ISOTIS

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN SOCIETY

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

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION, USING THE ISOTIS VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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

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AUTHORS

Chapter 1: Katharina Ereky-Stevens

Chapter 2: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Eleanor Brock

Chapter 3: Mareike Trauernicht, Juliane Schünke, Yvonne Anders

Chapter 4: Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, Giulia Pastori

Chapter 5: Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků

Chapter 6: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Mirjam Pardis

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PARTNERS INVOLVED

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

This report presents some key messages which address design and implementation, and focus on characteristics which we identified as those that most shaped our interventions: organisational support; practitioners' professional experience, knowledge, motivation and skills; parents' time motivation, skills and openness to share their experiences; participants' access to ICT and ICT confidence and skills, and a digital platform that is attractive and user-friendly. Key messages are followed up by recommendations for practice which guide some considerations regarding the political environment needed to facilitate the success of interventions aiming to support parents in bringing up their children in multi-lingual environments. Emphasis is put on embeddedness of initiatives in a wider political and institutional culture that respects and pays attention to language beliefs and language practices in families with diverse language backgrounds, and supports maintenance of heritage cultures and languages.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

KATHARINA EREKY-STEVENS

The ISOTIS project addresses issues raised by the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of European countries. Educational disadvantages going beyond disadvantages that arise from low socioeconomic status have been found for children who learn the school language as a second language (Leseman & van Tuijl, 2006; Stanat & Christensen, 2006). With the number of children with language backgrounds different to the school language increasing (Akgündüz et al., 2015a; Eurostat, 2015), this proposes challenges for Europe's education systems. Changes are needed, with a curriculum and pedagogy that positively addresses cultural and linguistic diversity, and teachers with competencies to interact in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context. For parent- and family- support systems in increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse societies, approaches are required that respond to the needs of families facing the task of integrating their heritage culture and background with the new cultural context they are living in. When integrating into new cultural communities, families have to renegotiate their beliefs, values and practices. When children start to attend preschool or school, this process can significantly affect family engagement with the school and teachers, and with their children's learning. Family support programmes need to respond to and strengthen home learning and educational partnerships in culturally and linguistically complex contexts.

With the aim of contributing to effective support for parents and families with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ISOTIS WP3 collected research evidence and expert knowledge on the best practices in supporting families of disadvantaged groups, including those with other cultural and language backgrounds, in providing stimulating home learning environments. A three-step procedure was applied, starting with an in inventory of promising and effective parent and family support programmes (Cadima, Nata, Evangelou, & Anders, 2017), which was followed by in-depth case studies (Cohen et al., 2018) that identified effective characteristics and generated recommendations for development specifically focussing on the ISOTIS target groups.

This report brings together the work done as part of the third step, which was to develop and test ICT-facilitated interventions for parents and professionals working with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. A main component of those interventions was the use of technology (the ISOTIS VLE) to address some of the difficult issues arising in parent support – particularly in diverse contexts, and to stimulate and empower stakeholders in multilingual and multicultural environments. An essential part of this task was to co-create content for the ISOTIS virtual learning environment (Pastori, Mangiatordi, & Pagani, 2019b) – a virtual learning tool to support professionals in dealing with diversity – and to test the tool when implementing interventions which make use of the VLE.

Support for language learning and the issues arising in culturally and linguistically diverse societies with non-native speakers is one of ISOTIS' key topics. The focus of the ISOTIS WP3 VLE task is on families managing and making best use of the several languages and language resources present in their life in supporting child development and learning. Thus, content developed for the VLE WP3 aims at supporting family engagement with multiple languages and

cultures. More specifically, the aims are to facilitate and strengthen:

- **<u>Belief in the value</u>** of heritage-language/multi-lingual competences
- **<u>Family language practices</u>** that make good use of family language resources in order to facilitate engagement with the home language, as well as parent engagement in child learning in school (or preschool)
- **<u>Management of several languages</u>** present in a family's life, including the heritage languages and the (dominant) school (preschool) language

1.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The **bio-ecological systems model of personal development**, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) is the overarching framework of the ISOTIS project. The model proposes that, as children develop, direct and indirect experiences in their different environments all contribute to their development. To understand human development, all contexts (the entire ecological system) have to be taken into account. Time is an important factor, affecting contexts and their significance in driving child development over time.

Importantly, the bio-ecological framework not only assumes system influences on child development, but sees the child as an active creator of its environment, shaping the system according to interests and needs. In line with Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, the key principle of the **transactional model** is that children and parents both bring their individual characteristics, and both change as a result of their interaction experiences (=transaction). In the context of language experiences and development, children are seen as active agents who interact with other social agents (e.g. parents and siblings) – all using their resources to form and negotiate language choices and language practices together with their linguistic and social identities (De Fina, 2012; Ochs 1996). This dynamic means that the development of the child's language knowledge, skills, preferences and views are neither a function of the child alone, nor the context alone (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000). Sameroff's model of transactional regulation (Sameroff, 2000) views culture, family, individual parents and children as part of a regulatory system, where different levels interact with each other in influencing behaviour and development. An understanding of this regulatory system is seen as the basis for intervention.

In applying the bio-ecological model of development to language socialisation and language acquisition, this framework demonstrates that to fully address questions related to children's language acquisition, proximal processes in the child's immediate environment (micro-system) as well as broader issues such as language ideologies of the social agents in each system, and parental beliefs about how to support child learning as well as the support of the wider family and community, have to be taken into account. Family language practices are influenced by parental language beliefs and parental language learning goals, attitudes and intentions which all contribute to the planning and management of language use at home (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008). The study of **family language policy** is concerned with exactly this intersection: how parental language beliefs and attitudes (which reflect the wider societal ideology) influence parental choices in terms of language use and strategies to shape and support child language learning at home (De Houwer, 1999; Tannenbaum, 2012). Commonly, different language

ideologies exist in different contexts or micro-systems; they can be explicit or implicit in nature, and create tensions that can direct family language practices – often towards the dominant language of the country multi-lingual families live in (King, 2000).

In bringing up their children, parents need to move between different micro-systems, each reflecting belief systems and ideologies. Social agents in different contexts need to build connections, communicate effectively and work together with others in those different micro-systems to support child learning. In multi-cultural contexts, this requires multi-cultural competencies – for parents as well as others involved in supporting child learning and development, e.g., educators/ teachers in the preschool or school, or other professionals supporting parents or children. The construct of **global competence** is therefore of significance for the WP3 VLE task. Education towards global competence has been recognised as essential to help develop more inclusive societies (e.g., OECD, 2018). The foundations of global competence are value for cultural diversity, the promotion of cultural awareness and respectful interactions in increasingly diverse societies. Within this framework, work has been done to support evidence-based decisions on how school can help to prepare students to become global citizens. The importance of professionals' attitudes and practices with culturally diverse children has been highlighted, with a focus on professionals' **multi-cultural beliefs** and **multi-cultural skills**. In the context of early interventions, the construct of **cultural sensitivity** has been identified as essential in supporting professionals to respectfully interact with culturally diverse families. The construct recognises that in order to incorporate their practices in unfamiliar contexts of diverse values and beliefs, professionals need to assess their beliefs, practices and values in relation to the families' beliefs, practices and values (Gardiner & French, 2011). In the context of ISOTIS VLE task, WP3, beliefs about multi-lingualism and strategies to support children's multi-lingual development are of particular importance. Multi-lingualism is viewed as a resource, with potential benefits for individuals and society (Council of the European Union, 2014).

In the context of parent support for multi-lingual up-bringing, this links well with a **resource-based approach** to early intervention, embedded in family system intervention models (e.g. Dunst & Trivette, 2009). The fundamental assumption of the resource-based model is that families and children are embedded within a number of ecological systems, and that child development and family functioning can be supported by assets and strengths within those systems. Thus, in order to support families successfully, personal resources need to be considered in their interplay with processes, contexts and time (Trivette, Dunst & Deal, 1997).

Figure 1.1: Theoretical framework

Values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, knowledge and skills of social actors

Regarding heritage languages and dominant language

Language choices and planning with regards to child learning /language acquisition

Regarding heritage languages and dominant language

Regarding heritage languages and dominant language

Regarding heritage languages and dominant language

Child development /language acquisition

Child (language) interaction with social actors [Focus on family language practices]

Macrosystem: attitudes and ideologies of the culture (cultural values, beliefs, customs, laws)

Extosystem: workplace, support services, school board, media, legal services, etc.

Mesosystem

Microsystems: immediate and extended family, neighbourhood, preschool and school

• Social Actors: parents, siblings, grandparents, peers, educators, teachers, etc.

Individual child: age, gender, health etc.

Chronosystem: time (socio-historical conditions and time since life events) With transitions as a context for significant change

1.2 THE ISSUE

A 2011 UNESCO report entitled 'enhancing learning for children from diverse backgrounds' states that 'language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment' (UNESCO, 2011, p.13). The report argues that respect for the languages of persons belonging to different linguistic communities is 'essential to peaceful cohabitation'. This is framed within UNESCO's mandate and commitment to quality education for all and to cultural and linguistic diversity in education (UNESCO, 2003a), and a response to research carried out in the context of linguistic and cultural discontinuity between home and educational institutions (UNESCO, 2011).

Linguistic and cultural discontinuity between home and school has been shown to interfere with children's learning of their heritage language (UNESCO, 2011). In a context where the heritage language of the family differs from the language of instruction in educational settings, children experience early on that languages are valued differently, and there is a risk that they perceive their heritage culture and language as having less value. Yet, knowledge of the family heritage

language is important for children's development of cultural identity and strong family connections. It has been argued that the family language is associated with positive emotions, stories and intimacy in social life (Guardado, 2008), and that it therefore has important emotional values, enables people to express their complex and intimate emotions (Kheirkhah, 2016; Pavlenko, 2004) and helps them to communicate effectively with the closest family members. Heritage language learning is therefore seen as important for the development and maintenance of family ties and close parent-child relations (Tannenbaum, 2012).

Loss of the heritage language can affect children's self-esteem and interfere with their learning in school. In the context of linguistic and cultural diversity, mother-tongue based instruction has shown to promote children's school enrolment, transitions between home and school, parent-school communication, and children's success in school (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Kioko, Mutiga, Muthwii, Schroeder, Inyega, & Trudell, 2008; Kosonen, 2005; Benson, 2002).

In the early years, family interactions are the main site for children's encounters with the heritage language, and parents and other family members and caregivers have the strongest influence on first language acquisition (Pesco & Crago, 2008). Family interactions are also the main context in which tensions between the use of heritage and school languages can play out, thus determining language maintenance and shift (Kheirkhah, 2016).

Parents' attitudes, wishes and goals (which are related to their experiences of migration and language learning, and ideologies of the society) play an important role in this dynamic, shaping language choices and parents' attempts to promote their children's language learning (Caldas, 2012; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; King & Fogle, 2006; Kirsch, 2012; Piller, 2001). Many minority parents have dual language goals – they want their children to learn the home language and be proud of their culture and heritage, and they also want their children to be successful in school, mastering the language of instruction (UNESCO, 2011). The desire to maintain the heritage language is often emotionally motivated – and driven by the wish to maintain strong and positive relations between all family members (Kheirkhah, 2016). Parental aims related to children's language development are also motivated by parents' impact beliefs, and their expectations about their children's language and literacy development (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; De Houwer, 1999). What constitutes good conditions for children's language development is often assessed in relation to educational institutions children are enrolled in, and the language promoted in those institutions (Schwartz & Moin, 2012).

Differences between parents' expressed desires and their actual language behaviours with their infants and young children have been found: Over time, parents with dual language goals tend to focus more on promoting the learning of the majority language than on their expressed desire for heritage language learning. This can lead to subtractive bilingualism, a process which can start very early on and accelerate as families are getting ready to enrol their children in educational institutions (UNESCO, 2011).

Importantly, children play an important role in driving family language interactions. As they increasingly spend time in educational institutions they might wish to use and identify more with the language of instruction, and the influence of peer contact is significant here (Caldas, 2006;

Yamatoo, 2001). At home, children might seem more involved and respond more positively when using the school language; they might protest against the use of the heritage language. For children in those contexts to maintain and develop their heritage language skills, families might have to have strict language rules (Tuominen, 1999). Strategies parents use are: reminding children to use the heritage language, requesting translations, or modelling translating sentences into the heritage language. Parents might perceive that directing or constraining children's language choices affects their responsivity, the conversational flow of interactions, and causes tensions in the family (Kheirkhah, 2016). In response, parents might adjust to (or at least accommodate) children's choices – even against their own language ideologies (Fogle, 2012; Luykx, 2005).

Thus, in a context where the home language is different from the language of instruction, the transitions from learning the heritage language to learning the language of instructions can happen too soon, or too abruptly, and with decreasing support for heritage language development, heritage language can easily get lost (UNESCO, 2011). Importantly, fluency and literacy in the mother tongue has been shown to promote second language learning, thus children with good skills in their home language will be better prepared for school (UNESCO, 2011). Preventing the loss of heritage language skills is particularly important in contexts where the heritage language is the child's first language, and where parents are not fluent in the majority language. Yet, in families with other language backgrounds, children are likely to become dominant in the societal language or to become passively bilingual as they grow up. (King & Fogle, 2006; Tuominen, 1999).

Language acquisition takes a long time (Cummins, 1991), and children with language backgrounds other than the language of instruction in school will need support to continue to develop their home language, as well as ongoing support to acquire skills in the language of instruction to succeed in school. To ensure first language/heritage language learning, young children need to be supported through formal instruction and language interactions with adults with high levels of literacy skills, who encourage children to expand their talk and expose children to high quality language experiences through oral stories and print (Lao, 2004; Hart & Risley, 1995; Eickelkamp, 2008; Johnston, 2006; UNESCO, 2011). The family home has the main role to play in heritage language maintenance, and thus parents have a crucial role in managing this challenging task. Parents may need support in how to raise their children to become bilingual/multilingual, and how to ensure children continue to develop proficiency in their first language when attending educational institutions with a different language. In some circumstances, a families' heritage language may not be spoken by anyone in the family, and these special circumstances can involve professionals and other supportive adults working towards language recovery.

Support from the community, and collaborations between all those involved in children's learning is essential. Professionals can play an important role in supporting parents, yet few guidelines and little training exist on how to support families in these contexts. This has led to calls for training, delivery and study of effective approaches to involve families in young children's bilingual/multilingual learning and education, and to encourage parents to continue to use their home language. Showing respect, listening, and communicating openly with parents about the

roles of language in child development, and the roles parents have in supporting language development are important principles in working with parents in this context (UNESCO, 2011).

The transition to preschool or school, and the school's approach to bi/multilingual education can be significant in determining children's language development in the different languages. Staff in school and preschool have an important role to play to involve families with other language backgrounds in their children's education and transition to schooling. Importantly, in a context of cultural and/or lingual differences between the home and the (pre)school, involving families is not only about collaboration that facilitate children's bi/multilingual development. Parental involvement in their children's learning is important for children's education and up-bringing in general. Research has shown that it has the potential to enhance children's academic achievement (Melhuish et al., 2008a,b) and can facilitate factors such as parent-teacher relationships, school attendance, parent self-confidence, and child mental health (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen 2001; Jeynes 2005). Parent school partnerships have the potential to enhance parental involvement in child learning. Different schools and teachers can have different approaches to trying to get parents involved, and parents can feel more or less ready to get involved, depending on their own educational experiences, and the level at which they feel comfortable when communicating with staff and other parents in school and preschool. If parents had very different experiences during their own schooling, and if they have difficulties with the school language, they are more likely to experience factors that complicate their involvement in their children's learning. Studies have demonstrated differences across cultures in parents' beliefs about how children learn, their aims for children's development, and their approaches to bringing up children (e.g., Harkness & Super, 1996; van Kleeck, 1994) which can influence parental involvement with school (and thus child learning) (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Thus, important factors to consider when supporting parents with other cultural and language backgrounds are parents' perceptions of the role they play in their child's education, and how confident they feel in their own abilities to support learning (Brock & Edmunds, 2010).

1.3 LINKS WITH PREVIOUS ISOTIS WP3 WORK

The short literature review above on the issue pointed towards a lack of knowledge and a lack of programmes that specifically focus on supporting families/parents with other cultural and language backgrounds in bringing up their children in multicultural and multi-lingual contexts. ISOTIS WP3 put together an inventory of promising and evidence-based programmes that address the needs of ITOSIT target groups in seven European countries (Cadima et al., 2017). In line with the literature review in this report, the vast majority of parent and family-focused support services and programmes that had been identified for the inventory, did not appear to explicitly target multicultural and multilingual aims. The report argues that there should be more recognition of the value of the home language as an asset for language learning and as fundamental for the development of (cultural) identity. While some of the programmes explicitly express the value of bi/multilingual development, only very few of the programmes that were included in the inventory explicitly refer to the aim of promoting the use of heritage language at home. The underlying assumption of such programmes is that when interacting with their children, using the language that parents are most competent in, will ensure higher quality language interactions, and thus better development of first language skills in young children. Skills in the

first language in this context are seen to support second language learning, and thus to facilitate a balanced bi/multilingual language development.

In line with the WP3 inventory, the results of the WP3 case studies (Cohen et al., 2018) confirmed the finding that in otherwise very promising or successful parent/family support programmes which address ISOTIS target groups, the support of first language/heritage language development seems to not be considered at all, or not considered in a well-coordinated way, with consistent plans lacking. The findings of the case studies thus further underlined a need for the development of shared understanding and guidelines with regards to interventions explicitly addressing language use and support when working with families with diverse language backgrounds.

With the ISOTIS VLE task in mind, the use of ICT to facilitate parent support programmes was of particular interest to the WP3 inventories as well as the case studies. The results of the inventory (Cadima et al., 2017) showed great variation in the extent to which ICT was used, and the report argues that there is a lot of uncovered potential of ICT use in parenting and family support programmes. The report points towards the potential of ICT to foster outreach and compliance of participants, to provide new ways of networking and thus help building communities, and to integrate the heritage language of families within programmes. At the same time caution is expressed, based on challenges ISOTIS target groups may face when accessing and making use of ICT. If access to ICT is more difficult for those that are most disadvantaged, the use of ICT to support family programmes may add to issues of inequality rather than help to work towards more equal programme access, engagement and benefits for all.

WP3 case studies (Cohen et al., 2018) showed that ICT was not usually planned as a programme component, but often dependent on the particular circumstances in the context of programme delivery. Practitioners and parents positively referred to the use of ICT if they had selected particular technologies that worked for them. In such instances, ICT was recognised as a valuable tool for teaching or parent support, for translations, for communication, and also to help facilitate the creation of relevant learning experiences. However, mixed opinions and beliefs were expressed by practitioners and parents who commonly expressed frustration with the fact that when making IT a programme component, there were usually too many problems with access, often referring to issues with the internet. Importantly, the WP3 case study report argues that ICT initiatives in parent and family focused support may work best through a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach.

1.4 PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISOTIS VLE

The main principle guiding the development of the ISOTIS VLE (Pastori et al., 2019b) was to initiate and enable collaborations between researchers and research participants (teachers, other professionals supporting parents, and children), who were invited to participate in creating content and materials for the VLE. Involving stakeholders in co-creative processes, and building on their cultural and linguistic resources were key design principles, and reflected the ISOTIS aims to increase engagement and empowerment of stakeholders, and contribute to enriched and intercultural curriculum and programme development.

The VLE was developed to provide a set of functions, sources and suggested activities (specific to each WP and the context of interventions) (Pastori et al., 2019b): a **repository of resources** (e.g. information on main topics, and guidelines for practice in classrooms, families, and family support work), a **social networking infrastructure** (facilitating communication and exchange through pages that adopt social media layouts), a **community of practice** (with shared working spaces for professionals, parents and children). To support involvement of stakeholders in co-creative processes, the VLE had a **multilingual interface**, with the aim to include as many languages of the research participants as feasible.

In accordance with the theoretical framework, content created for the WP3 VLE was developed to suit parent support work in linguistically diverse contexts by building on family resources and by supporting professionals and parents in processes of sharing, reflection, documentation and communication. In line with ISOTIS VLE principles, the following aims guided the design of content for the platform (see also Pastori, Mangiatori, & Pagani, 2019a):

Valuing family languages and cultural background. Raising awareness of multiple languages, creating an open atmosphere in which decisions on language use and strategies to promote language learning are considered and debatable, contextualising the use of heritage language within the context of multilingualism.

Promoting agency of all stakeholders. Empowering practitioners and families to create content for the platform, based on their individual experiences, and **reflections** on those.

Using the resources available. Making use of different languages and different experiences with education systems present in families in designing learning experiences for the platform. Emphasising the value of family language practices (in the heritage language) for children's learning and preparation for school.

Strengthening the community. Promoting community bonds, facilitating communication and collaboration between stakeholders, encouraging and supporting networking between stakeholders.

To facilitate coherence across WPs and to ensure content that was developed matched the principals mentioned above, a cross-WP VLE template was designed. The template suggested a shared structure for presentation of content, and invited all partners to assess whether content that is created is in coherence with ISOTIS values, and in coherence with intervention methods.

1.5 CONTEXT

Design of content for the VLE, and implementation and evaluation of VLE-based interventions for WP3 took place in four countries: the Czech Republic, England, Germany, and Italy. Contexts varied across countries. The work was predominately carried out in cooperation with community services offering support to families and parents; in Italy, work was carried out in schools. Cooperating practitioners were community workers, public librarians, family learning/parent

tutors, and teachers. The focus was on supporting families with language backgrounds other than the school language and children at preschool/early school age. The researchers established a working relationship with the institution/organisation and co-designed parent support intervention activities in cooperation with parents and practitioners in the participating institutions/organisations.

Institutions/organisations participated in the design phase, and delivered interventions to families that made use of the resources, which were co-created in co-operation with ISOTIS. Participating parents were part of the local community, and users of services offered by the participating institution/organisation. Intervention activities focussed on multiculturalism and multilingualism, and promoting heritage language and culture in linguistically and culturally complex contexts.

Figure 1.2: Context

England

- Leicestershire; provider of adult learning services
- Locations: adult learning centre, children's centre, primary school
- 4 practitioners (family learning tutors), 3 small groups of parents (n=11)
- parents with language backgrounds other than English and young children

Germany

- Berlin-Kreuzberg; provider of the parent programme 'Rucksack'
- Location: local preschool
- 1 practitioner, 1 group of parents (N=6)
- (Mainly) Turkish families with children soon to enter school

CONTEXT

Czech Republic

- Ostrava, 3 districts with large Roma populations
- Community centre, households in neighbourhood, public library branch
- 7 public librarians, 1 community worker, 2 teachers, and 8 parents
- Romany parents with young children

Italy

- Milan
- 2 primary schools, 1 lower secondary school
- 5 teachers and parents of children of three classrooms (N=134)
- high percentage of children and parents with immigrant backgrounds, mainly Arabic and Maghrebian

5

1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH AND RESEARCH PHASES

In order to develop content for the ISOTIS VLE and to test the digital tool when implementing interventions which make use of the VLE, a design-based research approach was employed (Pastori et al., 2019b) In each context of development and implementation, the research process consisted of three main phases: the exploratory phase, the co-design phase, and an implementation and evaluation phase.

Figure 1.3: Research approach and research phases
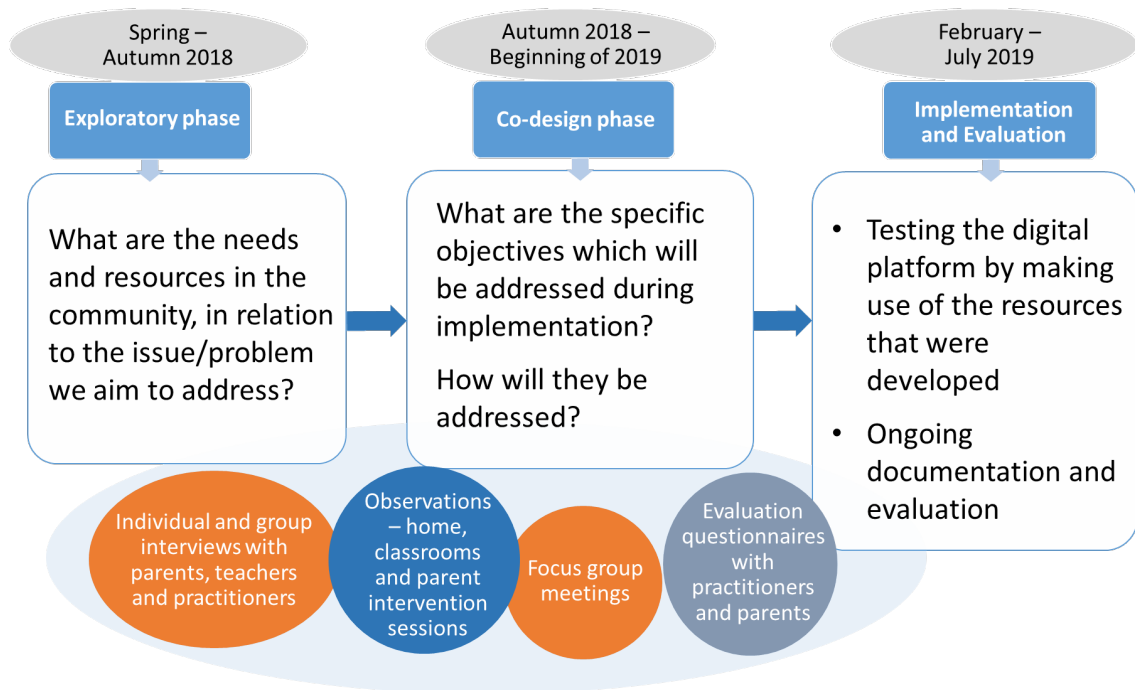
1.6.1 EXPLORATORY PHASE

Interviews and group discussions, and observations of routines and activities (either in family homes, or in primary school classrooms, or during parent support sessions) were carried out to gather information on several issues. First – regarding families – the resources and needs of families in relation to the heritage and school languages, the use of ICT, and the interaction with the pre/school. Second – regarding the organization/institution and the practitioners – practitioners' experiences, resources and views on heritage language support, support of bilingual families in preparation for school, and the use of a digital platform to support work with families.

In each area, the following themes were addressed: i) identity/understanding and knowledge; ii) perceptions/representations; iii) the level of declared programme/pedagogy and/or the level of practices, both from the perspective of practitioners and parents. In addition, information was collected on outreach, other resources that practitioners have access to in order to support parents, and resources that parents have in order to engage in the intervention and support their children's learning (e.g. socio-demographic characteristics, time, financial resources, ICT access, support and skills).

1.6.2 CO-DESIGN PHASE

Individual and group meetings with practitioners and parents were organised, first, to introduce and review suggestions for intervention activities and content and functions of the ISOTIS VLE. Feedback was sought, with a focus on usefulness, feasibility and attractiveness. Second, practitioners and (in some contexts) parents were introduced to the digital platform in order to assess how functions could be used in practice, and to train participants in using of the platform.

Third, suggestions for activities were revised, and content for the VLE was designed accordingly. Finally, plans for implementation and evaluation were specified.

1.6.3 MAIN FEATURES OF IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

During the co-design phase, a range of resources were developed for the VLE, including descriptions of experiences for parents to reflect on, and descriptions of activities for practitioners and parents, or parents and children to engage in. Practitioners taking part in the interventions chose some activities which they integrated into their ongoing support work with families.

Content created during the co-design phase was presented on the VLE platform. Some resources were prepared in the home languages of the participating families. In addition, use was made of the multi-lingual function of the platform, which allowed for content to be translated 'automatically' into the users' languages.

Implementation included interactions of practitioners and parents with the platform – during sessions which took place with groups of parents and practitioners, or with families accessing the platform at home. One of the features of implementation was to initiate collaboration between research participants (practitioners, parents, children), who were invited to create contents and materials for the VLE. As part of the intervention activities, participants were given the option to create materials to upload in the VLE (drawings, pictures, photos, audio- and video-files) with the aim to share those with selected individuals or groups. Implementation was accompanied by ongoing documentation and evaluation.

Table 1.1: Main features of monitoring and evaluation

General Overview: Aims and methods of data collection		
	Parents	Practitioners
Pre-Implementation	**Parent self-evaluation questionnaire.** Focusing on perceived importance of their heritage language, and strategies used to support children's learning of heritage and school language (including ICT).	
During-Implementation	**Researcher participant observations.** **Group reflections** on the materials prepared for the sections 'observe and reflect'. Focusing on parents' and children's language identity, competencies and use, family language practices (including oral storytelling practices), and experiences with the education system. **Engagement in activities** and with the VLE (qualitative documentation	**Practitioner informal feedback.** **Group reflections** on the materials prepared for the sections 'observe and reflect'. **Experiences** of using resources and engagement with activities. **Practitioners' written feedback.** Focusing on the quality of VLE resources and how they could be

	– mainly **observations** and descriptive field notes; other options: pictures & video-recordings, informal conversations before and after sessions. Focus on clarity, feasibility, level of engagement and enjoyment. **Use of the VLE** – observations carried out directly in the VLE. Focus on quantity of use, engagement in forum or on the noticeboard.	used during implementation (usefulness, attractiveness, clarity, feasibility, parent response and engagement) **Researcher participant observations.** **Engagement in activities and with the VLE.** Focus on clarity, feasibility, level of engagement and enjoyment. **Use of the VLE** – observations carried out directly in the VLE. Focus on quantity of use, engagement in forum or on the noticeboard.
Post-Implementation	**Parent self-evaluation questionnaire.** Focus on perceived importance of their heritage language, and strategies used to support children's learning of heritage and school language (including ICT). **Parent focus-group discussion.** Reflections on their answers to questions on the self-evaluation questionnaire, and the learning that took place through participation.	**Practitioner evaluation questionnaires.** Focusing on assessing which VLE resources and functions were explored, attractiveness, usability, future use and suggestions for changes. **Practitioner focus-group discussion or individual interview.** Focusing on assessing which VLE resources and functions were explored, attractiveness, usability, future use and suggestions for changes.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All research was carried out in adherence of professional guidelines for social/educational research.

Practitioners approached parents who were users of their services to ask for their interest in participation in this project. Parents received an invitation to participate in the research (e.g. research invitation flyer). If they were interested in taking part in this study, they were invited to attend an information meeting, where they received additional information about the programme, the research, and the digital platform. If parents agreed to take part, they were asked to provide informed consent.

Parental consent was sought before involving any children in observed activities in the centre/at home. Researchers were only present as observers and obtained verbal consent to observe from the children, and ensured the children were comfortable and informed. Where children interacted

with the VLE this was always with agreement of and in the presence of their parents.

Researcher safety

If home visits were carried out, the researcher alerted a designated colleague on each trip and kept her/him updated with departures from/arrivals home. The researcher also shared information of up-coming visits (including contact information, dates/times and locations of these visits) on a secure location [e.g. shared folder on a secure University server].

Participant burdens and/or risks

Prior to participation in this part of the research project, participants received information about the project and the processes involved in participation and had ample opportunity to ask questions regarding project details. Discussions/reflections/interview questions addressed issues of family heritage, with a focus on language and cultural identity, but did not go further in addressing sensitive topics such as race, religion or political beliefs.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without naming any reasons. They were assured of no adverse consequences of doing so. If a participant asked to withdraw from the study, s/he was free to leave the group discussion/meeting/interview and any information s/he provided was not used for analysis. At any time, participants could ask for their data to be deleted from the digital platform.

Observations of children

If observations of children were carried out, this was done in the presence of the parents, or with agreement of parents – the presence of a trusted practitioner. If at any instance a child seemed distressed, uncomfortable or distracted by the procedure, the activity was stopped. If the parent requested that an activity does not continue, the observation terminated, and any collected information was destroyed. To avoid such occurrences, verbal consent was obtained from the child, and the child was given time to become familiar with the researcher. Where observations were video-taped, informed consent was sought from the parents.

Participants were informed about who has access to materials they up-load on the digital platform, and how data privacy is ensured.

Participating families and practitioners were informed that they would not be named in any reports (all information on the digital platform, all fieldwork notes and transcripts will be anonymised) and that information they provided would be summarised and combined to present a general picture of the views of everyone involved in the design and piloting phase.

Participants were informed that the results of the design-based research will be written up in research reports and described in presentations and publications in scientific journals that report on the ISOTIS work on ICT-facilitated interventions. ISOITS researchers emphasised the value of information provided by each participant of this study. Research team contact details were provided in all contact letters and emails, in case participants had any project related queries.

Data protection/confidentiality

Issues of data protection and confidentiality were secured, and participants were required to read and sign the VLE privacy policy document.

1.8 OUTLOOK

With the aim to contribute to a wider implementation of effective support for parents and families with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ISOTIS WP3 developed and tested ICT-facilitated interventions for parents and professional working with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. This report brings together the work of these tasks. Chapter 2-5 will present the design of content for the VLE, and implementation and evaluation of the ISOTIS VLE-based interventions for WP3 which took place in European four countries: the Czech Republic, England, Germany, and Italy. Chapter 6 will bring together the findings in the four contexts and critically evaluate the interventions, with recommendations for future development and practice.

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CHAPTER 2. COUNTRY REPORT: ENGLAND

KATHARINA EREKY-STEVENS & ELEANOR BROCK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the work done in Leicestershire/England in carrying out ISOTIS task 3.4, which focused on developing resources for an ICT-facilitated intervention for parents, and family learning tutors supporting parents. Resources were developed and shared through the ISOTIS VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). The aim was to support family learning tutors implementing courses for parents whose first languages differed from the language used by early years provisions and school their children were attending or getting ready for. The overall aim was to help family learning tutors in their work of supporting families during the transition to school (or preschool), with a focus on families managing and making best use of the several languages and language resources present in their life.

The cooperating partner in this research is the Family Learning team that is part of **Leicestershire Adult Learning Service (LALS;** https://www.leics-als.ac.uk/**)**. Amongst other adult learning courses, the centre offers family learning to families with young children. One of the courses previously delivered by family learning tutors to parents is the **Family Skills programme** – a course for families with young children and language backgrounds other than English. Beyond a focus on strengthening parents' knowledge of the English school system and the ways of teaching and learning in primary school in England, one important focus of the programme is to promote the benefits of bilingualism and the use of heritage language. The content of the session addresses home literacy, reading and phonics, as well as oral traditions, the use of heritage language, and the benefits of bilingualism (Cara, 2018; Learning Unlimited, 2016). The delivery of adult learning courses is supported by a Moodle platform.

Contact was made when carrying out the ISOTIS WP3 case study of the Family Skills programme (Cohen et al., 2018). After extensive communication about the purpose of the project, the centre was invited to participate in the VLE project because of its special interest in working with parents of young children with language backgrounds other than English, and in working with a digital platform to support courses offered to adult learners, including parents. The centre agreed to take part in all three phases of work. Implementation was planned to involve family learning tutors integrating Family Skills resources (Learning Unlimited, 2016) with the resources added to the ISOTIS VLE, and making use of the VLE functions when delivering courses to parents in several locations in the local area.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND SITE SELECTION

2.2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

We employed a design-based research process (Pastori et al., 2019b) which focused on the involvement of stakeholders during all phases (see Figure 2.1). The exploratory phase helped to identify issues and define objectives. The co-design phase involved designing, seeking feedback, and testing resources. The implementation phase involved family learning tutors and parents

making use of the ISOTIS VLE during implementation of three family learning courses. Implementation was accompanied by repeated formative evaluation.

Figure 2.1: Research phases, ISOTIS task 3.4, Leicestershire/England

May – August 2018

First exploration and preparation
WP3 case study
Family Skills

- Finding out about **tutors' experiences** of working with EAL families (group discussion/Family Skills case study, FS observation dissemination event)
- Finding out about **parents' experiences** of taking part in course for EAL families with similar aims to ours (individual parent interviews/Family Skills case study, observation of group session)

2 Focus group meetings

2 Individual interviews

2 Observations

September–November 2018

Exploratory phase Leicestershire

- Sharing and reflecting on **experiences** and ideas for use of a **digital platform** to support work with families (group discussion)
- Finding out about centre's support work with EAL parents/families
- Finding out about resources and needs of EAL families (value of heritage and school language, language practices, use of ICT, interaction with pre/school)

1 Focus group meeting

1 Expert interview

1 Parent group discussion

November 2018-January 2019

Co-design phase Leicestershire

- Introduction to and review of activity ideas
- Seeking **feedback** (usefulness of activities, ease of use, enjoyment)
- Introduction to VLE, feedback, and **training**

1 Group meeting parents

4 Group meetings practitioners

November 2018-January 2019

Implementation and evaluation Leicestershire

- Courses for parents whose first language differed from the school language
- Topics: benefits of bilingualism, use of heritage language, oral traditions, home literacy, learning in the early years and in school in England
- Integration with Family Skills techniques and activities used by LALS
- Evaluation based on observations, group discussion and interviewing

3 Parent groups

4 Learning tutors

2 Researchers

2.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

Leicestershire Adult Learning Service (LALS) delivers a range of courses to adults[1]. Family learning courses commonly focus on topics such as home literacy, learning through play, the education system in England, healthy living, and family finances. Family learning courses are typically delivered by trained tutors, who also have experience in working with young children, and in working with adults with other language backgrounds (e.g. teaching English courses). Programme managers approve all courses before implementation.

Delivery usually takes place at local primary schools and community centres (e.g. Sure Start Children's Centres or local libraries, adult learning centres). Course implementation for this research study took place in three different locations in Leicestershire (East Midlands region of England): an adult learning centre in North-East Leicester; a Children, Young People and Family Centre (previously Sure Start Children's Centre) in South-West Leicester, and a primary school in the centre of Loughborough (a town north of Leicester). Based on the Index of multiple deprivation [(the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England, ranking areas from most deprived (1) to least deprived (10)] (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2015), one location ranks as being in one of the most deprived areas of England (1st decile), and the others as medium deprived (4th and 6th decile). Data from the Office for National Statistics (2015) shows that in 2014, migration levels in Leicester are above the national average: 35% of the population of Leicester were born outside the UK (compared to 13% national average). Migration levels are below average in Loughborough with 11% of the population born outside the UK. However, national data (Department for Education Statistics, 2018) for the particular school in Loughborough where the course took place (and where all the parents for this course were drawn from) shows that in 2018, 56.6% of the children attending were classified as having a first language other than English.

