that the children have always answered the question "Is there anything you don't like about your day care setting?" with a shake of the head or a "no". With regard to the joint brainstorming with the children, it became clear that they do not seem to define themselves through their cultural backgrounds or family languages.

**Keywords:** wellbeing; cultural background; family languages; play possibilities; movement space

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

The WP2 Children Study aims at exploring children's perspectives on facilitating elements (resilience factors) to feel good at school within differences. The goal was to allow children of the selected sites to express their perspective about what they think about differences (at cultural, somatic, linguistic, socio-economical etc. level), about their social and cultural identity and about their school context in terms of inclusion, what they identify as quality indicators of school inclusiveness and what they propose to make their school more welcoming and inclusive.

The present case study took place from 12.02.-15.02.2019 in a day care setting with a high

proportion of children and families with an immigrant background. The day care setting is located in a Berlin district with a high proportion of families with an immigrant background. Eight out of 10 children participating in the study had a migration background. This report is based on the definition of migration background by the federal ministry for migration and refugees: "A person has a migration background if he or she or at least one parent was not born with German citizenship" (Federal Ministry for Migration and Refugees, 2019). All in all, the study went very well. Currently, the audio files are transcribed and then evaluated promptly.

## 8.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITES

### 8.2.1 SELECTION OF THE SITES

**Selected site and selection criteria.** The child day care setting was initially selected according to Berlin districts with a presumably high proportion of children and families with an immigrant background. A Turkish-German day care setting in Berlin-Kreuzberg did not respond to telephone and written enquiries. Further enquiries were undertaken to other day care settings, but they were not willing to participate, partly due to a lack of staff. Then the educational director of the provider was contacted, which maintains several facilities in Berlin. The latter was then willing to ask selected head teachers to participate in the study, whose day care settings have a high proportion of children and families with an immigrant background. Then a head teacher in Berlin-Reinickendorf gave her consent.

**Procedures.** First, on 11 January 2019, a longer telephone conversation took place with the educational director of the provider on the content and scope of the case study. The basis was an information letter about the study, which had been sent to the educational director a few days before. The educational director was very interested in the study and promised to contact the selected head teachers immediately. On 29 January 2019, a personal discussion on the scope and content of the study was then arranged and carried out with the head teacher who agreed to take part in the study. Before starting the discussion about the study, the head teacher gave a tour of the day care setting. This gave the researchers a first impression of the setting. In the meeting itself, it was discussed, among other things, how many and which children should belong to the study, how to deal with the declarations of consent of parents, children and the pedagogical staff, in which room the study can take place and which general peculiarities should be taken into account.

### 8.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITES

The day care setting is located in the district Reinickendorf in the northwest of Berlin. The district has some rural parts, being characterised by forests and waters. Reinickendorf is also home to the "Weiße Stadt" and "Märkisches Viertel" large social housing estates, built between 1929 and 1974, in which more than 30,000 people live. By 31 December 2017, the district of Reinickendorf had 82,006 inhabitants and therefore has the third lowest population of all Berlin districts after the districts of Spandau and Treptow-Köpenick. Due to the share of water and forest areas in the

total area of 89.5 square kilometres in connection with the loose development of many districts, the average population density was 2,949 inhabitants per square kilometre on the reporting date, which is also the third lowest value of all Berlin districts. On 31 December 2016, the proportion of foreigners was 16.2%, while the proportion of the population with an immigrant background was 30.6%. On 31 December 2016, the average age of the population was 44.7 years. The average unemployment rate was 10.7% in 2017. The average monthly net household income is currently € 2,025 (Berlin-Brandenburg Statistical Office, 2017). Reinickendorf is very different, therefore it can be assumed that the mean values are derived from very high and very low unemployment rates/income in parts of this district.

The day care setting attended by children looks after 60 children aged between one and six years (school entry). The care takes place age-heterogeneous groups: 1 - 3 year olds are cared for together and the 3 - 6 year olds (or until primary school enrolment). The day care setting comprises four group areas with bright, modern rooms and a large exercise room. In the protected, park-like inner courtyard, the children have their own beautiful playground with a swing and climbing toys, a bottle crate and a snack garden. This is directly accessible from the group rooms. In addition, there is a room for further training and meetings as well as a room in which the specialists can relax.

The day care setting visited works according to the Berlin education programme, which is mandatory for all ECEC settings in Berlin being funded by public. In addition, the institution offers a wide range of intercultural educational opportunities. In addition to the focus on intercultural education, the day-care centre also attaches importance to individual promotion of age-appropriate (social) development, education for independence, promotion of creativity and diversity of movement, excursions/project work and language education integrated into everyday life. For all new children and families there is an individual design of the settling-in period in which the parents are directly involved. It is also part of the approach to give children sufficient freedom to learn according to their interests and strengths, to try themselves out, to explore the world together with other children and to contribute their ideas. The promotion of independence, self-confidence and social behaviour are the most important aspects of childcare. Children with special physical or psychological needs are also welcome at the day care setting. The basic prerequisite for good pedagogical work is the building of relationships and bonds between the children and the specialists in the day care setting. A trusting and close cooperation with the children's families is of particular importance. According to the management, the multilingual team of specialists (Turkish, Arabic, English) is able to address parents and children in their family language as well. Parental guidance and counselling services are designed to support families in difficult life situations. There are also regular development talks and cooperations with a family centre in Reinickendorf.

In contrast to WP4.3, the day care settings for children was chosen here as a contrast in order to gain child perspectives in institutions that do not participate in a particular programme.

### 8.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**Teachers and classes.** The team of pedagogical staff consists of 5 preschool teachers. All of

them have a training as state-approved educators. All preschool teachers are female. Three of the professionals look after children from the group who took part in the study. One of them has an additional qualification as a specialist for integration. She has 5 years of professional experience. Every preschool teacher speaks another language, for example Turkish, Arabic and/or English in addition to German. In addition, there is one social care assistant who is consciously supporting children with special needs. She has 5 years of professional experience as well. The head teacher has 37 years of professional experience as a preschool teacher. She has also been working as a head for about 15 years. She has deliberately switched to this private provider in order to be able to work more freely according to her pedagogical requirements. The team culture is characterised by multilingualism, openness, helpfulness and professional exchange.

The 10 children of the research group were 4 to 6 years old. 7 children had an immigrant background. There was one Syrian child with flight experience (5 years old, female) who spoke German very well. Then there were two children with a Turkish background, 1 child with an Arabic background, 1 child with a French background, 1 child with a Japanese background, 1 child with an English background and three children with a German background.

**Procedures of contacting practitioners.** The contact to the preschool teachers took place via the head. She informed the team. The researchers met the team on their first day of field observation.

### 8.3 PHASES OF WORK

With minimal changes, all steps were performed as recommended in the manual. The study took place from 12.02. - 15.02.2019. There were minimal changes at the point of field observation, presentation of the research and collection of informed consents. In our research, the estimated two days were divided. On one day (29.01.2019) the field survey as well as the conversation with the leader took place. Two weeks later (12.02.) another day was used to get to know the children from the research group. One morning (10.00-12.00 o'clock), while playing with the children, researchers explained why they are visiting the day care setting. Between these two days, one week before the field survey, there was a telephone call with the head teacher to find out how many parents had agreed to their children's participation in this study.

On 13.02.2019 (10.00 - 10.30 a.m.) the circle time was carried out together with the 10 children in a room for creative design. Afterwards it was considered how such an "Inclusion first aid kit" could look like. First of all, the children discussed the declaration of consent, which they were asked to sign themselves. The children were enthusiastic about this task and all signed it. The children wanted to make a doll ("human being") to help the fictitious new child who will come to the setting to feel welcomed. Together with the children, a list of materials was drawn up that were needed to make a doll. In total, this conversation with the children lasted about half an hour. Two research assistants were present. One researcher talked to the children. The other one had a child on her lap and made sure that the children were attentive. The children may have been a little tired and restless at first. They just came out of sports. But the restlessness disappeared during the conversation.

On 14.02.2019 (10.-11.30 a.m.), in the same room as the day before, the children discussed with each other how to make the doll ("Inclusion first aid kit"). Again, two researchers were present. At the beginning, a researcher read out again what was on the list of materials. The other one again remained a little in the background. Afterwards, the participants jointly considered where to find which materials and which child/children took over which part of the design. In the course of time, three boys formed their own group and painted cars. A researcher sat down with them and talked to them about their pictures and ideas. The researchers repeatedly asked the children about their ideas and justifications while they were designing.

On the last day (15.02.2019) the production and discussion of the identity cards as well as the Suns and Clouds took place in the time from 10.30-11.15 o'clock. The children were so enthusiastic about their identity cards that they first had to be excited about painting the Suns and Clouds in order to touch on another topic. Two children wanted to go into the garden with their identity cards and show them to their friends. Both researchers were able to have good conversations with the remaining 8 children.

## 8.4 METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 8.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

**Methodological challenges due to the context.** A difficulty here is seen in the time schedule for the individual activities. Children are not always ready to deal with given topics over a period of 2 to 3 hours (Day 3). A further methodological challenge comes from the fact that the institution was selected by the provider. It is therefore possible that the convenience sample/selection leads to a selection bias because institutions that deal unsensitively or negatively with social or cultural heterogeneity may refuse to participate.

**Methodological challenges with professionals.** There were no methodological challenges with the staff. Both head teacher and preschool teacher were well informed about the study and have been very cooperative and interested. In addition, together with the research group, we were allowed to move freely in the space for creative design and use all materials.

**Methodological challenges in researching with children.** Another difficulty is seen in the fact that important data are not recorded in informal moments (e.g. in spontaneous conversations with children, during greetings or farewells or during field observation, day 0). Additional field notes were made, which were then included in the analysis.

It was felt to be methodically difficult that children should have and pursue their own themes and are not always willing to focus on themes such as "Imagine a new child coming into your group...". The children, however, have always let themselves be addressed about it. Nevertheless, they wanted to pursue their own themes. Maybe it makes sense to read out a picture book about the topic and then talk to the children about it?

#### 8.4.2 ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

One difficulty is how to deal with conflicts between children and/or when a child cries and wants to be picked up by the researcher. This raises the question of what role the researcher should play in this situation. Where do the boundaries between the role as a data collector and the role as a comforting stranger blur unintentionally?

There was no ethically questionable situation with the specialists.

### 8.5 FINDINGS

#### 8.5.1 FACTORS PROMOTING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

The children report several times that they like it when there is a selection of freely accessible play possibilities and materials for creative design. They showed the researchers, for example, where there are special and, from their perspective, "precious" materials such as plastic gemstones that can be stuck on. In addition, the children are always enthusiastic about the outdoor facilities, which include a playground and open space to romp about. In addition, the children seem to like the freely accessible movement space very much. That was the first thing they wanted to show the researchers on their first visit.

#### 8.5.2 FACTORS UNDERMINING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

It is interesting to note that the children here have always answered "Is there anything you don't like about your day care setting?" with a shake of the head or a "no". Also in the field notes no further hints could be found.

#### 8.5.3 CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS

With regard to the joint brainstorming with the children, it became clear that they do not seem to define themselves through their cultural backgrounds or family languages. The original idea of the children was to build a robot. Here, however, the children themselves came to the conclusion that the robot could not speak and that they first had to "give" it language. They apparently considered this to be unattractive and came up with the idea of directly creating a "human being" (doll). What is interesting here is that they did not take up the topic of language and which language the "human being" should speak. Also no name and/or gender was determined. Her idea was to create a "human being" or a doll for the fictitious new child, which was not about age, origin or language, but rather about the enthusiastic collection of body parts, clothes and jewellery, which should belong to this initially neutral doll. In collecting ideas about what this "person" should have, it was particularly important to the girls that the doll should wear jewellery and "make-up" as well as earrings and "mascara". The boys supplemented rather body parts like "knees", "arms" or the "mobile phone" as technical device that this "person" should have with itself.

It was also interesting that this brainstorming resulted in smaller dialogues on the topic "What have I ever eaten and with whom have I eaten or prepared this food?". Here the children reported about decorating a cake together with their sister or coloring the cake glaze with their grandmother. Even more often the children talked about their "daddy" and their "mummy", with whom they "baked pizza in the forest" together or invited guests to dinner: "We had guests before, then they ate everything and my daddy, my mummy and I didn't eat anything, only the guests ate something".

"B: Do you know what? I've been in a forest before, I took some marshmallows with me, then I made a fire, it was dark, and then I fried that, my marshmallows.

I: Were you there alone?

B: With my mom and my dad."

The question here is whether it is a true event that a child has experienced or rather an imaginary story to show that children experience their parents as caregivers with a view to safety and security. Here, too, the children do not seem to define themselves through cultural backgrounds and/or family languages. This is also not evident from the food mentioned, although the children surveyed had different cultural backgrounds (Turkish, Arabic, German, French, Syrian, Japanese, English).

#### **8.5.4 EDUCATIONAL/FORMATIVE IMPACT**

The preschool teachers and the head teacher were pleased that the children were able to contact the researchers so quickly. They thanked them for the uncomplicated nature of the study and were amazed at how enthusiastic the children were to be allowed to participate.

Looking at the children and the context, it was surprising to see how touchingly most children took care of their "human being". When asked where he should be kept the next day (15.02.2019), the children thought about "sleeping" him under a table. Therefore they planned together which child should look for what to make it comfortable for their "human being", e.g. blanket, pillow.

#### **8.5.5 REPERCUSSIONS ON SPECIFIC CHILDREN**

There was one child who did not participate, but went to children again and again and disturbed them while doing handicrafts or painting, painting in their pictures or insulting them. The child spoke to the children in English. Both researchers tried to talk to the child and involve him in a friendly way. However, the child spoke the same incomprehensible sentence over and over again. At some point a child said "He's always like that". One of the researchers then looked for a preschool teacher and asked how she would deal with the child. The preschool teacher then said that it was a child with integration status, i.e. with special care needs. She then took this child with her into the garden. Language barriers or disabilities may also play a role here.

## Chapter 9. GREECE

Ioanna Strataki and Konstantinos Petrogiannis (Hellenic Open University)

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The Greek research team would like to thank the mayors of the municipality of Aghia Varvara and the municipality of Athens, as well as the personnel and the social Services Bureaus of the two municipalities for the provision of all the necessary assistance and permission to implement the study. We would like to especially thank Ms. Eleni Sermea, Mr. Mpalasis Galanis, Ms. Lydia Tzevatoglou, and Ms. Eleni Katsora.

### Abstract

The goal of the WP2 “Children Study” was (a) to explore children’s perspectives regarding the elements that make them feel good at school despite the differences and their social and cultural identity, and (b) to record children’s proposals for making their school more welcoming and inclusive. The present chapter presents the Greek case of this particular study, and describes the characteristics of the selected sites and participants, the procedures that were followed during the implementation of the study, methodological and ethical considerations that emerged, as well as some initial findings. Three groups of Roma and non-Roma children participated in the Greek study from two municipalities of the Attica Prefecture: one formal group with 22 children aged between 4-5 years registered with a municipal child-care centre, and two informal groups with 8 children each aged between 9-14 years old attending after-school programs of municipal community centres. Based on an initial analysis it was found that the majority of the children had a good relationship with the teachers and they enjoyed school by emphasising the learning of new things/experiences. However, especially in both informal groups, complaints about teachers’ rigidity for all the children in the class were recorded. Finally, some of the children’s proposals referred to improvement of school structural facilities and to supporting the newcomers by teaching them Greek language and assisting them to accommodate to their new context when they have problems.

**Keywords:** children’s perspective, well-being, inclusion, Roma, preschool, informal context

### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

The study was carried out by involving three groups of children, one "formal" and two "informal". Specifically, there was one formal group of 3-6 years old registered in a child-care centre in the municipality of Aghia Varvara (one of the 2 selected sites for WP2). Also, there were two informal groups of 9-14 years old children: one in the municipality of Aghia Varvara and one in the municipality of Athens. Both of them were constituted through the relevant Community Centres.

The necessary meetings with the authorities, the arrangements, the scheduling of the visits were undertaken between November 2018-February 2019.

## 9.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITES

### 9.2.1 SELECTION OF THE SITES

The selection criteria of the sites were the same as the interview study of WP2. Nonetheless, for the Children Study we decided to focus only on the first site of West Athens Sector and, specifically, on the municipality of Aghia Varvara given that the needed sample size was small, a constable cooperation had been established between the local authority and the project team, there was a continuity between all the other parts/tasks of the WP2. More explicitly, the municipality of Aghia Varvara was selected because the major part of the WP2 interview study with parents had already been conducted there. The specific child-care centre was one of the centres along with the municipality's Social Service bureau that the project team had collaborated with to approach parents who would be interested in participating in the interview study.

However, during the organization of the study of the informal group in Aghia Varvara a number of problems were raised such as delays in collecting the parents' consent forms and a low, non-stable, number of participant Roma children. Therefore, it was decided to collaborate with the community centre with a branch for Romani community of the municipality of Athens, as well. Moreover, we proceeded in this decision due to the fact that a Roma mediator that worked within the ISOTIS project for the parent interviews had been transferred to this particular centre. In addition, the teacher of this particular centre (municipality of Athens) showed high interest in the ISOTIS project and agreed on ensuring a group of Roma children especially for this particular task. And, finally, there were strong kinships between the Roma communities living in these two areas of Athens. The researchers decided to conduct the Children Study in both areas because they both had advantages and disadvantages.

The "West Athens sector" is represented in the current project principally by the municipality of Aghia Varvara and, to a minor degree, by the municipality of Ilion. The Unit of West Athens Sector is densely populated with 487.730<sup>4</sup> inhabitants living in 7 municipalities. West Athens is a territorial unit of the Attica region with major and chronic problems of poverty, social inequalities and marginalization<sup>5</sup>. The West Athens Sector has the highest rates of "absolute poverty" compared to the other three sectors of Athens. The rate of unemployment card holders is constantly higher than the average of the Prefecture of Attica and since 2012 higher than the country average<sup>6</sup>. The main issues of the unit are the high unemployment rates, especially among

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<sup>4</sup> Strategic Plan of the Attica Prefecture 2014-2019 (2016). *Deliverable of Phase A', Program of Intervention Research: Assessment of psycho-social needs of Roma in West Attica and best practices for the support and promotion of their social integration*. Athens: Technological Educational Institute of Athens. Retrieved from <http://www.teiath.gr/userfiles/lamveny/documents/roma/meletes/politikes.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Developmental Association of West Athens-General Directorate (2017). *Strategic Framework for "Sustainable Development" (BAA) of the Municipalities of Western Athens*. Technical Text of the support of "Open Consultation" with the Social and Professional Partners. Retrieved from <http://home.asda.gr/oxegalop/3-Keimeno-Diavoulefsis-OXE.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Prefectural Strategy for Social Inclusion and The Fight Against Poverty (2015). *Attica Prefecture*. Retrieved from [http://www.pepattikis.gr/wpcontent/uploads/2016/02/%CE%A0%CE%95%CE%A3%CE%9A%CE%95\\_%C](http://www.pepattikis.gr/wpcontent/uploads/2016/02/%CE%A0%CE%95%CE%A3%CE%9A%CE%95_%C)

women and young people, the concentration of immigrants, the lack of infrastructure, the degradation of the environment. These issues lead to social exclusion phenomena and give high priority to matters of social coherence, criminality, spread of drug use, and protection of the unemployed and vulnerable social groups.

Regarding the Municipality of Aghia Varvara, it was officially established as a discrete municipality in 1963, and in the 2011 census 26.550 inhabitants were recorded. According to 2014 demographic measurements Aghia Varvara has the highest percentage of immigrants from the Russian Confederation and Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>. The city of Agia Varvara has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest unemployment rate among the municipalities of Attica prefecture with 24,60%<sup>(3)</sup>. According to the UN's human poverty indicators that capture the human poverty of the population of a municipality in relation to the rest municipalities on the basis of their socio-economic profile, the municipality of Aghia Varvara is one of the six municipalities where 21% of the Attica Region's population with the greatest human poverty<sup>4</sup> live. In terms of extreme poverty, in the municipality of Aghia Varvara more than 2.000 people receive the beneficiary of the Fund of European Aid for the Most Deprived (FEAD)<sup>4</sup>. The Roma population of Aghia Varvara is estimated at 6.000 people<sup>4</sup>.

The municipality of Athens is one of the oldest municipalities of modern Greece and in the 2011 census 664.046 inhabitants were recorded<sup>(3)</sup>. The unemployment rate is 20,38%<sup>(3)</sup>. The Roma population of the municipality of Athens is 1.500 people. Around 800 Roma people live in the area of Votanikos and 500-800 Roma people in Kolonos<sup>(3)</sup>. The Roma people who live in Votanikos area stay in rented houses or shacks, they do not have access to social commodities and basic needs or services<sup>(3)</sup>. They also have major problems regarding housing, education, employment and health<sup>(3)</sup>. The Roma people who live in Kolonos area own their houses or they rent, they have access to social commodities and they face problems in employment and education<sup>(3)</sup>.

Regarding the formal group of 3- to 6-year-old children, following the appropriate research ethics considerations and clarifications provided to the local authorities and the relevant approval, the research team collaborated with the child-care centre in the municipality of Aghia Varvara. First, the researchers had a meeting with the head teacher of the centre to inform her about the content of the Children Study and to provide the necessary clarifications with regard to the anonymity and other personal data security procedures. At another meeting, the researchers met the educators of the centre to inform them about the goals of the Children Study and the activities that would be conducted. During this meeting the educators shared their opinion and their suggestions about the proposed activities. They also discussed about the time that would be most convenient for them to conduct the study. Moreover, the head teacher made the first contact with the parents of the group that would participate in the study providing the necessary explanations and clarifications concerning the study and research procedures. After collecting the consent forms, the final date of conducting the study was decided.

Regarding the informal group of 9-14-year-old children in the municipality of Aghia Varvara, the research team followed the same initial procedures as described for the formal group regarding the research ethics considerations and approval by the local authority. The research team collaborated with the Social Service bureau of the municipality and more specifically with the teacher who implements the supplementary teaching programme that currently is running by the community centre at the Town Hall. A number of meeting were taken place. First, the researchers

had a meeting with the teacher and the Roma mediators to inform them about the content of the Children Study and to provide the necessary descriptions, clarifications and the details of the tasks giving particular emphasis to the anonymity and personal data security procedures. Additionally, researchers discussed with the Roma mediators the possibility of calling more Roma children that did not participate in the supplementary teaching programme. At another meeting, the researchers met only with the teacher to discuss about the students that could participate in the study and the activities that would be conducted. Also, the teacher shared his opinion and his suggestions about the proposed activities. The parents of the students that would participate were informed about the aims and the relevant procedures of the study by both the teacher and the mediators. After collecting the consent forms, the final dates of conducting the study were scheduled.

Regarding the informal group of 9-14-year-old children living in the municipality of Athens, following the appropriate research ethics considerations and clarifications provided to the local authorities and the relevant approval, the research team collaborated with the community centre of the municipality and particularly with the teacher who works in the centre. The same procedures were applied like those followed in the former municipality regarding the provision of clarifications, description of the tasks, the anonymity and personal data security procedures. The teacher also shared her opinion and her suggestions about the proposed activities. The principal difference was that this year the supplementary teaching programme was not running because of lack of available space. However, an effort was made to call some of the children that had participated the previous year in the programme. Due to her role in the centre she kept contact with the Roma families since she has a role of agent between the families and the schools as part of the broader strategy for minimizing the school dropout rates. The teacher informed the parents of the students that could participate about the aims and the relevant procedures of the study. After collecting the consent forms, the final dates of conducting the study were scheduled.

### 9.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITES

The study was conducted in a child-care centre (for the formal group) and the spaces of the Community Centres (for the informal groups) of the two participating municipalities with the socio-demographic characteristics described in the former section.

During the interview study with parents of WP2, the research team collaborated with the day-care centre and the municipality of Aghia Varvara in order to reach parents who would like to participate. Therefore, it was decided to continue the collaboration for the Children Study as well. The local authority responded again positively to our request.

### 9.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**Formal group of 3-6-year-old children.** The group that participated in the study had one main educator who holds a bachelor degree from a higher level Technological Educational Institute's department of Early Childhood Education and one assistant who holds a certificate/diploma from a post-secondary vocational school (non-tertiary). The educators were initially informed by the

head-teacher about the ISOTIS project and the Children Study. Then, the researchers had a meeting with the educators of the centre to inform them about the goals, the activities, and the procedures that would be conducted for the realisation of the Children Study. In total 85 children were registered in the childcare centre grouped in 4 groups. The Children Study was undertaken with one of the groups. Approximately 22 children participated with age 4-5 years. Six of the children were Roma.

**1<sup>st</sup> informal group of 9-14-year-old children (Community Centre, municipality of Aghia Varvara).** The group that participated in the study had one primary school teacher holding a bachelor degree in Primary Education. The teacher was first informed by the researchers about the ISOTIS project and the “Children Study”. One researcher had another meeting with the teacher to discuss about the students that could participate in the study and the activities that would be conducted. Also, the teacher shared his opinion and his suggestions about the proposed activities. Approximately eight children (the number was ranging within the 4 days of the study) participated aged between 9 to 13 years. Only one of them was Roma and two children were coming from Albania. There was also one eight-year-old Moroccan student who had arrived by that period from Norway with his family.

**2<sup>nd</sup> informal group of 9-14-year-old children (Community Centre, municipality of Athens).** The group that participated in the study had one primary school teacher holding a bachelor degree Primary School Education. In addition, a Roma mediator was present during all the activities to assist in the discussions and make the children feel more comfortable. She is Roma and holding a bachelor as a Social Worker. The researchers had a meeting with the teacher to inform her about the content of the Children Study and to provide the necessary clarifications with regard to the anonymity and other personal data security procedures. Approximately eight children participated aged between 8 to 13 years. All of them were of Romani origin living permanently in Greece or (3 of them) had migrated with their families from Albania some years ago.

## **9.3 PHASES OF WORK**

### **9.3.1 FORMAL GROUP OF 3-6-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN**

All the activities were implemented according to the original planning but with some adaptations. More specifically, the 1<sup>st</sup> day, two of the researchers presented themselves and explained to children’s group the reason they would be in the classroom for a week. Also, they conducted field observation as both participants and non-participants in order to gather information about the children and the teaching methods. All the activities were audio recorded.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> day, the children were split in two groups. The first group of nine children worked in circle time with one researcher and discussed what they could propose and what materials they could prepare to welcome the “newcomers”, i.e. children arriving from another country, and make them feel as good as possible in their new school. Their final decision was to make a cake and have a party to welcome the new children. During the activity, the assistant was present to take care of

one child who had behavior problems. At the same time, the second group of 11 children had the child-led tour with one researcher and the educator who was assisting in the discussion. During the tour the children were slightly disoriented and they did not decide what to do for the “inclusion first aid kit”.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> day, the first group made a cardboard cake and some cotton cupcakes (see Appendix F, Figure F.1) under the supervision of the first researcher. After the suggestion of one of the center’s educators, it was decided to have a mask party where all the children would wear a monkey mask and one would wear a lion mask. The monkeys would be the old students and the lions would be the new students. However, it was not possible to have a party as it was planned because of the constant disruptive behaviors expressed by one specific child. During the activity, the assistant was present to take care of this particular child in order to accommodate the activities of the rest of the children. The second group drew something to welcome the new children under the supervision and cooperation of the second researcher and the educator of the class (see Appendix F, Figure F.2). Following the suggestion of the educator, two photos of two children, randomly selected, were used to show to the students how the new children would look like. In this way, it was considered that the students would get more engaged/committed to the goal of the activity and make it more realistic. At the end of the drawing activity, each child described to the researcher what they drew.

It was decided to split the activities of identity cards and the "suns and clouds" over two days because it was considered as being exhausting for the children. Therefore, the 4<sup>th</sup> day, both groups drew their identity card (see Appendix G) which included their portrait, what they would like to do when they grow up and their favorite toy. Before drawing, the children stood with the researchers in front of a mirror and had a small discussion about what characteristics they see and how they differ. After drawing each part, the children described to the researchers what they drew (see Appendix F, Figure F.3). During the activity, both the educator and the assistant were present. The assistant was taking care of a child who excessively displayed disruptive behavior during all the tasks.

The 5<sup>th</sup> day, each group had a small discussion about what they liked or disliked about their school and then they drew the suns and clouds (see Appendix F, Figure F.4). After completing their drawing, the children explained to the researchers their drawing. During the activity, both the educator and the assistant were present. The assistant was taking care of the child with disruptive behaviour. At the end of the study, all the drawings and the materials that were produced during the activities were displayed on a wall in the center of the daycare center (see Appendix F, Figure F.5).