2.2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics approval for all project phases was sought from the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. Ahead of implementation, a data sharing agreement was signed between the University of Oxford and the University of Milan/Bicocca. Leicestershire Adult Learning Services (LALS) IT support carried out a risk assessment prior to the start of implementation. The necessary steps were taken to ensure data protection/confidentiality.
Prior to participation in this all phases of this research study, participants received information about the project and their participation, had opportunity to ask questions and were asked to provide signed consent. Parents taking part in the implementation/evaluation phase received project information and the privacy policy in their first language.

Access to the platform was restricted to the following participants: Researchers involved in the study, LALS family learning tutors who participated in ISOTIS VLE development work, and other parents participating in the course. Parents were given access to the platform during the duration of the course only. During the co-design phase, and to ensure privacy while some of the legal issues in data management were still finalised, parents were not invited to upload any

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[1] Including English courses (ESOL, English for Speakers of Other Languages), GCSE courses, computing, employability, languages, skills for life & employability, family learning etc.

material onto the digital platform; materials that family learning tutors added were deleted at the end of each fieldwork visit.

Participants were informed that the results of the research would be written up in research reports, and described in presentations and publications in scientific journals that report on the ISOTIS work on ICT-facilitated interventions. Participants received thank you letters and vouchers for taking part, and links to the project website to read up on the progress and results of the study.

2.3 EXPLORATORY PHASE

2.3.1 PROCEDURES

The **Family Skills case study** (Cohen, et al., 2018; Appendix I) provides information on the experiences of family learning tutors delivering the programme, and those of parents taking part in the programme. Data collected as part of this study therefore helps to inform the VLE task. At the Leicestershire adult learning centre, data were subsequently collected through i) a focus group discussion with the programme manager, adult learning coordinators and tutors; ii) an expert interview with two family learning coordinators; and iii) a group discussion with three parents who were participating in family learning courses in the centre. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed. Fieldwork notes were written up to document observations. Information was summarised thematically in relation to three topic areas: heritage language support, parents' knowledge of the education system, and the use of ICT.

Interviews and group discussions carried out during the exploratory phase served to gather information on several issues. First, the resources and needs of EAL families in relation to the heritage and school language, the use of ICT, and the interaction with pre/school. Second, tutors' experiences, resources and views on heritage language support, support of bilingual families in preparation for school, and the use of a digital platform to support work with families. In each area, the following themes were addressed: i) identity/understanding and knowledge; ii) perceptions/representations; iii) the level of declared programme/pedagogy and/or the level of practices, both from the perspective of family learning tutors and parents.

2.3.2 GENERAL RESOURCES

Leicestershire Adult Learning Services (LALS) receive funding from the Skills Funding Agency and family learning courses are free to attend for participating adults. Finding time to attend sessions can be a struggle for parents. Work commitments and caring for younger children are the main issues, and getting to centres. Where possible, crèches and taxi services to the centre and back home are offered.

Family learning providers work in cooperation with schools and local centres that deliver family learning courses (e.g. children's centres, local libraries). Families are usually recruited by staff in those centres or schools or the tutors delivering the courses. The success of recruitment for programmes varies between areas and providers (Cara, O., 2018; Husain et al., 2018).

The Leicestershire adult learning service offers its own digital platform (Moodle) to family learning tutors and users of its services. ICT personnel are in place to ensure a secure and working system, and to provide some support to family learning tutors. The centre involved in this research has a computer room, with a projector in place, and desks set up for users of its services to use when participating in courses. In addition, small tablets are available to users of its services, however, they have experienced difficulties with the use of those tablets. Family learning tutors are provided with smart phones by the centre, and they have desks with computers at the centre in an office area. Most families who use services offered by LALS have smart phones, use email addresses, and commonly families also have tablets or a computer at home. However, mothers are mainly using their phones to communicate or access resources online.

The team ethos in the centre is very positive. The manager is involved in team meetings and provides support and feedback to family learning tutors; family learning tutors make use of opportunities to discuss their work and reflect together. Providing lots of opportunities for discussion and for people to share their experiences, ideas and approaches is also central to the centre's approach to working with parents. The value of peer learning is emphasised, and so are relationships with parents, with family learning tutors seeing it as part of their role to provide emotional support to parents. Meeting other parents is another motivator for parents to attend sessions. Parents value group learning, and peer support and report that they value the experience of finding out that parents all share similar issues, no matter what language or cultural background they have.

2.3.3 RESOURCES OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 2.1: Resources of participants in relation to heritage and school language, preparation for school and use of ICT

	Identity, Understanding and Knowledge	Perceptions/Representations	Programme Pedagogy and Practices
PRACTITIONERS			
Heritage language	Family learning tutors are often experienced in working with parents with other language backgrounds. Bilingualism and the experience of other cultures are recognised, valued and celebrated.	**Family learning tutors' perceptions of parents:** Parents are worried about their child struggling, or underachieving in school because of their different language background, the additional demands of learning two languages, and because of their lower skills in English. Language use and language practices vary hugely between families. **Family learning tutors' perceptions of their role:** Reassuring parents in the value of using their home language. Encouraging parents to interact with their child in the language they are confident and competent with. Not to have 'fixed' ideas about language choice.	Providing information on bilingual development. Making the value of heritage culture and language explicit. Making use of family resources (e.g. oral story telling activities) and web-based resources.
School language	Tutors commonly deliver family learning courses that encourage parents with other language backgrounds to practice their English. Some are trained to deliver ESOL courses (English for Speakers of Other Languages).	**Family learning tutors' perceptions of parents:** Parents attend courses to improve their levels of English. **Family learning tutors' perceptions of their role:** Teaching parents English.	Encouraging parents to actively engage in speaking English during course sessions. Giving parents some writing tasks. Getting the balance right about both languages.
Preparation for school	Tutors commonly have a background in early years or primary school teaching and are familiar with the curriculum, routines in local schools, and the ways of learning and teaching.	**Family learning tutors' perceptions of parents:** Parents attend courses to learn about the education system and what is expected from them. Parents want to help their children succeed in school. **Family learning tutors' perceptions of their role:**	Providing parents with information on the curriculum. Hands-on activities to teach about the concept of 'learning through play'. Teaching parents phonics in the way

		Strengthening parents' confidence in getting involved in children's learning in school and in communicating with school. Teaching about the curriculum and classroom routines/practices, the importance of home literacy, learning through play and phonics teaching in school. Teaching parents how things they do at home (in their home language) can support children's learning in school (e.g. storytelling, shared reading).	that their children learn it in school. Opportunities for shared reflections which focus on parent experiences. Teaching parents the meta-language used and taught in school.
Use of ICT	Tutors use a Moodle platform to support their teaching which allows them to communicate with parents and up-load resources. Differences between tutors in levels of perceived ICT skills.	**Family learning tutors' perceptions of challenges:** Lack of ICT resources in delivery sites. Issues with internet access for families at home. Lack of time to develop resources that can be shared on a digital platform. Lack of commitment and ICT confidence and skills of parents participating in family learning. Moodle platform seen as not attractive (text-based, too 'official looking') for parents, not designed to be used on smart phones, too complicated to navigate (too many 'clicks') and use. Parent concerns about confidentiality. Availability of easier communication tools (WhatsApp, text messaging). **Family learning tutors' perceptions of their role:** Engaging parents in adding information about themselves and documentations of home activities; seen to provide opportunity for reflection, and celebration of their learning. Motivation to increase use of their Moodle platform, to increase ICT skills, and encouragement from the management side to	Passing information on to parents through giving PowerPoint presentations. Using google translate with parents. Doing internet-based quizzes with parents. Passing links to online resources on to parents. Asking parents to fill in online diaries of home activities.

	Identity, Understanding and Knowledge	Perceptions/Representations	Programme Pedagogy and Practices
		do so. Wish to share resources through a digital platform. Wish for a digital platform that provides parents with an overview/structure of the course, and resources to engage with during sessions.	
PARENTS			
Heritage language	Language competencies, choice of language, and language practices vary hugely between families, but also within families (between parents, between siblings).	Parents want their children to learn and maintain their heritage language. They see their role in making their children understand the value of knowing their heritage language, and in providing children with positive experiences when speaking their heritage language. Parents experience difficulties motivating children to use/learn their first language, especially as children start attending school/grow older, or if they have older siblings. Parents report challenges in finding resources to teach child the heritage language.	Reminding children to respond to them in the heritage language. Repeating children's English responses in their first language. Sharing books at home with children in both languages. Watching programmes or films in the heritage language. Teaching children how to read and write in the heritage language. Organising for children to attend language classes on weekends.
School language		Parents wish to learn English to support child learning and to find employment Parents have concerns about children's ability to learn two languages. Parents observe children wanting to use English rather than	Mixed use of heritage and school language at home, dominance of school language for some families. Use of English during school related activities (shared reading, homework

		the parent's first language at home. **Perception of their role** Parents want to make sure children learn the school language, so they are not at a disadvantage in school.	tasks).
Preparation for school	Parents' experiences with school and learning in school are very different to their children's experiences.	Parents are afraid that their children may fall behind because the additional demands they are facing. Parents feel they lack knowledge of the education system (they want to know what children learn, when and how) and that they lack competencies in the school language. Parents want tutors to teach them about the education system, and to teach them how to support their child's learning.	Programme strategies that supported parents at home: Learning how to sound and read certain words so they can support their children learning to read. Creating resources to use at home. Being encouraged to do storytelling at home. Sharing experiences. Hands-on activities.
Use of ICT		Parents are concerned about children spending too much tome in front of screens; they value strategies that keep children away from screens. Parents wish for resources that are not text-based. Parents value online resources in heritage language.	Watching online programmes and films.

2.3.4 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

When working with parents with other language backgrounds, it is essential for family learning tutors to reassure parents about the value of their home languages. They are aware of parent concerns about children growing up with more than one language, and how learning English is also important to families – in relation to parent learning as well as child learning. They stress that it is all about getting the balance right and addressing both languages – the heritage language and the school language. Family learning tutors also want to teach parents that doing things at home with the child in the heritage language can help in many ways to prepare children for learning in school (e.g. book sharing, storytelling, routines). In addition to the issue of language beliefs and practices in families, family learning tutors and parents reported on the issue of parent concerns about their children's learning in school, and how to best support this learning. These are also important areas family learning tutors want to address during their courses.

Strategies that were mentioned by tutors and parents are:
- making the value for heritage language/culture explicit;
- documenting home activities to celebrate the learning that is happening and to stimulate reflective learning in the group;
- thinking about issues related to bilingual development and family language practices;
- activities that stimulate reflective learning and build on parents' experiences/observation skills.

Tutors taking part in this project are currently working with groups of parents with young children and other language backgrounds in their local delivery sites. Family learning tutors are aiming to offer a family learning course based on Family Skills to some of those parents already making use of their services. Family learning tutors are aiming to integrate the activities co-designed as part of the ISOTIS project (and the use of the ISOITS VLE) with the course. They hope that in participating in this project they will extend their expertise in working with this target group, and that they will learn more about making good use of their IT resources when working with parents and running family learning courses in particular. They want to improve parent engagement with/participation on a digital platform. They hope that through the work with the ISOTIS platform they will learn things that are transferrable to the Moodle platform they are currently using.

Tutors report that in other courses family learning tutors offer in Leicestershire (GCSE, ESOL), learners get more involved with the platform. What seems to motivate people to engage is if they see other learners adding personal stories/information. They are curious and want to see this information, and add their own. The other way to engage learners successfully seems to be through collaborative tasks – e.g. learners working together on a story (using collaborative writing tools). Family learning tutors think that there are ways to prepare resources on the platform that are more appealing to their users, but they state that they do not have the time to do this.

2.4 CO-DESIGN PHASE

2.4.1 PROCEDURES

The co-design phase took place at one of the Leicestershire Adult Learning centres between November 2019 and January 2019. In total, four group meetings with family learning tutors and one group meeting with parents were organised. Meetings lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. The aims of the meetings were:

- To introduce and review activity ideas/first templates, seeking feedback on activities (clarity, usefulness, feasibility, attractiveness).
- To introduce and review content and functions on the platform, seeking feedback on the VLE (clarity, usefulness, feasibility, attractiveness).
- To train family learning tutors in using the VLE.
- To add to the existing activity resources, and to review and finalise activity resources and development of content for the VLE
- To specify plans for implementation and evaluation, on the basis of feedback received and additional knowledge of the particular context of each intervention

When developing first activity ideas, care was taken to develop activities that reflected what was learnt during the exploratory phase, and fitted into the content of the existing programme delivered to our target group by LALS family learning tutors. This involved a document analysis of the Family Skills Toolkit (Learning Unlimited, 2016). During the process of co-design, activities were prepared on the VLE and tested with family learning tutors. This involved practitioner training sessions. Fieldwork notes were taken during and after each meeting, and selected moments were audiotaped and transcribed. Fieldwork notes and transcripts were summarized according to themes of interest.

The resources and VLE functions that were shared and reviewed during co-design meetings addressed the following topics: Raising awareness of issues related to the presence of several languages in the home: Identity, language maintenance, language practices; Oral traditions/storytelling at home. For both topics, different resources were prepared, including material which stimulates reflection in the group, theoretical background information, and description of activities for parents to do (either during the sessions with family learning tutors and other parents or at home with their children). The following VLE functions were reviewed:

- Forum: A place to discuss one of more topics together
- Group chat: A space where it is possible to write messages in real time to the rest of a group
- Image with hotspots: Adding text of multi-media elements above and image to make it interactive
- Presentation: Creating a presentation with multi-media and interactive content
- Noticeboard: A place to post messages to groups of parents.
- Projects and Materials: A way to save selected resources in own space, to edit and share with groups of parents.

2.4.2 RESULTS

RELEVANCE AND USEFULNESS OF PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR THE TARGET GROUP

While **parents** mentioned challenges and concerns around the issue of bilingual development, they did not rate their wish for support in this area as highly as in the area of 'leaning in school in England'. The main concerns parents wanted more support with, was understanding the English school system and supporting children's learning in school.

Tutors thought that it was an important aim in the work with parents with other language backgrounds to strengthen parents' beliefs about the *value of the home language* and thus build their self-esteem. They thought it was important for parents to learn about the benefits of bilingualism and the value that speaking in their first language at home has for children's learning. Tutors liked the ISOTIS video 'Two languages are better than one' and there was a high interest in the group when viewing those video-*materials that were used to facilitate parents in sharing their experiences*, especially with regards to their languages – in terms of language and identity, language and emotions, language practices in families, and perceived language competencies.

The team got very involved in the discussion around *story telling activities*. The VLE resources around story telling fitted in well with what the tutors usually do with parents, and family learning tutors valued the idea of extending activities in inviting parents to create documentation of their stories – videos, photos etc. to share in the group and at home with their children. The team expressed the particular value of sharing traditional stories.

Family learning tutors in the group expressed the view that our target group of parents really wishes to learn more about *learning in school in England*. They were keen to add activities that address the issue of learning through play and discussed how an activity with playdough has helped reflection in the group - showing parents the important learning that can happen when engaging in play. During our discussion, we also developed an idea of taking videos/sharing videos of children playing as a cue for parents to reflect on the learning that happens in those cases, and how the learning they can see links to the curriculum.

The group expressed the view that opportunities for *hands-on activities* are an important element of their work. Tasks that are given to parents would need to match the resources of each particular parent, and some might prefer more open tasks, others more structured ones.

RELEVANCE AND USEFULNESS OF THE VLE

When it came to the question of ICT supporting parents, **parents** expressed the wish for the school to make better use of ICT in order to communicate with them. They like the idea of sharing information (e.g. photos) with teachers to show the learning that happens at home, but more than that they would like to use a digital platform to learn more about what children do in school. However, when it came to the idea of using ICT to engage children in new learning experiences, parents seemed sceptical. While they could see some benefits, they were more concerned with asking for support in how to limit and reduce children's screen time.

Tutors taking part in this study were encouraged to make better use of their Moodle platform with their learners, especially concerning those learners taking part in family learning courses, as this group is particularly hard to motivate to make use of the platform. Tutors hope that in taking part in this project they will learn things that will enable them to make their Moodle platform more useful for their users.

ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE VLE

Parents appreciated the idea of language translations and the multi-lingual keyboard, but showed some irritation about mistakes in the translations produced by the automatic system. Parents appreciated that sharing information with other parents in the group could be of some interest for them; however, while they did not express concerns about uploading photos or some text, they did not respond with much enthusiasm. Tutors raised some doubts relating to people's readiness to share their work/experiences on a digital platform.

Tutors thought that it was exciting to have a Moodle that can be used in many languages. They reviewed materials we had prepared on the VLE and agreed that they looked attractive. They particularly liked the multi-media aspect of the platform (use of pictures and videos).

Tutors pointed out that they would like to see some kind of 'reward system' – some function that indicates a parent has done a task and rewards them with a sticker, maybe in the form of a course 'passport' similar to that which they have used before on paper.

FEASIBILITY OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE VLE

Tutors thought that logging on to the platform, viewing resources, reading messages and responding to them in writing would probably be feasible for parents. However, they had doubts about parents making use of the interactive digital tools proposed for some activities (e.g., creating images with hotspots, creating multi-media presentations). The digital tool family learning tutors thought would be most suitable for parent use was the 'forum'. During training session, family learning tutors practised up-loading pictures and editing/creating content. Most of them were able to manage tasks with our support. Nevertheless, they doubted that they would be able to work on the VLE independently – e.g., editing or adding content (pictures, video-files, audio-files).

We came across **numerous problems** during training sessions on the platform, including up-loading of pictures and audio-recordings, accessing the platform on mobile phones, and editing content. We also learned that we were unable to take photographs or video-recordings using the centre's tablets the tutors had hoped to use with parents during implementation.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGES

In response to the feedback on activities, we added different materials to engage parents in hands-on activities, which help shared reflections on issues related to the languages in their lives (some more structured, others more open, some focusing more on identity, others on language practices or perceived competencies). We also prepared some additional activities related to the education system and learning in pre/school in England (including the concept of learning through

play).

In response to the feedback we received on the VLE-aspects of the activities, we tried to simplify how parents were asked to engage with the VLE (using the forum only to up-load content, not using audio-files). To test some of the other digital tools in practice, the researchers created other interactive materials to share with parents during the course sessions. Some of those were based on Family Skills activities in the content area 'Primary Education'. None of the activities using those 'more advanced digital tools' involved parents independently up-loading content.

Figure 2.2: Resources and VLE functions to use and test during implementation

Material, which stimulates reflection in the group about the topic (including questions for reflection)

RAISING AWARENESS OF ISSUES RELATED TO THE PRESENCE OF SEVERAL LANGUAGES IN THE HOME: IDENTITY, LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE, LANGUAGE PRACTICES (added hands-on activities to encourage reflection)

STORYTELLING AT HOME (stronger focus on sharing of traditional stories)

ADDED TOPIC: LEARNING IN THE EARLY YEARS AND IN PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ENGLAND

Descriptions of activities for parents to do (either during the session – with practitioners and other parents, or at home – possibly with their children).

VLE Functions to use during implementation

Theoretical background information for parents and practitioners

Digital tools
Forum

Testing interactive content: H5P image with hotspot, 'drag and drop', quiz, questionnaire

My space:
Noticeboard
Project and Materials

Beeba
Multilingual keyboard
Translator (googletranslate)

For a full list of the materials which stimulate reflections, and the descriptions of activities, please see section 2.4.4.

2.4.3 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

In coherence with the shared WP3 objectives, resources that were added to the VLE supported shared thinking about cultural/language resources in the home, family engagement with languages in the home, and the integration of multiple cultural and language experiences. The exploratory and co-design phase in England lead us to add an additional focus on activities, which supported family engagement with experiences relevant to children's schooling. Resources that were developed aimed to involve learners in reflecting on the languages in their families, and their language practices (making this explicit through storytelling activities), as well as their

experiences with education systems. Parents were encouraged to draw on their personal experiences, values and knowledge, and, in a second step, to observe and explore their children's experiences. Hands-on activities were created to facilitate reflection, and parents were asked to explore processes taking place during language interactions at home, during child-adult interactions (e.g., shared reading) or during children's play (learning through play).

Many activities involved parents reflecting on their personal experiences in their countries of origin. There was a focus on relating those experiences to experiences they and their children had today in England. Sharing those stories with other parents in their group and hearing the stories of parents in those multi-cultural groups was thought to help strengthen connections between parents, and to raise cultural awareness and sensitivity – in relation to others and their experiences, but also towards one's own inter-cultural knowledge and competencies.

Activity suggestions were open to adjustments, and offered different examples of what could be done with a group of parents. Activity suggestions commonly started with a focus on what can be done during sessions to then extend to the family context and the involvement of children in particular. Where possible, activities involved more than just access to resources on the VLE, but also the option for parents to actively add content related to an activity to the VLE (documentation). Yet, because of the doubts that were raised by family learning tutors with regards to feasibility issues, care was taken to provide parents with the option to engage in activities without accessing the platform independently. In coherence with the target group resources, activity suggestions allowed and facilitated engagement with all languages present in the family life.

In terms of the role of the VLE, the plan was to make use of the platform during implementation in the following ways:
- Family learning tutors would access and use resources during session preparation and delivery;
- Parents would access/view resources that support session activities (e.g. watching video-clips, seeing the session plan);
- Parents would access the platform independently at home to view resources;
- Family learning tutors and/or parents would upload documentations of home activities;
- Family learning tutors and parents would communicate on the platform.

2.4.4 CORE ISSUES AND VLE CONTENT DESIGNED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

VLE Resources – Core Issue 1

CORE ISSUE 1: RAISING AWARENESS OF ISSUES RELATED TO THE PRESENCE OF SEVERAL LANGUAGES IN THE HOME: IDENTITY, LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE, AND LANGUAGE PRACTICES
GOALS
To promote: • awareness of languages in the family home, with a focus on changes happening over time • interactions which foster understanding about the value and use of family languages, family language practices, and the management of several languages in the family home • understanding that learning that is relevant to skills needed in school can take place when children are involved in everyday routines and interactions at home in the family's heritage language • a sense of pride in home environment and heritage culture/language • the use of several languages present in the families' lives
RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES
ISOTIS video 'Two languages are better than one' A video-clip introducing Pablo, a bilingual boy and informing about the benefits of bilingualism. https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3387 **My multi-lingual self – Children's language self-portrait[2]** A resource presenting children's drawings of themselves and their languages and some quotes of those children describing their drawings. Offered with questions to simulate reflections in the group (e.g. What do these children think and feel about their languages? How do you feel about the languages in your life?) https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2922 **Language self-portrait**[3] An activity asking parents or/and their children to make a self-portrait of themselves and their languages, showing which languages are part of their lives, and how they feel about them. https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2929&chapterid=526 **Family language profile**[4] An activity asking parents to make 'pictures/graphs' pf how they use languages with their family members. (e.g. When they talk to different family members, which language do they

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[2] Pictures from: Graziella Favaro, Il bilinguismo disegnato, in: Italiano LinguaDue, n.1 2023 (rivista on line). Retrieved from: https://www.giuntiscuola.it/sesamo/cultura-e-societa/intercultura-in-pratica/il-cinese-mi-viene-dal-cuore-l-italiano-e-nella-mia-testa1/

[3] This activity links closely with the activities developed for the project: Tales at home (https://www.talesathome.eu/). The project was introduced to practitioners and 'Tales at home' materials shared with the group for discussion.

[4] An activity prepared by the University of Milano-Biccoca, VLE 'multi-lingualism in the classroom' (Which languages I speak with whom; https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=1740)

use? Which language do family members respond back in? Which languages does their child use when talking to others in the family?)

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2929&chapterid=527

Language Tree
An activity asking parents or/and their children to choose one figure of a group of figures, all placed on and around a tree and showing varieties of expressions on their faces, and to explain (with reference to their languages), why they think the figure represents best how they feel about their engagement and competencies in their different languages.
The resource (picture which was used) we used is available through the 'Blobshop' and can be found here:
https://www.blobtree.com/collections/singles-collection

Language competency ladder[6]
An activity asking parents to place family member on the steps of a ladder to reflect on language competencies of different family members in different languages.
https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2929&chapterid=528

World map
An activity inviting parents to share some information about themselves, including where they come from, which language they speak and how old their children are. Depicting this information on a world map.
https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=2925

Word bank
An activity inviting parents in the group to contribute to a 'word bank' together with their children, using their heritage languages and possibly translations into the school language. Examples that were provided were animal names and noises, and objects in the classroom.
https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=2934

VLE Resources – Core Issue 2

CORE ISSUE 2: STORYTELLING AT HOME
GOALS
Raising parental awareness/understanding • of language choices and navigation between languages at home • that learning that is relevant to skills needed in school can take place when children are involved in everyday interactions at home • that talk about everyday experiences is one important way of storytelling • that storytelling contributes to children's language AND literacy development (reading and writing skills) • that story telling in the heritage language helps children's literacy development in the school language Parents practicing strategies they can use • to help their child's language and literacy development in the context of everyday routines and activities

• to initiate and stimulate shared talk/dialogue about everyday experiences/routines with their children
• to engage with the child in good quality language interactions, which address familiar routines and are characterized by connectedness and joint engagement
• to include elements of more than one language into language experiences at home

USE AND CONTENT OF RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES
Traditional stories/Stories of our lives A resource presenting traditional stories, inviting parents to reflect upon their own personal story-telling experiences. Followed by an activity inviting parents to engage in telling traditional stories (during the sessions and at home), and to engage the child in some story-retelling at home, possibly taking audio/video-recordings of this home activity and sharing this with the group. https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2942 https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=2944&forceview=1 **Storytelling with Teddy/Storytelling with Objects** Two activities inviting parents to do some storytelling activities at home, using photographs taken in their homes to facilitate the telling of stories and the sharing of those stories with the group. https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=2946 https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=2949 (not used during implementation) **Treasure Box**[5] An activity inviting parents to take photos of items that are important to them and share the stories of those items with the group. https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=2999

VLE Resources – Core Issue 3

CORE ISSUE 3: LEARNING IN THE EARLY YEARS AND IN PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ENGLAND
GOALS
• Reflecting on own school experiences, and how they differ to their child's experiences in England, and how this relates to parents' views, expectations, concerns about school/their child's learning in school. • Learning about the primary school system, being encouraged to ask questions. • Understanding that for young children so much learning that is relevant to skills needed in school takes place when children are involved in everyday play activities with other children and adults. • Learning about strategies to engage their child in good quality shared reading interactions. • Learning that all parents, regardless of their own literacy skills, can support their children's reading.

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[5] A resource prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by 'Freie Universitaet Berlin', Germany.

- Learning that book sharing in the heritage language helps children's literacy development in the school language.
- Feel more confident about supporting their children's learning.
- Parents using their observational skills and using descriptive language to reflect.

USE AND CONTENT OF RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

Classrooms and school experiences around the world[6]

Sharing of photos and a video-clip showing classrooms around the world; designed to help initiate sharing of different school experiences in the group.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3083

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UApQk25v8Ro

A case of a parent sharing some of her school experiences and comparing them to those of her children in England. To initiate reflection in the group.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2962

Learning through play: Video-cued group discussion

Sharing of various video-clips of children engaged in shared reading, and engaged in different in types of play. To draw attention to learners' observational skills and initiate group discussions around the learning that can be observed in those situations, and the strategies adults use to support joyful/playful learning.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3285

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2968

Learning through play: Play-dough activity

Engaging parents in making and playing with play-dough. Designed to initiate reflection on parents' experiences during this activity to encourage understanding of how such activities can be useful for children's learning.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2968&chapterid=544

The English curriculum: Match subject to picture[8]

A matching activity to test parent knowledge of the different school subjects (from: Family Skills toolkit) + a matching activity to engage the group in talking about the content of examples of books for young children.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=2974

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3096

The English Curriculum: Primary education quiz[8]

A quiz to test parent knowledge of the primary school system (from: Family Skills toolkit).

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/quiz/view.php?id=2976

Important school information[8]

Asking parents to fill in a digital form about their child's school, using information they can find on the school website (from: Family Skills toolkit). This activity was not used during implementation.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=2975

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[6] Source: Family Skills Toolkit: https://www.learningunlimited.co/projects/family-skills/family-skills-toolkit

2.5 IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION PHASE

2.5.1 LOCATION, PARTICIPANTS

Implementation took place in three different locations in Leicestershire (East Midlands region of England): an adult learning centre in North East Leicester; a Children, Young People and Family Centre (previously Sure Start Children's Centre) in South-west Leicester, and a primary school in the centre of Loughborough (a town north of Leicester).
Four family learning tutors were involved in the delivery of the courses. Three of four family learning tutors had been part of the exploratory and co-design phase, one practitioner was a new member of the family learning team and had joined this research study only during the co-design phase.

Family learning tutors collaborated during the implementation phase. They shared plans for the delivery of their courses, and exchanged experiences during delivery. One course was delivered by two family learning tutors collaboratively. Family skills tutors were in touch with the researcher throughout the duration of the course. They shared their session plans, and discussed the VLE materials they wanted to use as well as sharing ideas for the development of further VLE content. The researcher participated in selected sessions. The role of the researcher was to help family learning tutors to navigate the platform to find or add resources, to take part in sessions to facilitate the use of the platform, and to take part in selected sessions as a participant observer.

Small numbers of parents participated in the three courses: Two courses had five participating parents each, and one course had three participating parents. In one course, only three parents (of five) agreed to take part in the research project. 11 parents participated in the research. None of the parents had taken part in the exploratory/co-design phase of the research study. All participants were mothers, were born outside the country, and had immigrated to England as adults. The majority of children had been born in England. In most cases, the partner (child's father) had the same cultural/language background as the mother. The cultural and language backgrounds between participants varied. Countries of origin and heritage languages included were Poland (Polish), India (Gujarati, Tamil, Punjabi), Sri Lanka (Tamil), Taiwan (Mandarin), China (Mandarin), Japan (Japanese), Iran (Farsi).

In two of the courses, parents involved had previously taken part in courses offered by LALS. They were recruited by the family learning tutors running the course, with whom they were familiar. They also knew some of the parents from previous courses or through the schools their children attended. In one course, parents had not met the LALS practitioner. They had previously attended the centre where the course took place, and had been recruited by the centre's outreach worker. Parents on this course did not know each other. The parents on this course only had young children and no experience with having children in school in England. Parents on the other courses had children at preschool age and siblings at young primary school age.

Two of the courses ran crèches in the centres during session times. In the third group, two parents had their three-year olds with them during session times. In one group, parents lived in areas outside the neighbourhood. The centre organised a taxi service.

2.5.2 IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

Family learning tutors ran three parent courses that were based on the Family Skills Programme (Learning Unlimited, 2018) and integrated Family Skills resources with the resources added to the ITOTIS VLE. Following the content of the Family skills course, the courses addressed the following topics:

- the benefits of bilingualism;
- oral traditions;
- reading to children;
- primary education in the UK;
- learning through play;
- reading and phonics.

When preparing for their sessions, family learning tutors chose resources that had been added to the VLE to use. In addition, some new resources were created by the researcher during implementation – usually in response to the content and plans for sessions, and with the aim to make use of and test elements on the digital platform.

Because of legal issues, there was a delay in participants being allowed to add content to the platform. This meant that during the first sessions in two of the courses (which started earlier than the third course), it was not possible to make use of some of the activities we had developed, or at least not of the VLE-component of these activities.

Figure 2.3: Implementation: Structure and content of sessions
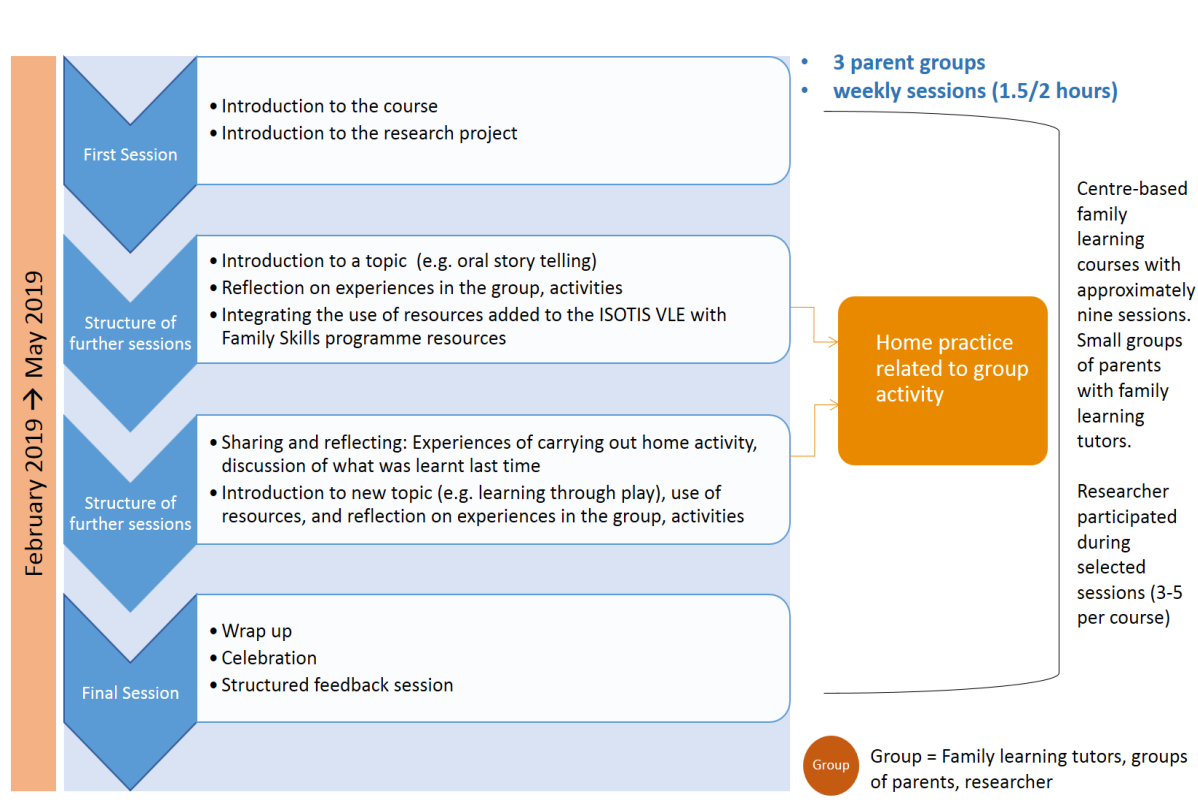
2.5.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

PRE-IMPLEMENTATION

Parent self-evaluation questionnaire. At the start of the intervention (T1), all parents who participated in the research (N=11) filled out a brief questionnaire on the perceived importance of their heritage language, and strategies used to support children's learning of heritage and school language (including ICT). The questionnaire consisted of nine structured questions [5-point scale; e.g., How important is it to you to use your heritage language when having a conversation with your child?, I do a number of things at home to help my child learn/maintain our heritage language (e.g., book reading, playing word games, storytelling).

Researcher participant observations. To introduce a new topic and new activities related to this topic, parents reflected on 'observation cases' – resources on the VLE designed to help initiate reflecting and sharing of experiences, views and perceptions. These focused on parents' and children's language identity, competencies and use, family language practices (including oral storytelling practices), and experiences with the education system.

Practitioner informal feedback. During informal conversations, family learning tutors provided feedback about parents' reflections on 'observation cases'.

DURING-IMPLEMENTATION

Researcher participant observations. The researcher participated in 12 implementation sessions (3-5 per parent group) and observed family learning tutors' and parents' engagement with activities during sessions, as well as family learning tutors' and parents' engagement with the VLE. This aimed to create a picture of how clear and feasible activities were, how activities were implemented by family learning tutors, how parents responded to activities (level of engagement, level of enjoyment), whether family learning tutors and parents accessed resources on the VLE, and whether they added content to the VLE.

The researcher took fieldwork notes, photos and some audio-recordings during sessions; descriptive fieldwork notes were written up after each observation. Documentations of activities (photos, audio-recordings) were up-loaded on the VLE noticeboard to be shared with parents and family learning tutors.

Practitioners' written feedback. Family learning tutors evaluated the quality of resources used during implementation in completing feedback forms that were accessible on the VLE. The forms consisted of nine structured questions (e.g., The activity seemed relevant to parents' needs, it was easy to engage parents in this activity; 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree), and four open questions [e.g., observing the group during implementation, how did the parents in your group respond to the activity (interest, peer interactions conversations), what were the most positive aspects of this activity?, How would you change this activity?], and room for other comments. Quantitative answers were summarised; qualitative responses analysed thematically. In total, 22 feedback forms were completed by 4 family learning tutors.

Practitioner informal feedback. During informal conversations, family learning tutors provided feedback on their experiences of using resources and parent engagement with activities.

POST-IMPLEMENTATION

Parent self-evaluation questionnaire. At the end of the course (T2), ten parents completed the self-questionnaire again.

Parent focus-group discussion. Parents' reflected on their answers to questions on the self-evaluation questionnaire, and changes in how they responded between the two time points stimulated short focus group discussion (30-45 minutes) in each parent group. These discussions were about the relevance and usefulness of the course activities and the VLE, and the learning that happened through participation. One focus group discussion was organised for each of the three parent groups. In total 10 parents took part in the three group discussions. Focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

Practitioner focus-group discussion. After the courses ended, all family learning tutors took part in one 2-hour focus group discussion to provide feedback and share their experiences of engaging with the co-designed activities and the VLE. Four family learning tutors took part in the group discussion. One practitioner was ill on the day, and a **face-to-face** one-hour interview was carried out with her the following week.