### **9.3.2 1<sup>ST</sup> INFORMAL GROUP OF 9-14-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN (COMMUNITY CENTRE, MUNICIPALITY OF AGHIA VARVARA)**

All the activities were implemented according to the initial planning but with some adaptations. This study was conducted by one researcher and the teacher of the group was always present assisting in the implementation of the activities. All the activities were audio recorded. On the 1<sup>st</sup> day, the researcher presented herself and explained the reasons she would be in the classroom for the four following days. Also, she conducted field observations as both participant and non-participant in order to gather information about the children.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, the researcher introduced the first "ice-breaker" activity. All the children participated and presented themselves. Then, they discussed what they would do in order to survive on the island. In the next phase, the researcher introduced the activity with the two videos. The first video that was used was from a research project entitled "Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion" (LERI) that was conducted in a school of the municipality of Aghia Varvara. In this project the students of the school were presenting areas of their school where conflicts between the students take place and areas where the students may be amused. After watching a small part of this video, the children discussed whether there are similar places at their schools, what they like or dislike about their schools, what makes them feel good or not at their school setting. The lack of time did not permit the accomplishment of the activity which was continued the third day.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, the children watched the second video about multilingualism and multiculturalism. Then, the children discussed about similar experiences they had in the past regarding inclusion or language, experiences of other students that they have heard of, how they consider a new student would feel at their school and what they could do to help a new student feel well, and what languages do the students speak at school. In this way this activity included part of the warm up activity which was sharing experiences of inclusion. The warming-up activity itself was not implemented due to lack of time. Finally, the activity of school autobiography was introduced. The children decided to write some things about their school autobiography and talked a little about it to the researcher.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> day, the children participated in the warming-up activity about the effectiveness and appreciation of the activities. Then, the researcher introduced the final activity of writing a message to the authorities. Since the lessons of the group took place at the town hall, the teacher and the students decided that it would be a great opportunity to write a letter to the mayor and deliver it to him. Initially, the children were supposed to work in groups of two but at the end each child wrote his/her own letter about what they would like to change at their school. After finishing the letter, each child talked about it to the researcher. Then, the children made by themselves envelopes where they put their letter in. At the same time, the teacher, for supporting them, combined all the ideas of the children and wrote a new more refined letter.

### **9.3.3 2<sup>nd</sup> INFORMAL GROUP OF 9-14-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN (COMMUNITY CENTRE, MUNICIPALITY OF ATHENS)**

All the activities were implemented according to the initial planning but with some adaptations. This study was conducted by one researcher. The teacher of the group and a mediator were always present assisting in the implementation of the activities. All the activities were audio recorded. On the 1<sup>st</sup> day, the researcher presented herself and explained the reason she would be in the classroom for four days. She didn't conduct field observation because the children were gathered voluntarily only for conducting the Children Study. Therefore, the researcher directly introduced the first ice-breaker activity of "lost in a deserted island". The researcher presented herself and then encouraged the children to do the same. Unfortunately, only a few children did so, because the majority was feeling a bit awkward or shy. So, the researcher started discussing with the children in order to receive some information about them. In a next phase, the researcher introduced the activity with the two videos. The first video that was used was from the research

project entitled “Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion” (LERI) that was conducted in a school of the municipality of Aghia Varvara. In this project the students of the school were presenting areas of their school where conflicts between the students take place and areas where the students may be amused. After watching a small part of this video, the children discussed whether there were similar places at their schools, what they like or dislike about their schools, what makes them feel good or not at their school. During this activity, the children were hesitant and not very talkative, something that was interpreted as a response to unfamiliarity with the researchers and the research procedures. In addition, most of the children reported that everything was fine at their school and didn't share more information. Due to lack of time, the activity was continued on the second day.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, the children watched the second video about multilingualism and multiculturalism. Then, the children discussed about similar experiences they had had in the past regarding inclusion or language, experiences of other students that they had heard of, how would a new student feel at their school and what they could do to help a new student feel well, and what languages do the students speak at school. In this way this activity included part of the warming-up activity which was sharing experiences of inclusion. The warming-up activity itself was not implemented because of the limited time available. Finally, the activity of school autobiography was introduced. The children decided to have a small personal interview and talk about their school autobiography to the researcher. It was not possible to write it, because many children did not prefer it or feared their writing was of poor quality. The children were considered to be more open and talkative in an interview situation.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, the researcher introduced the final activity of writing, "a message to the authorities". It was not possible to do it in written form as was planned, because many children did not prefer to write or possibly feared their writing was of poor quality. Therefore, they decided to talk to the researcher about what they would like to be changed at their school. This day the children were even more open and talkative.

## 9.4 METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 9.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

**Methodological challenges due to the context.** During the study of the formal group at the child-care centre, there were no particular problems regarding time spending on the activities or the number of participant children. Nonetheless, it was considered that the whole task would be better performed if the activities could be implemented by the main teacher of the group and not the researcher; this could be particularly useful, especially during the circle time, because the children were already more familiar with her and she could have the control.

Regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> informal group in Aghia Varvara, there were many problems during the organization of the study, like delays in collecting the consent forms and finding Roma children to participate. At the end, only one Roma child participated but there were children that were coming from other countries. One warming-up activity was not implemented due to lack of time, but its topic was discussed during the main activity.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> informal group only Roma children participated which resulted in missing the views of

non-Roma children. One weakness for the progress of the tasks with this particular group was the fact that it was not possible to have a day of observation. As an immediate impact the children did not have the time to get familiar with the researcher and were more sceptical to openly express their thoughts. This may explain that the children were hesitant and not talkative during two out of three days of the study.

**Methodological challenges with professionals.** There were no methodological challenges with the professionals in none of the three studies. On the contrary, all educators collaborated very well and assisted during the implementation of the activities. Especially the educators of the younger children were helpful by proposing solutions in order to make the children more engaged.

**Methodological challenges in researching with children.** Regarding the formal group of younger children, it was a challenging task for the researchers to control the children, as the kind of relationship they had was different than the one with their educator. In addition, the time of conducting the study was very short to ensure that the children would feel comfortable enough with the researchers to share their views. Therefore, we would recommend that it is more effective for the educator of the group to conduct the activities instead of the researchers. Moreover, the educators commented that the concept of new children coming at school was quite abstract for so young children to work on the relevant concepts and situations.

Regarding the informal groups with older children, the topic of inclusion and relevant experiences is a very sensitive and personal issue. It is important to ensure that the children feel comfortable enough with the researcher to share such information. For instance, during one activity two children of the 2<sup>nd</sup> informal group reported that there was no problem with their school as far as language is concerned. However, the teacher informed the researcher later that it has been almost a month that these children did not attend school possibly because they had difficulties with the language of the courses in the first grade of lower secondary school. In addition, two girls felt more comfortable to share their views in Romani language to the mediator. From this we conclude that one should take into account children's language background and the possible difficulties that could result from children's language proficiency.

A final common issue is related to the competence in writing. This was true for both the formal group (due to their developmental stage) and informal groups (due to either insufficient school attendance, language acquisition problems, fear of judgement etc). In these cases only the graphical mode (e.g. picture drawing) and the oral mode (e.g. presentation, discussion and interview) are considered as the most appropriate strategies for extracting information, views or perceptions from the informants.

#### 9.4.2 ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

During all three studies the children were given the choice to stop participating in any activity at any time and without any need for explanation. This was important especially for the young children who can get tired easily. Also, the presence and assistance of the groups' educators are essential in order to cope with a child's behavioural problems or discomfort. With regard to

professionals, they should be given the choice to propose adaptations regarding the activities and participate in the study.

## 9.5 FINDINGS

### 9.5.1 FACTORS PROMOTING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

Almost all of the students of the informal groups mentioned that the lesson of gymnastics makes them feel more relaxed and they would like to have it more often. Many students enjoy hanging out with their friends at school and play many different things such as hide and seek. Most of the students reported that they did not have any problem with their teachers and that they have a good relationship with them. Moreover, some children mentioned that they enjoy school by emphasising the learning of new things or having new experiences. Finally, one student said that he feels safe at school. The school is a “closed” area and the teachers are able to pay attention to the students not to fight or do stupid things.

### 9.5.2 FACTORS UNDERMINING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

It is important to mention that the children of the 2<sup>nd</sup> informal group described their schools as perfect and they could not mention anything bad about them. The researcher tried to discuss with them this topic during all three days of the study but nothing changed. Specifically, two children reported that everything was fine at their school. However, the teacher informed the researcher that these two children stopped school for almost a month. The teacher explained that the lessons in lower high-school get more difficult and a reason they stopped could be the problems with language that they have. This difference between the answers of the children and the actual situation could be explained by the lack of trust among the children and the researcher. Therefore, spending more time with the children is important and the opinions of the children of this group should be considered with caution.

Many children of both informal groups stated that they did not feel very well when children are fighting at school. Also, during the activity of the school autobiography, two students of the 1<sup>st</sup> informal group mentioned that, when they started school, the rest of the students were making fun of them because their proficiency in Greek language was not very good yet. Nonetheless, today they reported not to have any problem and instead to enjoy school. A student of the 2<sup>nd</sup> group described that two students from Syria in his school had a similar experience.

Another factor undermining the well-being of the children were the skills or the rigidity of some teachers. In the 1<sup>st</sup> informal group a child reported that his teacher was not good as she did not teach at all. The child said that he would prefer to change teacher because now they did not learn anything at all. Also, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> informal group some children mentioned that there was a teacher who was very strict or who shouted at students.

Finally, during the discussion on the factors undermining the well-being at school in the 1<sup>st</sup> informal group, some children referred to the lessons. Specifically, one child reported that he would like to have less homework because now he does not have enough time to spend for his activities like taekwondo. In both groups, children talked about difficult lessons. For instance, one

child mentioned that the lesson of religion used very difficult words, so she had to ask her mother about the meaning or just to learn them by heart.

### 9.5.3 CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS

In the preschool, the first group that had the tour did not come to a decision about how to welcome the new children. Therefore, it was decided to draw something for them. However, the children of the second group who worked in circle time decided to make a cake and have a party to welcome them. The next day, this group made a cardboard cake and some cotton cupcakes under the supervision of the first researcher. After the suggestion of one of the center's educators, it was decided to have a mask party where all the children would wear a monkey mask and one would wear a lion mask. The monkeys would be the old students and the lions would be the new students. However, it was not possible to have a party as it was planned, because of the constant disruptive behaviors of one specific child. During the activity, the assistant was present to take care of this particular child in order to accommodate the activities of the rest of the children.

Some of the informal groups' proposals referred to improvement of schools' structural facilities. One proposal was about painting the building of the school to make it more beautiful. Another proposal was to change the old-style toilets that are not very convenient for the children. Other proposals included having more football and basketball fields, a swimming pool and free school canteen so that the children won't burden their parents. Additionally, the children suggested to have playgrounds and more bins to have a clean school yard. A child requested to prohibit the entrance to older children in their school because they cause problems such as destroying facilities. Moreover, the children proposed to change some lessons as they find them difficult. Finally, during the discussion about what to do in order to welcome new students that come from another country, the children proposed to support them by teaching them Greek, making them friends and helping them when they have a problem. It has to be noted that the ideas and proposals of the children could not readily be implemented. Nonetheless, the teacher of the 1<sup>st</sup> group promised to deliver the proposals to the Mayor hoping that the children's ideas will be heard.

### 9.5.4 EDUCATIONAL/FORMATIVE IMPACT

**On professionals.** With regard to professionals, there were rare comments on the activities or the responses of the children in any of the groups. One characteristic comment was expressed by child care centre's staff about the fact that the activities were quite abstract for the children's age range and probably this was the reason for the restricted quantity of responses. One more issue evolved from the teacher of the informal group in the municipality of Aghia Varvara. More specifically he commented that through the activities he managed to learn about children's background and history that he would not know of otherwise.

**On children.** The restricted time for observation and, principally, the way of constructing the informal groups did not permit the extract of valuable observations concerning children. Especially

for the informal groups the short duration of the activities (less than 2 hours) and the lack of consistent communication between researchers (or even teachers) and the children are considered a significant odd for the appropriate recording of any significant impact on the children.

**On the context.** Regarding the formal group of children in a centre-based care and education provision, a visible product showing children that their voices were seriously taken into account can be considered the teachers' decision to present all the material that was produced by the children during the entire study on a wall in the centre of the building. In this way, they informed the rest of the classes and the parents about the ways that they could welcome new children at the centre, like having a welcoming party, as well as about what they like or dislike regarding their school.

With regard to the teacher of the informal group in Aghia Varvara, he ensured that he would pass children's letters with their proposals to the municipality's Mayor himself as they were in the same building. This made the students very enthusiastic about the activity and the fact that their proposals and ideas would really be read and taken seriously into account by a very important person in the community they live.

In both cases mentioned above, the teachers gave value to children's ideas and proposals by presenting them to other people as well as to authorities so that they would be inspired by them.

## Chapter 10. ITALY

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### Acknowledgments

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### Abstract

The present chapter focuses on the qualitative Children Study conducted in Italy as part of the ISOTIS cross-cultural study. The main aims of the Children Study were to explore children's views on inclusion, well-being at school and to elicit children's proposals to make their school (more) inclusive. In Italy, the fieldwork was carried out in two preschool classes, one primary school class, and in an after-school educational program run by Save the Children Italy. High levels of cultural and social diversity characterized all the three sites. This chapter will provide an overview of the characteristics of each site, the participants and the research procedure in the all three contexts, but the initial tentative data analysis will focus only on the study conducted with preschool children. The preschoolers were highly engaged in the research and advanced several proposals to make their school more inclusive and welcoming. Some of those proposals were actually implemented, showing children that their voices were taken into account seriously, and contributing to give visibility to multilingualism in their preschool context. Besides this educational impact, the study had also a formative impact on the teachers involved, who became more aware of children's competencies and experienced the value of participatory methodologies.

**Keywords:** children's voice; participatory research; well-being; inclusion; multilingualism; preschool

### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

In Italy the Children Study (Task 2.5 of the ISOTIS project) was conducted in three highly culturally diverse settings in the city of Milan:

- one preschool (two groups, respectively, of 4- and 5-year-old children),
- one primary school (one group of 10- to 11-year-old children)

- and an after-school educational program run by Save the Children Italy (two groups, respectively, one with 10 9- to 10-year-old children and the other with 21 10- to 14-year-old children).

The study was carried out between November 2018 and April 2019. The present country report will provide a picture of the sites, participants in the research and the research procedure, but an initial tentative data analysis will focus only on the study conducted with preschool children.

## 10.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITES

### 10.2.1 SELECTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITES

#### 10.2.1.1 Formal context: preschool and primary school

The preschool and the primary school involved in the Children Study were both part of the same Institution (i.e., *Istituto Comprensivo*) located in the same building. The *Istituto Comprensivo* also took part to the ISOTIS VLE activities (WP3.4, WP4.4, and WP5.4) and was selected for the following particular characteristics:

- **super-diversity:** the Institution is located in a culturally highly diverse neighborhood of Milan (the biggest city in the North of Italy) with a significant percentage of disadvantaged immigrant families (mainly Arabic and North African families, but not exclusively; see. Tab 10.1) and very few middle-class Italian families;

Table 10.1 *Istituto Comprensivo demographic data - School Year 2018/19*

	N. OF CHILDREN ENROLLED	N. OF NON-ITALOPHONE CHILDREN	% OF NON-ITALOPHONE CHILDREN	MAIN NATIONAL ORIGINS
<b>Preschool</b>	113	69	61%	Egypt, Philippines, Peru
<b>Primary school</b>	525	372	62%	Egypt, Philippines, Morocco

- **ICT equipment:** adequate ICT equipment (e.g., wifi connection, whiteboards...) were available in most of the classrooms of the Institution;
- **Motivation and availability to participate to the research:** an early connection was made during the application phase of the ISOTIS project with the principal who had stated his interest in participating in the research and an initial letter of intent was signed in January 2016. Afterwards, in 2017 in a meeting with the principal and the teachers, the ISOTIS project and the activities were presented. The participation of each class was negotiated with the assistant principal and the teachers.

According to its PTOF (i.e., Three-year Educational Offer Plan), the *Istituto Comprensivo* considers its educational offering, investing in the promotion of non-Italian speaking children's second language learning (e.g. by organizing specific classes for newcomers who do not speak Italian or Italian courses for foreign parents). However, despite stating in the official documents (PTOF) its intention to value pupils' linguistic competencies in *both* L1 and in L2, it presents monolingual teaching practices and curricula, and does not give particular attention to the mother tongues.

In the primary school, many teachers take multilingualism for granted, considering it merely one of the particular features of the school they work in and it is not considered a valuable resource that should be enhanced. Several teachers still embrace the idea that native languages, once acquired, do not need to be reinforced and nourished, or, at least, that first language maintenance is not the school's responsibility. Therefore, even though they let bilingual children act as linguistic mediators to help newcomers during their first days at school (e.g., translating teachers' instructions or assignments, helping new children settle), this practice is intended as an initial support for the newcomers, and not as a strategy to promote mother tongues. Some teachers allow this practice only during the first stages of the newcomers' arrival, and, because of the belief that speaking L1 slows down L2 acquisition, they forbid children to talk in L1 once Italian can be used as the language of communication at least at a minimum level.

At the preschool, teachers generally have a more open attitude towards multilingualism. They convey the idea that speaking another language is a form of cultural richness, and suggest that parents continue to speak their L1 at home. Every year at the end of February, they also organize the Mother Tongue Week. On the occasion of International Mother Language Day, the preschool teachers involve immigrant children's families in sharing traditional songs, dances, stories, rhymes, games from their countries of origin, presenting them to the classes in their L1. Although this occasion represents a precious opportunity to cherish diverse linguistic repertoires, it remains an isolated event that does not affect the daily life and the established monolingualism that pervades the curriculum also at this educational level.

#### 10.2.1.2 Informal context: Educational center *Fuoriclasse*

The informal context involved is an after-school service run by Save the Children in a very working-class, multicultural neighborhood on the outskirts of Milan.

Table 10.2 *Educational center Fuoriclasse demographic data - School Year 2018/19*

	N. OF CHILDREN ENROLLED	N. OF NON-ITALOPHONE CHILDREN	% OF NON-ITALOPHONE CHILDREN	MAIN NATIONAL ORIGINS
<b>Educational center <i>Fuoriclasse</i></b>	31	28	87%	Morocco, Egypt

The educational center *Fuoriclasse* (a play on words, meaning both “out-of-school” but also

“champ”) is part of an integrated program carried out by Save the Children Italy in cooperation with local schools and local organizations<sup>7</sup>. The program, created in 2011, targets students, teachers and families, and aims at combatting school drop-out through early prevention. The project was extended to the city of Milan in 2013/14.

Among the extra-curricular activities for students, there are “motivational workshops”, “school camps” and “after-school studying programs”. Our Children Study was realized during a “motivational workshop” held in one of the centers in Milan. The objectives of the “motivational workshops” are:

- to promote the motivation to study;
- to valorize children’s competences;
- to augment children’s self-esteem;
- to increase their capacity to overcome difficulties at school.

Active listening to children’s voices and their protagonism are central in this methodological approach. The structure of each workshop (four 1.5-hour meetings) has three phases: 1) a “theoretical part” for in-depth examination of the theme of the project, 2) a more practical phase where the theme is explored through the making of concrete products made by the students, and 3) a third phase that consists of peer education: a presentation of the work done to their classmates, aimed at transmitting the beauty and the importance of going to school.

The education center Fuoriclasse where we carried out our research is located in a multifunctional center that is experimenting with new forms of welfare in a very poor, segregated and multicultural neighborhood in the outskirts of Milan. This educational center also proposes activities for parents and mothers with very young children etc. Fuoriclasse is attended by children from two primary schools and two junior high school nearby. At the center it is possible to study, but also to play and learn while having fun: during the week homework is done and school subjects are studied in-depth, while on Saturday mornings there are workshops aimed at strengthening basic skills. It is open for primary school children every Wednesday and Friday from 4.30 p.m. to 7 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12 noon; for secondary school children it is open every Tuesday and Thursday from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.

### 10.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Two female preschool teachers participated in the study, both of them with over 20 years of teaching experience:

- the first teacher was the main teacher of the Orange Class, with 23 children (13 4-year-olds and 10 5-year-olds). She has had managerial responsibilities within the *Istituto Comprensivo* for over 15 years (she became the preschool coordinator the year before, and she has been assistant principal since April 2019) and she has promoted the Mother Tongue Week. She has also taken part in several training courses and action-research projects addressing topics such as multilingualism and intercultural competences;

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<sup>7</sup> See Save the Children, *Fuoriclasse, un modello di successo. Il contrasto alla dispersione scolastica*, <https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/fuoriclasse-un-modello-di-successo-il-contrasto-alla-dispersione-scolastica.pdf>

- the second teacher was a special education teacher with a supporting role in many classrooms, including the Orange Class and the Red Class.

In order to present the aims of the Children Study, the methodological framework and the activities planned, a specific meeting with the two teachers was held in September 2018. We had shared the Manual with them beforehand, and we discussed the proposal during the meeting. The teachers expressed their interest in the study and suggested introducing some changes and adaptations to the methodology (see Paragraph 3). They decided to involve two groups of children in the research: all of the 23 children in the Orange Class and the 4-year-olds in the Red Classroom (10 children). This second group of children was used to working with their peers from the Orange Class (they had already shared some joint activities) and the teachers considered it interesting to include them in the research to offer them the opportunity to take part in this participatory experience and express their points of view.

## 10.3 PHASES OF WORK

### 10.3.1 PRESCHOOL

The methodological proposal was shared and negotiated with the teachers who proposed introducing some modifications, described in detail below. Some of these adaptations, were decided beforehand (for instance, teachers suggested conducting two parallel studies: one with the 4-year-old children and one with the group of 5-year-olds); others were negotiated step-by-step, to better follow children's ideas and proposals. All of the activities were audio and video recorded.

We spent a few days in the classroom with the children, to let them familiarize and feel at ease with us (Step 0 of the Manual). We presented ourselves, our role as researchers and the aims of the Children Study, using simple words they could understand. Before starting the activities, each child signed a digital informed consent form that was presented through the ISOTIS VLE.

As a starting point to engage them in the research, we involved all 33 children participating in the study in a circle-time discussion about how to welcome new children that would start preschool the following year. We invited the children to consider that the newcomers would not know their new teachers, classmates and the spaces at the school, and that some of them would not even speak Italian. Following the children's leads, the researchers asked them what they proposed and what materials they could prepare to welcome the new children and make them feel comfortable in their school (Step 1 of the Manual). Then, two separate circle-time discussions were conducted, respectively with the 4-year-old group and with the 5-year-olds, in order to deepen the content that emerged during the first plenary discussion. From this point forward, the two groups of children followed 'parted ways'.

**4-year-old children.** In the circle-time discussions, among other themes, the younger children suggested that it could be important for the newcomers to have some friends at the new school and to know its spaces and its rules.

Hence, with this group, the study continued with the creation of the ID Card (Step 2A of the Manual). During circle-time, children were asked how they would present themselves to the

newcomers, and we introduced the ID Card template and its sections (Name, Class Name, Age, My portrait, and My favorite game/toy at preschool – this last section was proposed by the teacher, who thought it was more concrete and related to the welcoming framework proposed rather than asking them about what they wanted to be when they grew up). Then each child completed their ID Card. During the activity, their verbalizations were collected.

Since the children had suggested that it would be important for the newcomers to know the new school and its rules, the teachers proposed customizing the Sun & Cloud activity (Step 2B of the Manual), focusing on the school environment. Pictures of the various rooms/spaces taken by the teachers were projected on a whiteboard one by one, and the children engaged in a group discussion on each of them. They were asked what they liked/disliked in each space and why, and the rules for each space were elicited. Afterwards, large pictures of the spaces were printed and placed on the floor, and the children were asked to indicate their favorite and least favorite ones using emoticons (happy or sad faces) cut from cardboard.

Based on previous ideas and proposals, the final phase of the study was the creation of an 'inclusion first-aid kit' (Step 1B of the Manual), to make the new children feel comfortable and welcome in their school. Specifically, it consisted of a multilingual, digital mixed-media (visual and audio) tour of their school to present the different spaces/rooms and the rules to the newcomers. Following the children's proposal, their parents were actively involved in the realization of this artifact (see Par. 10.5.1).

**5-year-old children.** During the circle-time discussions, the children suggested many ways to welcome the newcomers. The next phase consisted of the implementation of these ideas and creating their version of the 'inclusion first-aid kit' (Step 1B of the Manual). Meanwhile, the teachers told us that one of the infant-toddler centers in the neighborhood planned to visit their school with a group of 10 2- to 3-year-old children who would start preschool the next year. They thought that this occasion could represent a unique, interesting opportunity to make the activities proposed to the class 'real and concrete'. Therefore, we dedicated the next two meetings scheduled for the Children Study to the observation of the 5-year-old children welcoming the younger ones and how they made use of the artifacts produced in the previous step. A final circle-time discussion was used to reflect on this experience with the children.

We agreed to co-conduct all the activities. The main reason that led to this choice was to lessen any possible intimidating effect of our presence as 'strangers' and to ensure children a familiar environment, with trusted adults, where they would feel at ease and free to express their opinions. Moreover, we considered the presence of the teachers as co-conductors crucial, especially during the opening circle-time, since they knew important information about their class that could help to better address each child individually and stimulate discussion, making reference to concrete episodes of the children's experience (e.g., how each child had experienced his/her first day of school and how they had felt; which children could speak a second language; which children had arrived at preschool without knowing Italian and how they had been helped to overcome the linguistic barrier...). Finally, we considered that the teachers could provide useful support in making children respect the class rules. On the one hand, teachers seen as authority figures, could address eventual misbehaviour more effectively than the researchers. On the other hand, this choice could contribute to preserving children's perception of our role as people who were

authentically interested in hearing children's points of view, neither judging nor evaluating their opinions or behaviour.

### 10.3.2 PRIMARY SCHOOL

The methodological proposal was presented to the teachers. The teachers were not involved in the research design and did not propose any adaptations. Therefore, the researcher and the research assistant introduced all adaptations described in detail below. Some of these adaptations were decided beforehand (for instance, to use a Virtual Learning Environment, designed by the Italian team in collaboration with ISOTIS partners, for Tasks 3.4, 4.4 and 5.4). Others were planned step by step, to better follow children's ideas and proposals (e.g. Step 3, inclusion kit). All the activities were audio and/or video recorded, although we respected the request of some children who asked not to be video recorded. During the first part of the study, each research session lasted 2h, but step 3 (the preparation of the inclusion kit) lasted for 4 hours and the implementation of one proposal lasted for three 2-hour meetings. All the activities were entirely conducted by the two researchers with the presence of a teacher for children with special needs (who was there for a student with a disability), except for the implementation of a proposal that was done in cooperation with the religion teacher (since the implementation concerned a topic connected with her discipline). Step 0 (observation) was realized at the end of the school year 2017/18, Step 0 (presentation of the research and collection of the informed consent) was carried out at the beginning of January 2019; Steps 1 to 3 were conducted between mid-January and mid-March 2019, and the implementation of the proposal selected was realized during the month of April 2019.

In May, 2018 (Step 0), the researcher spent a few days in the class with the children, to let them familiarize and feel at ease with her (Step 0 of the Manual). The researcher presented herself and her role as a researcher. In the middle of the following school year, in January 2019, the Children Study was executed. The Children Study was introduced to children using the ISOTIS VLE through a notifier for the class group at the VLE noticeboard. The class met in the computer lab with the research assistant. With her help, children signed up in the VLE, and received the directions to get to the class noticeboard, where the researcher had left a short video-message asking for permission to come back for some help to better understand their point of view on their school, in order to contribute to the European study ISOTIS. The researcher waited for the response in the school building without the children being aware of her presence at school. Once the children authorized her to come by answering through the noticeboard, the researcher joined them in the computer lab. There, the researchers explained the aims of the Children Study using simple words they could understand. Before starting the activities, each child signed a digital informed consent form, presented through the ISOTIS VLE. At the end of Step 0, the children were invited to create a sociogram: each child was given a drawing representing a flower with 5 petals and was asked to write the name of their 5 closest classmates and their name at the center of the flower.

The first step of the research, actively involving the children, was conducted in the computer lab and took two 2-hour meetings. As a starting point to engage the children in the research, the researcher's letter was presented through a PowToon animation. The customization of the letter

consisted of changing the sender: since the researcher writing to the children came from the Netherlands (and not from Italy as in the example letter), the examples contained in the letter were adapted according to cultural references from the Netherlands. After watching the PowToon animation on the noticeboard, each child received in their personal VLE space a part of the letter and some questions to answer individually on the VLE using the “Answer a question” tool. The children could choose whether to answer through a video or audio message, with a written text or with a drawing realized on the VLE.

Once all children had given individual answers, children with the same topic were invited to work together in small groups and asked to provide a group answer to the researcher who wrote the letter. The answer could take the form of a video, audio, written text or drawing. All answers were then posted on the VLE, watched together and discussed through a focus group discussion with all class members.

The ID card (Step 2A) (ID card) was not realized, while the evaluation of the school context (Step 2B - Sun and clouds) was realized on the VLE through the “Answer a question” tool. In this case, children worked in couples (each child could freely choose his/her partner). This choice was not made beforehand, but during the activity because of the lack of computers and also because some children had difficulties accessing their VLE space. The children were given the possibility to answer through a video, audio, written text or drawing. The activity was presented in the computer lab, but the children were then free to choose where to plan and compose their answers according to the language they chose (video, audio etc.). The step was concluded in a plenary session where all of the answers were presented to the class. This served as a starting point to introduce the idea of presenting some proposals for improving their school context (Step 3).