All family learning tutors received questionnaires, which listed the VLE components. They were asked to report in writing;

- what they explored and used,
- which components they thought were interesting,
- what they liked and didn't like,
- whether they thought the platform provided innovation in their practice, and
- the changes they would like to suggest.

The questionnaire was presented to the research participants, who filled in the questions and discussed and commented during and/or after responding to each question.

The VLE components considered in this discussion were the following:

RESOURCES	DIGITAL TOOLS	MY SPACE	BEEBA
Videos	Digital applications	Noticeboard	Aesthetic
Theoretical information	Tutorial	Projects and materials	Functionalities: vocal synthesis, keyboard,
Observation cases		Documentation	translations,
Experiences/activities			accessibility

The focus group discussion and interview were audio-recorded; the completed questionnaires were collected and analysed, and the oral comments integrated.

Practitioner questionnaire on the usability of the VLE

At the end of the meeting, family learning tutors were asked to complete a questionnaire on the usability of the platform. It consisted of 10 questions rated on a five-point scale (e.g., I found the

system unnecessarily complex; strongly disagree – to strongly agree), two questions summing up (e.g. Would you use this platform again?), and room for comments.

Figure 2.4: Monitoring and evaluation process and procedures
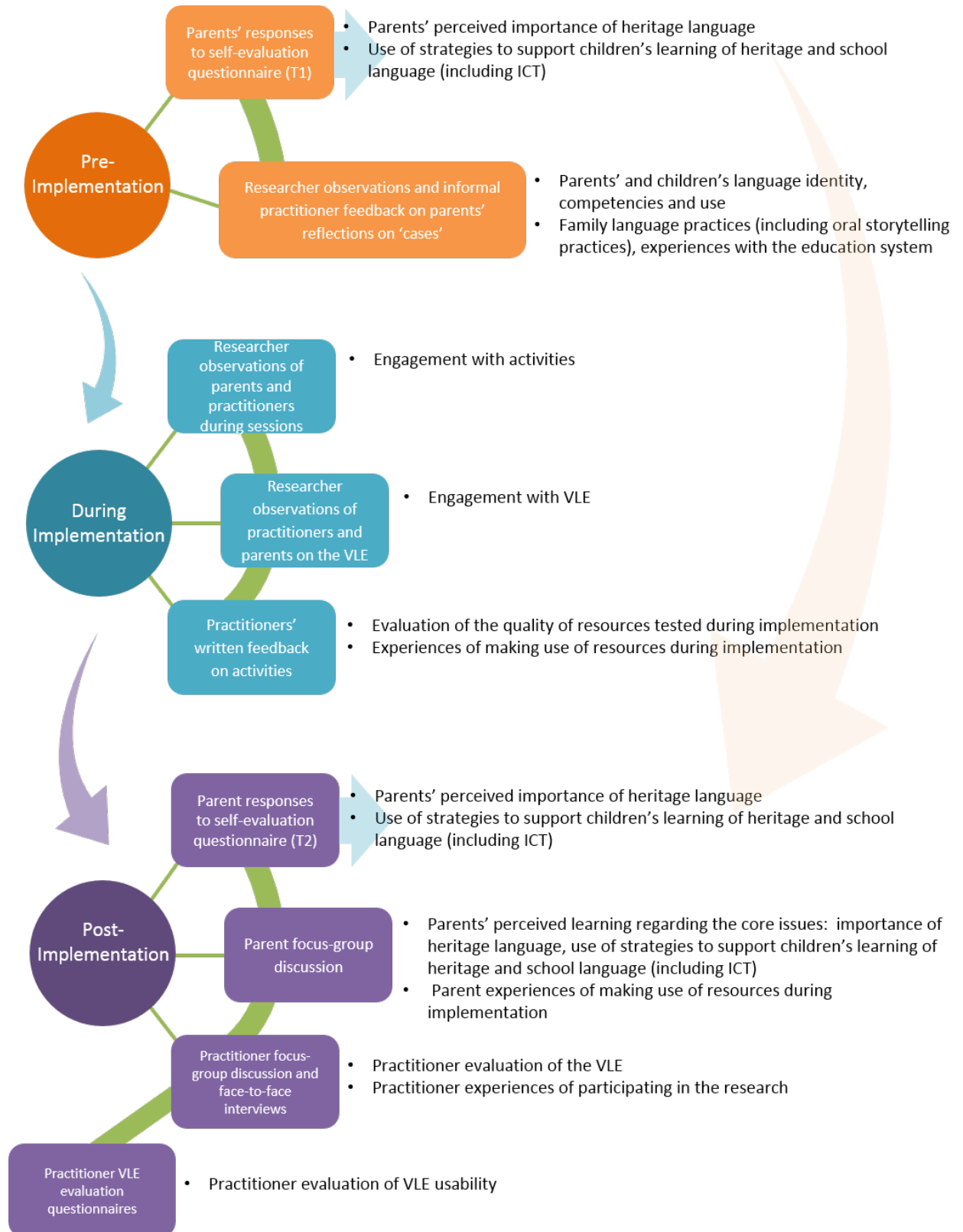
2.5.4 PRE/DURING-IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

We summarise observations and reflections, which are based on fieldwork observations[7] and practitioner feedback on activities.

USE OF RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES DURING THE SESSIONS

Over the course of all sessions, family learning tutors used all but three[8] of the resources, which had been added to the VLE. They commonly extended activities that were suggested on the VLE in integrating those with the use of Family Skills and personal resources. Where activity descriptions asked family learning tutors or parents to add digital content to the VLE, this proved to be difficult (see more in: Engagement with VLE content and functions).

CONTENT OF GROUP REFLECTIONS

Family learning tutors used activities addressing 'Core Issue One' mainly at the start of their courses to introduce the topic of bilingual development, family language practices, and beliefs and views on their children's language development. Parents explored and expressed how their languages were connected to places, people and emotions, and certain periods in their lives, and how they felt about their own language competencies. Family learning tutors used activities to learn more about parents' language use and practices, to teach parents about the benefits of being bilingual, and to strengthen parents' confidence to raise their children bilingually.

Storytelling was an important part of the course and telling and sharing of stories, as well as recorded storytelling at home, took place in all groups. In line with the Family Skills programme, the emphasis was on sharing traditional stories parents remembered from their childhood. The sharing of recorded storytelling at home linked very well with previous discussions, with parents reflecting how they feel about their children's language choices and competencies. Watching a video-clip on 'shared reading' also initiated talk in the group about how languages are used at home. Parents shared some strategies they use to facilitate their children in maintaining their heritage language skills, but also commented on the challenges of motivating their children, and of finding time and resources.

During shared reflections and discussions, family learning tutors emphasised the value of parents communicating with their children in their first language, and the value of children learning the family heritage language. Family learning tutors reassured parents about children's competencies to learn both languages. Yet, there was no shared discussion between parents and family learning tutors about *how* to manage this task, or how to integrate this task into everyday life.

Resources on classrooms and school experiences around the world, and those on the English Curriculum, prompted reflections about parents' experiences with school/preschool in their own countries, and prompted parents to ask questions about the English school system (assessments, homework, and expectations). Parents shared concerns about their children achieving, and

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[7] researcher observations of parent reflections on 'cases', and of parents' and practitioners' engagement during sessions and on the VLE

[8] 'Storytelling with objects', 'Word bank forum', and forum on 'Important school information' (see Table X/X – VLE resources)

strategies they use at home to prepare their children for tests. Family learning tutors followed this up with informative resources on the curriculum, and strategies to engage with children in shared reading, or support them with reading in English. In response to the video-clips on 'learning through play' and the 'play-dough activity', parents identified strategies parents/adults used when engaging with their children, and identified what and how children learn when they are engaged in play/playful activities.

Informal chatting in the group often followed moments of shared reflections. Parents shared experiences of growing up in the heritage country, attending schools in their heritage county, travelling back home today, family members abroad, the food parents miss, and experiences of living abroad. Importantly, activities involved parents speaking in English, and listening to each other.

ENGAGEMENT WITH ACTIVITIES

Engaging parents with video- and picture resources on the platform worked well, where family learning tutors engaged the parents with the resources by sharing them on one screen. Family learning tutors talked about the resources in an engaging way and the group responded with questions and in sharing their own experiences and views. If there were difficulties in sharing resources on-screen with the group (see engagement with the VLE), this quickly led to parents and practitioner disengaging with the materials.

Parents enjoyed and engaged well in shared reflections, and creative and hands-on activities. All activities supported a relaxed atmosphere, and led to informal chatting, and bonding in the group with everyone taking part. Groups would often sit around one table, facing each other and sharing their stories and experiences. Tasks, which involved speaking English in front of the group (e.g., sharing a traditional story), were met with more nervousness, and were challenging for some, but all parents appreciated those as opportunities to practice speaking English. Other parents listened attentively to the stories other parents shared. Tasks involving writing in English on a VLE forum were very difficult; much time and one-to-one support was needed to achieve only little.

Parent engagement in home activities varied, with only some few engaging reliably. Parents engaged better in home activities if they had had a chance to practice during sessions what they were expected to do at home, particularly if they had created resources that could be used to engage children at home. Parents were less likely to engage in home activities that involved writing, and those that involved shared reflections with their children (e.g. the language self-portrait, or comparing their and their children's school experiences). Some parents seemed to be more likely to do home activities that they could do on their own – without involving their children. Documenting home activities worked through parents sharing photos or video-clips they had taken at home on their smart phones (e.g. during storytelling, shared reading, or play with play-dough).

Interestingly, parents engaged very well with the home activity of telling and retelling a story. They brought back recordings to share with the group. Many of the children had retold the story in English and there was some insecurity in the groups about which language they should have used for this task, both for family learning tutors and for parents.

Accessing and sharing resources

Some parents struggled to remember the log-in details and some struggled to type; while others managed with ease. Until the legal issues were sorted, parents only had a guest log-on. Then their log-on details changed, which caused some confusion. Searching the internet to find the platform was difficult for parents. Nevertheless, some parents accessed the platform independently outside the sessions to read messages on the noticeboard or access some few resources.

In the beginning, family learning tutors had some difficulties locating the VLE resources relevant for their sessions but coped better when using the noticeboard, which was set up to list the topics of each session and to provide links to resources. Family learning tutors viewed resources on the VLE to prepare sessions. During sessions, resources were shared with parents on screen. Setting this up proved to be challenging in some groups and took up time. When parents were asked to access resources individually on school laptops, there were many technical difficulties; parents needed much one-to-one support and there was a lot of confusion, with parents ending up viewing resources at different time-points that prohibited shared reflection and discussion in the group. Digitalised Family Skills activities (matching pictures and the quiz) were completed by the groups of parents in various ways: on individual mobile phones and computers, or by using one screen and working together. Interestingly, all options worked well.

Language translations

Language translation functions were demonstrated at first when sharing the video-clip with parents; family learning tutors made use of during later sessions.

Adding content to the platform

During the first weeks of the course, legal issues for use of the VLE had not been fully resolved. This meant that neither parents nor family learning tutors were allowed to up-load content the parents had created. In addition, the family learning tutors did not feel confident enough to engage with the more interactive part of the platform, and were unsure about how to add pictures or text (e.g., to the world map). Where family learning tutors did not make use of resources that included interaction with the VLE and creation of content, they adapted activities to engage parents 'off screen' – e.g., using templates on paper for parents to work on.

In one group, parents logged onto the platform during sessions to add some sentences or pictures about their storytelling experiences, and about their experiences in school to a 'forum' (https://vle.isotis.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=2965). This took more time than expected, and parents needed much support to do the task. It was a challenge for parents to think of something to write down, and coping with the spelling and typing was difficult for some parents; How well they got on varied between the parents.

We failed to up-load storytelling recordings parents had taken on their phones, and struggled to up-load video-recordings taken during sessions. Parents and family learning tutors took photos to document activities during sessions. To follow-up activities, parents took photos of shared reading and play activities at home (on their phones) and showed those to the group during the

session. Parents did not up-load photos independently. Only one practitioner added some photos to the noticeboard to share with parents at the beginning of the next session.

It was mostly the researcher taking recordings and pictures and up-loading those onto the platform to share with parents and family learning tutors. Parents seemed quite happy and interested to see the collections, but it seemed unclear where to take the exercise from here. Family learning tutors felt that it would have been a better experience if parents could have up-loaded pictures and recordings themselves and maybe written a short story. Nevertheless, one parent reported later how pleased she was to be able to share the results with her child.
Some family learning tutors asked the researcher to add materials they wanted to share with other family learning tutors or parents. Towards the end of the course, some family learning tutors independently up—loaded video-clips and other materials they had selected to share with parents during sessions.

Communication on the VLE
The researcher and some family learning tutors communicated with parents in adding messages to the notice board. Most parents read those messages, and some tried to respond, but did not succeed. Family learning tutors communicated directly with parents via SMS or email. Parents in one group started a WhatsApp group to share some photos and communicate outside the session times.

STRENGTHS OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGES/IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

Family learning tutors thought that the activities were helpful to introduce topics, to get to know to each other, and to stimulate valuable shared reflections.

> *'I think it was useful for all to be given the space and time to consider and express how they feel about their countries/cultures/languages.' (Practitioner Journal, Language self-portraits)*
>
> *'One parent completed the home task with their child. She described her discussion with her son in detail. She had shown him her self-portrait and they had talked at length about their home countries and languages. It was a profound experience for them, as mother and son.' (Practitioner Journal, Language self-portraits)*

Family learning tutors commented that parents enjoyed the storytelling in the group, and that it improved their confidence in speaking, and in sharing tales with their children, as well as helping them to understand how to do the home activities on storytelling with their children. Focusing on stories from parents' cultures also demonstrated their value. Family learning tutors mentioned that the hands-on elements of activities allowed parents 'to think about *the processes they were using and those their children would be using when playing' (Practitioner Feedback, Learning through play: Play dough).*

All family learning tutors commented on the fact that the procedure of up-loading recordings of stories or photos of home activities was too difficult and that it would need to be improved. They mentioned that they would spend more time preparing for some activities – to make sure parents could see some examples, and to ensure activities could be done if accessing the VLE failed. One practitioner also mentioned an occasion where the sharing of video-clips was as helpful as

a hands-on activity in class can be:

> *'In future, I would aim to use an example of the story being told orally using puppets and people, rather than a cartoon. Although a cartoon is an example of an oral retelling, we tend to associate it with something we watch and listen to rather than something we do ourselves.' (Practitioner Feedback Journal, Traditional stories/Stories of our lives)*

EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES BY PRACTITIONERS

When evaluating activities in their written feedback, family learning tutors indicated that activities were clearly presented, fitted into the course content, and seemed relevant to parents' needs. They thought it was easy to engage parents in the activities, and easy to integrate activities with their ongoing support work. However, there was more insecurity regarding whether family learning tutors would do some activities again or recommend them to other family learning tutors. Activities involving a forum for parents to post content were evaluated less positively than other resources. Family learning tutors reported that parents did not engage with the VLE to upload content, and were unsure whether parents engaged with home activities throughout.

2.5.5 POST IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

PARENT SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES

At both time-points, parents indicated that it was important to them to use their heritage language when talking to their child, and that it was important to them that their child know the heritage language well. They indicated that they did a range of things at home that will help their child's learning in school, and a number of things to support their child's learning/maintaining of the heritage language (including book reading, playing word games, and storytelling). Thus, parents gave high ratings to the majority of questions listed in the questionnaire. They gave lower ratings mainly to those statements that addressed the use of ICT. At T2 (post-implementation), parents commented on the fact that they would now give themselves lower ratings for T1 than they had done when they started the course. This indicated that they perceived more change between T1 and T2 than was shown by their ratings at the two time points.

POST-IMPLEMENTATION PARENT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

During the post-implementation focus group discussions, parents reflected on the relevance and usefulness of the course activities and the VLE, and the learning that happened through participation. A main topic raised by parents was that in attending the course, they learned about the benefits of bilingual development. While they were all facing the task of bringing up their children in a multi-lingual environment, many of them felt they had not known much about bilingual up-bringing. They reported how they had been worried that it would be too difficult for their children to learn more than one language. Parents liked the message about the 'superpowers' bilingual children have, and shared it with their children. Some parents commented on the fact that learning about active and passive bilingualism helped them to recognise and appreciate their children's language competencies, motivated them to use their heritage language at home, and made them more confident in using the heritage language (even if their children responded in the school language). They felt more confident in teaching their children the heritage language, and had more confidence in their children's abilities to learn both languages. All in all, parents were more

optimistic that they would find a way to use and practice both the heritage and school language.

Parents thought that since attending the course they had done a number of things differently. The following strategies were mentioned:

- having conversations at home about the value of learning the heritage language, and their wishes for their children to learn the language
- reminding children to speak the heritage language at home
- reminding them to ask what words mean
- praising children more for trying to speak the heritage language
- translating back to the child a response the child had given in the school language
- responding back in the heritage language even if the child responds in English
- regularly sharing songs or video-clips in the heritage language with children
- sending children to heritage language classes
- practicing reading and writing in the heritage language and helping children to recognise and write letters/words

Parents appreciated learning about the education system in England, and thought that practicing storytelling during the class and engaging in a play activity really helped them to engage with their children at home in learning activities in playful ways. Storytelling activities in particular were highly valued by parents, because they enabled parents and children to do activities in both languages – the heritage language and the school language.

Some parents spoke about the fact that while they now spend more time teaching their children their language, it was a task that took time and was not easy to fit in. They thought that help from other people (children attending heritage language classes, children spending time with relatives in the parents' country of origin) and additional resources (digital apps, books) would be beneficial but was not always available. Nevertheless, some parents reported asking the wider family for support in teaching their child the heritage language, and sharing recordings of storytelling in the heritage language with family members in their countries of origin.

Finally, and in addition to the points mentioned above, parents appreciated **making friends**, having **opportunities to talk in English** and to learn new vocabulary, and **learning about other countries and cultures**.

POST-IMPLEMENTATION PRACTITIONER VLE EVALUATION

Practitioner focus-group discussion
When evaluating the different aspects of the VLE, family learning tutors consistently rated the VLE resources highest. This was followed by the VLE areas 'my space', but digital tools and functions were rated lower (see Table X).

Table 2.2: Evaluation of content and use of VLE resources, digital tools, my space and BEEBA

RESOURCES	%	DIGITAL TOOLS	%	MY SPACE	%	BEEBA	%
Explored by practitioners							
Videos	100	Digital applications	25	Noticeboard	100	Multi-lingual keyboard	25
Theoretical information	75	Tutorial	25	Projects and materials	100	Vocal synthesis	25
Observation cases	100			Documentation	25	Translator	75
Experiences/activities	100					Format options	0
Used by practitioners							
Videos	100	Digital applications	25	Noticeboard	100	Multi-lingual keyboard	0
Theoretical information	50	Tutorial	25	Projects and materials	100	Vocal synthesis	0
Observation cases	100			Documentation	25	Translator	50
Experiences/activities	100					Format options	0
Interesting to practitioners							
Videos	100	Digital applications	50	Noticeboard	100	Multi-lingual keyboard	75
Theoretical information	50	Tutorial	25	Projects and materials	100	Vocal synthesis	50
Observation cases	100			Documentation	0	Translator	75
Experiences/activities	100					Format options	0
Liked most by practitioners							
Videos	100	Digital applications	25	Noticeboard	50	Multi-lingual keyboard	0
Theoretical information	50	Tutorial	0	Projects and materials	100	Vocal synthesis	25
Observation cases	50			Documentation	0	Translator	0
Experiences/activities	75					Format options	0
*Not liked by practitioners**							
Videos	0	Digital applications	0	Noticeboard	0	Multi-lingual keyboard	0
Theoretical information	0	Tutorial	0	Projects and materials	0	Vocal synthesis	0
Observation cases	0			Documentation	0	Translator	0
Experiences/activities	0				0	Format options	0

*Practitioners commented that they liked the *potential* of most aspects of the VLE.

What family learning tutors liked most about the platform was collecting, sharing and using **resources** to prepare sessions and to use during sessions. They emphasised the fact that they

would like to use those resources again in a similar way, and that they would like to collect resources as a team and *share good practice* through their Moodle platform. The group expressed their wish to move the content that we had up-loaded and used over to their platform, and the group much appreciated the researcher's offer of support with this task.

Family learning tutors rated the **ISOTIS video** 'Two languages are better than one' very highly. They thought it was a 'life changer' and commented on the fact that parents did not usually get to hear the message about the benefits of speaking more than one language, or the importance of parents speaking the heritage language at home. Family learning tutors and parents loved the idea of bilingual children's 'superpowers' and really took this on board.

> *"That first video for the course [two languages are better than one] was excellent, and that was a life changer. Because they introduced that idea of children having superpowers, and that changes things for people …" (T1)*

Some thought that the **theoretical information** would be useful for new staff, but there were doubts about whether parents would make use of it.

> *"I think if you have the information readily accessible then yes by all means, put it up. But I wouldn't reinvent the wheel (…). I think the effort of finding information and collating it and putting it up far outweighs the people actually accessing it." (T2)*

Family learning tutors thought that the presentations of **observational cases** were valuable and helpful in stimulating shared reflection in the group. They commented on the fact that they 'helped to break down barriers' and motivated learners to share their own stories. Examples they named were the resources of children drawing and talking about their multi-lingual self, and an example of a parent comparing some of her school experiences with those of her children.

> *"The self-portraits I thought were really good, and it was excellent to have examples to start with as we find in a lot of our work. If you just present the task as a written task, people wouldn't know where to start, they wouldn't be able to visualise what it was and see the potential of it. So it was really important that they saw some examples for them to be able to engage with it fully. They might have done something but they wouldn't have understood how much you could get out of it." (T1)*

> *"[Y]ou [KES] shared yours [experiences] and suddenly everyone wanted to start talking about it, it almost a case of having to manage the conversation because everyone sort of felt that they had to share their experiences but I don't know if it would have necessarily been the same if you hadn't shared that, because I think they would be quite reluctant to go first."(T2)*

What family learning tutors made most use of was the materials describing **activities/experiences**. They valued that they were able to add their own resources (with the help of the researcher) and thought that the visual aspect of those resources was a real benefit. They enjoyed working with video-clips on the VLE and though they were easy to embed in their practice and that learners responded well.

> *"Going back to the using of the videos (…) y'know they're quite good to you know to really watch and have a think about- I like the importance of play, having a good look at it and watching it and saying what can we do and what are the benefits we can get out of it. So that was a real, they were, y'know really made the students, the learners think." (T5)*
> *"For example the video of [child] reading to her dad, that was excellent and that really did*

lead on very well to the task that we wanted the parents to do. We wanted them to discuss what dad was doing well, and then they could apply that, they could reflect on it and what they do at home and see if they do those things at home". (T1)

Family learning tutors commented on the fact, that the '**hands-on activities**' were very valuable, and practicing during sessions was important to prepare parents for home activities.

"I think one key thing that the parents highlighted through the course this time was that when you're not feeling confident and you're not sure what it is that the tutor is asking you to do at home, you really need to do it yourself first so that you understand what it is that you can be doing with your child at home." (T1)

The *potential* of the **digital tool** was appreciated, but family learning tutors reported that the more interactive functions of the VLE were not user-friendly enough. They commented that if parents needed so much support in being able to engage, this would 'eat into their teaching time', and not enhance a session, but be a barrier instead. They thought it was not realistic to think learners would be better able to engage next time, and that in general only the most 'motivated' learners, but not all learners would be able to engage. The forum was the tool they liked best and might use again (to engage users in some writing tasks).

"[Y]ou did a fantastic job of trying to train us but it was a really difficult tool to use. But I think if I was to deliver something like this again, honestly I probably wouldn't use it just for the sheer frustration of it." (T2)

"It was too hard. Because we were very much in the situation where we felt it was- if we didn't intervene and change it, it would actually hinder what was happening in the session, not help it at all. … [S]o, if we were to do it again we'd need to know that it was adding to the course. We only ever want to use technology to enhance what we're doing, […] and on this occasion unfortunately there were times when it didn't, so we had to just stop and do it a different way." (T1)

Family learning tutors thought that **parents documenting home activities on their phones** and sharing those during sessions, supported reflections and motivated parents to engage in the home activity. They commented that it was easy and quick for parents to take pictures and take recordings on their phones. They thought it was too complicated to log onto the platform to up-load these materials, but thought that, in principle, adding some of this content to the platform would have been be a valuable way of 'celebrating the learning' that happens through course participation.

Family learning tutors liked the '**my space**' area on the VLE, and made use of it with the help of the researcher – copying content into their group spaces, and using the noticeboard for each group of learners. They thought that they might have made more use of the noticeboard and of projects and materials of up-loading was more straightforward.

Family learning tutors thought that the **BEEBA** functions of the multilingual keyboard, the vocal synthesis and the translation functions all had potential for parents to use *at home* when translating from English, but not much value as a teaching tool to use during sessions.

Practitioners' learning. Most family learning tutors thought that having new materials to address the topic of bilingual development and language practices in multi-lingual families taught them more about the complexities of language practices at home. Engaging parents in those activities

raised their awareness of the challenges families face when dealing with more than one language at home. It was surprising to some to see the extent to which parents did not speak their own language with their children, and that they had not heard about the benefits of bilingualism before. They commented on the fact that they learned more about how parents in multi-lingual families feel. One practitioner reported that taking part in the project had given her 'some new tools to start thinking about their identity which I hadn't thought about before' (T4). Another practitioner thought that the experience of seeing the parents' perspective would change her teaching in ESOL classes – in future she would be more sensitive towards her learners' needs.

Practitioner questionnaire on the usability of the VLE. The usability of the platform was rated relatively low. Family learning tutors thought that the system was unnecessarily complex, that they would need the support of a technical person to use the system, and that people would not learn to use the system quickly. Family learning tutors were unsure about wanting to use the system again, and unsure about suggesting it to a colleague or friend. Statements on how confident they felt about using the system and, whether they thought the system was cumbersome to use and had too much inconsistency were judged neither clearly positive nor clearly negative. In total, 25% of evaluations were positive, 30% in the mid-range/neutral, and were 45% negative.

2.6 DISCUSSION

2.6.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

This research study confirmed that parents do not necessarily perceive the presence of several languages in the family as an advantage for their children's development. Parents describe many challenges related to the task of bringing their children up with more than one language. Parents want their children to learn and maintain the heritage language as well as the language of instruction. Yet, addressing these issues was not their main concern when attending family learning classes. Learning about the education system, supporting children's learning in school, and practicing their own language skills in English were the main drivers for attending the course. During implementation, parents nevertheless appreciated learning about the advantages of bilingualism and shared reflections about language use in families, language choices and practices. In fact, materials that had been prepared to support shared reflection worked well with regards to all topics that were addressed.

Many of the resources up-loaded onto the VLE to support the courses were used. The resources we had created, engaged parents in ways that addressed many of our objectives. Resources were particularly helpful in initiating shared discussions and reflections in the group. Participants emphasised the value of using observational cases and video-clips, creative and hands-on activities for parents to practice, and the documentation of home activities.

Family learning tutors followed up the sharing experiences with the education system and with learning in school by teaching parents strategies of how to engage children in playful ways to support their learning, and by teaching parents how to support their children's learning of skills needed for school (particularly learning to read in English). Parents very much appreciated the information and receiving supportive materials to engage their children with at home.

Discussions that focused on the views on bilingual development and language practices in multi-lingual families taught family learning tutors more about the complexities of language practices in families, and how parents feel about their children's language choices and competencies. These discussions provided opportunities for family learning tutors to emphasise the benefits of bilingual development to parents, and the value of parents speaking in their first language with their children. Parents walked away feeling more positive about their children's language competencies and their abilities to learn two languages, and more motivated to try out additional strategies at home to encourage their children's learning of their heritage language.

However, when it came to teaching their children the heritage language, parents also described challenges and a lack of resources. When sharing recorded storytelling moments during sessions, there was insecurity from parents regarding their choice and use of language. Family learning tutors could have made more of the opportunity to use these moments to reflect on the reality and the challenges of initiating and facilitating heritage language use at home. When family learning tutors and the researcher looked for resources that would help them to address the *issue of how to navigate between the different languages* present at home, we failed to identify useful resources – e.g., a video-clip showing book sharing or storytelling between parents and children using more than one language. To conclude, more needs to be done to support family learning tutors and parents in how to best manage several languages present in the families' homes when interacting in everyday routines and activities.

With regards to the topic 'learning in school' parents clearly showed how much they appreciated learning and practicing strategies to support their children. A limitation of the materials that had been prepared to help parents reflect on their multiple languages and children's language development was that they addressed mainly parent's beliefs, attitudes and knowledge, but did not focus concretely on planning with regards to 'language goals' and strategies parents could use to support those.

During implementation, practitioners were involved in adding materials to the VLE which supported their work with the parents. Materials were shared between practitioners, and most materials that had been designed were used during implementation. This 'resource bank' is one of the most positive aspects resulting from the use of the ISOTIS VLE tool during design and implementation.

Yet, work with the VLE tool was challenging on many levels, starting with access during sessions and at home, to complexities of the functions which the platform offered, to the size of the platform with difficulties to locate resources. In order to get involved with the platform, family learning tutors had to invest more time than expected (or wanted). For parents, the task was even more challenging. It was difficult to recruit parents who wanted to get involved in the study, and the involvement of ICT as a means to support the intervention did not facilitate parent motivation to attend the course. Training parents on a platform that was not sufficiently user-friendly and attractive seemed not a good use of time, and thus, active parent engagement with the platform was kept at a minimum. While parents were presented with content on the platform, parents were not able to independently up-load materials on the platform. Practitioners and parents found ways around this issue: parents prepared documentations at home on paper or took pictures recordings

on their mobile phones which they shared during the following sessions. These materials were valuable and supported further reflections and the sharing of experiences in the group. Yet, the fact that parents could not add those resources to the VLE restricted how those material could be used for further networking and collaborations.

Regarding the use of the VLE, it became clear that some parents managed better and were more motivated than others in accessing the platform and engaging with it. This indicates that, the use of a digital platform is challenging, and issues of 'exclusion' may be reinforced. Whereas the digital tool was thought to facilitate inclusiveness, it may actually work against its goal and restrict active engagement for those who might otherwise benefit most from the intervention. Shared reflections and creative and hands-on activities worked best in engaging all parents. Other activities (e.g., those involving writing, or some home activities) were less successful in engaging everyone.

The biggest drawback was that parents were not able to add content to the VLE. In addition, it seemed unclear what to do with documented experiences once they were up-loaded on the platform. If the process of up-loading becomes easier, there is potential for parents sharing content beyond the group with relatives or teachers in school, but this needs to be developed further with a tool that is more accessible and user-friendly for all.

To add one final point, parents and family learning tutors valued that the resources we provided had opened up opportunities for parents to speak in English and to listen to others. This was not something that had been considered when designing the resources, but may be an additional value (motivating parents to get involved and stay engaged) that could be considered more in the future.

2.6.2 TRANSFERABILITY AND FUTURE OUTPUTS

During the post-evaluation group meeting, family learning tutors expressed their interest in using the resources we had created in the future. A meeting with the IT support was organised to start a process of copying content we had created on the ISOTIS VLE over to the Leicestershire Moodle platform. The aim is for family learning tutors to be able to access these resources, but also to add new resources to facilitate shared practice. Family learning tutors will involve their IT support in helping them to up-load and share new additional resources. To demonstrate how the resources can facilitate experiences and activities, the researcher will write up 'stories' of successful implementation that will be available on the ISOTIS VLE and could also be added to the Leicestershire Moodle platform.

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CHAPTER 3. COUNTRY REPORT: GERMANY

MAREIKE TRAUERNICHT, JULIANE SCHÜNKE, & YVONNE ANDERS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In accordance with ISOTIS' aims and the framework for the VLE task across work packages (WP), specifically for WP3, we aimed to develop an ICT-facilitated intervention for parents and practitioners working with parents with the following objectives:

- strengthening of the home learning environment,
- fostering interactive exchange between caregiver and child as well as between families of the community,
- valuing diverse language contexts and cultural backgrounds,
- stimulating thinking and talking about different languages at home,
- facilitating the transition to primary school,
- considering technology as a resource.

In Germany, we focused on Turkish immigrant families, however, we also included some other multilingual families.

This report provides an overview of our research site, design, and plans, as well as of the exploration, co-design, and implementation phase of our work.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND SITE SELECTION

3.2.1 SELECTION OF THE SITE

In line with the German target group of Turkish parents, we were aiming at an organisation that was primarily working with Turkish speaking families. Furthermore, we were targeting non-formal organisations that reach out to many different families because of their low-threshold approach. In accordance with our aims, the organisation's programme should include the fostering of the home learning environment and the support of a multilingual upbringing of children.

We contacted several organisations meeting our criteria by e-mail and telephone, specifically in Berlin's districts Neukölln and Kreuzberg. The population of these districts consists of many Turkish and multilingual families. Since they have access to and potentially visit family support programmes in the area, they correspond to our target group.

Initially, the feedback of these organisations was negative. They indicated that they were already offering programmes on our topic and that they were working at full capacity.

At the suggestion of an acquainted foundation, we met with the director and the employees of a community centre of a welfare association in Berlin-Kreuzberg. The community centre finally offered us to carry out the VLE intervention as a part of the *Rucksack* [English: backpack] programme.

3.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

Our site was a welfare organisation that is associated with a community centre in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Kreuzberg is a neighbourhood with a comparatively high percentage of Turkish and Arabic speaking families. The proportion of residents with a migration background and foreigners

in the district Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg is 43.3 percent; around 30,000 of the 46,000 residents with a migration background originate from Turkey or OIC countries and Syria (Amt für Statistik Berlin Brandenburg, 2018). The welfare organisation we worked with offers a wide range of counselling services and family education. It focusses on the work with families of diverse backgrounds by valuing their languages and their experiences. The welfare organisation tries to reach as many families as possible with a low-level approach, for example via a family café in the community centre that is open on a daily basis or with programmes like *Rucksack* or *Hippy*.

The programme *Rucksack* aims to support multilingual families before the transition from preschool to primary school. The programme is carried out in cooperation with preschools and aims to strengthen multilingualism, parenting skills, and educational partnerships between parents and educational institutions.

3.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The parents participating in the VLE intervention were part of a *Rucksack* group that accompanied the transition from preschool to primary school. Most families in our targeted *Rucksack* parent group had a Turkish migration background. As the programme aimed at supporting the transition from preschool to primary school, at least one of the parents' children was of preschool age, i.e., between five and seven years old. The group meets two hours per week in a room in the associated preschool and is guided by a parent tutor. During this time, the parents can attend the meeting, but they are free to come or leave as they choose; their children are mostly being cared for in the associated preschool.

The parent tutors, called *"Elternbegleiterinnen"*, of the *Rucksack* programme are mostly mothers who have a migration background similar to the target group of the programme. They do not have formal training as a social worker, but they are trained to run the programme with parents.

3.2.4 PHASES OF WORK

- Phase 0 `Setting the stage` (January – July 2018): Literature reviews, exploration of the field and selecting and contacting possible sites;
- Phase 1 `Exploratory phase` (April – November 2018): Ethnographic exploration via interviews with families and experts in the field, specification of the focuses of the VLE, first designs of activities, selecting and contacting possible sites, finding a site;
- Phase 2 `Co-design phase` (December 2018 – February 2019): Meeting with experts of the site, interview with the programme coordinator, focus group with parents, a parent tutor, and an affiliated preschool teacher, improvement and finalizing of activities:
- Phase 3 `Implementation phase` (March – April 2019): Implementation of the VLE, monitoring, and evaluation.

3.2.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Steps were taken as described in the introduction of the report.

3.2.6 RELEVANT PREVIOUS ISOTIS WORK

The qualitative and quantitative data of work package 2 in the German context helped us to improve our understanding of the target group of families with a Turkish migration background (e.g., general use of languages and educational attainment). The analyses of the T3.3 case

studies informed us about family support programs' use of and people's attitudes towards the use of ICT and the integration of diverse languages. Based on these analyses, we expected low structured involvement and usage of ICT elements, mixed attitudes towards using it in family support programs for the most part, and mixed guidelines regarding the integration of first languages. Furthermore, the German team involved with work package 2 recommended some possible locations for the implementation of the VLE. Unfortunately, these locations did not give their consent to collaborate with us for T3.4.

3.3 EXPLORATORY PHASE

The exploratory phase in the German context was supposed to give an insight into the life realities and the beliefs of the target group. Furthermore, we aimed at understanding the work of our research site. Therefore, we conducted interviews with field experts to get an impression of their experiences with our target group, to help to define needs and resources, to specify research aims, and to anticipate possible challenges when working with them. We also conducted interviews with Turkish mothers. Furthermore, we had a meeting with the management of the site which we were planning to collaborate with.

3.3.1 OVERVIEW OF PROCEDURES OF EXPLORING THE CONTEXT

Interviews with experts

We conducted two expert interviews. With each interview we aimed at gaining more information about the use of languages and language acquisition of Turkish families, their educational integration, their use of ICT, their networks, and their use of social support.
One expert interview was conducted on April 19th, 2018, with a central figure in the field. He had many years of experience in working with Turkish families as well as good contacts to families and relevant institutions. In recent years, he has mostly worked with fathers.
The second interview was conducted on April 13th, 2018, with an employee of a small centre for mothers and their children. This centre is mainly frequented by Turkish and Arabic speaking mothers. It offers educational and family counselling, social counselling, and various leisure activities and courses for children and mothers.

Interviews with parents

The interviewed mothers were not participants of the VLE. We used these interviews to explore the field. With our support, a group of educational science bachelor students conducted four semi-structured interviews with Turkish mothers in June 2018. The meetings were held either at the interviewees' homes or in cafés. With each interview, we aimed at gaining more information about the families` language use and their language acquisition of the first and second language, their educational integration, and especially about the enrolment into preschool and the transition from preschool to primary school. Besides, parents were asked about their use of ICT, their networks, and their use of other possible (social) support services.

On November 11th, 2018, we had a meeting with representatives of the site that was collaborating with us. The purpose of this meeting was to present our project and to find out if it fits to one of the site's offers. We discovered that the programme *Rucksack* has a similar purpose as the VLE. At the end of the meeting, the coordinator of the programme *Rucksack* decided to cooperate with us.

3.3.2 DOCUMENTATION AND DATA SUMMARIES

All interviews were audio-taped, and we filled out field notes by using a template that we shared in our group of WP3.4. Some of the interviews were transcribed and used for further qualitative analyses.

3.3.3 RESULTS/FINDINGS

3.3.3.1 Results from interviews with experts of the field

Language

The mother-and-child-centre is frequented by many mothers who come from Turkey, and came to Germany for their marriage. Therefore, about 50 percent of the mothers who attend the mother and child centre can hardly speak German, and due to this, they attend integration and language courses. One of the two experts assumed that 80 percent of the families speak Turkish at home. The other expert reported that very religious and traditional Turkish families could hardly speak German. For them, the knowledge of foreign languages was not regarded as an enrichment. Families who intended to stay in Germany wanted their children to have excellent German language skills, and the number of these families had increased considerably. However, it was often difficult to reach out to these families. The expert also said that sometimes children force their parents to learn German because the children learned the language themselves in preschool. These children then noticed that their parents' German is not good, and they take their parents' statements less seriously, whereupon the parents want to improve their German language skills.

Use of ICT

The parents were very actively using ICT devices (mainly smartphones and tablets), primarily for the purpose of communication, for translation, and entertainment. Many parents had no concerns about their privacy.

Educational integration

Mothers are perceived as being very committed to their children's education, and they were very open to having a dialogue with the (preschool) teachers. One expert said that it would be beneficial if the educational institutions put the appreciation of all languages in everyday life into practice. An appreciation of the parents and their life situation is essential.

The parents would like their children to go to a preschool when they are two or three years old (and not younger). Turkish parents and educators in preschools sometimes have different expectations as to who is responsible for teaching the children independence in everyday life. Some parents expect their children to learn certain behaviour and skills in preschool and not at

home.

Support options and networks
Parents were well connected, and they supported each other.

3.3.3.2 Results from interviews with Turkish migrant parents

Language
In everyday life, families either predominantly speak Turkish or German and Turkish are spoken alternately. In order to support the German language, families speak German on certain occasions. Further, families watch movies in German, listen to German music, read German books, or children play unguided in German. The involvement in communities was generally perceived as being helpful for Turkish language development. The parents stated that it was very important for them to support their children in their language acquisition in both their family language and German.

Use of ICT
The parents regularly used of digital media in their everyday lives. These included smartphones, televisions, and laptops. The parents were open to social platforms to exchange educational experiences and the latest pedagogical knowledge. Some parents reported they sometimes used internet forums where parents can discuss educational issues. However, they were not able to name a specific platform that they use regularly. There was uncertainty about the integrity and quality of educational platforms.
Some of the parents believed that the use of digital media could be advantageous, but also disadvantageous. Mainly children should use digital media only for a certain period during the day. The parents were afraid that their children might quickly become addicted to online games.

Educational integration
Most interviewed parents did not want their children to enter preschool before the age of three, except in the case that both parents were working. Despite this, they considered the preschool as being very important for them because it puts children in a social environment where they communicate with others and learn to be independent. However, some parents reported (communicative) problems with the preschool. Further, some parents expressed their wish that Turkish should also be spoken in preschools. There were complaints about the structures being stuck, and there was a wish for more openness, involvement, and trustful relationships in the cooperation with the preschools. In general, the preschool was perceived as a preparation for primary school. The parents emphasized the importance of preschools during the transition period from preschool to primary school in terms of decision-making regarding the choice of primary school and the time when the child was ready to go; they said it would be difficult to assess their children by themselves. Most parents felt well informed about primary schools by the preschools.

Support options and networks
In general, families felt well connected with other Turkish families in the immediate environment. For some parents, the events of various Turkish communities were important for socializing with other Turkish families. According to the interviews mothers, networking with other families was an advantage and supported education.

With regard to contact possibilities in the preschools, parents perceived the motivation of pedagogical professionals as crucial for good cooperation between parents and professionals.

Identity, understanding and knowledge

The Turkish language was essential for the interviewed parents because it also meant access to their family and relatives in Turkey as well as access to literature and knowledge. The mothers reported that their children are expected to learn a wide range of terms and meanings to express themselves in a differentiated way (e.g., feelings).

On the other hand, the promotion of the German language was also important to them, because it enabled their children to find their way in the German (school) system so that they were successful. This was the reason why parents wanted to promote both languages.

3.3.3.3. The organisation

Outreach

The parent tutor running the local Rucksack group asked in preschools if multilingual parents were interested in the programme and might want to join. The site itself tries to reach many families with their low-threshold approach.

Perceptions/representations of staff members

It is crucial for the representatives of the site that the content can be translated into many languages and that the first language of the families is valued.

Identity, understanding and knowledge

The site sees itself as a multicultural institution that wants to address parents from all parts of society. To this end, they use established programmes such as Rucksack and Hippy, but they also offer informal services such as educational counselling or a café for parents.

The level of declared programme/pedagogy and the level of practices

The material for the parents of the Rucksack programme is already prepared, which makes it easy for the parent tutor to work it through with the parents. The material is discussed with the parents on a weekly basis. Parents receive copies of proposed activities which they can carry out together with their children. The realisation of the planned implementation seemed to work in this type of group.

Other resources that the professionals/parent tutors/volunteer workers have access to

The parent tutor did not receive any ICT support; however, she did not need it up to now, because the content is on paper. The parent tutor meets with parents for two hours a week. She prepares the material for the meetings beforehand. The work of the parent tutor is paid.

3.3.4 CONCLUSIONS

During the exploratory phase, several aspects stuck out that shaped the aims of our next phases and informed us about the needs of our target group. First, through the interviews it became very clear that the general attitude when working with parents should be rooted in appreciation of and confidence towards parents. The VLE should be a way to empower parents. We also found that

parents reported being very active in the use of ICT. Therefore, the use of a virtual environment seems to fit to their natural environments.

Regarding language acquisition, families wanted their family language to be appreciated, but additionally, they wanted their children to learn German. In the next phases, the VLE should therefore support both the first and the second language. Since some parents missed the appreciation of the preschool for the Turkish language and maybe also the appreciation of their cultural background, an activity strengthening both would be advisable. As the programme in which the VLE will be involved in focuses on, an activity dealing with the transition from preschool to primary school would be appropriate.

3.4 CO-DESIGN PHASE

3.4.1 PROCEDURES

In Germany, we conducted two field visits during the co-design phase. The goal of each visit was to give us a better understanding of the needs and contexts of the specific target group we are working with in the co-design and implementation phase. The following sections describe the aims, methods, and periods of the data acquisition for each visit:

Field visit I: Expert interview with the coordinator of the *Rucksack* programme
The meeting took place on December 14th, 2018, in a conference room of an office building where the coordinator is working. Two ISOTIS researchers and an affiliated student were present, and they interviewed the experts. The expert interview lasted about one hour. The questions aimed at understanding the programme *Rucksack* and the reality of life as well as the contexts of the families involved in *Rucksack* groups on a deeper level in order to adapt the implementation of the VLE. In terms of content, we focused on language skills, attitudes, educational integration, use of technologies and ICT skills, as well as on structural questions about the programme.

Field visit II: Focus group with *Rucksack* group
The meeting took place on January 24th, 2019, in a parent café room of a local preschool and lasted about 2.5 hours. Two ISOTIS researchers and an affiliated student, six parents (not all of them at the same time), the parent tutor, one preschool teacher affiliated to *Rucksack*, and the coordinator were present. After presenting ISOTIS and the VLE, we conducted a group interview with all attendants. We requested their feedback to the VLE and asked general questions concerning their use of ICT and their ICT skills, their language skills and attitudes towards their language use, as well as the experiences with regard to the transition of the parents' older children (if they had any) to primary school. After the meeting in the group, we discussed the future procedure for the implementation phase with the coordinator and the parent tutor.

3.4.2 DOCUMENTATION

The researchers made field notes after each meeting, and the interviews were audio-recorded. Afterward, we summarized the interviews according to our themes of interest. Additionally, we transcribed parts of the interviews for further analyses.

3.4.3 FINDINGS

Language skills and attitude
The coordinator explained that the language background of *Rucksack* parents is very diverse and heterogeneous; she was not able to describe a common trend concerning the language skills, both in the first and second language. For her, it was vital not to stigmatize multilingual parents by discerning them from other parents and also to foster multilingualism. However, she reported that, in general, parents wanted their children to learn German because they believed that the German language was highly regarded. The coordinator described the parents as very well connected. She further reported that children of multilingual families tended to have friends of the same first language. Moreover, preschools hosting a *Rucksack* group often followed a bilingual concept.

Educational integration
The coordinator described the compositions of the parents in *Rucksack* as heterogeneous in terms of their socioeconomic status. In her opinion, it was vital not to generalize. However, she explained that all parents have high educational aspirations for their children: they all expected their children to accomplish their A-levels. She also said that particularly in Berlin there are some districts with low-quality schools which is bothering some parents.

Use of technologies and ICT skills (of participating parentes and children)
The coordinator explained that everyone had a smartphone; the possession of other electronic devices, e.g., tablets, varies and depends on the financial background of the families. Preschools involved with *Rucksack* were also diversely equipped with ICT. Parents used ICT both for education and fun; in terms of languages, the parents used *Google Translate* and voice messages. They preferred their older children to use books instead of ICT.
The coordinator figured out that the parents were sceptical towards the VLE initially and that we would need to be very sensitive in the beginning in order to build up trust. However, the parent tutor we planned on working with would like the idea.

Resulting suggestions for changes/adaptations of the VLE
The implementation and content of the VLE should be integrated within the scheduled topics of the course. According to a following e-mail of the coordinator, the group she had in mind would talk about the topics "animals" and "autonomy" in March 2019 (when we intend to conduct the implementation phase).
The coordinator mentioned that the materials of the programme were not available in all languages up to now. The VLE was particular interesting for them because it offers a wide range of languages. The coordinator proposed to not only work with Turkish migrants, as we were initially planned, but to open up the group for parents who speak other languages. Thus, nobody would be excluded. The group she had in mind consisted mostly of Turkish parents, but a few parents had other nationalities. An e-mail of the coordinator after the meeting called our attention to the fact that in the specific group in which we were going to test the VLE, some parents did not (just) speak Turkish – even though most parents did –, but (also) Arabic, Bulgarian, Polish, and German. A possible adaptation of the content with regard to the languages was discussed. The

coordinator made clear that they did not need any additional linked resources on the VLE. She said no one would use them, and there were enough linked resources available online in other websites.

Resulting suggestions for the implementation phase

The coordinator explained that an implementation phase consisting of six meetings would be too long for the project. We decided to plan four to six meetings and to only use some time of the group meetings of *Rucksack* for the VLE. The coordinator also mentioned that some parents might be sceptical towards professionals being present in the group. We decided to reduce our presence to a minimum (in the beginning and at the end of the implementation phase).

3.4.3.2 Results from field visit II: focus group with Rucksack group

Relevance and usefulness of the VLE for the target group

Many parents of the group were familiar with ICT in their everyday life, especially with smartphones. Therefore, the VLE fitted to their natural environment. However, the interview also showed that parents did not necessarily use ICT for educational purposes and for stimulating the home learning environment. This would be a new aspect resulting from the VLE intervention.

Attractiveness of the work on the VLE

The parents appreciated the diverse languages and the related functions very much. They also mentioned that they liked the information for them as a parent. Furthermore, the interactive character of the site fitted to the strong network they already had among each other.

Feasibility of work on the VLE

The content of the activities and VLE, in general, seemed to be fitting. However, we figured that it might be possible that the parents and particularly the parent tutor would not be able to use the VLE without help and lengthy introductions. A challenging situation was looming.

Challenges of work on the VLE

Three kinds of challenges became obvious during the meeting: the parents' attitudes towards the use of ICT by their young children, only basic ICT skills together with a hesitant attitude of the parent tutor, and the kind of attendance of the parents during the sessions. The parents displayed different opinions with regard to their children's use of ICT. However, most of them were very cautious about the amount of time their children spend on electronic devices and about what they do with the electronic devices. The present preschool teacher even suggested that children should not use a smartphone before the age of six years. The parents stated that they could imagine using the VLE to get access to interesting information, but that they did not want their children to use it. However, the parents also stated that if their children were allowed to use the ICT, then something like the VLE would be better than other things. Their main concern was that their children might not spend enough time playing outside and that it might have adverse effects on the children's brain.

Furthermore, even though it was not openly expressed, we noticed that ICT skills of the parent tutor were very basic. She stated that she did not want to use our laptop during the sessions because she was afraid to take responsibility for it. However, there was no other computer available, and the implementation of the VLE would be limited otherwise. Another challenge was

that the parents did not join the sessions at the same time: some joined earlier, some later. Furthermore, the parents did not necessarily attend all of the sessions, but they sometimes skipped some weekly meetings. This would be a difficulty for the group work.

In sum, parents' and the parent tutor's fears and (negative) attitudes, a potential lack of necessary ICT skills, as well as well as a lack of ICT devices were revealed as important challenges to putting a tool like the VLE into practice.

Resources and needs of the parent tutor in relation to proposed activities/the VLE & ease of integration of proposed activities/work on the VLE into the ongoing work with the parents

We figured that the parent tutor would need to receive clear instructions of what to do, when and how. Technically, she would need a device with an internet connection. For the group, the compatibility of the VLE with a smartphone would be a must. Further, other than expected, the parent tutor would need some technical support during the sessions.

The VLE could be used for and integrated into parts of the official meetings (approx. 9.30 am to 10.30 am). The contents were discussed before.

Use of technologies and ICT skills of participating parents (and children)

The parent group reported that they use ICT a lot, for example for translations, to download letter templates, for recipes, and social networks. However, they displayed mixed opinions about their children using ICT. Most of them were very hesitant and afraid of brain damages. Some of the parents explained that their children had better ICT skills than they had. Some children used specific apps, but not necessarily for educational purposes. Many of the parents had strict rules in terms of the length of the ICT usage and they were concerned about their children's security.

Language skills and attitudes of participating parents (and children)

The group reported speaking two or three languages, including Turkish, German, Arabic, English, and the Kurdish dialect Zazaki. They declared that the language skills of their children differ, even in one family. Most parents agreed that girls had better language skills than boys. In general, they reported that children's oral skills were better than their writing skills. However, the parents indicated that it was very important for them that their children spoke the host and the family language so that they can cope with their daily life in Germany and understand their relatives in their home country.

The group initiated a debate about a term they called "heart language". They defined it as the language of emotional experiences and dreams, which is mostly the first language. The parent tutor explained: "Ich weine nie auf Deutsch, ich weine nur auf Türkisch [I never cry in German, I only cry in Turkish]". One promising aspect of the VLE is that the "heart language" of parents is integrated into the VLE: parents and parent tutors actually can browse through the website, look for information, and do activities in their "heart language".

Transition to primary school: experiences and needs

Only some parents had children attending (primary) school. For them, it was essential to search for a good primary school with a good mix of German and international children. They reported that some teachers were open for multilingualism and they valued the diversity, others were not open to that at all. In general, they explained that there was less contact and interaction between

parents of children in primary schools than in preschools.

Resulting suggestions for changes/adaptations of the VLE

From our experiences in the co-design phase, we figured that there should be a possibility to do activities in a print version for parents being reluctant towards using ICT with children. The suggested activities should provide examples on how to do them off-line and in nature. Furthermore, the coordinator asked for the inclusion of articles in our memory game. In line with the coordinator, we selected the following main languages for specific translations of activities in the VLE: Turkish, German, Arabic, (English). However, since we had only one meeting with the parent tutor and parents (shortly) before the start of the implementation phase, the possibility to participate in the development of activities on the VLE and to be actively involved in this research phase was limited.

3.4.4 DESIGNED ACTIVITES

In this section, we present the two activities we wanted to conduct in the group through the VLE during the implementation phase. Please find introductory texts, reflection ideas, as well as activities developed for our sessions here (section: *Promoting different languages at home*): https://vle.isotis.org/course/view.php?id=619#section-7

Activity 1: Treasure Box

For this activity, children and caregivers together think about five important or valued items for the child and/or the family. They take pictures of them and upload them into a template provided through the VLE. Item names are written in first and second language next to pictures. Each parent (and child) presents their *Treasure Box* in the next class.
Here you find a link to the template: https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3001

Activity 2: Memory Game

For this activity, participants discuss relevant items or routines for starting and being in school. Caregivers together with children take or search for pictures of those and present them in class. Thereby, items/routines are described in first and second languages. The pictures and descriptions on both languages are uploaded into the memory template provided by the VLE. The game can be played in the class or at home.
Here you find a link to the template: https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3008

3.4.5 ANALYSIS OF HOW CRITERIA ARE MET

Activity 1: Treasure Box

In coherence with the ISOTIS and WP 3 values, this activity stimulates interconnections among families, as individual Treasure Boxes can be shared within the group. Furthermore, participants are actively involved in creating the material in a participatory way. The activity fosters cultural sensitiveness, makes use of family resources, gives a voice to all, and can support the transition to school. There is an opportunity to integrate multiple languages. In coherence with the ISOTIS intervention method, the activity involves examples and is open to adjustments, it blends the use

of ICT and analogue activities, and it is transferable to other contexts and topics.

Activity 2: Memory Game

Similarly, the second activity builds on the co-creation of contents. It fosters interconnections between families and is connected to the local experiential world of participants, and it is supposed to facilitate the interactions between the caregiver and the child. Furthermore, the activity integrates multiple language resources, it prepares for primary school, and it makes use of ICT as a resource to foster the home learning environment. It can be adapted to different contexts and practices.

3.5 IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION PHASE

3.5.1 Procedures

Where, who, when

Location of the intervention
The intervention was implemented in a parent meeting room in a preschool environment.

Parent tutors and parents
We worked together with the same parent tutor and parents as we did during the co-design phase. However, the number of attending mothers varied from session to session and during the sessions.

Time frame
There were three meetings in March 2019 together with the parents and the parent tutor; they took about 75 minutes, 90 minutes, and 100 minutes. A final meeting with the parent tutor and the *Rucksack*-coordinator took place on May 13th which was about 100 minutes.

What and how

Objectives
The objectives of the intervention activities mirror the topics listed in the beginning of this country report. All objectives fit into the overall framework of ISOTIS, whose primary goal is to build "on the strengths and potential of culturally and linguistically diverse families, by giving them a voice [… and] to combat inequalities and increase inclusiveness" (ISOTIS, 2019). Following the objectives and the feedback we received from the field (see part II-III), we aimed at implementing the two activities presented in part III of the report, namely the *Treasure Box* and the *Memory Game*.

Delivery plans
Initially, we planned that the parent tutor introduces and uses the VLE in the course self-sufficiently. In the co-design phase, we realized that the parent tutor would feel overstrained by doing all of this just by herself, and we offered that one of our research team members would be present for every meeting. The parent tutor agreed gratefully and seemed relieved. However, we

still expected the parent tutor to lead the VLE sessions primarily; the present researcher's task would be to make sure everyone was able to enter the platform, to conduct the evaluation interviews, and to support the parent tutor or parents when problems arose.

The parent group we worked with took place on Thursdays from 9.00 to 11.00 am. However, parents came and went as they wanted. The parent tutor let us know beforehand that most parents were present between 9.30 and 10.30 am. This was the time when the usage of the VLE, including a short introduction of the topics and the introduction/presentation of the activities, was planned. The VLE was meant to support the parent tutor's preparation for the sessions and to foster our overall objectives in the course. Preschool teachers were not present during the implementation phase; however, some very young children joined in some of the meetings. The following table gives an overview of our planned dates and contents:

Table 3.1: Agenda of implementation phase in Germany

Date	Agenda
7th of March, 2019	· Privacy Policy, VLE access · First overview of VLE · Presentation of "Food for Thought" and "Group Discussion" · Introduction of 1st activity (*Treasure Box*)
21st of March, 2019	· Parents present the personal *Treasure Boxes*
28st of March, 2019	· Introduction of 2nd activity (*Memory Game*)
4th of April, 2019	· Parents present created *Memory Games*

Note. Initially, we scheduled four meetings as outlined in the table above. However, due to scheduling difficulties, after the first meeting, we decided to merge the second and third meeting and to shift the last meeting to the 28th of March.

Monitoring and evaluation procedures

During the implementation phase and according to the summary table of the evaluation steps in appendix A, we applied several procedures to monitor and evaluate the work on the VLE. The following table provides a detailed overview of data acquisition, methods, and sample size:

Table 3.2: Evaluation steps

	Parent Tutor	Parents
Pre-Implementation [7th of March 2019]	-	Self-evaluation questionnaire (T1; $n = 6$)
During Implementation [7th, 21st, and 28th of March 2019]	Questionnaire and written feedback to activities ($n = 2$); observations in the form of field notes (during each session)	Observations in the form of field notes (during each session)
After Implementation	Questionnaire; 1 face-to-face interview [13th of May 2019]	Self-evaluation questionnaire (T2; $n = 6$); 1 focus-group discussion (questions: see Appendix B) [28th of March 2019]

3.5.2 Results

In this section, we first provide an overview of each session in separate boxes, including its goals and procedures, most important observations, and some reflections. Subsequently, we report on the results of each evaluation procedure (cfl. table 8). Finally, we elaborate on overall results of the implementation phase (including the interview with the parent tutor) with regard to desired effects of and engagement with the activities, engagement with VLE functions and resources, and changes happening through the engagement with activities.

3.5.2.1 Overview of sessions

Session 1.
March 7, 2019
Goals
The aims of the first session were the activation of the parent accounts and the introduction to the VLE and first activity, the treasure box.
Procedure
At the beginning of this first session, the mothers and the parent tutor were given access to the VLE, and the mothers signed the privacy policy. Then the mothers were given an

overview of the contents and activities of the VLE and German part of the learning environment, in particular, the "Food for thought" and the group discussion. Afterward, the first activity, the treasure chest, was introduced. For this purpose, the proposed procedure and the instructions for creating a personal treasure box were presented. The example of a treasure box was shown and it was explained how to create an own treasure box. Parents were asked to take photos for the next session.

Observations and reflections

In this first session, it became very clear that it was very difficult for the parent tutor and parents to use the VLE. As a result, the present researcher took a more active role. However, parents and the parent tutor were trying to use the VLE and they were also willing to cooperate. They wanted to take photos for the next session, which the parent tutor reminded them of at the end of the session. The atmosphere in the group of mothers was open and relaxed. Private information about the children was also exchanged. When filling in the questionnaires, the mothers noted that the questionnaires in other languages were not necessary. Their German would be very good. Even though our aim was to appreciate their first languages and simplify the work for them, mothers perceived the translated questionnaires rather as criticism of their German. In the future, a more sensitive approach to translations is necessary.

Session 2.

March 21, 2019

Goals & activities

The second meeting's goal was to strengthen family's identities and to value diversity. For this, parents were supposed to show each other the personalized Treasure Boxes. Another goal of the session was to introduce and prepare the second activity, the creation of a Memory Game. Parents were asked to create a Memory Game for the next session or at least bring pictures to the next session, so that the group could create one together.

Observations & reflections

First of all, in response to the first session, in this session two instead of one researcher were present to support the parent tutor and the implementation of the activities.
Our observations during the session showed that parents were interested in collaborating with us, and they liked the activity. The atmosphere was open and pleasant. However, the group conducted the activity in a different way than we proposed in the previous session. Parents did not create a Treasure Box on the VLE, but rather selected pictures on their smartphones. Furthermore, parents did not interact with their children to select pictures, but did it on their own, sometimes even during the session and not at home beforehand. Many parents did not select pictures at all. Some of them mentioned that they did not want their young children to engage with technical devices. Further, parents and parent tutor were clearly overstrained

with technical aspects and complexity of the VLE. This restricted discussions about the content of the activity. Actually, even researchers had problems to allocate the activity to *My Spaces* and to upload pictures from smartphones to the activity templates. No parent was able or had accessed the VLE at home; some of them reported they did not have a laptop at home. Also, the parent tutor had not accessed the platform, as we suggested before. Additionally or as a consequence of this, the group showed resistance and motivational problems to really use the VLE, even though they reported that they liked the idea of the VLE.

Session 3.

March 28, 2019

Goals

On the one hand, the aim was to use the memory game to promote a playful use of the family language and German and, thus, ultimately to support the children's vocabulary development. On the other hand, the inclusion of the family language and German should ensure that both languages were equally important and valuable.

During this meeting, we wanted to create at least one memory game with photos the parents uploaded in their shared WhatsApp-group.

Procedure

In this session, two members of the research team were present again.

First, we wanted to create a memory game. Parents were asked in session 2 to send photos for the memory game in preparation for this session in their joint WhatsApp-group. A few parents had done this. These photos were supposed to be uploaded in a memory game template on the VLE using the parent tutor's smartphone. We wanted to do this together with her to reduce the difficulty of using the VLE for her and the parents.

As the VLE website was not available at the beginning of the session, we restructured the course of this session.

We let the parents fill in the questionnaires first, and then we did the focus group. After the VLE website was available again, we tried to create a memory game. Unfortunately, it was not possible to upload the photos of the parents with a smartphone. The upload function did not work. It was briefly considered to circumvent this problem by using a laptop. However, time was running out, and because this would not correspond to a procedure adapting to the environment of parents, we decided against this idea. At the end of the session, the parent tutor was asked to fill in the journal for the memory game.

Observations and reflections

During the whole session, the parents were very open to the intervention. The parents were also actively involved in the focus group. We noticed that the parents and especially the parent tutor were very relieved and almost amused, that at first the VLE website was not accessible and later the upload function did not work. The parents then told about their

problems at home uploading the photos, which did not work for them either. This led to frustration for the mothers who tried to upload photos. This also explains the prior relief of the parents and parent tutor.

Session 1

In the first session, we handed out self-evaluation questionnaires to participating mothers. In this questionnaire, they were asked to state how important their family language is to them, what they do at home to promote the language, to what extent they use ICT and how effective they consider themselves. The mothers had the opportunity to fill in the questionnaires in German, English, Turkish, or Arabic. The completed questionnaires were placed into envelopes, so they and we would be able to compare responses with responses in the last session, where they filled out the same questionnaires again. Generally, the mothers stated that it is important for them to speak with their child in their family language and that their child has a good knowledge of this language. On average, mothers indicated to do a lot or very much to promote the family language as well as German at home. They were more likely to exchange information about the upbringing of a bilingual child with other people. Some mothers used ICT more often to search for information to promote the language, but gave less encouragement to their child with ICT in his or her language development. Mothers reported that promoting the family language was moderate to very strongly one of their strengths. They also felt moderate to very competent in preparing their child for the transition to primary school.

Session 2

For the second session, the parent tutor filled out the journal about the conducted activity. She evaluated the activity *Treasure Box* in a very positive way, according to the journal questionnaire. The only items she ticked I agree instead of I completely agree were "The activity was clearly presented", "I would do this activity again", and "Parents engaged with the activity outside the session/at home". She did not agree with the item "Parents engaged with the VLE to uploaded content which documented their engagement with this activity". She reported that the reaction of the group towards the activity was mainly positive and that she liked that parents had to collaborate. She stated that the internet connection needed to be improved and that she would appreciate if children would be able to upload their voices for the words of the Memory Game.

Session 3

In the third session, we conducted a focus group with parents (see Appendix B for specific questions), the parent tutor filled out another journal about the conducted activity, and parents filled out the self-evaluation questionnaires again. We will elaborate on each.

The focus group revealed that none of the mothers indicated that anything had changed during the implementation phase. One mother stated that she was increasingly promoting her son's German language knowledge. However, this was triggered by other children commenting on his little knowledge of German in the preschool. With regard to bilingualism, the mothers stated that it was not easy to teach children both languages at a high level and that they wanted their children not to switch between the two languages within a sentence. Also, mothers indicated that they were critical of the use of ICT for educational purposes regarding the involvement of children.

They were explicitly afraid of what would happen to their children's pictures or videos and that they might be stolen from the platform. The mothers also mentioned that the children did not see the platform because they found it difficult to use. They also believed that ICT is harmful to (small) children. One suggestion for improving the VLE was that the VLE had content that could be printed out, for example. The mothers seemed to want a connection between the physical and the virtual world or a meaningful addition from the virtual world to their physical world. Moreover, if the interaction included children, the mothers preferred the intervention not to be virtual. Furthermore, the mothers reported that the login and usage had to be quick and easy, preferably via an app; this would spark their interest. An app would also solve the problem with the recurring login. Similar activities already existed and were uploaded on the tablet of a son of one of the mothers, for example. The VLE's structure and density of information were good. The mothers positively emphasized that the virtual learning environment was a protected environment with trustworthy content and no advertisement, and the ideas of the activities were stimulating. The parent tutor also pointed out that even if parents were doubtful about ICT, children had to learn to deal with it at school at the latest, for example, when doing homework. Therefore, a virtual learning environment would also make sense for their children.

During the focus group with the parents, the parent tutor was supposed to fill out <u>the journal for the memory game</u>. In the journal, she agreed or absolutely agreed that the activity was clearly presented and easily includible in her work schedule. She also stated it was easy to involve parents in this activity and that she would recommend the activity to other parent tutors. However, she indicated that the activity was not relevant to the parents' needs, and she neither agreed nor disagreed that the activity fitted into the course content and that the parent tutor would do it again. Regarding the mothers, she stated that they had enjoyed it, but that the use of the activity online should be made more accessible. She noted positively that the activity encouraged parents to exchange opinions and carry out other activities.

Further, parents filled out the <u>self-evaluation questionnaires</u> again. However, two parents filled in the questionnaire for the first time. The mothers stated that it was very important to them to speak with their child in the family language and that their child has a good knowledge of this language. It was important to the mothers that they can speak with their child in their family language, and it was essential to them that their child had a good knowledge of the family language. They indicated to do very much at home to promote the family language, but they did moderately much to promote German. Both stated that they did not speak at all to other people about raising a bilingual child. This was surprising because Rucksack is also supposed to offer this possibility. However, one mother stated she used ICT very often, the other mother sometimes to search for information to promote the language, but both use ICT at home to promote their children's language development. Both reported that promoting family language was definitely one of their strengths. They also felt very competent in preparing their children for the transition to primary school. Unfortunately, not all questionnaires were labelled as pre- or post-measurement; therefore, we could not always interpret the direction of changed responses. However, the deviations in the answers on a 5 Likert scale vary by one point.

3.5.2.3 Overall results of implementation phase

Content and desired effects of the activities

In the beginning, two different activities were selected with specific goals: The treasure box was intended to foster the valuing of the origin of the family and to promote and value interaction with the child. The memory game was intended to promote the child's vocabulary and support the transition from preschool to primary school.

With the treasure box the parents should be encouraged to share what is important for their child and themselves. If possible, they should tell little background stories, e.g. about the child's favourite toy or the recipe for a dish that the child likes, and the mother received from her own mother. The memory game should have encouraged the parents to take photos of school materials or their surroundings and to create their memory with them. This would have allowed the parents to talk to their children and the group about the upcoming start of school. Furthermore, the aim was to enhance the vocabulary of the children while playing memory.

At least the exchange during the sessions and the focus group in the last session prompted the parents to exchange stories and experiences of themselves of their and their children's bilingualism. They were aware of differences in language acquisition between their sons and daughters and they were also aware of contexts their children speak their family language or German (observations 1-3, focus group). Otherwise, the parents and parent tutor hardly used the activities.

Engagement with activities

Use, clarity and ease of the activities

The desired interaction and our goals were hardly achieved as the parents found it challenging to deal with the activities on the VLE-website (observations 1-3, focus group, parent tutor interview). The structure and intention of the activities (and the VLE itself) were clear to the parents, but unfortunately, they did not manage to carry out the activities online (observations 1-3, focus group). The parent tutors also stated that parents preferred activities on paper (parent tutor interview). Since there was no real engagement with the activities, they were not able to reflect on it during the implementation. In the session's discussions, the parents talked about topics regarding bilingualism, valuing the family language and their role as a parent in this and were very open (observations 1-3), but no finished games or boxes of the families were created.

Relevance and pedagogy

The themes of the activities were relevant for the parents, and they appreciated them (focus group). The mothers even stated that they wanted activities that promote their children's language development and allow them to play with their language or voice. They said this should be integrated into the activity (focus group). The parent tutor also found the activities interesting (parent tutor interview). On the other hand, the mothers reported that many apps with great activities for their children already exist, so they would not necessarily use the VLE in their daily life. Instead, a mother said she would rather go cycling with her child, especially as the preschool teachers also recommended this. She said this would promote the child's motor skills, and she was also able to promote the language development of their child during this kind of activity (focus group). Furthermore, a mother stated that she had built the memory game with her son offline.

She took photos and glued them on cardboard at home (focus group). This might indicate that the activity was interesting to the mother, but she just wanted the game to be used offline (focus group). Until the implementation of the VLE the parent tutor conducted all activities on paper und also encouraged the parents to do activities offline (parent tutor interview).

Engagement with activities

Since it was difficult for the mothers and the parent tutor, and since they were also a bit hesitant due to their critical attitude towards ICT, the engagement with the activities was rather low. When the parents were asked during the last focus group about the effect of the VLE implementation or activities, one mother smiled and said they did not like it. Even though the parent tutor stated that she liked the activities, it was hard for her to really integrate them into the group work (parent tutor interview, observations 1-3), maybe due to the lack of ICT skills or the lack of the VLE's user-friendliness.

Engagement with VLE functions and resources

Use, clarity and ease of VLE-resources and functions

The general interaction with the VLE was very low. Parents and the parent tutor were very hesitant to use resources and functions, and the website's complexity deterred them
(Observations 1-3; focus group; parent tutor interview). Most of them were even reluctant to log into the platform by themselves, and some reported to have difficulties with the login process. No one was able to navigate to a certain activity by herself. Some reported that they tried to upload pictures (focus group, observations 2 and 3), but failed. Several parents reported that the website was too complicated and time-consuming. One parent explained that the VLE was not attractive to her because it was too complicated and slow (focus group).

Relevance (fitting parent needs/parent tutor aims/content of the session)

The parent tutor explained that she appreciated the many languages that are integrated into the VLE. However, she also described that it was very unusual to see Turkish words in an ICT-context, where she usually only sees German or English words. She liked the fact that Turkish was being integrated, but it did not help her to understand functions but rather complicated her comprehension. Apparently, Turkish words for ICT-components are not used very often (parent tutor interview). The parent tutor also reflected that the activities were adaptive to the content of the sessions (parent tutor interview). However, in the end, we applied them in a more general format.

The parents stated that they already knew some apps similar to the activities we introduced, so they did not see a high added value (focus group). What they liked about the VLE was that they knew who created it and that it did not include advertisements. Furthermore, they had some ideas for potential functions of the VLE, such as the idea to record their children's voices for the words of the *Memory Game*. One mother explained that she would like to use the idea of the *Treasure Box* for an offline activity with her child.

Pedagogy (VLE part of the activity fits ways in which group interacts, is taught)

On the one side, the idea of the VLE fitted very well to the way how parents of the group used ICT in everyday life, namely for translations and social connections (see co-design phase). However, on the other side, the parent tutor made very clear during the expert interview after the

implementation that she usually tells parents not to use technical devices with children under the age of 6. The fact that we asked parents to interact with children when doing the activities on the platform contradicted her general pedagogical attitude. This was difficult for her.

Similarly, the parents mentioned in the focus group that they did not wish their children to use ICT, but rather play and learn outside/offline/haptic. However, they were aware of the fact that children need to be introduced to ICT at some point, but according to them not before school entry. This was also one reason for the fact that they did not work together with children on the VLE and why their motivation was not very strong. One parent even reported that the group had taken part in a training held by a preschool teacher who explicitly warned parents against the usage of ICT by their children.

Engagement

It became evident that the parent tutor and also the parents evaluated the VLE much more positive when being verbally asked or according to their answers in the questionnaires. However, our observations of their behaviour were a bit different: They were very hesitant in using the website, especially with their children.

Changes happening through engagement with activity

Throughout the implementation phase and during the focus group in the end, it became clear that the topics we touched on with the VLE (first language, second language, preparation for school) were very relevant and important for the parents. However, since technical aspects took over so much time during the implementation, our observations indicated that the activities were not able to initiate changes in parents' views and practices. It was instead the interviews during the phases that prompted parents to reflect as well as share experiences and views within the group.

3.6 DISCUSSION

In this last part of the report, we critically reflect the whole project process in Germany. Thereby, we include all three phases (exploration, co-design, and implementation phase) and address the following issues:

(1) Relevance/feasibility of the aims that were set at the beginning

(2) Main difficulties and challenges

(3) Main positive aspects

(4) Lessons learned: key aspects to change, key aspects to maintain

3.6.1 RELEVANCE AND FEASIBILITY OF AIMS

Concerning our objectives stated in the introduction, to some extent, the project strengthened the home learning environment by inviting parents for reflection and providing some new ideas for activities with their children. In the same way, we also fostered exchange between caregivers and child, but mostly between parents of the group. Through discussions about language and through including multiple first languages into the VLE, we also strengthened valuing diverse language contexts and backgrounds. However, during the discussions, we did not touch cultural backgrounds very much. We stimulated thinking and talking about different languages at home.