The children were first asked to think about suggestions on how to make their school more welcoming and inclusive, in order to inform the Dutch researcher who would be collecting suggestions from children in different European countries in order to send them to the European Union to improve school inclusiveness in Europe. After this phase, the researchers asked the children to make concrete proposals that could be directly implemented in their own school. This latter step was introduced by giving a concrete example of a letter written by another class of 9-year-old children from another neighborhood on the outskirts of Milan: these children wrote a letter to the Mayor of the city who answered the letter and implemented one of the children’s proposals in the following months.

After, we invited the children to prepare proposals on how to make their school (more) welcoming and inclusive. Children were free to form small groups and choose the form their proposal would take: video, letters, posters, drawings etc. Groups varied between 2 and 6 members. The outputs of this activity were:

- posters;
- letters to the school director;
- video clips and video interviews of other children in the class;
- short video clips where the children acted or simulated an information campaign;
- video messages to the teachers;
- a protocol on how to welcome newly-arrived students.

The last phase of work led to the implementation of one of the students' proposals after negotiation with all the teachers of the class. In continuity with a video prepared by one of the groups on different religions, the children opted to create an awareness raising project about religious diversity in the school. To do so, the class made a digital, multi-religious calendar on the VLE to be posted on the school website: the calendar contained videos, information, pictures and explanations collected among the school personnel and the families regarding special dates and celebrations for different religions.

### 10.3.3 AFTER-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FUORICLASSE

The methodological proposal was shared and negotiated with the coordinator and the educators of the after-school center who proposed some adaptations, described in detail below. Some of these adaptations were decided beforehand (for instance, educators suggested conducting two parallel studies: one with the primary school children (9-11 years old), and one with the group of junior high school children (11-14 years old); others were negotiated step-by-step, to better follow the children's responsiveness to the methodology, as well as ideas and proposals. Special attention was paid to adapting the method for the 9-11 year old group given that the research protocol for the informal context was meant for older children. All the research steps were realized over the period of 5 1.5 hour meetings for each group. The junior high school group was held one afternoon a week on a week day from 15-16:30 and the primary school group between 17.00 - 18:30 pm, right after school ended.

One exploratory step was carried out at the beginning of December, while the other Step 1s were conducted in January. A further meeting for restitution of the research results is planned for the beginning of June and will be held at the University of Milan-Bicocca. Following the professional advice, to avoid being too intrusive, video recording was gradually introduced. The activities were realized in presence of one researcher, one research assistant, two educators from the after-school program and one volunteer. The activities were mainly led by the researchers, although the two educators did intervene in some occasions to clarify some points or regain the children's attention.

For both groups, one month before starting the research (step 0), the researchers participated to a workshop organized by Save the Children and attended by the research participants. During this session, the researchers introduced themselves to the children, letting them familiarize and feel at ease with them. They presented themselves, their roles as researchers and the aims of the Children Study using simple words they could understand (not only age-appropriate language, but also easy to understand because of the high number of non-native speakers not always at ease with Italian). Each child signed an informed consent form and was given a consent form for their parents.

Each of the following steps was introduced by playful warming-up activities involving children, differentiated among the two groups. Both educators and researchers participated in the warming-up activity along with the children. The first step of the research involved both groups in the activity called "Something about me that you don't know": in a circle, each child was asked to go to the center, say the sentence "Something about me that you don't know is...", complete it and then go

and touch another group member. Afterwards, a video-cued focus group was realized in both groups using two clips as stimuli, the first focusing on newly-arrived students unable to speak the national language, the second focusing on the exclusion of second generation immigrants because of the inability to speak his parents' mother tongue :

- a clip from the short film 'Immersion' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6Y0HAjLKYI>)
- an extract of the movie "Almanya. My family goes to Germany".

For the primary school group, free discussion was held after watching both clips. For the junior high school group, children were asked after each clip to write their impressions and personal experiences related to the topic raised by the clip on a post-it. The children were asked to share what they wrote on the post-it afterwards. This moment of sharing served as introduction of a focus-group discussion.

Next, an autobiographical activity was carried out with different methodologies for the two groups:

- For the primary school group, we adapted the ID card template from the formal research protocol (see Par. 3.4.1), creating different sheets, each exploring specific aspects of their school biography (e.g. the first day at school, what made them feel good at school, etc.). Children were invited to fill out some of the sheets that they could choose. Children were free to audio or video record an interview;
- For the junior high school group, the researcher drew a line on the floor using duct tape and explained to the students that they would hear a number of statements about things that they themselves might have experienced at school to some degree. Participants (both children and adults taking part in the activity) were asked to get closer to the line the more the statement matched their own experiences (e.g. on the line if they had experienced exactly the same situation, very far from the line if they had not experienced it at all; for an example of the process, see the short video clip from the movie Freedom writers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9axXKI3zBgU>). The statements were meant to help children to gradually reflect on their school experience. Examples of statements we provided are:
  - My school experience was entirely in Italy
  - My first day of school was in Milan
  - I enjoyed my first day of school
  - I was afraid before I started school
  - I felt discriminated by one of my teachers
  - I feel excluded by my classmates.
- After the warming-up activity, the autobiography was created as suggested in the manual (see Chapter 3, step 2B, informal context). Children could also carry out an audio or video interview.

The last step for both groups consisted of a message to the authorities, adapted in the following ways:

- primary school: the primary school group realized a big poster where all of the children contributed with their ideas on how to make school (more) welcoming and inclusive
- junior high school: each child realized a message in a different way.

In both groups, the activity was finished with a small celebration, following the suggestion made

by some of the participants who had underlined how food is a form of socialization that brings up people together. A video clip of the results of each of the two research journeys will be edited by the research team and presented to the children at the meeting in June 2019. They will then decide whether they want to present it in their own school.

## 10.4 METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 10.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

**Methodological challenges due to the context.** The two teachers who took part in the study were highly committed and engaged, and present at all of the activities of the Children Study. However, they did not teach in the same class and had different work schedules.

Moreover, since 4- and 5-year-olds from the Orange Class were involved separately, it was necessary to schedule the activities during the hours when the other class teacher (who chose not to participate in the research) was present. In this way, while one group of children was busy with the Children Study, the other group was engaged in regular activities with the second teacher.

The two classes involved (Orange and Red) both participated in other curricular projects with external experts.

All these elements reduced the time available to conduct the study, and at times it was quite difficult to schedule the activities without letting too much time to pass between one meeting and another.

**Methodological challenges with professionals.** In the light of the experience gained during pilot phase, we considered both the advantages and disadvantages of co-conducting all of the activities with the teachers and opted for the second solution. As already explained in Paragraph 3, this choice proved to be effective and valuable especially during the initial phases of the study, when the children did not know us well and we had a more superficial knowledge of their characteristics, attitudes and personal stories.

There were also some downsides of letting the teachers play an active role in conducting the activities. For instance, we noticed that the teachers were very interested in exploring the theme of rules. Although this theme emerged spontaneously during the first circle-time discussion, during the subsequent activity (i.e., the circle-time with the 4-year-olds group) the teachers went back to this topic more than once and tried to stimulate children to discuss this topic further.

Afterwards, we shared our concerns with the teachers. They became aware of their tendency and agreed that was important to follow all the leads children provided with an open attitude and not to focus solely or mainly on those topics that they, the teachers, were interested in. The episode was not repeated again and the issue was resolved. On the one hand, they paid more attention to avoid guiding too much; on the other hand, thanks to the increasing familiarity we had with children, we could take on a more leading role during the activities.

Even though the issue was sorted out nicely, this episode made us reflect further on the complementary advantages and disadvantages of co-conducting the activities with the teachers

and on how important guidance is especially during the circle-time discussions, since it has decisive influence on the data collection.

**Methodological challenges in researching with children.** The stimuli provided were effective and the children were highly engaged during all of the activities. Particularly, the introduction used in the first circle-time discussion as a starting point to involve the children in the research (Step 1A) powerfully impacted their experience, addressing a concrete issue they were able to relate to.

Although some interesting data emerged during informal moments, the most significant data were gathered during the ‘formal’ research activities.

#### 10.4.2 ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

**Ethical reflections in researching with children.** We presented the informed consent form for children to the teachers who considered it a way to truly respect the children’s voices. However, they found the form too long and complex for their children and suggested creating a shorter, simpler version of it that, while including all of the core elements of the original one, was more accessible to young children.

We presented a digital, interactive version of the revised consent form through the ISOTIS VLE. We explained the aim of the research, its implications and their rights to each child, and then we assisted them in the completion of the form. Most of the children completed the consent individually. Following the teachers’ suggestion, the shyest children went through the process together with one or two peers. The digital presentation of the consent form was quite engaging, and some of the children asked us questions regarding the various passages of it and its implications (e.g. if we planned to share the video recordings on YouTube). Still, we noted that some children signed the consent form without understanding – despite our efforts to provide further explanations using simple language – regarding what we were asking them and why.

The consent form was designed after an extensive literature review on the topic (see Chapter 4) and following the guidelines provided by the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) project (Graham et al., 2013). However, the fieldwork observations made us question the validity and the significance for children of proposing an informed consent form to children that young, and raised interest in exploring alternative solutions.

#### **Ethical reflections in working with teachers**

As mentioned above, on the one hand, the choice to let teachers co-conduct the activities was more respectful at the ethical level, since it contributed to ensure a familiar, reassuring environment where children could more easily express their ideas. On the other hand, it also raised the issues of losing control of the guiding the activities.

### 10.5 FINDINGS

### 10.5.1 CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS

The children were highly engaged in the research process and, despite their young age, were able to take on a different point of view from their own.

1. They pointed out that the newcomers would be **excited about the new toys** at preschool, but they might also **feel sad and lonely, missing their parents and their friends** and **need to be comforted**. Hence they proposed:
  - letting the newcomers play with their toys, hiding those that could be harmful to younger children (for instance, small LEGO blocks);
  - reading the newcomers a book they liked;
  - making friendship bracelets to make them understand that they already had some friends in the new school;
  - decorating their classroom to make it more welcoming and joyful.
2. Secondly, they pointed out that the new children would not be aware of the **rules** of the class/school and, consequently, remarked on the need to teach them those rules.
3. These two points paved a way for a reflection on **linguistic differences**. In fact, some children raised the issue about how to comfort the newcomers or explain the classroom rules to them if they could not speak Italian. To overcome this issue, the children proposed:
  - using what they considered *universal gestures* (e.g., hugs, kisses, caresses) to communicate with and comfort the new children feeling sad;
  - teaching the newcomers some words and sentences in Italian;
  - using their mother tongue - if they shared it - to overcome the linguistic barrier. Some of the preschool children with immigrant backgrounds recognized that they did not fully master their first language. Thus they suggested involving their parents as linguistic mediators.
  - celebrating a party singing songs in various languages to offer everyone the chance to 'feel at home' and express themselves even in their home language.

The children were involved in realizing some of their proposals. For instance, with teachers' assistance, they:

- created a multilingual poster to welcome newcomers (with the word 'welcome' written in different languages);
- decorated their classroom using bright colors and smiling emoticons, that in their opinion could reassure the newcomers;
- realized a digital mixed-media (visual and audio) tour of their school to present the different spaces/rooms and the rules. They suggested involving parents with immigrant backgrounds in providing a written and audio translation (incorporated in the digital artifact) of the sentences they selected to present each space/room, in order to make the tour accessible also to children who did not speak Italian.

### 10.5.2 FACTORS UNDERMINING AND PROMOTING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

Children recognized that several elements could contribute to influence a child's well-being at school:

#### Factors undermining well-being:

- missing their parents and friends may contribute to making a child feel sad at school;
- not knowing the school environment, its spaces and rules may make a child feel lost and uncomfortable;
- the linguistic barrier may be an obstacle that made it difficult for children to make friends and communicate at school.

#### Factors promoting well-being:

- teachers and peers could play a crucial role in ensuring that a child felt welcomed and at ease at school, in introducing the school, its spaces and its rules to the newcomers;
- the opportunity to see their mother tongues used in the school environment could contribute to making a child 'feel at home' in the school context;
- peers and parents could act as linguistic mediators and help non-Italian speaking children overcome the linguistic barrier. Moreover, peers could teach them Italian.

### 10.5.3 EDUCATIONAL/FORMATIVE IMPACT

The Children Study had an impact at various levels:

- **On teachers.** Even though the two teachers involved had a high consideration of their children's competencies, they were surprised that they had such clear ideas about complex issues and advanced such sophisticated proposals. Moreover, they experienced a participatory methodology involving children that they had not practiced before, and appreciated its value;
- **On children.** We observed that some children, usually shy and bashful ones, started to actively participate in the activity proposed and freely expressed their ideas after the first few meetings. Furthermore, we observed a change in the attitudes towards home languages: at the beginning some children with immigrant backgrounds were shy about speaking their home language and talking about them. Gradually, seeing their peers' examples and the general climate established where linguistic diversity was appreciated and valued, they started to be prouder about their origins and share some words or songs in their mother tongues;
- **On the context.** Some proposals made by the children were actually implemented. On the one hand, this outcome contributed to show children that their voices were not only listened to, but also taken seriously into account. On the other hand, their ideas contributed to changing the preschool context, characterized by dominant monolingualism, giving visibility to home languages, not only during a one-time event (i.e., Mother Tongue Week), but in everyday life.

## Chapter 11. NORWAY

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### Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the collaborating municipality, and the management and staff in the participating ECEC-institution (in Norwegian: Kindergarten) and school as well as our potential participants and their parents. Based on our national privacy regulations, all names (municipality; sites/institutions) are kept anonymous.

### Abstract

The country report from Norway is a brief summary of the current status of the project, right before the beginning of the data collection. The contact with the pre-school and the primary school is finally established and the concrete cooperation initiated. For the pre-school the timeline for the data collections are set, and for the primary school, this will be decided right after Easter. The pre-school institution is a municipal kindergarten (in a Norwegian context this institution is named Kindergarten) for somewhat over 100 children aged 0–5 years and is organized in 6 units. About 30 employees are working in the institution that has a high proportion of children with migrant background (> 75 %). Data collection is planned for week 19 (May). The Primary school (grades 1-7) has more than 500 pupils (age 6-14) organized in classes of 20-30 students and about 80 employees. The proportion of pupils with migration background is greater than 75 %. Data collection will be conducted in May 2019. In addition to plans for data collection including sound recording and photos, we work on the plans and timelines for transcriptions and analyses of data as well as reporting. Furthermore, we are still working on establishing contact with an institution that provides after school activities for children age 10-16.

**Keywords:** Norway; pre-school; primary school; child-interview; after school

### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

Due to a long and challenging process to get approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and subsequent long-term negotiations with the municipality, the process of collecting data has not started yet. When it comes to Kindergarten data collection is now decided (week 19), when it comes to the primary school we are still working on the final agreement with the headmaster (we are waiting for the decision concerning the timeslot for the data collection, hoping that this will be done in May).