However, the aim to facilitate the transition to primary school was too ambitious, especially because the time was very limited. Our project was not able to lead parents and the tutor to consider technology as a resource. During the implementation phase, they came across too many technical problems and instead saw hazards than advantages of ICT tools for their children. To put it in a nutshell, of the objectives have been touched to some extent. However, the time of the intervention was not long enough to create significant and sustainable progress. The aim to facilitate the transition to primary school was not feasible for us, and the VLE was not operational enough to change participants' view on perceiving technology as a resource. Generally, the short time period, relatively low ICT skills for such a complex virtual environment, and partly negative attitudes of parents and the tutor towards using ICT with young children made it difficult to reach all our aims. Future projects should take more time to develop a user-friendly VLE and to train parents and staff in using it. Further, the lack of a stable internet connection and functioning laptop on the site and the lack of motivation and skills to get engaged with the platform interfered with reaching our aims.

3.6.2 MAIN DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES

During the exploration phase, it was not easy to find a partner who would collaborate with us. Many organisations were already dealing with issues of multilingualism and transition from preschool to primary school and did not see an added value in working with us. In the end, an internal contact worked as an intermediary and brought us into contact with our collaboration partner. During the implementation phase, it became apparent that the VLE was too difficult to access and to navigate for parents and the tutor. The internet connection was poor and some parents and the tutor did not have the required technical skills and/or apt technical devices. Additionally, because parents were not used and were sometimes confused to see specific ICT terms in their first languages.

These facts came along with missing motivational aspects to engage with the VLE. Further, we realised during the process, but especially during the evaluation interview in the end, that our way to foster exchange between caregiver and child somehow contradicted the tutor's pedagogical approach. She always taught the parents to not use ICT tools for and with children, but rather to go outside and interact in the real world. Now, we prompted her to apply the opposite, at least to some extent. The complex and somehow confusing layout of the VLE, missing technical skills on the side of the parents and the tutor, at some points a lack of motivation, a short time implementation period, and contradicting pedagogical beliefs made it difficult to succeed.

3.6.3 MAIN POSITIVE ASPECTS

In the beginning, the coordinator of *Rucksack* confirmed that she appreciated and supported the integration of the promotion of the first language into parent support programmes and had already integrated topics concerning the transition from preschool to primary school. With regard to the VLE, our cooperation partner appreciated that parents' and parent tutor's needs and wishes had been involved in the development process of the VLE. They also appreciated the activities themselves; however, only one parent tried them out offline. Further, the focus on the families' environments, the intention of practicability and user-friendliness, and the consideration of multilingualism of the VLE was appreciated. Despite the challenges we met, for reasons of sustainability, the cooperation partner had interest in using the when our collaboration had

finished. Another promising aspect of the VLE is the implementation of multilingualism: since parents refer to their family language as their "heart language" that is important to them, the use of their "heart language" could make the VLE appealing, even though it has not been used substantially. Other positive aspects included that the project fostered the tutor's and parents' reflections about (the ways of using) ICT, language, and possible activities with children.

In terms of sustainability, the local coordinator of *Rucksack* as well as the licensors of the programme were very interested in using the VLE also for future classes, underlining the general interest for using a platform like VLE.

3.6.4 LESSONS LEARNED: KEY ASPECTS TO CHANGE AND TO MAINTAIN

Regarding the co-design-phase, in retrospect, an intensive training for the parent tutor would have been highly necessary, so that she would have been able to carry out the VLE interventions independently during the implementation phase. We also noticed that it might make a big difference if collaborating parent tutors are used to work with digital environments or at least see the added value and are motivated.

From our experience during the implementation phase, we conclude that the VLE should be turned into a simple and appealing app. Both parents and parent tutor experienced serious problems when accessing and navigating through the very complicated VLE. Not all of them had computers, and it was hard for them to use the VLE on a browser of a smartphone. If an ICT intervention like this is not user-friendly – especially for disadvantaged families –, parents will not use it and the project is not sustainable. Further, the implementation phase would have been more intense and effective if we had had more time to foster motivation, to train skills, and to implement activities; three meetings were not enough.

In general, the idea to create a virtual environment that fosters exchange between families, educational settings, and professional development across regional borders has great potential to foster (international) exchange, valuing of diverse backgrounds, and learning. However, from our experience, the path to use the VLE in a family support programme setting still seems to be long and is paved with motivational and technical stumbling blocks.

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Appendix A: Summary of evaluation steps

	General Overview: Aims and methods of data collection			
	Pre-Implementation (exploratory, co-design)	**Pre-Implementation**	**During Implementation**	**Post-Implementation**
Parents	Language: views, identity, competencies and family practices - **Individual interviews and/or focus groups** - **Observations** in centres (sessions, meetings etc.)/descriptive field notes Feedback on VLE and activities – **Co-design meetings**/descriptive field notes	Perceived importance of heritage language, strategies used to support children's learning of heritage and school language (including ICT) – brief **self-evaluation questionnaire (T1)**	**Engagement in activities** and with the VLE (qualitative documentation – mainly **observations** and descriptive field notes; other options: pictures & video-recordings, informal conversations before and after sessions **Use of the VLE** – observations carried out directly in the VLE (quantity of use, engagement in forum or on the noticeboard) **VLE usability testing**	**Self-evaluation questionnaire (T2)** Feedback on the VLE and activities **– focus group discussion**
		Group reflections on the 'cases' (the materials prepared for the sections 'observe and reflect') – mainly **observations** [where observations are not feasible, possibly feedback from parent tutors]		
Parent tutors	views/perceptions, declared programme/pedagogy in relation to (support of) family		Feedback about experiences of trying out activities in practice – **Written feedback on the VLE**	Feedback on the VLE, the activities and the participation in the research work

	language practices – **Individual interviews and/or focus groups** - **Observations** in centres (sessions, meetings etc.)/descriptive field notes Feedback on VLE and activities – **Co-design meetings**/descriptive field notes		Process of implementation of activities and engagement with the VLE during sessions – **qualitative documentation**: mainly **observations** and descriptive field notes; other options: pictures & video-recordings, informal conversations before and after sessions Use of the VLE – **observations** carried out directly in the VLE (quantity of use, engagement in forum or on the noticeboard) **VLE usability testing**	– **focus group discussion or face-to-face interviews**
Child			Engagement in activities (with the parent or with a parent tutor) – **observations**	
Teacher/ educator [9]			Experiences of involvement in intervention **– written feedback**	Experiences of involvement in intervention **– face-to-face interview**

[9] Optional: may not be relevant on all sites. In some sites, the teachers ARE the practitioners, in which case this is not relevant. In others teachers are not part of the intervention at all

Appendix B: Questions for focus group at the end of the implementation phase

Questions relating the parent questionnaire

Have your answers changed from the first to the second questionnaire regarding:
- The promotion of your family/heritage language at home
- The promotion of German at home
- The exchange on your child's bilingualism
- The use of new information technology (apps, YouTube videos, certain websites)

Questions regarding the use of the virtual learning environment

- Can you tell us what you think might facilitate access to VLE?
  - (What should be improved, e.g: Login, structure, usability of certain functions (e.g. voice recording))
- What would motivate you or help you to integrate VLE into your everyday life and use it with your children?
- What did you take with you when testing the virtual learning environment?
- Would you prefer analog, i.e. offline learning methods to virtual methods? And what would these be?

CHAPTER 4. COUNTRY REPORT: ITALY

ALICE SOPHIE SARCINELLI & GIULIA PASTORI

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 DEFINITION OF THE MAIN TOPICS/PROBLEMS[10]

A peculiar feature of the Italian ISOTIS VLE intervention was the strong synergy among WP3, WP4 and WP5. The intervention was consistent with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), the overarching framework of the ISOTIS project and the VLE-related tasks in WP3, 4 and 5 (see D.4.4), and embraced one of the main aim of the Isotis project, which was 'supporting disadvantaged families and communities in using their own social, cultural and linguistic resources to create safe and stimulating home environments for their children' (see DoW-p.4). To do so, the intervention focused specifically **on the meso-level of the connection and relationship between the school and the family-system**[11], in terms of communication, partnership and collaboration, striving for coherence in children's experiences in their wider educational niche and to strengthen partnership and communication between teachers and parents on delicate issues such as multilingualism and language heritage, hybrid cultural identities and intercultural and global competence in general (see also D.4.4).

In general, the ISOTIS VLE interventions prioritized the promotion of community bonds in multilingual, multicultural and socially disadvantaged (pre)school and informal settings among the main actors (practitioners, parents and children), and the promotion of global intercultural competence of individuals and communities by:

- raising awareness and knowledge about multiple languages, cultures, human rights, discrimination mechanisms and promoting skills and critical thinking in multiple languages in order to establish shared understanding;
- promoting the agency of all stakeholders based on valuing their cultural background, resources and identity;
- using available resources in the form of diverse family languages and cultural backgrounds in order to innovate learning practices of children and professionals and to create rich learning experiences.
- sustaining communication and collaboration between stakeholders, encouraging and supporting networking between stakeholders.

These general priorities were outlined in the Italian intervention for families in relation to the school-family relationship in synergy with the objectives and actions carried out with and by teachers in the classroom for the innovation of the curricular activities to support multilingual

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[10] The theoretical framework and the activity templates were realized with the contribution of Chiara Bove, University of Milan-Bicocca.

[11] The Isotis works used to design the intervention were: the literature review from the WP3, 2.3 Mesosystem regarding Family/parental engagement, involvement and trust in school services (p. 13-14, d3.1) Anders Y., Cadima J., Evangelou M., & Nata G. (2017), Parent and family-focused support to increase educational equality. CENTRAL ASSUMPTIONS AND CORE CONCEPTS, D3.1 Report on literature review WP3, available at www.isotis.org. and, for preschool only, the materials used for the integrated report on family-school relationship.

development in early childhood and primary education (D4.4, focusing on curricular activities to support multilingual development in early childhood and primary education), striving to promote systemic synergy between what was happening in the classroom, in the children's experience at school and parent involvement in terms of communication and participation in the activities.

Some main evidence underlined by the literature also supported the main focus on teacher-parent communication and partnership:

- Parental involvement at school is crucial for the optimal social and cognitive growth of the child: by being present and proactive, parents can have greater impact on children's learning, well-being and school success;
- Parents are rarely considered "knowledgeable partners" (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996), although they are key-informants for teachers and children on development and learning issues. However, too often parent involvement at school is lacking, especially regarding their engagement as competent partners in child learning and development. Cross-cultural dialogue and "cultural negotiation" (Tobin, 2016) are rare in schools. Instead, a more asymmetric, face-to-face model is dominant;
- Not all parents are equally equipped to participate at school because of their language, cultural and social skills. This is a crucial issue for contemporary Italian pre/school settings where too often there is a lack of possibility for engaging parents and teachers in discussions on educational matters that are crucial for both parties. Instead, there is often one-way communication that does not allow for in-depth discussion and exchange of opinions, knowledge and educational resources;
- Minorities and immigrants often face additional barriers that prevent them from participating in their children's school environment. Yet, immigrants parents had much to contribute to the dialogue in preschool practice when they were given an opportunity to discuss their ideas and concerns (Tobin, Adair & Arzubiaga, 2013);
- Technology can be used to support early literacy practices of immigrant families (Lee, Hoekje & Levine 2018), to support mother-tongue maintenance and to enrich opportunities for the parent-teacher communication and collaboration, by sharing what children experience at school and in family environments.

4.1.2 MAIN GOALS
Consistent with the specific WP3 theoretical model, the IT intervention used the VLE:
- to strengthen parent-teacher communication and exchange on learning issues;
- to encourage/sustain the development of new forms-*practices* of parent involvement, participation, and communication with the teachers, by strengthening the process of "cultural negotiation and mutual understandings" (Mantovani & Bove, 2016);
- to capitalize on family strengths and resources (capabilities) in developing positive and empowering learning relationships with their children at home and at school;

The specific goals of the intervention were defined more precisely after the exploratory phase of field work conducted in the school context selected for the intervention (see par. 2b), fine-tuning the main aims of the ISOTIS VLE intervention study with the characteristics of the context and the main results. The intervention was meant to pursue the following objectives:

- **Making learning visible:** the VLE was used as a space for making children's experiences and learning at school more visible to parents in order to increase knowledge and awareness that parents in general and parents from minorities had regarding their children's lives in contexts outside the home and to strengthen mutual understanding, connections, and create a partnership between families and educational settings. Seeing one's own child engaged and in relation with others (teachers-educators) or with elements in the context (material stimuli, spaces), through ad hoc images selected by the teachers/educators, is an indirect support-model, especially when the child is seen together with other children, in relation to spaces, contexts, teachers;
- **Innovate parent-teacher communication:** the intervention and the use of the VLE meant to support a more symmetrical model of establishing contact and involvement with families regarding children' learning in multilingual contexts in order to promote more meaningful collaboration and shared responsibility between teachers and parents;
- **Networking**: the intervention and the use of the VLE wanted to widen the communication between parents (on an informal level), not only between parents from the same cultural community, but also between parents of different cultural backgrounds and between immigrant and non-immigrant parents. By offering a multilingual and multimodal communication system incorporated in the ISOTIS platform, an attempt was made to strengthen the social network between parents (already rather active within the school thanks to initiatives promoted by the parents themselves), support and discussion (peer-learning or peer-tutoring) to reduce the feeling of isolation of many migrant parents;
- **Improving parent agency and parental competences:** the intervention and the use of the VLE aimed at sustaining parent engagement and agency.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND SITE SELECTION

4.2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The intervention followed a design-based approach: after the selection of the site according to specific criteria and an exploratory phase of in depth knowledge of the school context and of the four classes involved in the ISOTIS study, the researchers collaborated with the professionals to define the specific objectives and to-co-design the family-school partnership experiences for each class. After the first meetings aimed to contact the school principal and to share, with the school staff participating to the research, the ISOTIS general goals and framework, the workflow followed the main phases presented in the general chapters of the report (see paragraph 1.5): an exploratory phase, a co-design and implementation phase, and a monitoring/evaluating phase along the whole process and at the end of it. The exploratory phase was aimed to discover the local microsystem, at least part of its components and features: the characteristics of the school setting and of the specific classes involved in the research in relation to the teachers, children, and parents. The exploratory phase ended with the agreement on the key topics of the intervention – multilingualism, language awareness and the participatory research with children - it represented the foundation of the following phases and allowed to adjust the intervention to the site characteristics, needs, interests and expectations. Afterwards, the co-design and implementation phases occurred in a circular process, alternating times to design the activities,

times to follow up and give feedback, and times to design next steps and so on.

The monitoring system was part of the workflow as illustrate in the figure below.

Figure 4.1: Overall workflow
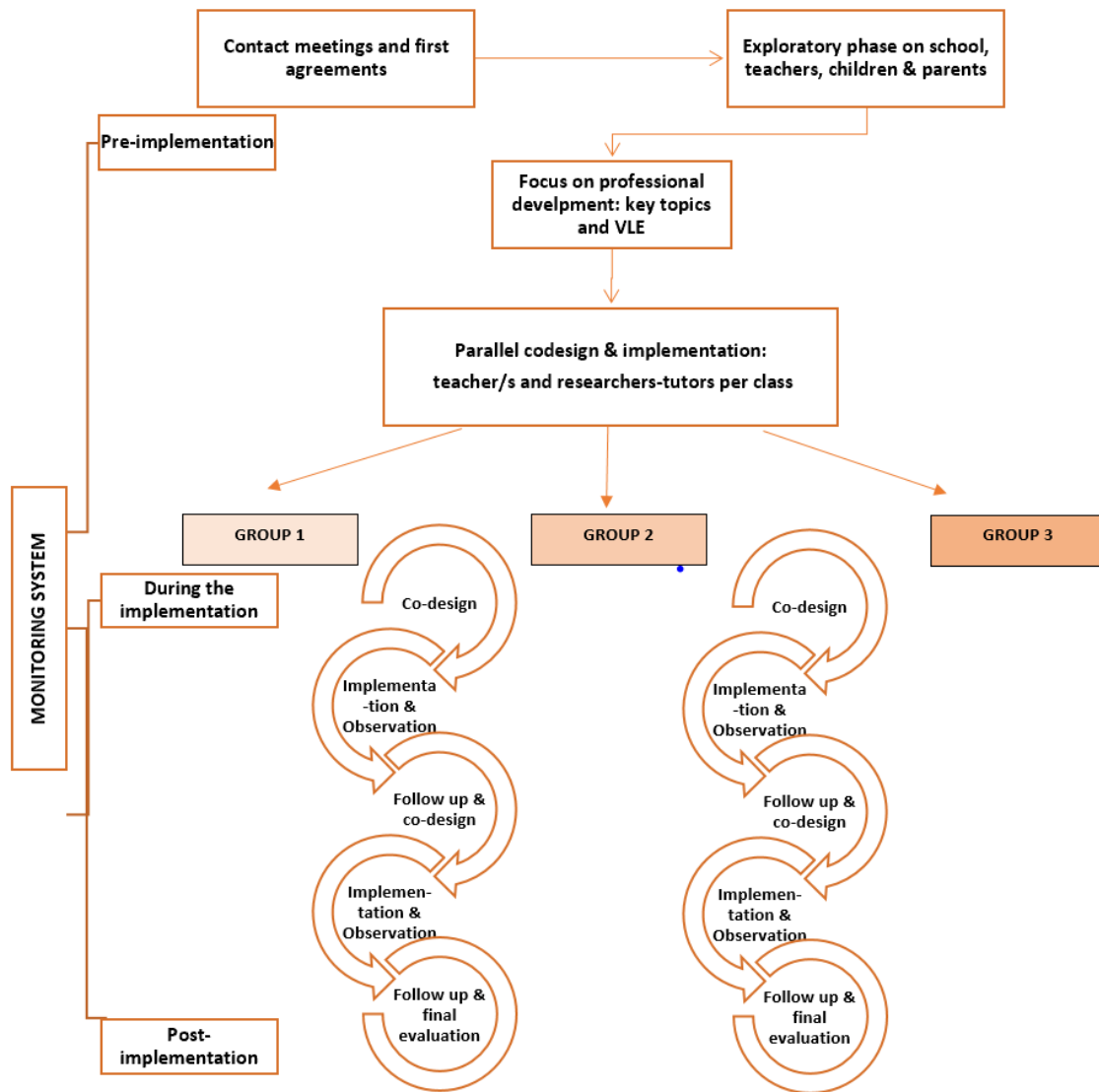
4.2.2 CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SITE

4.2.2.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT

The Italian school context is characterized by high linguistic and cultural diversity (over 200 ethnic groups and an unknown number of languages)[12] that, however, is neglected by a pervasive monolingualism of the curriculum and of the teaching practices, weak political endorsement and scarce central economic investments. As a result, mother tongues are generally invisible in the school context (with the sole exception of few languages considered 'valuable', such as English or French or German), and the richness of children's and parents' linguistic repertoires is often not considered and, consequently, not valued. Moreover, also the level of foreign languages

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[12] The Italian school context is characterized by high linguistic and cultural diversity (over 200 ethnic groups and an unknown number of languages) (Ministry of Education, 2019).

teaching (nearly exclusively English) is low, especially in the preschool and primary school segments, and it doesn't reach the EU 1+2, with the exception of the middle school segment and one typology of high school characterized by a curriculum with a core-teaching of foreign languages entitled "liceo linguistico").

Though since the Nineties several studies and experiences have been carried out on the topics intercultural education and multilingualism, and the enhancement apported to national curriculum guidelines (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 2012), still teachers frequently do not have information and specific (pre- and in-service) professional development opportunities on the topics of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and do not know how to find ways to deal with the linguistic and cultural diversity that increasingly characterized Italian classrooms. They are also challenged by communicating with parents with migrant backgrounds and involving them in school life.

Another common sore point regards Italian teachers' relationship with ICT. They generally have scarce familiarity with technology and, even when they utilize ICT in the teaching-learning process, their use is often limited to a basic level without seizing the full potential that ICT may offer. This is in contrast with the National Guidelines from the Ministry of Education for early childhood and early education that indicates the need to teach technical skills also to digital native, but above all, to offer digital education. According to the National Guidelines, digital competence consists above all in "knowing how to search, choose, evaluate information on the net and the responsible use of the means, so as not to harm oneself and others" and learning to access information "knowing how to properly select, organize, relate and manage situations and solve problems". Finally, "it is necessary for young people to learn how to search for information in reliable and authoritative sites, comparing different sources - not only found on the web, but also in books, documents and through testimonies - to be interpreted critically" (Ministero della pubblica istruzione, 2018).

4.2.2.2 SELECTION OF THE SITE

Due to the synergy among WPs, we decided to realize the VLE intervention within the school context. This choice ensured a common context where the intervention could be implemented in a coordinated way, using the VLE as a shared key mediator and tool in the work with parents, professionals and children.
The main criteria that guided the site selection process were:

- classes with a significant presence of **children with a diverse cultural and linguistic background** (included some target group children from Maghreb);
- availability of adequate **ICT equipment** (e.g., Wi-Fi connection, whiteboards, PCs or tablets…);
- **motivation and availability** of the school principal and of a group of teachers to participate in the research.

The choice fell on one *Istituto Comprensivo* (i.e., comprehensive institute, indicating a grouping of primary schools, lower secondary schools and pre-primary schools managed by a single school manager) in Milan (the biggest city in the North of Italy). Another *Istituto Comprensivo* (IC), located

in Milan and characterized by a high presence of students of Chinese origin, was also considered. Even though also this IC met all the criteria, this option was dismissed. In fact, at this early stage (2016), we were not sure if the VLE would have been able to support the specificity of the Chinese language.

The *Istituto Comprensivo* comprises a preschool, two primary schools and a lower secondary school, and met all the above-mentioned criteria. The IC selected was attended by over one thousand pupils (see Tab. 1): the preschool and the primary school (#1) were involved in the VLE intervention.

Table 4.1: Istituto Compresivo organization PTOF (Piano Triennale dell'Offerta Formativa) 2016/19

	N. OF CLASSES	N. OF CHILDREN ENROLLED
Preschool	5	113
Primary school #1	20	525
Primary school #2	12	263
Lower secondary school	15	327
IC	52	1228

The organization of the *Istituto Comprensivo*, comprising different school levels managed by a single principal, is quite common in the Italian school system. The principal (*dirigente scolastico*) is the legal representative, and is responsible for the management of the school's financial and material resources and the results of the school. The principal has independent powers of management, coordination, and use of the resources. Thus, the principal is assisted by one teacher (teachers A. and F. that were involved in the intervention) in each of the schools that compose the IC, who help him especially in the task of coordinating the teaching staff.

Moreover, there are teachers with specific tasks within the school overall management, the so-called *Funzioni Strumentali* (i.e., Instrumental Function). The *Funzioni Strumentali* are appointed by the principal, with the approval of the teaching body, to those teachers who have applied for it and who, according to their curriculum, possess particular skills and abilities in the areas of intervention identified as crucial to implement the objectives stated in the PTOF. Among the five areas addressed by a specific *Funzione Strumentale* in the IC selected, we recall: 1) multi-media technologies and communication; 2) students' welcoming and intercultural education.

There are several collective bodies that represent the IC:
- the overall institution (*Consiglio d'Istituto* – institute council, responsible for decisions relating to the balance sheet and the organisation and planning of school activities);
- the overall teaching staff (*Collegio docenti* – teachers' committee, responsible for the educational planning and the elaboration of the PTOF - Piano Triennale dell'Offerta

Formativa: Three-Year Educational Plan - and for the periodical review of the overall teaching activity to ensure that it conforms to the planned objectives);

- the teachers of the classes at the same grade (*Consiglio di interclasse* – interclass board);
- the teachers of each single class (*Consiglio di classe* – class board).

These last two boards formulate the educational and teaching plans for the classes, assess classes' teaching and discipline, organize innovation remedial and support initiatives, and carry out the periodic and final assessment of pupils.

Italian school grants **parent participation in school life** through their membership in the *Consiglio d'Istituto* and the presence of one parents' representative in the *Consiglio di classe*. Among the crucial aspects of the *Istituto Comprensivo* educational offering and missions stated in the PTOF, we recall :

- the promotion of each child's potential;
- an open, constructive collaboration with families;
- the possibility for everyone who enters the school – whether they be pupils, professionals or parents – to feel welcomed as a person and as a carrier of resources and enrichment for others;
- students' development of awareness and skills in the use of the ICTs;
- the enhancement of pupils' linguistic competencies in both L1 and in L2.

The preschool and the primary school (#1) involved in the ISOTIS VLE intervention are located in the same building (where also an infant-toddler center is hosted) in a culturally highly diverse neighborhood of Milan.

The super-diversity of population attending these schools includes a significant percentage of disadvantaged immigrant families (mainly Arabic and North African families, but not exclusively; see. Tab. 2) and a few middle-class Italian families.

Table 4.2: Istituto Compresivo demographic data - School Year 2018/19

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

4.2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During the preparation for the implementation, we focused on how to ensure the protection of privacy and confidentiality of parents and children in using the VLE platform (see report D4-4 Section A). Concerning parents: researchers provided each parent/family with a password e personal username. Parents were asked to log in to the platform and change their email and password in order to receive personal notifications and ensure privacy.

4.3 EXPLORATORY PHASE – MAKING THE POINT

In close collaboration with the Italian team involved in WP4/WP5, the exploratory ethnographic phase was aimed at getting to know the school sites, the teachers/professionals involved and the families.

4.3.1 PROCEDURES

The figure below provides the common workflow of the exploratory phase for the 3 WPs.

Figure 4.2 Exploratory phase - workflow
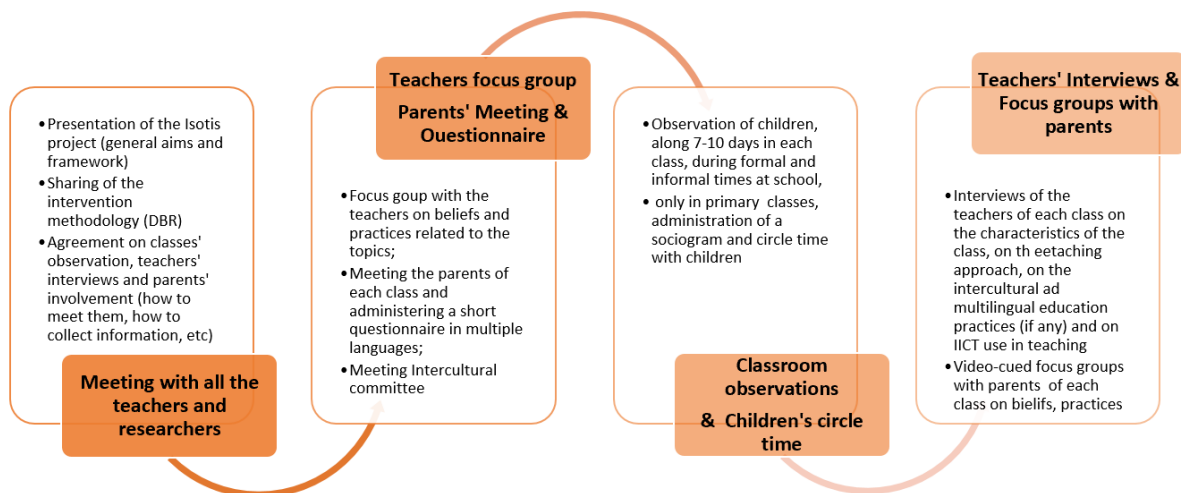
For what it concern the WP3, the exploratory phase included three steps:

- Step I: Getting to know the school and the school staff (overlapping with WP4/WP5, same steps for the three WPs)
- Step II: Getting to know the classes involved in the intervention
- Step III: Getting to know the families and their experiences with language at home

Table 4.3: Overview of meetings, aims and tools of the exploratory phase:

OVERVIEW OF MEETINGS, AIMS AND TOOLS September 2017-May 2018
Step I: Getting to know the school and the school staff
✓ **Meeting (n° 2) with the principal** and teachers coordinating the preschool and primary school staff: **Goal:** collecting some first information about the school and the school staff; introducing the research (aims and goals, methodology, timing) and selecting the classes. **Procedures**: the P.I. met the principal to negotiate the classes and the teachers to be involved in the study and had informal conversations in the pre-intervention phase, but also along the intervention implementation. ✓ **Document analysis:** **Goal**: describing the pedagogical philosophy and education mission and offer, as declared in the official school guidelines **Procedure:** Consultation of the *Istituto Comprensivo* PTOF (i.e., **Three-year Educational Offer Plan**), the official, public document that illustrates the school educational offering ✓ **Meeting (n° 1) with the teachers involved in the study (WP3, 4, 5)** **Goals**: motivating the teachers by describing the research (aims and goals, methodology, timing) and its expected impact for the school-setting; negotiating the methodology with the teachers; engaging them as key mediators in order to contact and involve the families. **Procedure**: a formal meeting with the principal, the professionals from the selected classes and the IT-team group of researchers was held on the 1st of February 2018 ✓ **Focus group (n°1) with all the teachers together** **Goal:** to observe and describe teachers's representations and practices on: new-comers arrivals; IT as L2; valuing L1 and uses of ITC. **Procedure:** after a questionnaire based on the indicators of the volume "La mia scuola è inclusiva e interculturale? Domande e indicatori per osservare e osservarci" (Favaro, 2013), a FG was conduced to explore the following topics: è stato condotto un focus gruppi sui seguenti temi: new-comers arrivals; IT as L2; valuing L1 and uses of ITC.
Step II: Getting to know the classes involved in the intervention
✓ **Interviews (n° 5) with all the teachers involved** in the intervention **Goal:** elicit teachers' beliefs, attitudes, strategies and doubts on the same above-listed topics (teachers' motivation and competences, the past and ongoing projects on multiculturality, multilingualism, ICTs teaching and learning). **Procedures:** The interview were divided per class (May-June 2018, Annex 4, section A, report D44). The colleagues from the same class took part in the interview as well. An interview was conducted also to the teacher who has a role in the school of promoting and supporting multi-media technologies and communication, involved in the research to support the other teachers.

✓ **Ethnographic field observation** (May 2018 - See Annex 4, section A, report D44).
Goal: To observe and describe: teachers' practices in dealing with multiculturalism and multilingualism and in communicating with families; if and how ICT was used in the family-school communication; use of linguistic and plurilinguistic practices between children/parents/teachers (translanguaging /language brokering).
Procedure: Each researcher spent one week in the class. Both participant and non-participant observation were made using common observation guidelines and a template for observation record.

Step III: Getting to know the families and their experiences with language at home

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✓ **Parent's questionnaires** (See Annex 4, section A, report D4.4)
Goals: The goal of the questionnaire was to collect data to create a first "map" of the languages known and/or spoken by the families, the existing ICT-technologies at home and the beliefs related to mother-tongue maintenance and expectations about the role of school.
Procedure: All of the families from the 4 classes selected were asked to fill in the questionnaires in March-May, 2018 during one after school meeting (one per class) organized by the researchers in collaboration with the teachers in the primary school and organized by the teachers in the preschool. During these meetings, the study was briefly presented to the parents and the questionnaire was proposed at the end, offering help to fill it in. In the days following the teachers helped in reaching out to parents who were not present at the meetings and collected the questionnaires. Two versions of the questionnaires were provided: one for parents with migrant backgrounds, later translated in several languages (Arabic, Romanian, English, Spanish, French, Portuguese), and one for native parents, with an attention paid to Italian dialects In reference to the language repertoire. The questionnaire was meant to keep track of the different language repertoires of all the family components.

✓ **Focus group (FG) discussions with parents** (See Annex 4, section A, report D44):
Goals: To explore parents' beliefs and practices in-depth related to: languages and multilingual experiences and resources to support children's learning of L1 and L2 at home and at school; the family-school relationship; ICT and technologies at home.
Procedure: With the help of the teachers, in each of the 4 classes selected families were invited to a "snack-party at school" with the goal of getting to know each other and discuss their linguistic experiences and beliefs. Some activities were organized for the children while the parents participated in the Focus Group (using the same FG question guide for all classes). Following the video-cued method introduced by Joseph Tobin (Tobin, et. al. 2000, 2016), a short video-clip was used to provoke the discussion (a short clip from the movie "Almanya. My family goes to Germany" (directed by Yasemin Şamdereli) in order to involve parents in a discussion on the linguistic and identity challenges related to migration and the education of children in different cultural contexts.

4.3.2 RESULTS/FINDINGS

4.3.2.1 TEACHERS

The VLE intervention involved 4 classes (see Tab. 3).

Table 4.4: Classes and teachers involved in the VLE intervention

	N. OF CLASSES INVOLVED	CHILDREN'S AGE	N. OF CHILDREN IN EACH CLASS	TEACHERS INVOLVED
Preschool	1	4 and 5-year-olds	23	A., B.
Primary school	3	7-year-olds (2nd grade)	24	C., G.
		8-year-olds (3rd grade)	22	D., E.
		10-year-olds (5th grade)	22	F., G.

Eight female teachers and the principal took part to the research[13]:

- A. was the main teacher of a preschool class. She had had managerial responsibilities within the *Istituto Comprensivo* for over 15 years (being the preschool coordinator and, since April 2019, the main assistant principal);
- B. was a special education preschool teacher with a supporting role in many classrooms, including A.'s one;
- C. was the main teacher of a 2nd grade class where she taught Italian Literacy, History, English and PE;
- D. was a Math and Science teacher and worked in a 3nd grade class;
- E. worked in a 3rd grade class where she taught Italian, History, Geography and English;
- F. was the main teacher of a 5th grade class (where she taught Italian, History, and Geography) and the vice-principal of the primary school. She resigned in April 2019 due to professional problems;
- G. taught the Religion in two of the classes involved (2h per week in each class);
- H. was a special education teacher with a supporting role in the 5th grade class;
- I. is the principal. He was little present in the school we worked in, delegating many responsibilities initially to F. and then to A.

The school, especially the primary school, was characterized by a dominant traditional approach[14], while the preschool setting seemed more open to active parent participation in the activities and in school life in general. Coherently with this result, parent-school communication and approach to multiculturalism and multilingualism in the relationship with parents did not reveal any particularly original traits or significant initiatives or projects, although a distinction should be made between primary and preschool. Concerning **parent-school collaboration**, preschool

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[13] For additional information on teachers' profiles and school organization see Report D5.4, Italian country report chapter.

[14] To know more on the teaching approach and teachers' attitudes towards ICT, see the Italian Country Report in D4.4.

teachers described as generally positive and fruitful, declaring that many families were highly engaged in the activities proposed by the teachers. In the primary school, communication with families was organized using institutional tools and modes, present in all schools in Italy[15]. To facilitate communication, two figures were presented: the **'communication assistant'** (an operator who facilitates communication, learning and the relationship between students with sensory disabilities and the family, school and services in the neighborhood) and the **cultural mediator**, or a person who goes to the facility only at the request of the teacher or family, for linguistic and cultural translation into both languages and cultures during communication, in case of communication difficulties and linguistic understanding. The Parents' Association has allowed the school to have this service available through an agreement with a cooperative. The teachers stated that they asked for the support of mediators, especially during the first meetings with families at the beginning of the school year or when the family arrives during the school year, while they said (and our observations confirms it) that during the daily life they used Google translate or, more frequently, children, to translate some communications. Teachers expressed the desire to have more language mediators available and that these figures be present daily at school, expanding their functions, directly helping parents to interact with the school context (secretariats, meetings with other parents) and to find useful information. In this regard, overall, the teachers seemed to have a one-way type of idea of communication with families between school and family: the teachers had the task of providing information to the family, telling how the school works, what are the rules were and values that characterized it. No interest was expressed regarding the possible usefulness of using a mediator to create opportunities for exchange, dialogue and therefore also to listen to the experience of parents, their school experience in their country, which teachers imagined to be different, so they thought it was necessary to carefully explain the different organizational model of the Italian school.

This unidirectional attitude recalled an assimilationist integration approach where the "immigrant" is invited to tune in to and appropriate the host culture, while the culture of origin, of the family does not seem to be useful in the inclusion process. In fact, in regards with **teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism and multilingualism in the parents-teachers communication**, primary school teachers who assumed cultural diversity and linguistic barriers to be the main (or the only) reason behind communication difficulties and the lack of involvement and investment in school activities shown by some families. Some of them complained about these barriers or, in a few cases, overtly criticized parents in front of their students. Specifically regarding the cultural backgrounds, teachers showed that they did not know the cultural, linguistic, religious backgrounds of their students and families particularly well, and in some cases they expressed prejudicial attitudes. Observations and interviews in primary school showed that educational issues related to multiculturalism and multilingualism were not directly addressed in opportunities for dialogue between teachers and parents. Although school over the years has participated in numerous projects on linguistic-cultural issues (in the year of the intervention, there was a project

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[15] The tools and modes observed are: private meetings between teachers and family; the school diary of each child, in which didactic and disciplinary communications are written; the electronic register, mainly for didactic and evaluation purposes; class meetings, open to all parents; classroom councils, open to parents representing a specific class; phone calls or messages for occasional and urgent events (e.g. child illness during school hours); messaging used by some teachers for direct communication with class parent representatives, who mediate communication using a dedicated WhatsApp group with all the other parents in the class.

for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children[16]), these projects do not seem to have profoundly changed the daily teaching practice or attitude of many of the teachers involved in the project, especially in primary school: multiculturalism, multireligiousness, multilingualism, discrimination, stereotypes, multicultural citizenship can sporadically be talked about with families in urgent cases. In primary school there was an almost total absence of educational practices aimed at enhancing the histories of children and families and therefore their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Many teachers took multiculturalism and multilingualism for granted, considering them merely one of the particular features of the school they work in, not a valuable resource that should be enhanced. Several teachers, moreover, said they still embraced 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. On the contrary, the maintenance of the mother tongue in the family is seen with some ambivalence and, especially when the child has some difficulties and is not supported in studying at home by the family, this practice is considered a disadvantage. For most primary school teachers involved in research, speaking L1 at school was seen as an obstacle or even as a practice to be avoided (in some cases prohibited at school), with a few exceptions (for more details see D4.4, Italian Country Report), and they shared the misbelief that speaking L1 slows down L2 acquisition and forbade children to talk in L1 once Italian could be used as the language of communication, at least at a minimum level. 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 was intended as an initial support for the newcomers, and not as a strategy to promote their mother tongues too.