We have concertized and decided an agreement with one pre-school. There has been one meeting to inform the administration in the municipal and the staff. We have scheduled the next

meetings and will finish data collection by May 10.

We work on adjusting the tools for data collection in the pre-school. These adjustments are developed in accordance to conversations with the teachers; from our side we plan to use conversation, photos, and identity cards with the children's drawings. We do also consider using the letter from a fictional child, telling that he or she will start in the kindergarten. This as an introduction to start the process of bringing in the children's voices.

We intend to apply all measures for data collection in the primary school, but have to adjust this in relation to any restrictions that may arise from the school's management.

## 11.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITE

### 11.2.1 SELECTION OF THE SITE

**Selected site and selection criteria.** The site (municipality) is selected as one where ISOTIS WP2 qualitative and quantitative interviews have been conducted. The selected pre-school and school is located in a multicultural area with a population of mixed sociocultural and ethnic backgrounds. The availability and agreement from the leaders in the municipal has also been important, as well as convenience for the researchers in terms of distance from the university.

The children in the particular pre-school (Norwegian: Kindergarten) are between 1 and 5 year of age and the total number of children in the provision is about 100. This is an average size for a Norwegian pre-school. For the pre-school we plan three days of data collection, the first on April 23, and the collection will be finished in the second week of May.

The primary school (grades 1-7) has more than 500 students (age 6 to 14 years), organized in classes of 20 to 30 students, and about 80 employees. The proportion of students with migration background is greater than 75 %. Data collection will be conducted in May 2019. In this particular school, there has recently been a change in school management. The profiling of the school has in that regard somewhat changed, from primarily focusing on its multicultural character, where the school still is ambitious, to an increased focus on outcomes in terms of grades in school subjects.

**Procedures.** We are still working on this part. There has been a process following several steps. The first to get the permission from the Norwegian Center for Data Research. The next steps have followed formal procedures, contacting the formal leaders of the municipality, then the leaders in the local community and the leaders of the participating pre-school and primary school. Included in all information given at all levels are a description of the aims of the project, the target groups and the agreement templates.

The presentation provided for the schools consist of both written information, oral information and face-to-face meetings with the leaders of the pre-school and primary school.

The next step is to receive the written consent from the parents and agreements with the teachers in the classes where we will conduct the data collection. Then, our focus is on the consent of the children: oral information including the aim of the study and the children's right to decide whether

to attend or withdraw at any time.

### 11.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

The pre-school and school are located in an urban/suburban area in the southeast of Norway, counting about 8000 inhabitants. In this area, there is a large population (approx. 50%) of immigrants, among these many with Turkish backgrounds. This is also the area within the municipality with the highest proportion of low-income families. There are projects within the municipality to work on the development of this area/neighbourhood, due to its socio-demographic challenges. For this reason, there are some construction areas close to the pre-school.

The public pre-school as well as the public school is owned and operated by the municipality. The location is a suburban area, however close to the city center. About 50% of the inhabitants have an immigrant background, some of them third generation as the first immigrants settled in this area in the 1970s others have arrived later and it is an area where many new-coming immigrants settle today.

The “kindergarten” can be characterized as a traditional Norwegian pre-school that follows the national “Curriculum Framework for the Task and Content of Kindergartens”. In general and according to the curriculum, the holistic pedagogy (Educare) in Norwegian Kindergartens has play, care and learning as core values and content.

### 11.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**Teachers and classes.** Approximately one third of the staff in Kindergarten is educated as pre-school teacher, which is a three years university/college study. Additionally, there are assistants educated on a higher secondary level and assistants without relevant formal education. Teachers in primary school normally have at least 4 years higher education (university/college). We will know more about their special skills and educational background when starting data collection with the particular groups. Regarding the composition of the classes, we are aware that there will be some challenges with the languages, as not all children have Norwegian as their mother tongue. For that reason, we are working specifically on preparing the data collection making every step understandable for the children.

**Procedures of contacting practitioners.** After we had chosen the target area, we first contacted the administration leaders of education in the municipality, thereafter the leaders of the schools and pre-schools in the area the institutions are located. It has been important to involve all the different levels of stakeholders and leaders before we asked for consent in the pre-school. This was time-consuming, but a necessity.

## 11.3 PHASES OF WORK

First meetings with the institutions are done, the project is presented for the municipal administration in 2018 and now for the heads of the pre-school and school.

The negotiation of the research process with the professionals involved is still ongoing.

The professionals will assume the role of facilitators and advisors and will cooperate with the researchers in the different steps of implementation. The researcher will be responsible for and will conduct the data collection.

## 11.4 METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 11.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

**Methodological challenges due to the context.** As mentioned before, it was extremely demanding to recruit this site. The time for data collection in school is still not finally decided.

There are challenges due to the timing of the study as we had a late start due to a long non-response period from the municipality. The time before and around Easter in an inconvenient time for the pre-schools and the start of data collection has to be further postponed. For that reason, we will not finish before medio/ultimo May.

The formal demands to the information that should be provided to the parents according to the national regulations (NSD/data protection services) are so complex and demanding that the letter communicates quite badly, the letter almost has a “frightening potential”.

**Methodological challenges with professionals.** There was an outspoken concern if this will be too time-consuming, however this is sorted out now in the planning process.

### 11.4.2 ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

**Ethical reflexions in researching with children.** A main challenge was and is that there has been conducted research studies in this area earlier where the target population felt that they were featured in an unfavourable way in the findings and conclusions of this study. Furthermore, there are both parents and children with problems to understand Norwegian (especially in the pre-school). For that reason we need to present some drawings as well, like the examples from the pilot study in Italy.

**Ethical reflexions in working with professionals.** In general, the professionals are positive (or neutral) to the study and we can expect support in conducting the interviews. By now, no concrete requirements have been raised regarding the professionals' participation in the interview studies. The professionals are concerned with what light the study's findings may throw at their institutions. Furthermore they are reflecting on how to communicate the intentions and content of the study to parents (e.g. how the intentions of the study are presented and explained, how the concrete measures for the data collection are carried out, as well as how to inform about what the children will be exposed to).

## Chapter 12. POLAND

Kamila Wichrowska and Olga Wysłowska (University of Warsaw)

### Abstract

The following study is a part of the Task 2.5 of the ISOTIS project and was conducted in Poland based on the manual developed by the task leaders. This case study involved two groups of children recruited via Warsaw formal educational settings, more specific a public preschool and a primary school. In total 28 children took part in the study (thirteen 4- to 6-year-olds and fifteen 8- to 10-year-olds). Both groups included pupils of socially disadvantaged background. In both contexts within two days children participated in several individual, small group and whole group activities. The general goal of the research was to learn about children's perspectives on inclusive aspects of their educational settings facilitating well-being of all pupils. The following summary of the technical report presents the context and implementation process of the study. Moreover ethical challenges encountered by the research team are outlined. The findings revealed that children relate their well-being in the educational setting to: having the possibility to choose what, where and with whom they want to play, tasty food, setting openness for parental involvement, warm relations with teachers and peers as well as attractive outdoor and indoor space and toys.

**Keywords:** socially disadvantaged children; Poland; ISOTIS project, children wellbeing; children views on inclusion

### 12.1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents Children Study conducted in Poland (part of the ISOTIS Task 2.5). The study was based on the theoretical framework and implementation guidelines included in the manual "Feel good: children's views on inclusion", draft proposal - June 22, 2018 by Giulia Pastori, Valentina Pagani, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli. The general aim of the study was to explore children's perspectives on facilitating elements (resilience factors) to feel good at school within differences; more specific to allow children of the selected sites to express their perspective about what they think about differences (at cultural, somatic, linguistic, socioeconomic etc. level), about their social and cultural identity and about their school context in terms of inclusion, what they identify as quality indicators of school inclusiveness and what they propose to make their school more welcoming and inclusive. The main focus of the Polish research group was to explore perspectives of children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

### 12.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITES

### 12.2.1 SELECTION OF THE SITES

The sites taken into consideration for the Children Study were consistent with those selected for the purposes of the Polish part of the ISOTIS project, namely the cities Warsaw and Łódź. Ultimately, the decision on conducting the study in Warsaw was taken on the basis of the following factors: well established contacts of the Polish researchers involved in the ISOTIS project with educational institutions across the city, positive experiences of collaboration with potential partner institutions (the ones providing services to disadvantaged children) within the CARE and ISOTIS projects, and, lastly, favourable organizational aspects (all members of the Polish research group work in Warsaw on a daily basis, which enabled greater flexibility in adjusting the organization of the study to the institutions' preferences).

### 12.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITES

Warsaw is the capital of Poland and the biggest and most populated city of the country. According to the Polish Central Statistical Office the population of Warsaw is estimated at 1.760 million residents, and it is rising. The unemployment rate in Warsaw is one of the lowest in all cities in the country and the average salary is the highest. Warsaw is divided into 18 administrative districts. The most socially disadvantaged areas of several districts are involved in the city revitalization program (projects aimed at providing children and young adults at risk of social exclusion with a developmentally supportive environment). The settings selected for the study are located in two different districts of the city.

The selected preschool is situated in the Żoliborz district. Żoliborz is one of the central areas of the city and is located on the left bank of the Vistula river. It is the smallest borough of all 18 in the city, with approximately 50,000 inhabitants. The selected preschool is situated in the neighbourhood which used to be considered the most disadvantaged part of the district; however, due to good transportation and favourable location (closeness to the city centre; well-established infrastructure; several well-kept parks with play areas for children) the interest of investors has increased, which has resulted in attracting new inhabitants. Currently the neighbourhood, as well as the whole district, is considered safe and rather wealthy. Nevertheless, several blocks of social flats are located in the neighbourhood. Regarding the population the locality it is rather homogeneous, more specific inhabited by Poles.

The primary school is situated in the Praga-Północ district. The area is separated from Żoliborz just by the Vistula river. The neighbourhood where the selected school is situated is full of contrasts. On the one hand, due to its central location and well developed transportation, it is attractive for investors and old tenement houses and abandoned factories are being restored and turned into art galleries, art centres and lofts. On the other hand, the new investments may abut properties in a very bad technical condition and low standard (e.g. with a shared toilet for inhabitants of several flats; without hot water supply; without central heating). The neighbourhood is commonly regarded as dangerous and its inhabitants as socially disadvantaged (it is involved in the city revitalization program), having problems with the law and with drugs and alcohol abuse. A lot of artistic, educational and social programs dedicated to children and youth at risk of social marginalization have been implemented in the area. As a result some video material presenting the daily life in the neighbourhood is available on youtube, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKvxzGRSqQA>.

The area where the school is located is rather homogeneous in terms of population - it is inhabited by Poles, though there is a considerable Roma group.

### 12.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In the preschool 3 teachers were directly involved in the study. All the professionals were women of Polish origin.

In the school as a rule the class was supposed to have a class teacher and an assistant teacher (specialist responsible for supporting the children with special educational needs and the work of the class teacher). However, at the time when the study was conducted the class teacher was on extended sick leave. Due to the staff shortage the responsibilities of the class teacher were divided between two teachers, hence as a result three teachers were directly engaged in the study, namely two substitute teachers exchanging the role of a leading teacher and an assistant teacher.

## 12.3 PHASES OF WORK

In both contexts two main types of the actions took place. Firstly the preparatory actions concerning activities such as settings selection, establishing contact, elaboration of rules of cooperation (including adjustment of the study scenarios according to the professionals' suggestions) and completion of formal requirements concerning the case study implementation were taken (these actions lasted approximately 6 months in terms of the preschool and 8 months regarding the school). Secondly, the actions related to the implementation of the study with children took place. Within the process of negotiations with professionals in both settings it was decided that the research activities would be conducted within two days preceded by Day '0' dedicated to acquainting children with the researchers and allowing the researchers to learn more about the group of pupils. Outline of the actions conducted within the two days of the research is as follows:

### 12.3.1 PRESCHOOL

#### Day 1

**Phase 1 – Introduction of the study:** Researchers introduced themselves as well as explained the goal of the visit - learning about the children's experiences in their preschool in order to identify its most welcoming aspects and the qualities which could be improved in order to make it more accessible to all children. Next, information concerning the documentation of the activities within the study was provided to the children and the rules of involvement in the activities were discussed. The final step of this phase was to prepare the name cards for the researchers and children.

**Phase 2 – ID cards:** First, one of the researchers presented her own ID card explaining in detail all the elements of the template as well as the idea behind the activity (... knowing who the children enrolled in the preschool are could make the new pupils feel more confident and welcome at the

new place...). During the activity the researchers encouraged children to talk about their ID cards. Each of pupils who had accomplished the task was encouraged to document his/her work. The next step was a group discussion on the activities planned for the following day. The children and researchers exchanged ideas what the most welcoming aspects of the centre were.

In the afternoon, when children had already gone home, the researchers visited the centre and took photos of the places and toys which had been mentioned by the children as welcoming and attractive. The photos as well as the documentation of ID cards (photos, audio and video recordings) were used for preparing the PowerPoint presentation shown to the children on the following day.

## Day 2

**Phase 1 – Revision of the tasks accomplished on the previous day:** The researcher showed the PowerPoint presentation consisting of two parts. The first part included the photos of the ID cards made by the children the previous day (and the audio or videos recordings of children presenting their cards).

**Phase 2 – Brainstorm - the welcoming characteristics of the centre and fields for improvement:** The second part of the presentation consisted of photos and very brief descriptions of places, activities and toys mentioned by the children on the previous day. Based on the slides the group continued the considerations on the advantages of the preschool. When the children seemed to have exhausted the topic, the researchers redirected the discussion to the aspects of the preschool which the children considered worth improving in order to make the place more welcoming to all. The final stage of the discussion was an invitation to the suns and clouds task.

**Phase 3 – Suns and clouds:** During the activity the researchers encouraged children to talk about their works. When a child finished the task, he/she had an opportunity to present his/her work to the chosen researcher and document the presentation and/or the creation process. Finally, the children could stick their sun(s) and cloud(s) on the 'preschool sky'.

**Phase 4 – Trip around the premises:** The children who had finished the suns and clouds task were invited to guide one of the researchers around the centre (a small-group activity). Photos and recordings were made during the trips.

**Phase 5 – Summing up the activities:** When all the volunteers had completed the trip the whole group was invited to sit on the carpet in order to sum up the activities.

## 12.3.2 SCHOOL

### Day 1

**Phase 1 – Introduction of the study:** Researchers introduced themselves as well as explained the goal of the visit - learning about the children's experiences in their school in order to identify its most welcoming aspects and the qualities which could be improved in order to make it more accessible to all children. Next, information concerning the documentation of the activities within the study was provided to the children and the rules of involvement in the activities were discussed. The final step of this phase was to prepare the name cards for the researchers and

children.