At the preschool, teachers generally had a more open attitude towards multilingualism and multiculturalism. The coordinator of the Preschool had participated in many projects, also in collaboration with university researchers[17] and intercultural centers, aimed at the inclusion of children and families with migrant backgrounds and the enhancement of the mother tongue. Both the teachers involved in the intervention conveyed the idea that speaking another language is a form of cultural richness, and suggested that parents were invited continue to speak their L1 at home. Moreover, every year at the end of February, they also organized the Mother Tongue Week. On the occasion of International Mother Language Day (21 February 2019), the preschool teachers involved 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 represented a precious opportunity to cherish diverse linguistic repertoires and to value cultural diversity, it remained an isolated event that did not affect the daily life and the established monolingualism.

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[16]The national project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (RSC) children is promoted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR). The work at school, aimed primarily at inclusion and combating early school leaving, lasts three years and is aimed not only at RSC children but all children in the project class, teachers, school managers and ATA staff and follows a global perspective that gives importance to the creation of a social network to support the target population. Info available on the web page: https://www.minori.it/it/progetti-sperimentali-285/il-progetto-rsc.

[17] In collaboration with the Milan-Bicocca University, the class of the coordinator of the preschool participated in the project *Le storie sono un'ancora*, whose ultimate goal was to strengthen storytelling, the enhancement of the mother tongue and Italian L2 skills, the inclusion of children and immigrants families, through practical workshops for children on storytelling. See: http://www.centrocome.it/?post_type=progetti&p=952.

The intervention involved 4 groups of parents for the 4 classes involved in the WP4 and WP5 interventions (see Table below).

Table 4.5: Parents and teachers involved in the VLE interventions

Class	N. of parent	N. of Italian parents	N. of immigrants parents	Nationalities	Migration	Languages spoken
Preschool class		9	13	Egypt Philippines Morocco Moldova Peru Sri Lanka	5 G1immigrants, 9 G2 immigrants.	Arabic (Egyptian& Moroccan), Moldovan, Spanish, English, Tagalog, Sinhalese.
2nd grade class	44	10 (2 mixed couples)	34	Egypt Philippines Moldova Morocco Santo Domingo Brazil Nigeria Romania	14 migrated long ago (their children are G2 immigrants) 24 recently migrated (their children are G1 immigrants)	Arabic (Egyptian and Moroccan), Tagalog, Spaniard, French, English, Moldavian, Russian, Portuguese, Nigerian, Romanian, Romani. Italian dialects: Neapolitan, Apulian, Calabrese, Sicilian, Milanese.
3rd grade class	44	9 (1 mixed couple)	35	Albania Romania Egypt Morocco Kosovo Sri Lanka Peru	6 families recently migrated, others present in Italy for a longer period.	Arabic (Egyptian and Moroccan), Albanian, Singhalese, French, Kosovar, Romanian, Romani, Spanish. Italian dialects: Neapolitan.
5th grade class	44	10	34	Egypt Morocco Peru Philippines Ecuador El Salvador Sri Lanka Romania	8 migrated recently.	Arabic (Egyptian and Moroccan), Singhalese, Romanian, Romani, Moldavian, Spanish, Filipino, English.

Concerning **the parents' linguistic culture(s)**, among the 66 parents who filled in the questionnaire, 25.8% were Italian and 22.7% Egyptian, the % of subjects who declared they spoke Italian or Arabic as their mother tongue was the same, 24% - with other nationalities (Philippines, Ecuador, Peru, Romania, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Moldova, Kosovo, Morocco, Pakistan,

El Salvador and Albania) also present.

Table 4.6: Frequency of questionnaires collected per class

		Class	
		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	1ª	16	24,2
	2C	18	27,3
	Preschool	14	21,2
	4C	18	27,3
	Total	66	100,0

In addition to Arabic and Italian, the most represented languages were Spanish (12.1%) and Filipino (10.6%). Among the languages spoken there were also two dialects: Trentino and Neapolitan. The two tables below show the percentages of the languages spoken:

Figure 4.3: Percentages of languages spoken
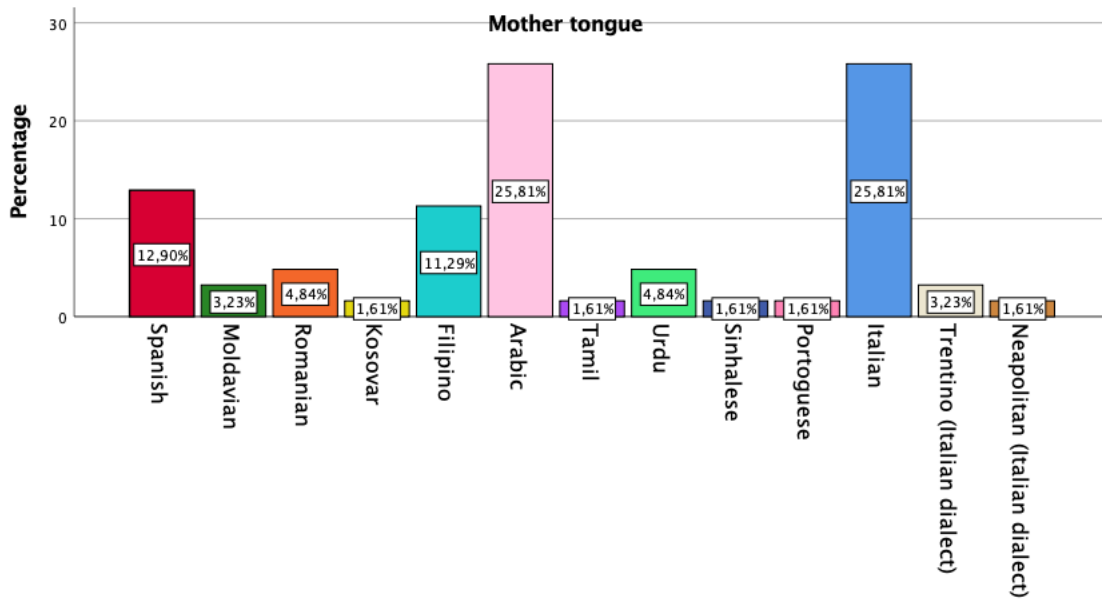
Figure 4.4: Distribution of languages spoken per class
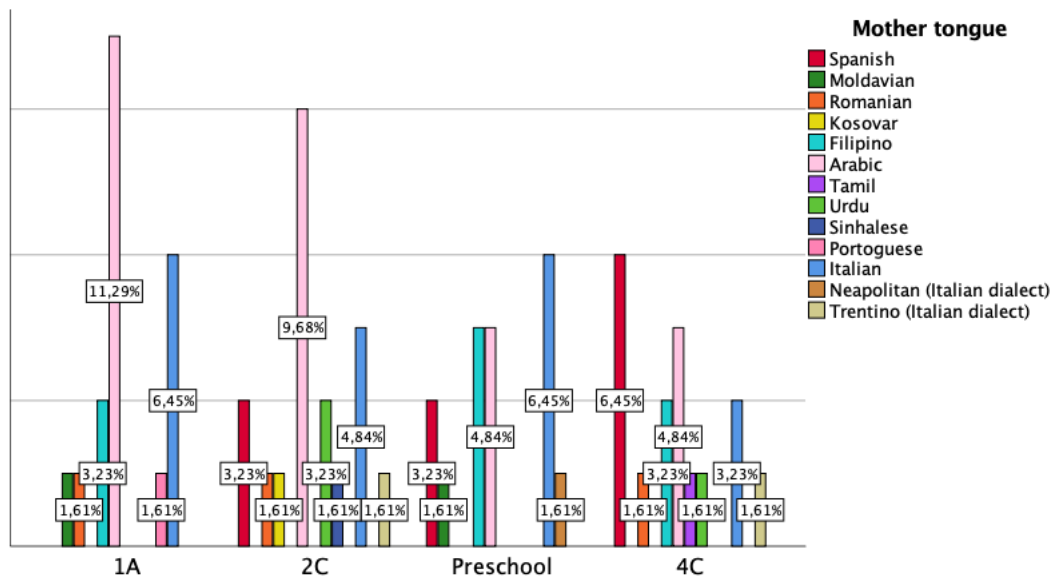
As can be seen in the table above, the languages were not equally distributed in the various classes: for example, there was a clear majority of Arabic speakers in 1st and 2nd grade (which correspond to 2nd and 3rd grade during the intervention, since the data was collected the previous year), which was less present in the questionnaires collected in preschool where the number of Italian speakers was clearly predominant compared to other languages. The 4th grade (the 5th during the intervention) presented a more homogeneous distribution of languages, with a minority of Italians and a fair distribution of Spanish, Filipino and Arabic. In many homes parents are already bilingual (e.g. Arabic-French, Swahili-French, Tagalog-English etc.). This is the case of a parent of Filipino origin where 4 languages are spoken at home (two Filipino dialects, Tagalog and since they migrated to Italy, Italian): "*We already speak two languages with our children, Filipino and a bit of English. We are happy, slowly we are also adding Italian, with patience, because four are a lot... As far as culture is concerned, what we do with our children is continue first of all with the language, secondly with religion (they are Catholic) and in addition we continue with the games from the Philippines and then with food*".

Concerning **parent views on multilingualism and multiculturalism**, migrant parents mostly perceived the mother tongue as a central feature in their children's growth, for communication with the extended family (both in Italy and in their home country), and for the potential return to the country of origin. These factors also motivated their economic investment in learning activities, like private classes and schools - e.g. Egyptian school and exams, or classes of Sinhalese -, Arabic classes on weekends or home teaching of the alphabet by parents (mothers). Some immigrantsparents wanted their children to learn the family's native language, but they did not always succeed. This created communication problems in the family, sometimes even between parents and children. The way in which the L1 is transmitted is sometimes dictated by advice received from professionals related to the world of childhood such as pediatricians or teachers. In some cases, speaking one's mother tongue with children was a matter of affective attachment

(e.g. Albanian) without the investment of time and resources, but - as for all parents - mainly through food, trips to the country of origin, the occasional reading of books, music, or the participation (with reading, songs, and dances) in school initiatives to promote cultural diversity. At home, parents offer cartoons or books to keep the language of origin alive in children. Some parents tell us that, although they speak in LM, the children answer in Italian ("*I speak my language to them (..) but they always speak Italian (laughs), I tell them no, but they speak Italian*"). Moreover, to transmit culture, the first element they use is food. "*First of all, mixed, because our children are used to Italian food. Even in Morocco, when we are on vacation, they say pasta, pizza, we want pasta. That's how we do it. Moroccan and Italian cooking*". Although some parents think that the enhancement of the mother tongue in class is a useful and inclusive practice, they believe that the child should focus on learning Italian and that this can also encourage their parents to learn Italian.

Concerning **parents expectations on multilingualism**, some parents expect their children learn languages other than Italian and their mother tongue, e.g. English, especially if this is the parents' second language (e.g. Sri Lanka) or if they consider children may need it in the future. The promotion of mother tongues in everyday school life is mostly welcome, although parents generally do not give feedback on specific activities. They do not mind if children use their mother tongue to occasionally communicate with other children, but they view the school as the context in which their children are supposed to speak Italian, whereas the home and the family are seen as the contexts for learning one's mother tongue. This is also in line with most teachers' advice, especially to parents who are not fluent in Italian. Some parents think of bringing them back to their country of origin, which is why they are particularly concerned with maintaining the L1. Besides promoting mother tongues, any initiative aimed at supporting children who do not speak Italian when starting preschool is deemed helpful. Despite being a highly diverse (pre)school, initiatives on diversity and the promotion of mother tongues took place once in a while as extraordinary events. However, parents appreciated them and stressed that multilingualism was a distinguishing feature of this school that should be promoted as a key resource even in more systematic ways throughout learning activities. Native parents generally appreciate the fact that their children learn in a context in which they are exposed to multiple languages, and some of them wished the school hosted language classes of the widely-spoken mother tongues (e.g. Arabic, Chinese...) held by immigrant parents, so that all children could attend them and broaden their language skills. Multilingualism is also seen positively by many Italian parents (even if language barriers are a difficulty in communication between parents) and diversity is seen as a strength and as a resource of this specific school. They would like to see a greater enhancement at school for their own, mostly monolingual children (some parents suggested that the school could include the Arabic language in the school curriculum also for children of families who are not Arabic-speaking). It should be noted that the Italian families who have remained at the school are mostly families with a strong 'progressive' ideological orientation, open and interested in having their children live a very intense experience of socialization in a superdiverse context. Unfortunately, the white flight has affected this school over the years, greatly impacting on the Italian families who have chosen remain at the school.

More generally, parents expressed a certain satisfaction with the **school-family relationship** and in particular with the school as a 'protected' place with respect to a wider context, territorial and

national- that was not always welcoming (*"Yes, the problem is outside the school, we are fine here, in this school, it's the truth, there's no problem in our school, but outside...").* Parent initiative at school is very strong and proactive: they manage the school Intercultural Committee (which organizes initiatives and events to raise awareness about the value multiculturalism and multilingualism and provides services to facilitate the participation of all the families to the school life (e.g., making a service of linguistic mediation available; providing translation for some official documents in different languages…). Among others, one remarkable initiative organized by the Intercultural Committee is the *Open School Saturdays*: off-days in which the school is open to everybody with a rich program of events, such as book readings, workshops, free classes for children and adults, photo exhibitions, music performances… Parents also created a Cultural Association that superintends the after-school educational offering (e.g., music classes, chess classes, sport courses…). However, parent initiative is mainly coordinated by Italian parents (who are the minority), while migrant parents are mainly the "receivers"/users of the services offered by such organization. Some second-language Italian speakers – particularly mothers with an immigrant background quite or very fluent in Italian – actively participated in school activities aimed at promoting mother tongues and cultural diversity. They contributed by reading books and stories in their mother tongue, music, songs, dances, games, and food. These activities usually took place because of specific initiatives, such as the International Mother Tongue Week, but are said to happen a few times a year, especially at preschool.

Concerning the **presence of ICT at home and use of them for family-school communication** The questionnaires showed that in families, there was a good presence of ICT (TV, computer, internet, smartphone and tablet) around 84-85% of subjects for all 4 technologies investigated (see table below).

Table 4.7: Presence of ITC

	Included		Escluded		
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N
television * class	55	83,3%	11	16,7%	66
computer * class	57	86,4%	9	13,6%	66
internet * class	57	86,4%	9	13,6%	66
smartphone * class	58	87,9%	8	12,1%	66
tablet * class	57	86,4%	9	13,6%	66

Table 4.8: Presence of specific equipment

Class	Television	Computer	internet	smartphone	tablet
1A	10	12	12	13	13
2C	16	16	16	16	16
preschool	13	13	13	13	12
4C	16	16	16	16	16
Total	55	57	57	58	57

Nevertheless, parents, whether they are native or Italian L2 speakers, usually communicate with teachers without using ICTs. Communication takes place on a daily basis when taking children to school or picking them up, or during periodical collective or individual meetings organized by the school. During focus groups with parents in one class, there was widespread use of Skype and Messenger to communicate with the family. In addition, children are shown films or cartoons in their native language.

4.3.3 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

From the data collected during the exploratory phase, the contrast between a strong presence of multilingualism in the family and the limited space for multilingualism in the school's educational proposal could be seen, despite the expectations expressed by many parents. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to work on the innovation of the curriculum in the enhancement of multilingualism and the communication and collaboration methods between teachers and families during the intervention. The possibility to introduce multilingual digital supports in the school-family communication was also created. The strong presence of technologies at home suggested that the use of VLE during the intervention would not be an obstacle. It was also observed that the use of technology was not a common practice used by teachers to communicate with families. Overall, teachers, particularly in the primary school, showed that they had little knowledge of the cultures of their students' families and that they did not have a clear educational orientation with respect to the issues raised by multiculturalism and multi-lingualism, with attitudes connoted r by ambivalence and uncertainty in daily practice, alongside abstract statements of appreciation of diversity. As a result, they did not have specific didactic or communicative strategies, either with children or with parents. Mother tongues, for example, seemed to be invisible in the class or visible only during relational or didactic 'urgencies'.

Specifically, in the relationship with the parents, a unidirectional model of communication emerged. The teachers were not particularly interested in knowing the family background better, but focused on making parents understand the functioning of the school in Italy, an appreciable objective but which seems to be the expression of a partial cultural decentralization (i.e., limited to posing the problem that the other may have had a different school experience and may not understand what the logic and functioning of the Italian context were, but without asking and listening to the other perspective). This model and attitude seemed to be linked to an unbalanced approach to integration based on assimilationism. It was therefore salient for the structuring of

the intervention activities, to convey to the teachers the importance of recognizing the different cultural perspectives and to create more opportunities and space for children and parents to express themselves and to tell about themselves.

The focus groups with parents, in fact, if on the one hand they stated that at school they felt welcomed, on the other hand they also expressed great interest in the ISOTIS project as an opportunity to innovate the possibilities of cultural and linguistic enhancement for all families and children.

On a positive note, the school emerged as a protected place, an island within a wider context that was not always welcoming. Some parents talked about the uneasiness of not feeling their own value was recognized. Some parents had problems with integration in social contexts outside the school, such as in the neighbourhood. Some mothers perceived discriminatory attitudes towards them and their children; some parents perceived a devaluation of their person and their knowledge because, for example, educational or professional qualifications were not recognized in Italy and this was very demotivating for them. Expanding and strengthening the pathways for communication, sharing and dialogue between teachers and parents on these issues and also regarding concerns, strategies and educational resources emerged as a clear priority during the exploratory phase.

4.4 CO-DESIGN PHASE

4.4.1 PROCEDURES

Since the agreed intervention implied a set of structured meetings and activities, during the kick-off meeting held in September 2018, we drew up a first draft agenda for the plenary meetings planned for the whole school year with the teachers. In this occasion, we presented and negotiated with them a proposal for the cross-WPs VLE intervention. The proposal, with specific regard to the WP3 framework and objectives. The training of the practitioners was held during the period October-February and the intervention in the period February-June. All activities were held in the school. Fieldwork notes were taken during and after each meeting, and selected moments were audiotaped and transcribed. Fieldwork notes and transcripts were summarized according to themes of interest. Each co-designed meeting was audio-recorded: FG were audiotaped and then transcribed.

The planning of the meetings dedicated to co-design and reflection and the meetings aimed at organizing a video-cued focus group with parents were agreed on *in itinere* with the teachers of each of the 4 classes involved. Each class was also assigned a researcher contact, in the role of 'coach', and a research-assistant, who were able to follow more closely and accompany the teachers of that specific class during all phases of the intervention cross-WPs. Considering the central role that the VLE would have played in the Italian intervention (also in virtue of the strong synergy between WPs), the VLE was already introduced during the kick-off meeting and later presented more in-depth during the dedicated training meetings. After the phase dedicated to the teachers professional development with all the group of teachers in plenary meetings (Sept-2018-Nov.2018), the co-design and implementation phase proceeded with parallel meetings divided per class. Each class teaching staff (two teachers per class) had the opportunity to collaborate with a researcher and a senior student (senior students developed their degree thesis

collaborating to the research), who assisted as tutor and co-tutor the same teachers along all the work, to explore the VLE and the resource repository (also autonomously browsed), to define the specific goals and activities with the parents of their class, carefully considering how to use of the VLE as virtual space to experiment new forms of family-school communication and for the video-cued dialogues with the parents from the class to be held at the end of WP4 intervention in the class.

From the first VLE training meeting, teachers were provided with personal user accounts to explore the tool both during the training and autonomously. Furthermore, we tried not to limit the use of the VLE to dedicated training meetings only, but to make it as salient as possible in all the activities, to encourage the teachers to familiarize themselves and 'touch' its functionalities and potential. In order to properly inform the parents and involve them, a meeting in November 2018 was held to present the VLE, to give information on the Privacy Policy and on the procedures of login for teachers children and parents, to announce their future involvement in the use of the VLE also in relation to the children's activities at school. The exploration of the VLE was guided and supported by the researchers. Specific training meetings were dedicated to introduce teachers and parents to the VLE and discover together its functionalities. During the meetings the Each participant received personal login credentials since the beginning of the intervention to continue the exploration on their own. To deepen the exploration of the VLE, some VLE specific activities were presented to the teachers and used as a joint 'class exercise' also during the face-to-face thematic plenary meetings.

The iterative cycle of co-design meetings, implementation of the activities, follow up and formative evaluation meeting aimed to co-design the following steps, took place along the months between January 2019 and June 2019. 6 meetings were held to accompany the teachers in the co-design of the activities to be carried out with parents, as well as to support the teachers throughout the project helping them to reflect on what was done in a critical and generative way.

Trainings with teachers and parents were realized in synergy with WP5 intervention, including topics and actions concerning family-school relationship:

Table 4.9: Overview of the teachers training actions connected to WP3 (September 2018 – June 2019)

| KEY TOPIC	TEACHERS INVOLVED	PD STRATEGY	DELIVERY MODES	OBJECTIVES
Family-school collaboration	All the teachers	Training, coaching, reflection	Face-to-face meetings aimed at the organization of a video-cued focus group with parents at the end of the school year	Supporting teachers' **skills** in dialoguing with parents and promoting more positive **attitudes** towards diverse families

Table 4.10: Overview of the parents training actions (November 2018 – March 2019)

KEY TOPIC	TEACHERS INVOLVED	TRAINING STRATEGY	DELIVERY MODES	OBJECTIVES
Use of ITC to enhance family-school communication	All the parents of each class	Training, coaching	Face-to-face meetings aimed at the exploration of the VLE tools and resources	Supporting parents in using the VLE with parents

4.4.2 FINDINGS

The activities were co-designed following the 3 main dimensions of the Global Competence perspective: knowledge and awareness (values, knowledge and critical thinking); the use and valuing of families resources (attitudes and skills) and the acquisition of new competences (take action) (see figure below).

Figure 4.5: The three phases of the global competence perspective

KNOWLEDGE & AWARENESS
•Values, Knowledge and Critical thinking

VALORIZATION OF CHIDREN'S AND FAMILIES' RESOURCES
•Attitudes and Skills

NEW COMPETENCE ACQUISITION
•Take action
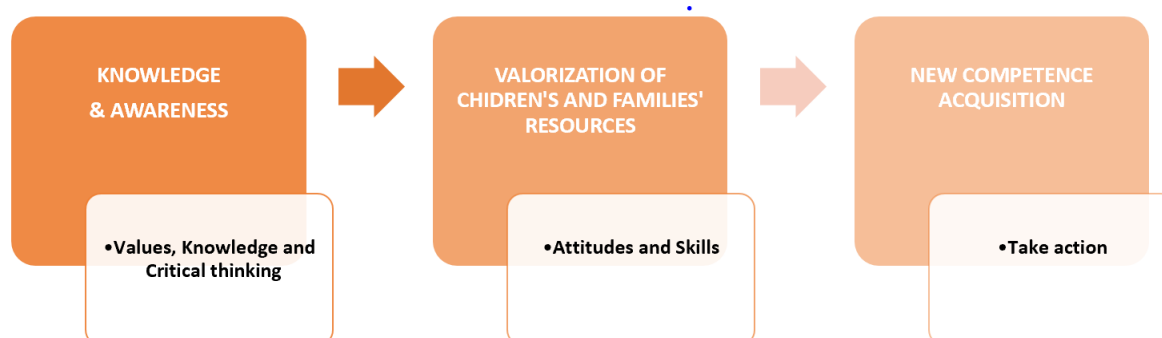
The co-design-based research process focused on co-creating specific content in each class to be used during activities such as:

- thinking and talking with parents about child engagement with languages in school/preschool and how parents can support learning in school (in the dominant language);
- organizing opportunities for parents to ask questions about how school/preschool supports child language development and about school expectations regarding parent engagement in the child's learning in school/preschool;
- stimulating parent engagement with the heritage language and in other language experiences by asking parents to publish content in their mother tongue on the VLE noticeboard.

The data collected in the exploratory phase offered us an overall picture of some of the most relevant needs (even the implicit ones) and the co-design meetings served to decide in each class how to involve professionals and parents in the intervention in terms of school-family communication. In particular, activities were chosen that could provide:

- the inclusion of the L1 and different cultures in the school context as resources to be valued;
- a sense of acceptance and appreciation by families and children, encouraging the serenity of students about their multiple spheres of belonging, creating opportunities for dialogue and exchange aimed at increasing spontaneous curiosity;
- tools for the development of skills and especially fostering positive attitudes of teachers towards their languages / dialects, cultures and family identities;
- stimuli to change teachers' educational practices.

4.5 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

4.5.1 CORE ISSUES AND VLE CONTENT DESIGNED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The overall intervention hinged around 3 main key-topics and as many activities, that are described below:

Overview of the core issue, activities and VLE content designed for implementation

	KNOWLEDGE & AWARENESS	VALORIZATION OF FAMILY'S RESOURCES	NEW COMPETENCE ACQQUISITION: TAKE ACTION
GOALS	• Use of ICTs and the VLE to enhance family-school communication; • Reducing distance and bridging teacher-parent networking and collaboration on key learning topics to strengthen connections between the home contexts and the school contexts; • Increase knowledge and awareness that minorities have on their children's lives in the out-of-home contexts.	• Parent involvement in school activities through their linguistic and cultural competences • Use the VLE to encourage/sustain the development of new forms-*practices* of parent involvement, participation, and communication with the teachers	• Encouraging teachers in **rethinking** the modalities of dialogue and discussion with parents; • Supporting teachers in acquiring new **skills** in dialoguing with parents; • Promoting more positive **attitudes** towards diverse families.
KEY-TOPIC	**Use of ITC to enhance family-school communication**	**Family as a resource for school activities**	**Family-school communication**

ACTIVITY (AND LINK TO VLE IF	VLE class groups to share children's experience at school	Family's participation to school activities	Video-cued dialogues between parents and teachers https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=1519
ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	• Used of the notice board to send notices and communications to parents and creation of thematic notice boards collecting the documentation from the activities carried out with the children within the ISOTIS project (WP2 Children Study and WP4)	• Parents virtual (on the VLE) or in face-to-face contributions to school activities (story-telling in Mother Tongue, • Participation to WP4 outputs through translations and documentation about other religions)	• Presentation for parents of the activities and of the products of the VLE intervention followed by a final focus group with teachers on family-school communication on multilingualism and multiculturalism.
RESOURCES CREATED ON VLE	• Class general noticeboard parents/teachers • Thematic class noticeboards	• Section "Project and Materials" for each class • Class noticeboard parents/children (5th grade only)	• Presentations (most of them uploaded on the VLE class noticeboard or section "Project and materials") of products, outputs, pictures and videos

4.5.1.1 KEY TOPICS: USE OF ICT TO ENHANCE FAMIY-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

In the **preschool class**, A. and B., although they declared that they were not in favour of using ICTs in preschools and that they had never used them in activities with children, appreciated the possibility of using the platform to manage communication with families and to document projects carried out at school with the children. To this end, they used the notice board to send notices and communications to parents and created thematic notice boards where they collected the documentation (photos, drawings, videos, transcripts of observations and conversations carried out in class) from the activities carried out with the children within the ISOTIS project (WP2 Children Study and WP4) such as the ID card of each child, a video in which each child introduces themselves to the children who will arrive the year after and declares their favorite game; a table illustrating the spaces of the school preferred by each child; the presentation, through text and images, of the different spaces of the school; written and/or audio texts of songs, lullabies and nursery rhymes recorded by parents in different mother tongues on the occasion of mother tongue week; a project, accompanied by photographs, made with 5 year-old children from the orange class aimed at welcoming children to the preschool the following year).

The 2nd grade class introduced parents to their VLE account during the meetings where a notice board was created for the parents of the class containing a 'welcome post' in several languages and an invitation to write in several languages. Subsequently, the teacher encouraged the parents to participate through the VLE in several ways:

- by writing directly on the platform;

- by writing in the diary to translate some texts to upload to the platform;
- by writing messages to the parents' representative (Italian) asking her to mediate and involve the rest of the parents;
- by creating discussion topics and links to the Isotis video "Two languages are better than one" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3M6VUVeGBI);
- by requiring holiday homework involving parents and children on the VLE (e.g. for Italian homework, families were asked to upload photos of trips and everyday life during the Easter holidays with short descriptive texts as captions).

During the co-design meetings, the idea of using VLE to encourage school-family communication was shared at different times. However, the teachers, who were very busy with other projects and curricular planning, were rather reluctant to actually implement it, which only took place from April onwards. Specifically, the teachers decided to use the VLE in two ways:
- as a notice board to send notices to parents and report the tasks assigned to the children. In this case, they initially decided not to allow parents to respond to published notices/communications, so as to avoid having to "handle too many messages on too many different channels". At a later stage, however, they decided to allow parents to post comments/replies;
- to share with the parents the documentation (pictures, drawings, videos, digital artifacts realized by students) from the activities carried out in class (WP4) through a specific thematic board (called "Un po' di noi" - "a bit of us"- https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hsuforum/view.php?id=3371).

Specifically, one of the activities carried out in class and shared in this space was the creation of a multilingual digital storytelling activity (WP4, https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3576). Parents were encouraged (informally by teachers at drop off/pick up from school; and by children through video messages published on the VLE) to share translations (audio-recorded and/or written) into their own language of the stories selected by the children on the VLE.

In the 5th grade class, the teachers of the fifth grade used the VLE very little (F. took a marginal part in all the activities of the cross-WPs intervention even before resigning; G., on the other hand, stated that she did not feel very competent in the use of ICTs and that she had a certain fear of using them). Even though G. recognized "*the use of digital technologies in a positive and intelligent way*" as a strong point of the intervention, she did not improve her attitudes and competences in the use of ICTs. Therefore, the parent noticeboard was entirely designed by the researchers and no content was posted by the teachers.

4.5.1.2 KEY TOPIC: FAMILY AS A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Through the thematic bulletin boards, the teachers of the **pre-school class** tried to encourage parents to actively contribute to the proposals, curiosities and solicitations that emerged from the children regarding the theme of multilingualism during the activities carried out in class (WP2 Children Study and WP4). In particular, parents were asked to translate the rules established by the children regarding the use of the different spaces of the school into their mother tongue.

The parents of the **2nd grade class** were asked**:**

- to come to class, during school hours, to tell (or in the Italian regional dialects) some stories that were traditional, from some personal experiences or considered significant for their own culture of reference in their mother tongue. Subsequently, the children re-elaborated characters and places, uniting the different elements of the parents' narratives into a single story of fantasy. Finally, parents were asked to translate the texts invented by the children into their mother tongues. In this way the class got the plot in tagalog, German, French, Moldavian and Nigerian;
- to share texts in the mother tongue on the virtual class bulletin board;
- to share written or audio translations of various materials proposed by the teacher or produced by the children during school hours.

Parents of the **3rd grade class** were asked to contribute to the implementation of the two multilingual digital storytelling (DS) projects by translating the two stories selected by the children into their mother tongues. The students also uploaded video messages to the "A bit of us" bulletin board to encourage parents to participate, by writing or audio-recording the translations directly on the VLE. As only one family used the VLE to publish their own translation of the two stories, it was decided to use other channels to involve the parents: some parents provided a written 'paper and pencil' translation of the two stories; in addition to this, a Singhalese mother used WhatsApp to record and send her own and her son's voice while they were reading the stories to researchers, and a Moroccan mother went to school to record herself reading in Arabic.

In the **5th grade class**, following the children's leads during the WP2 Children study activity, we decided to make a digital, multi-religious calendar on the VLE (https://vle.isotis.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=2450) 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. Parents were asked to contribute photos, recipes, videos and other forms of documentation about their religious holidays. Given the teacher's lack of initiative, the researchers, with the help of the children, asked the parents for their contribution through video and audio posted on a notice board for parents and students in the class created specifically for this purpose and through letters in mother tongues written by the children themselves.

4.5.1.3 KEY TOPIC: FAMILY-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Family-school communication emerged as one of the IC sore points during the exploratory phase and a valuable PD topic to invest in. Some general issues concerning family-school communication were dealt with during the teachers' training (see key topic 2.1). In addition, the resources on the VLE of the course "Family&School partnership" (https://vle.isotis.org/course/view.php?id=202) and, in particular, the video "Family&School communication" were created and discussed with teachers. 9 (Looking at the world with other glasses! How to understand cultural misunderstanding, https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3418, https://youtu.be/WrZityEriI0?). We then proposed an activity for teachers that could contribute to empowering dialogue with parents (see

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=1519). The activity consisted of selecting and sharing some moments of their children's "life in the classroom" (e.g. video-clips drawn from video-observations made by teachers, materials produced by children…) with parents as a starting point for discussions with families about relevant educational themes. As in our previous research and professional development courses, the use of these untraditional stimuli can contribute to creating a less structured setting that the traditional one for teacher-parent meetings. This change can facilitate the constructive exchange of viewpoints and allow for a dialogical setting. Moreover, it can contribute to motivating even those parents who are generally more reluctant to be actively engaged in the discussion. The activity was initially proposed to teachers during the kick-off plenary meeting held in September 2018, and was specifically explained and discussed afterwards during dedicated, individual co-design meetings with the teachers of each class.

All the teachers decided to share some materials taken from the documentation (photos, videos) of the activities carried out in the classroom and the artifacts made by the children within the project (WP2 Children Study and WP4) with their parents. In each class the presence of linguistic mediators was planned (according to the linguistic needs of the parents of the class) to promote the active participation of parents with little knowledge of Italian. The **preschool teachers**, A. and B., were very enthusiastic about this activity, considering it an opportunity to give parents feedback on the experience and ask for their opinions and assessments of the work done. However, it was not possible to plan the meeting with the teachers because of the absence of A. for health reasons. B., also because of her role as special education teacher, did not feel able to manage the organization and to conduct the meeting, so it was entirely handled by the team of researchers. In the **2nd grade class**, this activity was planned during the co-planning meetings with C. and G. (whose presence, however, was discontinuous due to other concomitant school commitments). C. was excited to have a discussion with parents on issues of interest to the research and eager to ask them some questions. The questions were negotiated with the researchers in order to avoid being overly indicative or evaluative. To invite parents to the school-family meeting, C. prepared a digital leaflet that was published on the VLE on the bulletin board of the 'class group'. The meeting was held on the occasion of the final class party, thus ensuring the participation of at least one parent for each child. D. and E. decided to share with the parents some of the documentation produced in the **3rd grade class** within the WP4 intervention. This activity was planned during the co-design meetings and the teachers invited the parents to the meeting by publishing a notice on the VLE (as well as sending a written note in each child's personal diary). However, the teachers preferred to leave the organization of the meeting to the researchers and the children, stating that they were too overburdened (with other overlapping projects) to handle it themselves. Although a meeting with the families took place also in the **5th grade class**, it was entirely designed by the researchers and the children (as far as the choice and the presentation of the content) without any contribution from the class teachers (F. no longer worked at the school; G. instead was not interested).

4.6 IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION PHASE

4.6.1 LOCATION, PARTICIPANTS

Implementation took place in the school setting. This intervention was characterized by the

collaboration between the researchers and the teachers of each class: one researcher and a senior student were assigned as tutor and co-tutor of the teacher/s of the class, collaborating in designing the parent-school collaboration experiences, in monitoring and observing parents and teachers during the experiences, in collecting the documentation (visual and textual), in exchanging views on the ongoing activities to take decisions on the following steps, and giving support to make use of the VLE with the parents, and to reflect on the experience. The implementation was carried out in 4 groups, each composed by the parents of the class involved in the cross-WPs intervention. Some teachers took some photos and videos documenting the activities.

4.6.2 IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

All the activities required the involvement of the parents in sharing their language competencies and their knowledge through the VLE or in presence at school. The codesign and implementation phase resulted as in the figure below:

Figure 4.6: Co-design and implementation phase
The cooperation between teachers and researchers took place on the basis of a precise agreement of complementarity of roles as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 4.7: Agreement between teachers and reaserchers

TEACHER:

Choosing the activities and customize them

Conduting the activities

Sharing with the researchers ideas, opinions and doubts on the activities

Fill out the monitoring tools

Contributing to the documention of the activities

RESEARCHER:

Offering support and resources (scientific, metodological, instrumental...)

Providing teachers with reflections and feedbacks on the activities

Documentation of the activities (researcher fieldwork diary, audio and video-recording, photos)

4.6.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

The monitoring system we relied on comprised different evaluation instruments and addressed several dimensions/topics both with practitioners and with parents.