**Phase 2 – Discussion on the letter:** The researcher introduced the activity based on a letter describing other academics' experiences from a visit to a different primary school. The researcher read the letter aloud and each part of the letter was discussed with children.

**Phase 3 – ID cards:** First, one of the researchers presented her own ID card explaining in detail all the elements of the template as well as the idea behind the activity (... knowing who the pupils are could make the new students feel more confident and welcome at the new school...). During the activity the researchers encouraged children to talk about their ID cards. Each of pupils who had accomplished the task was encouraged to document his/her work.

**Phase 4 – Summing up:** Volunteers presented their ID cards to the group. Afterwards the researchers briefly presented the activities planned for the following day.

## Day 2

**Phase 1 – Revision of the tasks accomplished on the previous day:** The researcher asked the class to tell the research assistant who came to the class for the first time about the activities conducted on the previous day. Volunteer pupils presented their work.

**Phase 2 – Brainstorm - welcoming and worth improving aspects of the school:** The discussion about the welcoming aspects of the school was initiated. When the topic was exhausted the researcher redirected the discussion to the topic of improvements which could be introduced at their school in order to make all children feel welcome. Finally, the presentation of the suns and clouds templates and explanation of the task took place.

**Phase 3 – Suns and clouds:** Children and adults together rearranged the tables (making four big tables allowing children to work in small groups). At each of the tables there was a group of 3 or 4 children. Various arts & crafts materials were provided to children as well as the templates of suns and clouds and the 'school sky' template. During the task the researcher encouraged children to talk about their ideas.

**Phase 4 – Trip around the school:** Simultaneously to the suns and clouds activity the small groups of children were showing the researcher what they considered the most meaningful places in the school. Photos and recordings were made during the trips.

**Phase 5 – Summing up the activities:** Within the whole group the researcher asked the volunteer pupils to share their experiences from the trips around the school and to present their ideas of the school skies. Lastly, the researcher finished the study by acknowledging children's engagement.

## 12.4 METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 12.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

The main methodological challenge concerned the sample selection. More specifically, as in the Polish study the focus was on identifying inclusive aspects of educational settings as perceived

by native socially disadvantaged children, in our research group occurred questions such as: should settings involving high or low percentage of pupils of such background be included?; in what context (high or low percentage of socially disadvantaged children) it is easier for children to notice inclusive aspects of the settings? As a result the decision on involving one group with just a few and the other with the majority of socially disadvantaged children was taken.

#### 12.4.2 ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

The main ethical challenge concerned gaining children's consents for documenting their works and utterances (photos, audio recordings, videos). Within the process of establishing the legal framework of the study the rules of children's participation were defined, taking into consideration the suggestions of different professionals (legal advisor, ethical committee members, researchers and practitioners), guidelines provided in the study manual and the research literature.

The following rules were considered:

- the children were to be informed about the voluntary involvement in all activities within the study at the beginning of both days of research activities, and about the possibility to withdraw from or join the activities at any time they wished without any negative consequences (oral consent);
- within each phase of the study the children were to be asked if they agreed to be audio recorded or photographed;
- every participant would be asked each time for their permission to document his/her work with a photograph;
- the children would be given the choice if and which pieces of their work might be kept by researchers and which they would like to keep for themselves (e.g. for the parents, friends);
- the decision of the children who did not want to take part in the study or any of the proposed activities or to be audio recorded would be fully respected, i.e. the researchers and teachers would not try to convince them to change their mind;
- even though the researchers tried to foresee all the possible obstacles within each phase of the study, it was taken into consideration that something might happen that would make the children upset, hence the decision on providing all activities (even small-group tours around institutions) in the presence of at least two adults; this arrangement would allow one of the adults to individually support a child in need while the other would continue the activity with the rest of the group.

The researchers felt that the elaborated rules secured children rights. At the same time the researchers could have noticed that on some occasion children 'used' their rights and for example refused their artwork to be photographed without any particular reason (their decision was respected on every occasion). One may say that children were not used to making decisions in such matters and simply had a pleasure of being 'decisive'.

## 12.5 FINDINGS

### 12.5.1 FACTORS PROMOTING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

**Choice in terms of where children spent time.** The factor turned up on several occasions in both places. However, in the preschool, where the children are used to considerable freedom in terms of visiting friends/siblings in other groups and inviting other pupils into their own class, the topic was more strongly highlighted (it turned up on more occasions and more children mentioned it). Moreover, this factor appeared in the context of the younger children as something that they appreciated in their preschool and would like to stay as it was, whereas at school the children referred to this aspect as visible to some extent, though they would appreciate having more occasions to make decisions on where they spent time during breaks and within afterschool time (the majority of the children were enrolled to the after-school center- świelica, organized at school).

**Preschool as a welcoming environment for parents.** This aspect turned up only in the preschool. On some occasions the children mentioned different contexts of the parents' involvement in the life of the preschool, for example while talking about the sofa corner where they could spend time together, or about their parents' visits in the preschool to read books or talk about their profession. Moreover, the researchers observed a few situations of parental involvement in the daily life of the preschool. For example, during one of the visits of the researchers preceding the study, one mother, who had walked her children to the centre, came with the younger son, who was eager to have breakfast with the group, which teachers agreed to. During the meal the mother helped and talked not only with her own children, but also with other pupils. The group was very positive about the presence of the mother, they asked her questions about the baby brother of their friend. The comfortable, positive atmosphere in this situation, but also in others, clearly indicated that parents were frequent guests in the preschool and that the children appreciate their presence.

**Attractive play areas.** In both sites this factor was mentioned as one of the key characteristics making the children feel good on the premises (the children were very keen to describe the different places which they liked; they mentioned many different examples; the topic turned up several times on both days and was mentioned by most of the children). In the preschool the following places were mentioned: two outdoor playgrounds - the small one in front of the centre and the big one combined with a big open space at the back of the centre; the corridor where children might 'drive' toy vehicles; the plastic balls pool; the space in the class with gymnastics ladders and mattresses; the sofa corner in the corridor, where individual children or small groups could spend time with parents or members of the staff; the art room; the exhibition space, where volunteer children placed their art works. At the school the children mentioned: the library, where children might read books, but also do some arts & crafts or use the computers; the playground, *...especially that it was renewed and there is a big ship to play in...*; the corridor on the first floor with gymnastics ladders; the after-school centre rooms; the locker room, which was appreciated because *...it is in the basement and it is like walking to the subway, because it is underground, so it is really cool...*

**Individual and small group educational arrangements.** In both places the children indicated that they appreciated individual and small-group activities organized in places other than their classroom. More specifically, the school children stated they enjoyed working in the pedagogue's room or in the room for sensual integration classes because it was quiet there, they were alone with the adult (or with just a few pupils) and could talk with him/her, and they regarded the activities as attractive. The preschool pupils mentioned that they enjoyed reading books in small groups on the sofa in the corridor. One may say that the children appreciated the friendly and intimate atmosphere of individual and small-group activities.

**Positive relations with the practitioners working at the institution.** Positive relations with different members of the staff were pointed out by the children at both places. Importantly, in both groups the children mentioned the teachers who were present during the research actions. The children indicated that they liked the aforementioned professionals in general e.g.... *because she is nice to me...* or because they organize attractive activities.

**Availability of tasty food.** The children did not refer to the topic directly, but the situations observed by researchers clearly indicated that the availability of tasty food was an important factor making children feel good on the premises. During the snack break at the school the teacher gave the children small cartons of milk. All the children were very eager to get the drink. When one of the girls realized that there were some cartons left (some children were absent that day), she asked the teacher if she might take the milk home for her parents. Before the assistant teacher answered another child approached and said that he would also like to take some more milk home for his brother because there wasn't any at home. As it seemed that more children wanted to ask for the milk, the assistant teacher said that there were only two cartons left, and more children would like to take an additional carton of milk, hence none of children would get one. The assistant teacher was very sensitive explaining the situation and children seemed to understand her decision. Afterwards the teacher explained to the researchers that it was a frequent situation for some children to take the food available at school for their parents or siblings and that she sometimes noticed that pupils came to school without anything to eat. Moreover, the snacks (fruit) and drinks (milk, apple juice) provided at school on occasion are very attractive to children.

### 12.5.2 FACTORS UNDERMINING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

All the factors undermining the well-being of the children presented below were mentioned by the school pupils. Regarding the younger group, the children's discussion concerning what could be improved to make the preschool more welcoming focused on proposals of new ways of using the space and new types of activities that could be introduced, e.g. a dancing space.

**Negative experiences with another pupil.** On several occasions a few pupils stated that they had had negative experiences regarding relations with classmates. For example during the snack break, when one of the boys was drawing, two other boys approached him and started to tease him about his picture. When the researcher reacted the boy said that this was normal and that

the boys in the class often mocked him and that is why he did not like school. One may consider that the boy would mention it as the reason for not liking school when the topic of the factors undermining the children's well-being at school was discussed before the break; however, the boy had not mentioned the issue then. On a different occasion, one of the girls talking about her ID card stated that she would not like to be aggressive anymore and that her classmates often made her very angry, for example by laughing at her weight (the girl had been diagnosed with behavioural disorders). Moreover, a different pupil claimed that children did not want to play with him, though the researchers' observed that the boy's behaviour was extremely discouraging, as he was loud (he often shouted instead of talking), used swear words and was generally overwhelming towards others (also physically).

**Instability of the staff.** Even though the children did not refer directly to the turnover of the staff, there were several situations showing that this was an important issue affecting their well-being at school. For example, even though the class had been informed that the leading researcher would be accompanied by different academics on both days of the study, the children were particularly interested in the reasons for the change. One may say that the children expected to hear that the researcher had not withdrawn because of their behaviour. On another occasion the researcher was present during a conversation of some children who argued who would teach them the following day. One of children said that it did not matter because the person would not withstand their class and leave at some point.

**Rhythm of activities incompatible with children's needs.** Before the study the researchers learnt from the assistant teacher that children usually 'worked nicely' for the first two lessons during the day, but afterwards it was very difficult for them to stay focused and they would start to misbehave. The researcher's observations from Day '0' confirmed that at about 10am (lessons started at 8 am) the children started to lose interest in the activities, stopped following the teacher's instructions, and an episode of aggressive behaviour took place during the break. Also during the days when the research actions took place the children started to lose interest in the activities after two hours of work. One may say that the group was giving clear signals that they needed a longer break at a certain point, or should switch to physical activity; however, due to the school's organizational framework the children's needs in this matter were not sufficiently considered.

**Office supplies and arts and crafts materials not available/not sufficient to needs/expectations of all children.** During the ID cards activity it happened that a few pupils did not have crayons or that the crayons they had were in a very bad condition. One of the boys stated that he had bad crayons, so he would not draw and it would be good if there were the same crayons available to all children at school.

**General malaise.** During the discussion on the factors undermining the well-being at school some children referred to out-of-school / general experiences.

Quotation School; Day 1, Phase 3

--KW-- *Could you tell me about your ID card?*

--Ch3-- *...I like to play football. Others like me, because I am friendly. At school I like to play nothing. I would like to change in myself... I would like to change in myself my life...*

The boy quoted above was not open to clarification questions, and was upset when asked; on seeing that the researcher moved on to the further sections of the ID card. Moreover, the researchers observed that most school pupils had great difficulties in saying positive things about themselves. More specifically, the children found it hard to define what others might like about them or to name what they liked about others. One may say that their vocabulary of positive characteristics was much more limited than their vocabulary of critical and negative expressions. Another example of general malaise was when one of the boys wrote on a cloud that what needed to be improved at the school was *lost youth*.

### 12.5.3 CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS

In the preschool the children's proposals of what could be changed in the setting to make it more welcoming to all children turned out very abstract. More specifically, the pupils proposed organizing a dancing space on the second floor (which would require enlarging the building of the preschool as it is a one-floor building in the first place) with a disco ball, where they could dance to rock and roll music and listen to Michael Jackson's songs. The other idea concerned planting a forest in the playground. The researchers failed to moderate the discussion to other, more down-to-earth topics. Moreover, all the clouds in the 'Suns and Clouds' activity also referred to the positive characteristics of the preschool (or the disco ball and dancing space which the children would like to have). One may say that the children found their preschool welcoming enough and did not feel any need to introduce changes. The only 'doable' proposal that was made was adding the photos from the children's trips around the preschool (one of the conducted activities) and of the preschool sky (collection of children's artworks produced within the 'Suns and Clouds' activity) to the PowerPoint presentation made by researchers and showing it to new coming pupils the following year to introduce them to the preschool context and to inform them about all the great things they would experience. However, it was not an original idea of the children, as during the summary of the children's accomplishments on the first day one of the teachers suggested that the presentation should be shown to other stakeholders of their community (parents, other pupils and teachers). Nevertheless, the researchers added the materials collected during the second day of research actions and provided the preschool with the presentation, which the director decided would be used for the new coming group of children the following year.

Regarding the older group, the children came up with just a few proposals of what could be changed or added to the school in order to make it more welcoming to all children. The proposals concerned: developing a more attractive set of extracurricular activities including field trips (children did not specify what kind of activities they would like, they only used general expressions such as *cool, interesting, nice...*). Additionally, the pupils mentioned that children would feel better at the school if *things* (equipment) *worked well*. The pupils explained that the interactive board in their class had been broken for quite a while, and so had some of the computers in the library. Three boys suggested that a quiet rest area would help the children who were tired of school noise to feel better. Lastly, children stated that every child felt better at school when he/she knew

where their classroom and other important places at school were. The discussion with the children over their proposals did not result in any implementation ideas. The children eagerly accepted the suggestion of the researchers, who proposed preparing a guidebook of the positive features of the school based on the photos and children's statements collected during the trips around the school.

## 12.5.4 EDUCATIONAL/FORMATIVE IMPACT

### 12.5.4.1 On professionals

The researchers asked the teachers about their impressions of the study after the first and the second day of research activities.

#### Preschool teachers

- The teachers claimed that even though they were aware that children felt well in the preschool, it was valuable to hear them talking with external professionals about which characteristics of the place they appreciated the most;
- The teachers stated that they were surprised how much the children enjoyed seeing their works and listening to themselves and their colleagues during the PowerPoint presentation.