Table 4.11: Overview of the monitoring system with practitioners

When (time)	How (instruments)	What (dimensions/topics addressed related to WP3)
Exploratory phase	✓ Observations in the classroom and field notes	Teachers' practices in dealing with parents multiculturalism and multilingualism; ICTs use in the family-school communication
	✓ Interviews with teachers (audio-recorded and fully transcribed *verbatim*)	Teachers' beliefs/attitudes towards and practices in dealing with multiculturalism, multilingualism and intercultural competence; opinions on ICTs use in the family-school communication
	✓ Teacher' reflective self-evaluation questionnaire	Intercultural sensitivity; Strengthening school community; Reducing prejudices; Multilingualism; Parent-teacher relationships; Global competence; ICTs in the family-school communication

Implementatio n phase	✓ Qualitative documentation, including observations in the classroom and field notes; short interviews/conversations with teachers; pictures and audio/video-recordings	Opinions and formative evaluation on activities; Impact of the intervention on PD about family-school communication (changes in competencies/skills, knowledge, beliefs/attitudes, practices)
	✓ Teacher's diary	Opinions and formative evaluation on activities
Post-phase	✓ Interviews with teachers and with the principal (audio-recorded and fully transcribed *verbatim*)	Satisfaction; Impact of the intervention on collaboration practices with parents; Evaluation of the VLE (usage, usefulness, satisfaction, future use); Intervention process and partnership with ISOTIS researchers
	✓ Teacher's diary	Satisfaction; Impact of the intervention on PD
	✓ Reflective self-evaluation questionnaire	Intercultural sensitivity; Strengthening classroom community; Reducing prejudices; Multilingualism; Parent-teacher relationships; Global competence; ICTs in family-school communication

Table 4.12: Overview of the monitoring system with parents

When (time)	How (instruments)	What (dimensions/topics addressed)
Exploratory phase	✓ Parents' questionnaire	"Map" of the languages known and/or spoken at home (with the children/among the parents/with the other children at home/with the teacher/with other parents at school); existing technologies at home and other resources in terms of ICT-technology
	✓ Focus group with parents (audio-recorded and fully transcribed *verbatim*)	Parents' linguistic experience at home, their everyday experiences with the languages at home and with their children, as well as about their

		ideas, beliefs, desires, aspirations for their children, as well as their beliefs and ideas on multilingualism and language-learning
Implementation phase	✓ Qualitative documentation, including observations and field notes; short interviews/conversations with parents; pictures and audio/video-recordings	Opinions and formative evaluation on activities; Impact of the intervention on parents (changes in competences/skills, knowledge, beliefs/attitudes, practices)
Post-phase	✓ Interviews with focal parents (audio-recorded and fully transcribed *verbatim*)	Language practices at home; specific activities to enhance the use of the mother tongue; parents' expectations on multilingualism; experts' advice on multilingualism; insights on the promotion of mother tongues at school and on the support to second language learners; relationships with other parents and teachers; relationships among children; general expectations regarding the school as a diverse and multilingual context; insights on the VLE.
	✓ Focus group with each group of parents (audio- and video-recorded and fully transcribed *verbatim*)	General opinions on the activities and on the use of VLE, impact on parents and on family life

4.6.4 PRE/DURING-IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

To sum up, the intervention with each group resulted into a digital multilingual or multicultural product or artefact:

- The **preschool** class created a presentation of the spaces of the school with rules to used them "This is our school: spaces and ateliers presented by the children" https://vle.isotis.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=3057;

- The **2nd grade** class created a digital storytelling artifact in italian language https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3556 uploaded and shared with the VLE 2nd class group and a multilingual digital storytelling https://drive.google.com/open?id=19cpbEET0EBu3ePedgLZH2c7YNfEIHGZB shared during the final focus group with parents;

- The **3rd grade** class created two multilingual digital storytelling projects shared with the parents on the VLE: https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3576;

- The **5th grad**e class created a collaborative digital multi-religious calendar for the school website: https://h5p.org/node/473025?feed_me=nps.

The results will be described in the following sections for each class group and will be organized around 3 main key-topics and as many activities.

4.6.4.1 KEY TOPICS: USE OF ICT TO ENHANCE FAMIY-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

In the **preschool class**, parent participation in the project was generally low. Only a small number of families (9), in fact, saw these materials. Those who saw the materials expressed positive opinions. In the **2nd grade class**, from the researchers' observations, great enthusiasm of the main teacher in involving parents in class life through the platform and a great curiosity to know the languages and cultures of the families emerged. For these reasons, the teacher continued, throughout the Isotis project, to stimulate parents to participate through the VLE. The teacher expected more cooperation from the parents, not believing that the obstacle was the use of technologies, which - according to her - all parents use daily, especially those who have relatives living in distant countries. About half of the parents made at least one access to the platform, other parents wrote on the platform accessing from the children's account, because they had lost their password and ID, or because the children knew the procedure to enter and it was easier. Some parents contributed to the platform:

- by translating the stories proposed by the teacher;
- by recording a foreign language audio;
- a dad and a little girl sent a video to ask the teacher about an assignment;
- by spontaneously sharing stories in a foreign language;
- by uploading some photos over the holidays.

C. felt that if there had not been a great deal of interest from her and the children, the parents would not have taken the opportunity to participate in school life. C. described their involvement as 'passive': "*More than 'they felt', they were involved. They were involved! (...) in the sense that it did not come from them, the interest in the platform, but it was an interest induced by the explanations of the teachers, the visualizations by the researchers, by the involvement of their children. So it is not something that came directly from them. Also because, this thing in my opinion, is explained by the fact that everything related to the research, information, materials, present in the platform, were not seen.*"

In fact, the teacher used numerous strategies to invite parents to the platform in order to:

- communicate with parents using a dedicated bulletin board, requesting collaboration, participation and transmitting information on the activities carried out at school by the students;
- translate some content posted by parents in their mother tongue using 'Beeba';
- create discussion topics on the platform by addressing parents directly and asking them to write on the platform and to share various types of content in their mother tongue;
- to post photos, videos or artifacts of children in the classroom to increase the interest and attractiveness of the VLE;
- to ask the children to act as mediators "Tell Mom and Dad to look and write on the platform";
- to reinforce, with thanks and questions, every contribution uploaded by the parents.

The teacher was happy with how some parents participated, in particular the class representative who acted as a bridge between her and her parents on several occasions. She was impressed by the fact that a parent and a child contacted her on the platform in private by sending her a video to ask for explanations on an educational issue. G. was disappointed by the lack of participation of the others: "*I was amazed. Because Y.'s mother has always been quite present, this year a little less from certain points of view, but here, they were the only families that never accessed the platform. The only families. As for G. [child in the mixed-parent child's class], however, there was a lot of slowness in the involvement of the parents.*"

The parents from this class who used the platform considered it a very useful means of school-family communication, but they found it not user-friendly. This reason may explain the lack of participation on the platform by parents, observed by researchers who acknowledge the teacher's considerable effort to stimulate and nurture communication with families, where parents did not seem to be as participatory. The input for communication (almost) never came from them; families mainly responded to teacher's requests, and only a minority (always the same parents) responded to all the requests by C. on the VLE. The majority of teachers interacted sporadically or never wrote anything with/on the platform. However, the parents who used the platform at least once considered it a positive tool, especially to help children develop skills and knowledge and to stay in touch with each other even at a distance. Although a generally positive opinion of the platform with respect to multilingual and multicultural content emerged in the focus group with families, such appreciation did not translate into participatory behavior or a symmetrical exchange of information/questions. Perhaps the way in which C. proposed the topics influenced the teacher C. focused very much on the children and on innovating the curriculum, and less on specific activities proposed to parents. Perhaps, with more time available, parents would have responded more quickly to her proposals and communications.

In the 3rd grade class, some parents viewed the notices and documentation, added some comments and contributed by uploading the translation of the stories for multilingual digital storytelling into their mother tongue. However, most of the parents in the class, despite the requests of teachers and children, never entered the platform. The teachers gave a partly critical and partly positive assessment of the activity. On the one hand, they recognized that the possibility of using VLE to actively contribute to classroom activities aimed at enhancing multilingualism was a very welcome opportunity for parents: "*they felt valued, their language was valued... even the few parents who participated were motivated and rewarded*". On the other hand, they assessed the general lack of use of the platform by families as a weakness, which they attributed in particular to three factors:

- the economic difficulties of many families of the class: "*half the class has serious economic problems ... so what happened, what happens in class, what you do in class, is not so impelling ... That is, they must make it to the end of the month, or even to the end of the day, so ... we have so many children who arrive in the morning and say they have not had breakfast, don't have a snack ... so parents care little about that, the platform, their language ... a good part, half class at least*";
- the very specific focus on multilingualism, which has probably made Italian families feel less involved: "*Italians, for example, didn't, haven't…felt involved, haven't participated*";

- the excessively complex and unintuitive structure of the platform: "*a digital tool is too "complicated" for them, to access, to have a connection (...) Maybe they made themselves available for the interview, where they can interact in a different way than digitally*".

Parents present at the focus group at the end of the intervention only partially confirmed the impressions of the teachers. All those present (8) greatly appreciated the work done in class during the project (WP4), but only three of the 8 parents said they had used the platform. Parents who did not use the platform stated that the main reason was the limited time available to find a moment in the family and work routine to actively explore the VLE. Two elements that, as researchers, we think can contribute at least in part to explaining the low use of the VLE by families are:

- The VLE was actually used as a channel for communicating with families and for sharing class life with them only very late, almost at the end of the school year. Perhaps, if it had been possible to anticipate the time, more families would have had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the platform or to find a moment to access it;
- (Almost all) parents in the class received the credentials to access the VLE associated with their e-mail address. This type of registration allows the user to receive an email alert each time a message is written or a resource is uploaded to a forum/message board in one of the subscribed groups. It is possible, therefore, that some parents, seeing the alerts and communications from teachers directly by email, did not feel the need to enter the platform to read the same communication.

In the **5th grade class**, parents had little access to the platform. This was due both to the lack of participation and cooperation of the teachers in preparing the list of parents, sending credentials and instructions, as well as the notable autonomy of the children in using the VLE from home without the assistance of parents. A mother, with a younger daughter in another class involved in the experimentation of the platform, noticed this discrepancy between the involvement of parents in the second grade compared to the fifth: "*In fact I wasn't involved, because Lorenzo didn't tell me anything and she did ... and then I entered with her and she showed me all the work. But I saw that the fifth grade class had not yet uploaded the video of the parents, only the group of children. I wondered why*". Some parents confessed to the lack of time to follow their children: "*I didn't try because of the work I do, but my daughter did, but the first few times she didn't manage to get in. I don't know if she got in. Now I don't follow her that much*", "*I haven't tried it. Then there was a sheet with two passwords, one in my name and one in the wife's name too, then with which we can enter? (...) Eh, I didn't even try it. I thought one for each family (...) you don't have time to do it and the wife... "you go, you follow everything"*". An Arabic mother, on the other hand, also entered by phone and wanted to be able to use the platform even in middle school.

4.6.4.2 KEY TOPICS: FAMILY AS A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Very few parents (1/2) of the **pre-school class** contributed to the translation of some texts (a mother during the week of the mother tongue taught the children a nursery rhyme in Tagalog and provided the text; a mother during the last days of school was willing to translate the texts of the

rules to be respected in the different spaces of the school, defined during focus groups conducted with the children). The teachers reserved the right to involve other parents during the following school year in order to complete the project. From the observations made by the research team, the preschool-family relationship appeared positive and fruitful, as also stated by the teachers. Some parents also translated materials related to the activities carried out at school to be uploaded on the platform into their mother tongue. Others showed some interest, but this did not translate into active participation. Some parents (not Italian speakers), according to the teachers, had not understood the objectives of the project and the requests made to them. Others would not participate for cultural reasons ("*They expect things from the school. They do not easily enter into the logic that the school needs their contribution*"). Parent access and use of the platform could have been encouraged, from the beginning of the project, by video materials featuring the children. The theoretical contributions made available to parents on the platform were judged to be of little use ("*If a parent is attentive to this issue, the network is full of contributions*").

In the **2nd grade class**, school-family communication took place, between parents and the teacher, and through the children themselves, who recorded private video messages asking parents to help them translate the story invented in class. The children actively participated in the meetings with their parents by translating from foreign languages into Italian for their classmates. During the class meetings:

- Two parents sang a typical Philippine song in Tagalog with a guitar. The parents had prepared a poster with the lyrics of the song in Tagalog so that the whole class could sing with them. The children were very involved, sang the song and asked the parents many questions about both the language and the Philippines;
- A Moldovan mother told a traditional story in Moldovan and Russian, also bringing the story written on paper so that the children could also see the Moldovan and Russian alphabet. The class asked their mother many questions and asked her about some sounds that were difficult for them to pronounce and about the Cyrillic alphabet, which is completely different from the Italian one;
- An Egyptian mother sent a link to a video of a typical song in Arabic to the Italian mothers present at the meeting, uploading it later on the platform. The Arabic-speaking children were enthusiastic and some said they knew that song and sang it, translating some parts for their classmates;
- An Italian parent - not having a dialect or a foreign language to share - decided to tell the children what the constitution was and explained Article 3, considered particularly important both for the Italian culture and for the theme of the project. It reads: "All citizens have equal dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal and social conditions." The children asked many questions to the mother, and together with the teacher they deepened the importance of equality and sharing common rules.

The teacher actively participated in the group discussion by asking the parents questions about their culture and/or language. Some parents (a minority) were particularly involved and answered all the teacher's requests made through the platform, came to school to tell stories in their mother tongue, proposed some stories spontaneously on the VLE. Parents particularly appreciated the fact that they helped the children to translate some stories into their mother tongue because it

allowed them to see the children's renewed/new interest in the language and culture/country of their parents. It was mainly the parents who came to school to tell stories in LM who were impressed both by the class's interest in their language and the history of their country of origin and by the impact their involvement had on their children. The teacher thought that the parents who participated the most in the Isotis project and actively contributed to the activities, also using the platform, were those who were most interested in the education of children. They were more interested than other parents, even before the arrival of researchers at school, and therefore it was not specifically due to the project. This actually had an impact on the relationship the children had with the language of origin of their families.

In total, 6 families of the **3rd grade class** actively participated in the implementation of the multilingual DS projects. Thanks to their collaboration and that of some children, it was possible to translate the stories into different languages: Italian, Albanian, Arabic, Singhalese, Spanish and Romanian. Although only some of the parents in the class contributed, the teachers judged this involvement to be positive: the experience enhanced the linguistic repertoires of the families and contributed to making the parents feel very motivated and valued. This positive evaluation also emerges from the parents' words. Not only did the activity give visibility to their L1, but it was also a valuable opportunity to share it with their children. The main negative point was the involvement of the families of the Italian children. Although they were asked to contribute to the DS with their own regional dialects or other languages known/spoken in the family or for work by the parents (e.g. English and French), none participated. This partly influenced the experience of Italian children who, although they were very actively involved in the production of the two artifacts, did not participate with the same enthusiasm as their classmates in the final meeting, as the teachers pointed out.

In the **5th grade class**, parents were involved late, due to the departure of the class teacher. The parents did not feel directly involved and seemed to experience the project as something that mainly concerned their children. An example of this is the testimony of this mother who talks about the work done at home by her daughter editing of a video to post on the class space on the platform: "*My daughter drove me crazy. Apart from the fact that there was the video to edit and therefore stress; but she was very enthusiastic (...) for her the project was beautiful and she had a lot of fun*". A father's comment also showed indirect participation in helping their children to carry out the collection of materials for the multi-religious multimedia calendar: "*we searched the Internet and she asked (...) She asked how to search and what to do, how to investigate, because more than anything she was interested in the stories of Ramadan. Why? Why do they do it? Why don't they? How do they do it? There are so many things she asked and so many answers that I didn't have, so we looked together*".

The request to share materials about their religious holidays struck a Moroccan mother, whose son wanted to make a video on how to pray: "*The teachers asked about the Koran, praying, how to pray and my son felt at home (...). The most beautiful thing was what was done about religions, because in Egypt, in particular, this topic could not be discussed so much. In this way we talk and discuss together and it is a beautiful thing for us (...) the children said how to pray and this was useful for them, in the sense that they heard that it is something that does not exist here in Italy*". This family allowed their son to bring the Koran to school and brought their child to school at the

end of the school year to redo the video of him explaining how to pray in the Muslim religion, which unfortunately for technical problems had been lost. This mother was probably particularly impressed by the fact that - before the intervention - the class teachers had strong Islamophobic prejudices against this family and this child.

4.6.4.3 KEY TOPIC: FAMILY-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

At the beginning of the **preschool** meeting, attended by a good number of families, a video was shown featuring clips of: a circle time led by teachers with the children talking about how to welcome the children in the transition from the infant-toddler center to the preschool and how to make the school more inclusive; some activities realized in the preschool during two meetings with the children from the infant-toddler center who visited their school, activities suggested by the preschool children (see also Report WP2 Children Study). After watching the videos, a focus group was set up where the parents actively participated:

- underlining their satisfaction with what was proposed to the children at school (one mother defined the project as "*a turning point*", another "*great opportunity*");
- judging that it was very enriching - not only for the children, but also for the families themselves - for the children to get closer to the themes of multilingualism and multiculturalism;
- sharing some reflections on the choice of maintaining the mother tongue at home.

B. was very satisfied with the meeting, considering that it contributed to enhancing the image of the school and the work usually done by teachers in relation to the issues of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the eyes of parents ("I*t has made what we have been saying for a long time concrete and visible*").

With the support of C., the meeting of the **2nd grade class** started with the children showing the work done within the ISOTIS project (WP4) and they shared their impressions of the whole experience (both in Italian and in their mother tongues). This had a dual purpose: on the one hand it served as a signal of inclusion, recognition and enhancement, on the other hand it was a method to ensure that some thoughts were understood by all parents. A PowerPoint presentation with photos and videos illustrated what the children were saying. At the end of the children's presentation, the teachers chose to show a multilingual digital storytelling project (https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=1930) created by the students in collaboration with C. and some parents. Afterwards, there was discussion and dialogue led by C. (G. was only present at part of the meeting because of other school commitments), during which almost all parents had the opportunity to speak. C. led the presentation of the children autonomously supporting the children (giving them directions) while during the focus group, she asked some (few) questions agreed in advance with the researchers and had the role of assistant, taking note of some important statements the parents and intervening occasionally to stimulate dialogue. Nevertheless, the possibility of organizing and leading the meeting in person further increased C.'s involvement and motivation. During the final interview and from the diary, C.'s evaluation was very positive, because:

- it fostered dialogue and discussion between teachers and parents, increasing knowledge and awareness about multilingual practices and the use of ICT in the family;

- it stimulated many reflections on the involvement and importance of parent inclusion in the school context and on the importance of recognizing the cultural identity of families from migrant backgrounds;
- the presentation of children's work acted as a trigger for discussion and proved to be effective by helping to make parents feel directly involved.

With regard to parental participation, some parents were spontaneously particularly involved in the discussion and most parents spoke during the meeting after being stimulated by requests for intervention from researchers or teachers. Few (3) parents did not speak during the meeting: this was mainly due to a lack of confidence in Italian due to the fact that they did not have a mediator in their own language or because they were not sitting near the mediators. 3 other parents were absent because they were engaged in meetings in classes of their other children. The participation of the parents was high (at least one parent per child participated, except for 3 out of 22 children, and almost all of them intervened) but it was not perceived as such by the teacher, who was instead negatively surprised by the limited participation of some parents.

The meeting of the **3rd grade class** began with the children, supported by the researchers and teachers, showing the parents some videos and final products made during the year, followed by a moment of feedback and discussion also directly involving the children. Subsequently, a focus group with parents and teachers was led by the researchers. About half of the parents in the class took part in the meeting and almost all of them contributed very actively to the discussion (only a few mothers with a migrant backgrounds expressed themselves to a lesser extent because they felt less confident although the cultural-linguistic mediator was there, even though they contributed with significant and incisive interventions). For the parents it was their first opportunity to share some reflections matured during the year regarding maintaining their mother tongues with the teachers and to request, clearly and explicitly, the integration of L1 in the curriculum. During the final interview, D. and E., while sharing these reflections proposed by the researchers, nevertheless minimized the scope of the activity judging that, however interesting, not all parents participated or made a significant contributions to the discussion, and especially none of the 4 parents of the Italian children in the class were present at the meeting, perhaps they felt less directly involved, given the focus on the theme of multilingualism.

The meeting of the **5th grade class** took place in two phases: at first, the students presented the activities carried out during the year following an outline prepared by them and showing their outputs on the VLE (videos and posters produced on the "Feeling good at school" and the religious multidigital calendar). Most of the students participated actively and enthusiastically with the "technical" help and coordination of the research assistants. The presentation took place in the presence of some cultural mediators who helped the parents with the most difficulty in understanding. This presentation was followed by an exchange between parents and teachers led by a researcher. Despite the presence of the religion teacher, her participation was passive. As for the parents, some families participated in the meeting, but their participation was not particularly active. F. commented on this fact considering it a (further) manifestation of the lack of interest on the part of the parents in the activities carried out at school that has always characterized this class ("*A class where... there has never been a great deal of involvement, a great deal of stimulation. That's how they are*"). However, the teacher did not seem to realize the

fact that the difficulties in communication and the relationship with the families, confirmed by this meeting, could also depend on the attitude of the teachers themselves, who, despite the great enthusiasm shown by their students to organize the meeting, did not get involved.

4.6.5 POST-INTERVENTION EVALUATION & DISCUSSION

4.6.5.1 USE AND APPRECIATION OF THE VLE

What they explored?
TEACHERS & PARENTS
Parents and teachers explored the overall structure of the VLE with the three main sections (MY SPACE, CONTENTS, and TOOLS) and the main functions offered. Specific meetings with parents were held for each class to present:

- BEEBA;
- CONTENT SECTION: explore the resources (Isotis videos);
- MY GROUPES (notice boards teachers&parents, students&parents - 5th grade class only; teachers&students&parents - 2nd grade only).

What did they use?

TEACHERS

- CONTENT section:
  o to increase knowledge regarding some key topics (language awareness, bi-/multi-lingualism, intercultural competence…) (e.g., ISOTIS VIDEOS, sub-sections DID YOU KNOW?);
  o to sustain teachers' reflectivity (e.g., cases of the sub-section OBSERVE AND REFLECT).

Aim: increasing teachers' awareness, knowledge and skills in dealing with multicultural/multilingual families.

- NOTICE BOARDS AND FORUMS:
  o to send notices to parents and report the tasks assigned to the children;
  o to share documentation with the parents;
  o to engage parents in school activities.

Aim: experimenting new ways to communicate with parents; enhancing family-school dialogue and collaboration.

- REFLECTIVE DIARY:
  o to keep track of and to document the activities carried out;
  o to report personal reflections throughout the intervention;

Aim: increasing teachers' reflective skills in family-school communication.

PARENTS
- CONTENT section (videos):
  o to get informed about Bilingual children language learning

Aim: increasing parents' awareness, knowledge and skills in growing up multicultural/multilingual children.

- NOTICE BOARD:
  o to contribute to children's output and activities;
  o to read teachers' notices and the class documentation;

Aim: experimenting new ways to communicate with teachers; enhancing family-school dialogue and collaboration.

What resources and functionalities they appreciated most?

TEACHERS
More than the repository function, the teachers considered interesting the opportunities for communication and sharing between teachers and families.

PARENTS
Aspects most appreciated by parents:
- making communication among parents, with teachers & with the school system more inclusive, more rapid, easier for non-native speakers;
- the possibility to have access to documentation of activities realized in class by their children and get messages from the teachers;
- the possibility to strengthen the collaboration between the school and the home contexts as learning environments & to increase their awareness of the school system and learning activities & to improve their participation in their children's school life and their support in learning activities and homework;
- the way the VLE was used by children (constructive, formative use, different from the most popular social media).

Resources most appreciated:
- multilingual messages&contents;
- translation tools (Beeba);
- videos communication with teachers through novel audio-visual resources;

- visual content and content of a didactic nature (e.g. on multilingualism).

What didn't they like most?

TEACHERS

The teachers criticized the VLE mainly because it was perceived as unintuitive, excessively complex and fragmented in its functions. All these aspects made it quite difficult for the professionals to use – far less master – the platform in complete autonomy without the assistance of the researchers. Moreover, also its graphical interface was considered aesthetically unattractive.

PARENTS

Aspect that parents did not appreciate:
- not user-friendly (problem encountered with the password), not easily accessible ("too nice"/"too many things", difficulty or impossibility to find specific materials and documents, among the wealth of resources provided);
- not smartphones-friendly;
- difficulty of access if lacking of an internet connection;
- some Italian parents found the video not very interesting and other the the theoretical contributions of little use.

Some pitfalls:
- it disempowered immigrant parents and discouraged them from learning the language of their immigration country;
- similarities with other tools that are already available (e.g. Google translator);
- due to more or less implicit gender roles, the implementation of another digital communication tool is overwhelmingly for mothers who communicate via the WhatsApp chat.

What potential did they see in the platform?

TEACHERS & PARENTS

Both teachers and parents considered the VLE a powerful tool to enhance family-school communication and collaboration. In fact, the use of the VLE contributed to defining more symmetrical relationship/negotiation modalities between teachers and parents and to enhance parents' levels of engagement and participation to the school life. The sharing of some of the activities at school and/or at home through the VLE contributed to defining a more symmetrical relationship/negotiation modalities between teachers and parents: teachers could make some examples of "activities" or "educational interventions" done at school visible, parents contributed to making their linguistic and (inter)cultural competences visible. In this sense, not only activities at school but also stories from cultures of origin and other cultural traditions were shared through physical presence, the artefacts of each class and on the platform, for knowledge that flows in both directions. Communication between school and migrant families, often complicated by problems of linguistic misunderstanding, was also facilitated by the visual languages used (video-

photo) and by the greater presence of the languages of origin at school and on the VLE. This kind of communication was also particularly useful to parents who did not participate very much in school life, or who were not in a position to participate because they did not have a voice (in the broadest sense: excessively fragile, vulnerable, isolated, or bearers of an idea of school as an independent context from the family which they should respect without intervening). The interaction between school and family, often unidirectional (school to family), developed also in the opposite direction: family to school. These strengths induced the Principal and A. (as the assistant principal) to extend the use of VLE to the whole school starting from the next year. C., who will be teaching in another school next year, was also so pleased that she proposed the use of VLE to the Principal of her new school.

Moreover, the teachers considered that the VLE has the potential to build a community of learners and to favour/scaffold the dialogue and exchange among professionals from different schools/countries. These strengths made the school principal decide to extend the use of VLE to the whole school starting from the next year; while C. proposed the use of the VLE to the principal of her new school.

What changes would they suggest?

TEACHERS

- Making the VLE structure and its functions more immediate, intuitive and, overall, userl-friendly;
- Making the interface more atractive;
- Enhancing and improving the opportunities for communication and exchange that the VLE can offer;
- Developing the translating functions further.

PARENTS

- Separate the functions for translation from those for communication and the contents;
- Increase usability via smartphone with an easier interface (e.g. highlight the sections for frequent and immediate use (translations) from those for consultation).

What role did the VLE play during the process of work and the activities?

TEACHERS & PARENTS

On one hand, the use of the VLE contributed to enhance family-school communication. On the other hand, it contributed to make teachers find and experiment new modalities to engage and communicate with families (one of the sore point they had pointed out in the exploratory phase) and to acquire a more critical and reflective stance in their way to value families.

What the main challenges in the use of the VLE and what the main advantages in using it?

TEACHERS

The main challenge dealt with the possibility to make teachers explore and use the VLE in a more

autonomous and deliberate way. Although they experienced first-hand the opportunities offered by the VLE at various levels (PD, family-school communication), they often relied on the technical support of the ISOTIS researchers. The lack of familiarity of the teaching staff with ICTs and the time constraints played a role in that. Moreover, involving the teachers, who were very busy with other projects and curricular planning, especially from April onwards.

PARENTS

Involving families in school activities was a challenge because of the limited time available, problems in accessing the platform, lack of participation and cooperation of some teachers. Moreover, almost all parents received the credentials to access the VLE associated with their e-mail address. This type of registration allows the user to receive an email alert each time a message is written or a resource is uploaded to a forum/message board in one of the subscribed groups. It is possible, therefore, that some parents, seeing the alerts and communications from teachers directly by email, did not feel the need to enter the platform to read the same communication.

Summing up: points of strength and points of weakness of the VLE

Overall, the evaluation seems to suggest that the VLE has a good potential, offering interesting and valuable functions. Nonetheless, it is crucial to improve both its interface and its structure to make them more intuitive and straightforward.

Lessons learned and recommendations

The intervention highlighted some valuable lessons:

- it is necessary to make the overall structure and interface of the platform simpler and more intuitive, so as to favour a more active, gratifying and autonomous use by teachers;
- it will be important to work to enhance and improve the opportunities for communication and exchange that VLE can offer at various levels (between teachers and pupils, between teachers and families, between professionals) – especially considering that it is one of the aspects considered more promising by the participants;
- it is important to plan an extended time to let the professionals & parents (familiarize with the VLE. While it can be helpful to provide some demonstrations/tutorials to show them the possibilities that the VLE provides, it is nonetheless crucial to let them explore its functions at their pace;
- to overcome teachers' possible resistances towards ICTs, it could be useful to consider a parallel involvement of children. In fact, pupils can play a bridge role, helping teachers to approach and see the potential offered by the new technologies.

4.6.5.2 THE TEACHERS' POINT OF VIEW ON THE CONTENT OF THE INTERVENTION

Overall, the teachers who participated in the project gave a positive assessment of the intervention, believing that it increased their knowledge and sensibility on the themes of multilingualism and interculturalism made them more attentive to the theme of multilingualism,

with positive repercussions on their daily family-school communication[18]. Specifically, the meetings with the parents increased the knowledge of some teachers both regarding the culture of the families and the use of the different languages spoken at home. C., for example, at the beginning of the project stated that she had no knowledge of multilingualism, no skills to enhance the mother tongue in class or knowledge of how to encourage its use at home. She acknowledges that, through meetings with parents, she has acquired a greater awareness and sensitivity about the perceptions of parents and children regarding the use of the mother tongue at home. These reflections, also present in the diary, have stimulated the teacher's desire to plan multilingual and intercultural school activities for the following year: "(...) *I think it would be desirable to propose meetings, perhaps at the beginning of the first year, to illustrate the meaning of the teaching proposal [referring to a multilingual proposal] to families. For example, I would like to illustrate the videos on bilingualism, then I would explain them, I would show some proposals for families and finally I would show some work already produced by other classes to families who would like to enroll their children at the school"*.

4.6.5.3 THE PARENTS POINTS OF VIEW ON THE CONTENT OF THE INTERVENTION

Parents generally appreciated the various features of the intervention. Some parents expressed significant considerations about the effects of using the mother tongue in class, such as:

- reassuring children with dual linguistic and cultural affiliation: "*I really liked the fact that they used their mother tongue in class and that it relaxed them. Because it was something that was a bit taboo and I never understood. "You don't speak Arabic at all, Tagalog" (...) But that they were relaxed using it, without violating a rule written on the stone, in my opinion is very reassuring and also enriching*;

- Being useful for welcoming new arrivals: "*Also because it does not deny roots, in short. It also helps. Because maybe children arrive during the year and are struggling, they can also be helped and feel a little more comfortable, right?*

- facilitating the improvement and role that the mother tongue played outside the domestic sphere for bilingual children who rarely practiced their mother tongue other than Italian: "*I wished he could speak one of his two mother tongues [Albanian] with other children even at school because it would have been a way to improve the language and accelerate his expression in Albanese*" (Mother, 3rd Grade).

- involving parents by sharing specific resources stemming from their socio-cultural background as well as their individual skills. Especially by organizing artistic and cultural activities with the children, the teachers and other parents: "*Yes, when the International Mother Tongue week comes, they [the teachers] organize lots of activities. I have always taken part in them with the teachers by doing something related to my country of origin [Sri Lanka] like reading and singing songs. Sometimes I did games we do in our* country"(Mother, 3rd Grade).

- stimulating children's interest in acquiring language skills: "*That is, in the end it's a way for Italian children to learn other languages as well, hearing them and using words in other languages, perhaps repeated several times. It can be useful for everyone*".

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[18] On the evaluation of the teachers on the professional development during the intervention see D5.4, Italian Country Report.

- encouraging openness and learning of other languages in the future: "*I hope this is an approach that will make it easier for them to learn languages. Surely for me, when I think of myself, multilingualism came into my life later, around the age of ten/twelve when I started travelling, realizing that I was travelling and using another language. But for them, already in class, already at the age of six, it's clear that "bread" can be said in many ways. In my opinion this opens the mind a lot*".

- encouraging critical-reflexive thinking because "*some words have the same roots, therefore this creates a capacity to create cultural, historical and various kinds of connections*".

Although some parents thought that the enhancement of the mother tongue in the classroom was a useful and inclusive practice, they believed that it was a priority for children to learn Italian, in the hope that they could also be of help to parents in learning this language (see see D44, Italian Country report).

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 5. COUNTRY REPORT: CZECH REPUBLIC

KATEŘINA SIDIROPULU JANKŮ

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the research proceedings in using the VLE to support multilingual care and education in the Czech Republic's non-school environment, focusing on Roma families. The research took place in the city of Ostrava, and we cooperated with local public library branches and a community centre which focuses on supporting mainly socially disadvantaged Roma families. At the same time, both the library and the community centre cooperate with formal education facilities, and their portfolio of services includes education support.

We started our fieldwork in public libraries knowing of their ongoing community-oriented education activities for children, including Roma. The library employees took the opportunity and initiated cooperation with the local basic school, emphasising use of the Romany language in the families of local pupils. This significantly enriched the co-design phase, which occurred at the same time and thus intertwined with the exploratory phase.

Because disadvantaged Roma families often face housing difficulties, they move around the city and the region quite frequently. Therefore, it became natural to operate in more than one library branch. In the end, the research extended across three library branches, one community centre and two schools with the WP3.4 activities, attempting to maintain a close focus on four families with preschool-aged children during the implementation phase. Other cooperating institutions and people created secondary research resources which helped to contextualise the data.

We would like to emphasise that our efforts were to uncover information about low threshold technology users since data on such users is scarce. Such research requires extra care and ethical considerations, as well as being time-consuming and fragile in terms of the sustainability of the cooperation and the impact of the implementation. Often low competence in technology use aligns with extensive social deprivation and vulnerable and unstable social conditions. In order to mediate living conditions and the potential for VLE use in supporting multilingual care, we have included illustrative mini-cases in the Czech country report.

5.2 PRESENTATION OF THE SITES

5.2.1 SITE SELECTION

In the Czech context, the selected criteria were as follows:

- A city neighbourhood where the Romany language is used on a daily basis, thus Roma people are present in the streets and speak Romany;
- A well-established community centre operates in such a neighbourhood, working with Czech-Roma families (in a broader sense, not just nuclear families) with children aged 3–8 years old;

- A preference for a community centre which already offers education and parenting oriented programmes which the WP3.4 work can be built upon;
- The site does not suffer from the burden of being over-researched, therefore probably a site where other ISOTIS fieldwork research is not being realised;
- A certain level of sustainability in the cooperation (i.e. it will most likely be offering similar services with a similar number of employees and volunteers several months later) and therefore the capacity among community workers to cooperate and not fluctuate too highly in terms of employees and volunteers;
- Previous personal ties with the ISOTIS researcher so as to raise the probability of trust and concord in cooperation; and
- Ideally, someone from the staff/volunteers speaks the Romany language

In 2017 we did the first sensitising pre-research contact in Ústí nad Labem. The professionals we contacted were willing to cooperate with us, but there appeared to be a lack of Romany families speaking the Romany language and, at the same time, willing to participate in developing a VLE. Further, we consulted about possible interconnectedness with the Brno site; however, there seemed to be a problem of overloading the community centres working with Romany families. After all, we had selected the site in the north-east Moravian metropolitan city of Ostrava, where socially excluded and Romany speaking families live and where we could work with previously built connections to institutions.

5.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

During the exploratory phase, the cooperating institutions were chosen in three city districts of Ostrava, a city of several tens of thousands of inhabitants with a significant population of people of Roma origin – mainly descendants of Slovak Roma who came to the region for work after 1945. Unlike in some Czech cities, people recognisable as Roma are present in many city quarters and are not isolated to a few socially excluded localities. Such localities nevertheless exist in the city and are the natural centre of Roma-oriented social work.

In the cooperating **public library branches**, the demographic occurrence of Roma visitors is more likely – usually, these are Roma children attending through organised activities by local education facilities. Sometimes Roma teenagers come in the afternoon with younger siblings, the library branches operating as a community centre for them. Each library branch has a specialist focusing on work with children. Such specialists prepare the monthly programme for neighbouring education facilities (kindergarten, elementary schools, community centres with education programmes) after which the organised visits, usually in the morning hours, take place. The usual length of the programme is 50 minutes and consists of book readings, simple art activities, interactive tasks, and kinetic activities. The librarian rearranges the prepared programme according to the actual setting of the child group and adapts it to the immediate group dynamics. One of the library branches focuses its library activities explicitly on Roma culture, including books, CDs and DVDs accessible to visitors. Therefore, college students from the wider region visit a specific branch when writing diploma work on Roma-related topics. This library branch also cooperates with the Museum of Romani Culture, the only representative institution of Roma culture in the Czech Republic.

The **community centre** focuses on social, education and legal-advisory work with socially deprived families, with an explicit focus on Roma clients and eliminating their possible disadvantaged social position. The community centre was established in the late 1990s with a background of Christian values. These nevertheless do not frame the day-to-day operation in any tangible way. The mission statement of the community centre speaks of helping individual people for the sake of greater social good on a small, step-by-step basis. This is expressed in small daily steps like accompanying clients to schools or offices where it is assumed, or already experienced by clients, that they are treated as second-class citizens because they are Roma or uneducated. Parents are treated as social work and legal-advisory clients – in this respect, the community centre follows the law on social services, Act no. 208/2006, and is a certified provider. The community centre also supports self-sufficient parenting and, through a combination of various social services, tries to prevent removing children from client families due to suspicion of bad care (raised by the school or social welfare office).

Besides that, activities supporting parenting skills take place in the community centre, especially within a three-year parenting and pre-school preparation project, the "**Family Club**". Four times a week parents may come and their children can play and participate in educational activities, get ready to attend education facilities in the future and get a snack. The community centre cooperates with the local public library branch as well as with local kindergartens, and together they realise these activities. Furthermore, a speech therapist visits the club and prepares children for their upcoming school years[19].

When reflecting on the educational activities of the community centre, the centre manager, focusing on socially-activating services including the "Family Club", reflects on the lack of education erudition of the employees due to their high fluctuation, caused in part by the fact that such work is rather low-paid and more competent employees tend to leave. Therefore, we agree that cooperation in the VLE implementation phase requires the physical presence of a researcher in order to implement the innovative learning process appropriately.