#### School teachers

- One of the teachers was positively surprised with the reaction of the children to some questions concerning the letter (the letter was read to the children within the 'Letter' activity), for example when the children said without any hesitation that they knew that when they had a problem they could share it with the teachers at school.
- One of the teachers stated that due to frequent misbehaviour of the children small group activities were not organized in the class, but seeing that children were very engaged in the suns and clouds task while it did not end in a disaster, she decided she would try to work with the pupils within this organizational arrangement;
- One of the teachers was surprised with the fact that the children said nice things to each other during the activities, for example when some pupils stated that at school they liked to play with their classmates, as she had heard mostly negative comments regarding the relations among them;
- One of the teachers was also surprised that children said so many positive things about her, even though she had worked with the group for just a few months and the teacher was surprised to learn how important the library was for the children;

### 12.5.4.2 On children

#### School pupils

The researchers found out from the teachers about the arrangements in which the class usually

worked and were concerned that children were not used to taking part in group discussions or small-group tasks. However, it turned out that putting pupils in the position of experts and the joint work on developing the rules concerning the participation in tasks encouraged the pupils to actively participate in the proposed tasks. But most importantly, children seemed to genuinely enjoy the cooperation with one another.

#### 12.5.4.3 On the context

##### **Preschool**

It is planned that the presentation based on children works will be used as part of the adaptation program for new pupils next year.

##### **School**

After the discussion of the study's results with the teachers, the idea to involve the children in creating a framework of extracurricular activities at school was put forward. More specifically, it was decided that the school pupils (not only from the class but from all lower-primary school classes) would be more actively involved in defining topics of extracurricular classes in the following year.

# ANNEXES

## Appendix A. OBSERVATION TEMPLATE INCLUDED IN THE MANUAL

NAME:	
DATE: ____/____/____	
CLAS:	
OBSERVATION TIME: FROM _____ TO _____	
NAME OF THE TEACHER:	
SUBJECT:	
TOTAL N. OF CHILDREN:	TOTAL OF TARGET CHILDREN:
(IF RELEVANT) NATIONALITY OF CHILDREN WITH IMMIGRANT BACKGROUND (specify if 1°, 2° or 3° generation)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ...</li> <li>- ...</li> </ul>	
KEY-CHILDREN:	
Name	Reason to be considered a key-child:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ...</li> <li>- ....</li> <li>- ....</li> </ul>	
RESEARCHER'S NOTES:	

Description a key-moment and context (place and characteristic of the situation, of the place etc.)

Number of children:

N. of target-children:

Time:

## Appendix B. LETTER/TRIGGER (FORMAL CONTEXT - 9-10 YEARS - STEP 1)

How to introduce the letter to children		
<p>The researcher will explain to children (using a child-friendly, age-appropriate language) that he/she is working at an international project, called ISOTIS, and is interested to know what students across Europe think about their schools. The researcher will tell children that he/she has received a letter from one of his/her [Italian] colleague, reporting some thoughts of the [Italian] pupils her/his colleague has met about their school experience in [Italy] and some questions and curiosity [Italian] pupils have about their school.</p>		
Themes addressed	Text of the letter	Possible questions for the focus group
<b>Presentation of the research</b>	<p>Hi! My name is [Valentina] and I live in [Milano] in Italy. You might have heard of it, [there has been Expo a couple of years ago: many people from all over the world came and visited it!]</p> <p>I am a researcher at the University, the school for adults. What am I searching for, you may ask? Well, I am doing a research about what children across Europe think about their schools. In a few days, my colleague [NAME OF THE RESEARCHER] will come to your class. Since I am very curious about your school, I asked her to bring you this letter.</p>	
<b>Language and communication</b>	<p>Last June I spent one entire day in the class [5^c] at [NAME OF THE SCHOOL] in [Milano]. I met 25 10/11ys old pupils. During the day, I was impressed about the number of languages that the kids could speak... Beside Italian, I can speak just a bit of English, that I have been studying for many years. On the contrary, Fatima - who arrived a couple of months ago from Morocco – could already speak Italian pretty well! Before coming, she was worried because she didn't know a word of Italian. She hoped to learn it quickly to play with her new classmates, but, at the same time, she feared to forget Arabic while learning Italian. Well, that was not at all the case. During my visit, I observed her switching easily from Italian to Arabic. She would greet her Italian classmates saying "Ciao", while with Mohamed one said "Salam aleikum" and the other answered "Aleikum salam"!</p>	<p><i>In her letter, [Valentina] told us about Fatima's story. Fatima was afraid that learning Italian she would forget Arabic. What do you think about her fear?</i></p> <p><i>If a child from another country (like Fatima) arrived in your school, do you think he/she would fear to lose his/her language?</i></p> <p><i>Do you speak different languages in your school?</i></p>
<b>Social relationship</b>	<p>When she was still in Morocco, she was wondering about her new life in Italy and her new school. She was afraid to be different from all the other children and that they would not have room for a new friend. Finally, things were not as bad as she had imagined.</p>	<p><i>Fatima was afraid of feeling different and alone. What do you think about Fatima's fears?</i></p> <p><i>If a child from another country (like Fatima) arrived in your school, do you think he/she would feel different from anyone else?</i></p> <p><i>If a child from another country (like Fatima) arrived in your school, do you think he/she would find new friends in your class?</i></p>
<b>Identity: cultural difference (sub-item: food)</b>	<p>I stayed with the class also for lunch. When we left the classroom to go to the canteen, Mahmoud and Nabeel headed towards the exit of the school where their mothers were waiting for them. The other children explained me that Mahmoud and Nabeel decided to do the ramadan this year. They explained me what ramadan was all about and all the rules they learnt at the religion class. After lunch-break,</p>	<p><i>Mahmoud and Nabeel are missing lunch break and play-time after lunch because they decided to do Ramadan. How do you think they felt in this occasion?</i></p>

	<p>Mahmoud and Nabeel came back. As I approached them, they told me how proud they were of their decision. On the contrary, the teachers were afraid they would faint because the temperatures were very high and the children weren't drinking water all day. For these reasons, the principle of the school asked their parents to bring them home during lunch-time.</p>	<p><i>Has similar episodes ever happened in your classroom?</i></p> <p><i>In your school, are there occasions to learn about different cultural traditions?</i></p> <p><i>How these different cultures get along together?</i></p>
<p><b>Identity: racial difference (sub-item: skin color)</b></p>	<p>During recess we went outside in the school garden. Maria, Zuna and I, making the most of the warm September day, lied down in the grass basking in the sun. Suddenly, Maria said: "I'd better go back to class and put on some sunscreen... if my freckles get sunburned again, mummy will kill me!". And, addressing Zuna, she added: "Lucky you, you run no risk of getting sunburn!". While Maria walked away, Zuna confessed how proud she is very proud of her rich cinnamon complexion. But it hasn't always been like that. When she was in preschool, she had had a very hard time since some of her buddies had made fun of her for that. She told me: "Luckily, nothing like that has ever happened here...". And with a smile she added: "With my new classmates it's easy to leave those sad moments in the past".</p>	<p><i>What do you think Zuna felt in preschool and in primary school, given the different attitudes of their school-mates?</i></p> <p><i>Have you ever experienced similar difficult moments (like children making fun of others)?</i></p> <p><i>Have those moments between children ever happened in your classroom? What has happened? How have you overcome such moments?</i></p>
<p><b>Social inequalities (if relevant for your context)</b></p>	<p>Towards the end of the school day, the teacher Angela started illustrating the school-trip to Rome planned for the end of October. While we were leaving the classroom, Mauro – who lives in a social housing nearby the school - approached the teacher Angela to tell her that his parents did not paid the sum for the school-trip yet and he was a bit worried. Angela said that he should not worry and promised that Mauro will come to Rome in any case.</p>	<p>[PARTNERS WITH LOW-INCOME AS TARGET GROUP WILL INCLUDE SOME QUESTIONS THEY CONSIDER RELEVANT ON THIS TOPIC]</p>
<p><b>School organization</b></p>	<p>When I got home, I was exhausted and yet still excited about the experience! I found this school very interesting, but I don't know if schools in other countries are similar to this one. Could you tell me a bit about your school? Bye bye from Italy! Valentina</p>	<p><i>[Valentina] was curious about your school. Do you think that your school is similar to the one in [Italy] she has visited?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think [Valentina] could find interesting/special or surprising about your school?</i></p>

## Appendix C. ID CARD TEMPLATES

### EXAMPLE OF ID CARD TEMPLATE (9-10 YEARS)

# My ID Card

Name\*:

Age:

I was born in:

This is me... (brief self-presentation)

If I could change something of me, I would change...

My portrait:

When I grow up, I would like to be...

If I say school, I think of...

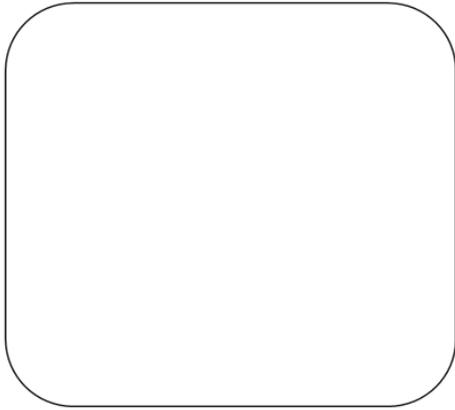
\*To further ensure anonymity the child's name can be substituted by a nickname

# My ID Card

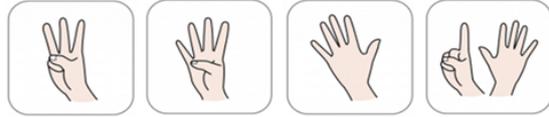
Name\*:

Classroom  
name:

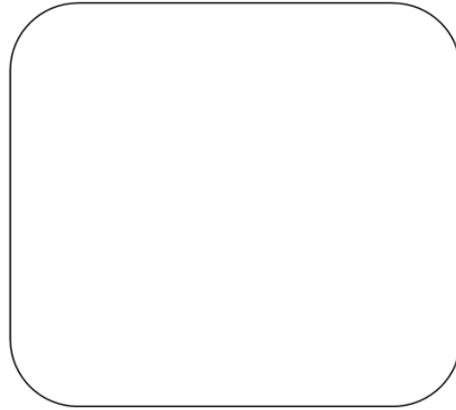
My portrait:



Age:



When I grow up, I'll be...



\*To further ensure anonymity the child's name can be substituted by a nickname

## Appendix D. EXAMPLE OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### I declare if I agree to participate to ISOTIS research

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER explained us the research she/she is doing on schools in Europe with his/her colleagues of the ISOTIS project of other European countries (Olga, Elga, Katarina and many others). She/he asked my class if we can help her/him to know better our school. She/he would like to tell to children of other countries and to the ISOTIS group how is our school. She/he proposed us to do some discussions, drawings etc. She/he explained that Italian law<sup>8</sup> (CUSTOMIZE) does not allow to use our real names. To sign drawings and texts, we can choose a new name to use instead of ours. At the end, NAME OF THE RESEARCHER answered to all our questions.

I \_\_\_\_\_  
(NAME AND SURNAME)

I understood that:



- I can choose whether or not I wish to participate to this research



RISPETTARE IL SILENZIO  
QUANDO E' IL MOMENTO



- I am free not to talk during activities, if I wish



- I am allowed to stop participating in any moment



- I could sign with a new name to be used during the research instead of mine

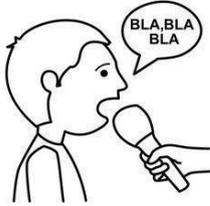


<sup>8</sup> Dlgs 196/2003 art. 13

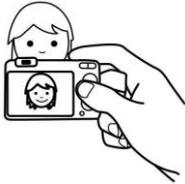
I agree to:



- participate in a research project



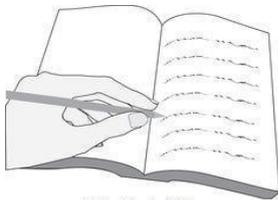
- the recording of my voice



- be photographed



- show pictures, texts, drawings I will produce to other children and to the ISOTIS researchers



© Can Stock Photo

- That (NAME OF THE RESEARCHERS) can tell about this experience to other people or even writing a book about it



- That, in the book or while talking about it, (NAME OF THE RESEARCHERS) can include pictures they took, my texts or drawings



Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E. PROPOSALS ANALYSED ACCORDING TO THE CODING TREE

TOPIC	PROPOSALS	COUNTRY WHERE THE PROPOSAL WAS MADE
<b>School organization (subtopic: learning)</b>	<p>Cancelling subjects</p> <p>Making subjects easier</p> <p>No stressful exams</p> <p>Changing some lessons</p>	<p>CZ,</p> <p>IT informal,</p> <p>EL informal</p>
<b>Social relationships (subtopic: conflict)</b>	<p>Need for adults to help with conflicts among children: children suggested that teachers or parents could help children in solving conflicts or situations of exclusions</p>	<p>CZ,</p> <p>IT informal</p>
<b>Diversity (subtopic: Language → school valuing L1)</b>	<p>Bilingual signs in the school</p> <p>Providing visual forms of presentation of the school, the spaces and the activities to newcomers</p>	<p>CZ,</p> <p>PL,</p> <p>IT preschool</p>
<b>Social relationships (subtopic: inclusion/acceptance; friendship)</b>	<p>Supporting newcomers and being friendly with them</p> <p>Creating the conditions so that a newcomer would feel welcome such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make a doll for them</li> <li>• have a party and a cake</li> <li>• create friendship bracelets</li> <li>• create a big poster with “Welcome” in different languages</li> </ul>	<p>DE,</p> <p>EL informal,</p> <p>IT preschool and primary school</p>
<b>School organization (subtopic: space)</b>	<p>Improvement of the school’s structural facilities</p>	<p>EL informal,</p> <p>IT informal,</p> <p>IT primary school, PL</p>
<b>School organization (subtopic: Space)</b>	<p>Making the school more beautiful</p> <p>Decorating the space with bright colours and smiling emoticons</p>	<p>EL informal,</p> <p>IT primary school and informal, PL,</p>

		IT preschool
<b>School organization (sub-topic: Play)</b>	Creating some leisure spaces in the school	EL informal, IT primary school and informal, PL
<b>School organization (sub-topic: Food)</b> <b>Social inequality (economic poverty)</b>	Free canteen to avoid economic inequalities	EL informal
<b>Language (sub-topic: Support in learning L2 from teachers)</b>	L2 teaching mediation and support in L2 Involving parents as linguistic mediators	EL informal, IT primary school, IT preschool

## Appendix F. DOCUMENTATION PRODUCED BY THE GREEK TEAM

Figure F.1 *Cake and masks*



Figure F.2 *Drawings to welcome the “newcomers”*



Figure F.3 Children's IDs



Figure F.4 Suns and clouds



Figure F.5 Presentation of all the material that was produced during the study



## Appendix G. ID CARD TEMPLATE USED BY THE GREEK TEAM

Όνομα: **Η ταυτότητά μου**

Ηλικία: **Το πορτρέτο μου**



Όταν μεγαλώσω θα γίνω...

Το αγαπημένο μου παιχνίδι είναι...



ISOTIS

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT  
TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN SOCIETY**



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