5.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The participating practitioners can be characterised as people from ethnic majority backgrounds who choose to work with Romany people because they have a close relationship to Romany culture (one of the participating librarians comes from a folk music family and grew up meeting Romany bands at specialised festivals, and therefore, she has a positive approach towards Romany culture) or a neutral approach framed as either generally humanistic, Christian or, less often, pro-multicultural. Sometimes people of a Romany ethno-cultural background may be seen both in the community centre and library, but it is rather rare. Usually, such professionals consider themselves a part of the Romany elite and tend to support the development of Romany culture and pride.

The cooperating professionals most active in the research were the following:

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[19] In the Czech Republic, due to very strict rules regarding the pronunciation of the consonants "r" and "ř", it is very common that pre-school and early school children visit a speech therapist. Therefore, such a service is a normal part of the school year's preparation.

Carmen Crown is a middle-age community worker and one of the establishing members of the community centre. She has worked in the field for over a decade and considers herself a not clearly specified "believer in the better side of people". She is a certified community worker and keeps a strict eye on her junior colleagues, who often have lower work moral. She is well known among Roma families in the neighbourhood where the community centre is located, and due to her long-standing reputation, she enjoys a great deal of trust.

Daisy is head of the library branches which work with predominantly Romany clients, and she is responsible for further education and supporting community-oriented work in the branches. She is middle age and could be, according to her world view, considered a European, believing that supporting ethnic minority clients of any kind naturally belongs within her agenda. She seemed to enjoy the possibility of further professional development for herself and her subordinates.

Check-desk librarians in all the branches we cooperated with were female aged 20–60, and they all shared neutral or positive relationships towards Romany clients. Several described work as more demanding due to the more kinetic expression of Romany children, a lack of competences in attracting parents to visit the library branches more regularly, and a poor understanding of their work as essential for the visiting children, no matter their ethnic-cultural background. Leadership in expanding literacy and regular readership seemed to be a well-internalised competence. Despite some plasticity, the interaction style of the programmes they prepared, and which we could observe, was rather directive and did not allow much space for the co-creation of meanings or activities with the child clients.

We created a more systematic research cooperation with four families living or working in one neighbourhood, but they did not have a close interrelationship.

The Lewis family (Linda Lewis + Luke Lewis). Mrs. Lewis is approximately 50 years old and a widow who has her two grandsons in her custody. Luke is a five-year-old child. He has one brother who is already attending elementary school. Luke can already syllabify and can do some writing too. Nevertheless, Carmen noted that the authorities are currently negotiating whether to place Luke in a practical school. She thinks it is improper as his intellectual capacities are high; nevertheless, his social handicap is rather significant, and a practical school (also known as a 'special school' is widely misused for this purpose. Luke seems to enjoy attending the Family Club and ISOTIS activities we do together. Mrs. Lewis moved lodging houses during the course of our research cooperation. She and her two grandsons now have one room in the female part of a lodging house; there is a big bed, two cupboards, a table, one chair, and a television. There is an improvised kitchen in the hall for three rooms occupied by different tenants and a shared bathroom. Based on hearsay from neighbours, her son, who has just returned from prison, is sleeping there as well even though he has no right to do so.

The Townson-Smith family (Tamara Townson/Smith, Thomas Smith + Tricia Townson). Tamara Townson is the grandmother and legal custodian of Tricia Townson. At the same time, Thomas Smith, the spouse of Tamara Townson, is who accompanies Tricia to the Family Club on a regular basis.

Once, when Carmen and I were chatting in the community centre after the Family Club, the community worker mentioned she does not know what Tamara Townson looks like: "I've seen her [Tamara] here perhaps twice." Tricia Townson is a 5-year-old girl. Towards the end of our cooperation, we recognised we had learned very little about Tricia, as if the family had built a security wall around her. When working on activities, she either cooperated with the community workers or Thomas. Communication with Thomas Smith meanwhile was influenced by a condition affecting his hearing. Apart from that, he was friendly, as was Tamara Townson. Nevertheless, after raising expectations for the VLE, due to delays and a lack of content attractive enough for their child, we seemed to lose their attention fast. The Townson-Smith household was always crowded when we visited; it was not clear who was living there and who was visiting. There were pictures of saints, old furniture, laundry on the balcony and a dog (apart from the usual). The building was in rather bad condition with no lock on the main entrance, a dirty hallway and half-destroyed mailboxes.

The Albi family (Nina Albi + Ninuš Albi and Norbert Albi, Nikola Albi, baby twins). Nina Albi, a woman approximately in her late 30s, has five children. The first two, Nikola (14) and Ninuš (secondary target child, 12) are half-orphans; their father passed away, and they are getting orphan social support. Carmen has noticed that their mother does not share these funds fairly with the children and is exploiting them. Carmen has already started to negotiate with these two children about the possibility of living outside the family and Nina has been informed of this. The middle child, Norbert (primary target child, 5), has an unknown father. The last two children are twins, a baby daughter (1) who lives with the family and a baby boy (1) who lives with a foster family—he has Down syndrome and Nina uses her right to visit him. Norbert (5) is a very perceptive preschooler who responded fast to our cooperation. At the same time, he seemed to be quite picky about authorities. He came once to Family Club then stated he did not want to attend again. Carmen noted this was because he had to behave and follow the rules there. Norbert likes to spend time with his older sister Ninuš, but she is annoyed by his company. Ninuš (12) is a girl with a very sad look in her eye and a story behind that look. Recently, as Carmen shared with me, the personnel in the school Ninuš attends learned that she has self-harming tendencies, and she was sent for a psychiatric examination. The Albi household appeared very messy; the building where the flat is located seemed like a formal small enterprise, not a housing facility. The beds were half-made, half-unmade. The floor was rather dirty. A small baby girl was eating a chocolate cookie and sausage at the same time when we came. Nevertheless, Norbert had his own small box of Lego, which was somehow surprising in the half-empty household.

The Balážová family (Clara Balážová + Cilka Čonková and Cyrano Čonka). Clara Balážová is one of the Family Club employees, she is of Roma origin and active in sustaining the Roma language and culture (she was part of the public broadcasting project for Roma youth). Clara is the mother of two preschool children, Cyrano (approximately five years old) and Cilka (approximately three years old). Cyrano is an observant and somewhat shy preschool boy focused on doing things properly (for example, when he writes, he is very proud of being able to write his whole name). Cilka is a nice and cooperative preschool girl; however, one we had very little opportunity to interact with. Clara kept her eye on Cilka when around her. We did not visit the Balážová household.

5.3 PHASES OF WORK

Table 5.1: WP3.4 CZ Phases of Work

PHASES	Preparatory	Exploration & co-design	Implementation
TIMELINE	11/2017– 9/2018	9/2018– 2/2019	7/2019
GROUP, METHOD			
Practitioners, individual interview		n=5	
Practitioners, telephone interview		n=6	
Practitioners, group interview	n=5	n=2	
Practitioners, focus group		n=1	
Practitioners, observation in community centre	n=1	n=8	
Practitioners, observation in school	n=1		
Families, individual interview		n=7	n=1
Families, group interview			n=2
Families, observation in household	n=1		
Families, observation in neighbourhood		n=1	n=3
Families, observation in community centre		n=3	
Testing VLE, household			n=5
Testing VLE, community centre			n=5
Testing VLE, neighbourhood			n=1
Testing VLE, distant			n=15
Pre-evaluation, family questionnaire			n=4
Post-evaluation, family questionnaire			n=4
Post-evaluation, family focus group			n=1
During-evaluation, practitioner's diary			n=24
Post-evaluation, practitioner's questionnaire			n=6
Post-evaluation, practitioners' focus group			n=1

5.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The chosen research setting presents a very specific social context as we were operating among a group of parents who are among the most vulnerable, who are jeopardised by both social exclusion and deprivation of supportive sources relevant to parenting strategies, and who face racial and cultural oppression due to their multilingual parenting practices. Such a choice, even though attractive for the research purposes of ISOTIS, brings specific ethical considerations which had to be taken into account and processed.

Mistrust in signing documents. Many poor uneducated Roma people paid for their naivety and signed disadvantageous contracts for either rent, housing purchases or loans over the past 30 years, during which the former-Czech socialist economy was opened up and restructured. Therefore, signing documents is a sensitive topic. This context, combined with the rather complicated language of the ISOTIS informed consent forms, mandatory due to legal regulations, meant that the process of signing these forms had to be cautiously approached with previous negotiation of an unwritten agreement (Sidiropulu Janků 2015). The negotiation would not have been possible without the gatekeeping assistance of the community centre manager, Carmen Crown. The nature of such a process is twofold as the implementation phase could have jeopardised the fragile and long-term trust built between the community centre employees and their clients, and so, we had to proceed cautiously in the subsequent phase.

Inner boundaries among Roma families. It is a well-known fact that inner relationships among Czech and Slovak Roma include elements of excluding boundaries, distinguishing among each other as the ritually clean "žuže" and insufficient "degeše" (Jakoubek 2006). When negotiating possible cooperation among Roma families, potential links among people who would otherwise keep a symbolic distance from each other were created. It was hard to estimate how individual parents would react to seeing each other in common working groups or discussion space in the VLE, but it can be surmised that such a digitalised space would be perceived as a social space as such. Therefore, we had to cautiously negotiate their common existence within this space, refraining from making it too intimate or personal in terms of shared data for all participating actors.

Initiating reflection on the professional standards of cooperating partners. During the observation of activities in the library branches and consecutive interviews with the librarians, it became obvious that librarians do not reflect much on the pedagogic style of their work with children. They also demonstrated a lack of intercultural competencies while working with Roma children. This is in contrast with the amount of goodwill and care they demonstrate while working with Roma children. The community centre manager spoke of a lack of pedagogic competences among the community centre staff. Based on that, we estimate that the reflective processes of the ISOTIS project may bring to the researched social field some uncomfortable reflective processes, and we should be cautious about causing insensitive interventions, even though they would be in the full accordance with the ISOTIS project philosophy. One measure is anonymisation and pseudonymisation procedures, while another is to cautiously set the implementation phase in such a way that is strictly co-creative and keeps users, including practitioners, in control of the ongoing learning processes – safe.

Written informed consent. The overall process of negotiating the informed consent forms for this research with the Masaryk University ethical committee was rather lengthy and not smooth. Negotiating a proper privacy policy form in regard to VLE-use takes a long time and jeopardised the accomplishment of the implementation phase. Possible postponement was pre-negotiated with the research partners. Nevertheless, due to the time lag, the unwritten as well as written informed consent had to be re-negotiated, and some of the cooperating families dropped out. Luckily, we succeeded in keeping some of the families' cooperation and gained new ones.

5.5 RELEVANT PREVIOUS ISOTIS WORK

Some of the data from the ISOTIS studies within the work package "Resources, experiences, aspirations and support needs of families in disadvantaged communities" (WP2), namely "Conducted the structural personal parent interviews" (T2.3) and "Conducting the personal in-depth parent interviews" (T2.4) helped us to design the intervention in a more fitting way[20].

First, the **economic standards** in Roma families tend to be lower than in Czech majority families. When planning future implementation procedures, it means to cautiously assume the economic standards and possibilities of cooperating families. We, for example, consider offering tram tickets to cooperating families if we are about to invite them to a library or community centre, not automatically assuming that such a minor expense does not play a role in the decision-making process.

Table 5.2: Czech Roma and ethnic majority mothers´ household economic situation

Income per consumption unit per month in CZK			
	Target group		
	Romani	majority	Total
Mean	8 504	11 713	10 094
Median	8 083	10 122	8 846
Minimum	2 674	2 949	2 674
Maximum	28 778	32 375	32 375
Std. Deviation	3 845	5 992	5 270
N	228	224	452

Source: ISOTIS T2.3 data

Further, looking closer at the issue of the **value of minority and majority languages in education**, it is remarkable to notice that the majority mothers valued minority language mastery more than minority mothers.

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[20] The WP2.3 data was processed and prepared by Petr Fučík. The WP2.4 data was processed under the supervision of Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků.

Table 5.3: Czech Roma and ethnic majority mothers´ attitude towards diverse languages

Now we would like to know your opinion on how the preschool/school should be inclusive of children from different countries and cultures						
target group + income level		disagree	slightly disagree	undecided	slightly agree	agree
minority lower income	It is more important that non-Czech speaking children develop a higher level of skill in Czech than in their home language	12,7%	3,6%	11,8%	13,6%	58,2%
	Non-Czech speaking children should be allowed to speak their home language to each other at preschool/school	18,9%	9,9%	9,0%	19,8%	42,3%
minority higher income	It is more important that non-Czech speaking children develop a higher level of skill in English than in their home language	14,5%	4,3%	5,1%	12,8%	63,2%
	Non-Czech speaking children should be allowed to speak their home language to each other at preschool/school	28,2%	17,1%	5,1%	10,3%	39,3%
majority lower income	It is more important that non-Czech speaking children develop a higher level of skill in Czech than in their home language	13,4%	10,7%	13,4%	25,0%	37,5%
	Non-Czech speaking children should be allowed to speak their home language to each other at preschool/school	19,6%	11,6%	8,9%	21,4%	38,4%
majority higher income	It is more important that non-Czech speaking children develop a higher level of skill in Czech than in their home language	14,3%	22,3%	16,1%	20,5%	26,8%
	Non-Czech speaking children should be allowed to speak their home language to each other at preschool/school	13,4%	9,8%	10,7%	28,6%	37,5%

Source: ISOTIS T2.3 data

These figures suggest being cautious in presenting the minority language competence of children as an automatic value. It may happen that multilingualism would not be accepted positively, especially in connection with the minority language of one's family. Therefore, we should pay close attention to explaining the value of multilingualism as it concerns both minority and majority languages during the implementation phase.

The data from the study "Conducting the personal in-depth parent interviews" (T2.4) demonstrates the **nature of the relationship of Czech Roma mothers towards the community centres and the community centres' personnel**. In general, the relationship appears to be **rather pragmatic**, mothers speak of education tutorials but also about keeping their children out of trouble that lurks on the streets. Furthermore, mothers speak of the desire to meet their children's interests, but they often experience a scarcity of financial means. The spatial aspect of after school activities is also crucial; the **vast majority of mothers consider only community centres in the neighbourhood** when taking decision about the after-school time schedules of their children. This supported the focus on the neighbourhood community centre as well as those

families who lived in the neighbourhood and were established clients of the community centre. Furthermore, we kept in mind that parents may consider cautiously the value of cooperation for them, and we discussed the arrangement of getting access to and cooperation from the families with the community centre workers very closely. Part of the access procedure was participating in the programmes for families so that the interconnection was created before the research participation negotiation.

5.6 EXPLORATORY PHASE – MAKING THE POINT

5.6.1 OVERVIEW OF PROCEDURES FOR EXPLORING THE CONTEXT

The exploratory phase consisted of interviews with practitioners and observation of their routine work with clients from target families, as well as observation of the general working routine of selected community centres and neighbourhoods where the community centres operate and target families live.

The exploratory phase also consisted of contextualised reflection stemming from the Czech data of other ISOTIS research tasks (see chapter 5.5), as well as regular sensitising debates across the international context within WP3.4. These debates helped to select common as well as site-specific topics to follow and core issues to transfer into future VLE resources.

5.6.2 DOCUMENTATION AND DATA SUMMARIES

The observations were recorded using hand-written fieldnotes in the Czech language and selected fieldnotes were further elaborated and investigated with short informative interviews.

All data was cautiously managed in terms of the ISOTIS and Masaryk University ethical codes of conduct, including obtaining informed consent where appropriate, anonymisation or pseudonymisation of all the data, and safe archiving of recordings for the duration of the project.

5.6.3 RESULTS

5.6.3.1 THE ORGANISATION

In order to secure the sustainability of future intervention, the activities were planned so as to be easily incorporated into the education sessions of pre-school children, which were already taking place in the library branches. Usually, 60-minute group visits are prepared by the librarians of each branch separately; they incorporate seasonal topics and use the books available.

The observations of the sessions and after session reflection interviews showed the importance of flexibility in the prepared sessions so that the activities can be mixed and incorporated accordingly, based on the actual condition of children (and parents), their ability to focus, their interest and their temperament. Kinetic and cognitive stimulation were to ideally be combined so children would not have to sit in one place for too long.

At the same time, the co-design phase showed low competences of practitioners in learning in dialogue. They tended towards a frontal education approach and if dialogue with children was introduced, it usually did not last long and the reset of the rather directive education approach happened fast.

The overall approach of practitioners towards Roma children was that they need more kinetic activities and that they tend to focus worse than ethnic majority children. The observation nevertheless showed rather different expectations of practitioners (need to correct children when sharing "out of the box" ideas of the librarians, valuing Czech language without accepting alternative) that would support the thesis on moral alchemy being applied towards Roma children, and the general conservative setting of the Czech education sphere (Jarkovská et al. 2015).

It appears that the Library is skilful in supporting early literacy development, and individual branches cooperate with local schools and pre-schools as well as non-formal education facilities in this respect.

5.6.3.2 PARENTS

The assumption that the Romany language would be used in a hybrid rather than a comprehensive manner in the target families was fulfilled. It was not taken for granted that families understand multilingualism as a value, despite using multiple languages themselves.

Some of the cooperating families live in a very deprived social situation; the living conditions change rapidly or are under threat of rapid change, such as forced relocation, the taking of children into state custody due to behavioural problems at school, or drug use within the household. Despite such dramatic living conditions, the parents we spoke to were able to focus on the child's development and educational support when thematised.

Further, in many Czech Roma families from socially deprived surroundings, foster care by grandmothers has become common practice recently (Fučík, Sidiropulu Janků 2019). Therefore, it is relevant to use term parent/caretaker because the presence of a biological parent in daily life parental situations cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, based on the exploratory observations and interviews with practitioners, it can be assumed that teenage siblings are also taking care of target children.

5.6.4 SUMMARY

An analysis of the context and identification of specific objectives and educational problems by researchers and practitioners in collaboration exposed the relevance of the focus on the Romany language. Nevertheless, cautiousness in imposing the value of using the language and expecting full linguistic competence in an ethnic minority language would have been false.

Based on the exploration, **three core issues** were selected as relevant to the context of Czech Roma families in order to prepare appropriate resources for the VLE:
1. Awareness raising of multilingualism, multilingual care and the possibilities to incorporate multiple languages in daily family life;

2. Supportive interactions which help parents and caretakers to raise their children multilingually and practitioners to support multilingual families and children;
3. Knowledge of strategies to assist school-age children, support literacy and establish a school-related work routine.

5.7 THE CO-DESIGN PHASE – PREPARING VLE RESOURCES

In June 2018 the first information meeting at the cooperating public library took place. Later in September, it turned out the library employees had taken the knowledge and initiated cooperation with a local basic school and emphasised working with the Romany language in the families of local pupils. Therefore, the exploratory and co-design phase naturally intertwined in time. While the investigations of the exploratory phase focuses on the nature of working with Roma families in libraries and community centres as well as the lived dynamics of Czech-Roma relationships as they are experienced by both Roma families and detached professionals, the co-design phase oscillated around pictures of a child's first words, which were elaborated by Roma children in the local elementary school in cooperation with the library.

As regards the course of events in the Czech field, the exploratory and co-design phases intertwined naturally. In parallel with visiting the sites, I also observed practitioners in their work with children and families, and we worked on relevant VLE resources. Therefore, both phases are presented together.

5.7.1 OVERVIEW OF PROCEDURES OF CO-DESIGN PROCEDURES

The co-design phase consisted of interactions with practitioners, the observation of target families and joint development of potential VLE resources. In a further phase, individual interviews with selected families focused on selected guiding principles of the VLE resources which were under preparation for the implementation phase.

5.7.2 DOCUMENTATION AND DATA SUMMARIES

During the exploratory phase, the main source of data were interviews with practitioners about the ISOTIS focus, the usual practices in the community centre and library branches regarding the target families, and the education activities typically conducted. We furthermore conducted several observations of activities for pre-school and early school children prepared by practitioners in cooperation with local schools. Regarding the co-design procedures, we discussed with the practitioners their usual material preparation procedures, the values and ideas behind the preparation and their reflections on the usual practice. We also co-designed a multilingual leporello book intended for both offline and online forms. One focus group, which covered the co-designing thematic line and reflected the nature of the cooperation with target families (both children and parents/caregiving persons), took place as part of this phase and included the presence of both teaching staff from the local school and community workers.

The observations were recorded with hand-written fieldnotes in the Czech language with selected fieldnotes conducted in English and shared with the WP3.4 team in order to sensitise them to the topics of the WP3.4 focus. Informative pictures and drawings were added to the data, as well as

pictures of materials used for activities which were realised by community workers and librarians with children.

All data was cautiously managed according to the ISOTIS and Masaryk University ethical codes of conduct, including obtaining informed consent where appropriate, anonymization or pseudonymization of all the data, and safe archiving of recordings for the timespan of the project.

5.7.3 RESULTS

5.7.3.1 FEEDBACK REGARDING PREPARED VLE RESOURCES RECEIVED IN THE FIELD

In general, both practitioners and parents showed curiosity in the VLE. Practitioners suggested well-developed scenarios combined with flexibility, parents expressed curiosity in its potential to help develop their children's educational skills, and they were rather indifferent regarding the issue of multilingual development and care.

5.7.3.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGES – ADAPTATIONS

Because the cultural self-conceptualisation of Roma parents we worked with was very diverse and due to technical limitations in the low threshold households, we did not incorporate the dialogic potential of the VLE into the projects implementation. Rather, the combination of offline and online materials was reinforced.

5.7.3.3 HOW WERE FINDINGS SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS

The outcomes of the co-design phase were integrally intertwined into how the VLE interface for the Czech implementation was structured, including the instructions for the activities. Also, based on the experiences of VLE implementation in the United Kingdom and Germany, the preparations were piloted with one of the community workers in order to avoid unnecessary disturbances caused by technical issues in the interface. Only after several waves of such testing was the interface first introduced to more community workers and then later to the parents themselves.

5.7.4 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Based on the exploratory findings, we decided to support multilingual families

- by approaching them as bearers of a valued language code (the Roma language);
- by contextualising the use of the Roma language as one of many forms of multilingualism;
- by inviting them to co-create the VLE, thus making them hands-on experts in a tool which will be more universally useful.

By offering multilingual tools for advancing the language development of the children, the plan was to do so both on-site and on-line, and thus increase the understanding of people with Roma heritage as bilingual and support further development of the multilingual nature of family communication. Such development may be supported by sharing the co-created digital social space in the VLE.

Within the pre-school, elementary school and community centres, we decided to support those who already approach the Roma language and heritage as beneficial to working with people of Roma heritage more efficiently, using the VLE to support the educational success of the children.

It appeared that attracting parents for educational cooperation in the format of a study group might be an uneasy task. The parents were however ready to cooperate on a one-to-one basis rather than together.

Both practitioners and parents expressed interest in the VLE as such. Nevertheless, the risk of losing interest should the VLE not be easy to use was quite high. Therefore, we proceeded with highly individualised preparation and a set of micro-studies so as to allow the observation of cooperation between parents with children and the assisting practitioners within the time and surroundings which fit them best. The self-equipment of the researcher for the implementation phase (laptop and remote online access) seemed to be a necessity.

Considering the activities planned, preference was given to **less private-based content** due to the fragile position of the Roma culture and language in Czech society as well as the intra-group tensions which might have jeopardised the cooperation of Roma parents from different social layers (who would not cooperate closely were it not for the ISOTIS activities).

The general assumption of solid ICT literacy was jeopardised in the case of Czech WP3.4 work. Nevertheless, we decided to proceed and look for **low ICT literacy solutions** instead. One of the decisions made was to search for possibilities to use platforms already in use by the families. We needed to especially keep in mind the generation gap as some Roma children were in the foster care of their grandparents, and we therefore highly recommend the introduction of generation gap-friendly solutions within the VLE.

Based on the **hybrid and fragmental forms of the Romany language being used** in the Roma families we worked with, we focused on fragmented words rather than sentence-oriented content, and we supported the usage of **AV forms of task fulfilment**.

Core partnership for implementation
Core partnership means intense work with a small group of motivated parents and their pre-school children, followed by the observation and accompaniment of the researcher.

Supplement partnership for implementation
Supplement partnership means management accessibility of the VLE was provided to cooperating library district employees, who would independently test activities with interested library clients and report on the testing. The researcher's role is rather to supervise and facilitate, not intense cooperation in the VLE-bound activities.

5.7.5 CORE ISSUES AND VLE CONTENT DESIGNED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the inputs, templates were developed as suggested scenarios for more general topics, including videos, sensitising cases, online activities and offline work sheets. These scenarios were shared with practitioners via VLE Notebook, but they were advised to take this Notebook as

orientation, not dogma, and wander around the VLE as they wished. The report of how practitioners used the VLE consists of online data and practitioner diaries which practitioners filled out after every activity they accomplished.

It is important to emphasise that the final set of activity templates include inputs from the implementation phase. We co-designed selected items based on the implementation of fieldwork inputs, and contrariwise, some of the previously planned activities were not designed into the VLE in the end due to either technical or GDPR issues and because the complex requirements for long-term constant cooperation focus on the task was considered fragile within the context of the life conditions of the cooperating families.

The activity templates, either designed or adapted by Czech WP3.4 team are presented in the following tables.

VLE Resources – Core Issue 1

CORE ISSUE 1: AWARENESS RAISING OF MULTILINGUALISM, MULTILINGUAL CARE AND THE POSSIBILITIES TO INCORPORATE MULTIPLE LANGUAGES IN DAILY FAMILY LIFE
GOALS
To promote: Awareness of multilingualism in families   Notions of multilingual care possibilities to support multiple language use in the family home and outside the domestic environment   Sustainability towards multiple languages in a wider family environment across generations   A perspective of multilingualism as a value for life with general learning skills potential   The interconnection of ethnic minority (Romany), ethnic majority (Czech) and global (English) language competency   Reflective thinking about inter-ethnic interactions which can be initiated by the presence of multiple languages in shared social space
RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES
She is a Gadjo – Example from the Czech Republic   In order to succeed in raising awareness regarding multilingualism and draw the attention of ethnic-cultural minority families, it is important that practitioners have time to reflect on their own position regarding the issue. In cases where practitioners are from an ethnic majority, it is also useful to consider the possible prejudice of ethnic minority families towards him/her. This is a reflective case focused on sensitising one to the possible dynamics of inter-ethnic relationships in the day-to-day community and family support work with ethnic minority families.   https://vle.isotis.org/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=3301   *Two Languages Are Better Than One*: **Video-cued discussion**[21]   Parents and practitioners watch a video thematising multilingual schoolmates, development of the multilingual brain and strategies multilingual children introduce in order to communicate

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[21] A resource prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by 'University of Milano-Bicocca', Italy.

with their social surroundings in various languages. The second part introduces some basic facts showing that multilingualism is, from a global perspective, the norm rather than a deviance. After watching the video, a follow-up discussion is conducted on the linguistic situation within the families.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3387

Pablo Work Sheet

This activity is suggested as supplementary to watching the video *Two Languages Are Better Than One*. While parents watch the video, children may complete with the work sheet, colouring iconic buildings from diverse states and linking variations of the name "Paul" in different languages to flags of the states and iconic buildings.

https://vle.isotis.org/pluginfile.php/5748/mod_resource/content/1/ISOTIS%20Paul.pdf

Stano Daniel: Proud to Speak Romani: **Video-cued discussion**[22]

Parents are asked to watch a video with Stano Daniel, who speaks several languages in it. They are also asked to count and try to identify all the languages being used. Afterward, they are supposed to compose a discussion group and try to pinpoint all the languages used in the video. Sharing knowledge about diverse languages is supposed to open up the topic of multilingualism and respectively de-stigmatise knowledge of ethnic minority languages.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3467

Celebrities I. (Roma)[23]

Drag and drop linking diverse Roma celebrities with their biographies.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=2635

Celebrities II. (Multilingual)[24]

Drag and drop linking diverse Czech celebrities with a multilingual background, including those of Romany ethnic-cultural backgrounds, with their biographies.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3437

Linguistic First Aid Kit[25]

The activity encourages participating families to develop a first aid kit of basic terms and phrases strangers may need in order to orientate themselves in a Romani-speaking environment.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/folder/view.php?id=3707

International Bakery Online[26]

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[22] A resource prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by the International Step by Step Association, Netherlands.
[23] A resource prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by the T4.4 team from Masaryk University, Czech Republic with use of pictures made by children in the cooperating school.
[24] A resource prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by the T4.4 team from Masaryk University, Czech Republic with usage of pictures made by children in the cooperating school.
[25] The resource is a modification of an activity prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by the University of Oxford, United Kingdom. Development of this modified activity was part of the exploratory phase, but it was not implemented.
[26] The resource is a modification of the "Bread Tasting Party" activity developed by the WP3.4 team from Utrecht University, Netherlands based on call for more activities for preschool children in the VLE.

Similar to the Pablo Work Sheet activity, children are supposed to link different pieces of bread to flags and the names of breads in their national languages. This time, the Romany language, bread and flag is also present, suggesting a discussion about Romany culture and why there is not a Romany state but a language and flag. The activity follows the first steps with families on the topic of multilingualism; this time parents are encouraged to actively participate in the activity with the children.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/data/field.php?d=2

International Bakery Offline[27]

Similar to the Pablo Work Sheet activity, children are supposed to link different pieces of bread to flags and the names of breads in national languages. This time, the Romany language, bread and flag is also present, suggesting a discussion about Romany culture, and why there is not a Romany state while there exists a language and a flag. The activity follows the first steps with families on the topic of multilingualism; this time parents are encouraged to actively participate in the activity with the children. Time-fillers can be added by creating diverse types of baked goods with play dough.

https://vle.isotis.org/pluginfile.php/5900/mod_resource/content/1/ISOTIS%20pek%C3%A1rna.pdf

My Avatar

Every VLE user may create his/her own avatar, choosing the skin colour, eye shape, and another visual attribute. After, the users may discuss their choices and link the discussion to the children's human figures made within the activity Greetings from around the World.

https://vle.isotis.org/course/view.php?id=952

VLE Resources – Core Issue 2

CORE ISSUE 2: SUPPORTIVE INTERACTIONS WHICH HELP PARENTS AND CARETAKERS TO RAISE THEIR CHILDREN MULTILINGUALLY AND PRACTITIONERS TO SUPPORT MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES AND CHILDREN
GOALS
To promote: Competence in the use of multiple languages existing in a family environment for learning/education support   Use of a family heritage language in everyday interactions, even where only fragments of the heritage language are present   Value of multiple language learning from an early age   Cooperation between practitioners and parents/caretakers in early child development in ethnic minority/low threshold families   Intercultural sensitivity of practitioners when supporting family care in ethnic minority families with different ethno-cultural backgrounds
RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

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[27] The resource is a modification of the activity "Bread Tasting Party" developed by the WP3.4 team from Utrecht University, Netherlands, based on call for more activities for preschool children in the VLE.

Who is it?

In order to assist families in early childhood family care, it is crucial for practitioners to create trusting relationships. Sensitivity towards gendered boundaries in the household and knowledge about ICT equipment may be crucial in suggesting sustainable interventions. This is a reflective case focused on the reflection of gendered boundaries and ICT equipment in the target households. Keeping these notions in mind may prepare practitioners more efficiently for family assistance.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=2982

Memo Game Online[28]

VLE users may play an online memo game with pictures from everyday school life, the game contains a legend in both Czech and Roma languages.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3445

Memo Game Offline[29]

The offline variant of the memo game consists of pictures from everyday school life with a legend in both Czech and Roma languages, but it also has an empty variant and users are encouraged to complete the game with whatever language they know or would like to learn.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/folder/view.php?id=3681

Greetings from around the World[30]

A set of activities focused on strengthening awareness of the diversity of looks, ethnic-cultural backgrounds and linguistic competences in children's collectives and human societies. Children create diverse figures, choose skin colour and other visible attributes, and attach greetings in different languages to created figures. Finally, they stick these different human figures together to make a chain.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/data/view.php?id=3712

International Kitchen[31]

The offline work sheet combines learning about different bread cultures from across the globe (including Roma cuisine, language and flag) with motoric skills practice.

The activity is not available in the VLE.

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[28] A resource prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by the T4.4 team from Masaryk University, Czech Republic with the use of pictures made by children in the cooperating school. The general idea of the multilingual memo game was developed by the team from Freie Universität Berin, Germany.

[29] A resource originally prepared for the ISOTIS VLE in online form by the T4.4 team from Masaryk University, Czech Republic with usage of pictures made by children in the cooperating school. The general idea of the multilingual memo game was developed by team from Freie Universität Berin, Germany.

[30] The resource is a modification of the activity "Multicultural hand-by-hand paper dolls", developed for the ISOTIS VLE by the WP3.4 team from Utrecht University, Netherlands based on a call for more activities for preschool children in the VLE.

[31] The resource was developed by participating practitioners. It is inspired by the activity "International Bakery", which is a modification of the activity "Bread Tasting Party", developed by the WP3.4 team from Utrecht University, Netherlands based on call for more activities for preschool children in the VLE.

VLE Resources – Core Issue 3

CORE ISSUE 3: KNOWLEDGE OF STRATEGIES TO ASSIST SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, SUPPORT LITERACY AND ESTABLISH A SCHOOL-RELATED WORK ROUTINE
GOALS
To promote: Parents/caretakers taking an active role in supporting a child's educational pathway Common reading on regular basis as a caretaking value supporting educational achievements Giving voice to children as a positive value while supporting educational achievements The positive value of taking small steps in introducing literacy support in low threshold households The step-by-step development of literacy in early childhood
RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES
"I Know Them, I Know When They Have More Serious Issues to Deal With." In families facing multiple adversities, early childhood family care faces special challenges. This is a reflective case focused on sensitising the parents/caretakers and practitioners to the uneasy task of supporting a child on their education pathway when the family situation is challenged by existential issues, such as moving from place to place, money and material comfort scarcity, or severe conflicts, including confrontations with the law. https://vle.isotis.org/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=2981 **Shared Reading (Maddi): Video-cued Discussion[32]** Parents and practitioners watch a video of a father reading with a pre-school child. Afterward, they discuss the value of shared reading and the usual practice in their households. https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3098 **Shared Reading Follow-up** Based on the video-cued discussion on shared reading (Maddi), parents are encouraged to read at home for five minutes a day in the upcoming week, giving the child space to express, repeating after the child what he/she points out, developing stories based on shared reading together. Meanwhile, children choose a book of their interest and get a photocopy of two pages for home. Besides that, parents are given two pages of templates: 1. Parents are supposed to notice up to three new words a child learns through the reading exercise. 2. Parents are supposed to encourage the child to draw a story using the items present on the two pages they would read together with the parents. The activity is not available in the VLE. **My Way to School[33]** A set of activities leading to a child learning their future path to a local school they will attend, or respectively a school/preschool facility they are already attending. Family is encouraged to take notes about diverse languages and cultures present and visible in the public space, create a map together, and share and discuss it with other families.

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[32] A resource prepared for the ISOTIS VLE by the University of Oxford, United Kingdom.

[33] Developing the activity was part of the ISOTIS VLE exploratory phase, but it was not implemented.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/folder/view.php?id=3707

Library Visits[34]

Practitioners are encouraged to go through library resources in the ethnic minority language and co-create with families a collage on the topic chosen by the families. Later, they may share the collage online with other participating families.

https://vle.isotis.org/mod/folder/view.php?id=3707

5.8 IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

5.8.1 PROCEDURES

5.8.1.1 LOCATIONS, PARTICIPANTS, TIME FRAME, IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

The location for the implementation phase remained the same; we worked more intensely in the Ostrava city district where the community centre is situated.

All the participating practitioners followed to the implementation phase. Two librarians took part in direct work with participating families while the remaining cooperating practitioners tested the activities on their own and recorded their inputs in the practitioner's diary. We continued to cooperate with three families from the exploratory and co-design phase and gained two further families for cooperation. Some of the interactions did not develop over the course of events into signed informed consents; nevertheless, the interactions and inputs were an important part of the research process. One family dropped out due to a change in existential circumstances, which happens quite often in marginalised social surroundings (end of a housing contract, going to jail, etc.).

Together, 11 VLE testing sessions with the presence of the researcher (five in the households, five in the community centre or library, and one in the neighbourhood) and 15 distant VLE testing phases were realised. Additionally, three family observations in the neighbourhood, two family group interviews and one individual interview with a family member were realised. As well, the practitioners filled in their practitioner's diary 24 times as part of the evaluation during the research process. Four families completed the pre-evaluation and post-evaluation questionnaires and participated in the final evaluation focus group. Six practitioners filled in the final VLE evaluation questionnaire and the focus group was realised based on the results of the questionnaire as well as the overall research cooperation with five of them.

The following table provides an overview of the cooperating families during the course of all three phases of the VLE research.

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[34] Developing the activity was part of the ISOTIS VLE exploratory phase, but it was not implemented.

Table 5.4: Cooperating Families over the Course of the Research

FAMILY PHASE	Albi	Balážová	Day	Lewis	Local	Stoiková	Townson	Ziková
Exploratory				x	x		x	
Co-design		x	x	x			x	
Implementation	x	x		x		x	x	x

Based on the previous experiences of other national teams and on observations and interviews in the Czech Republic during the exploratory and co-design phases, two metaphors were used to eliminate frustration with VLE malfunctions:

- Construction site (You are entering something that is not yet finalised, and by using the draft version, you will help to shape even better the final function and fit for users).
- Testing a new boardgame (Some people get the job of testing new desk games before the game companies put it on the market. It can be a lot of fun, and it is a natural part of the process that some parts of the game do not work perfectly. We kindly ask you to report such moments as well).

5.8.1.2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

During the implementation phase, practitioners wrote a structured diary reflecting on the VLE sessions and VLE resources while using them either with clients or alone. After the implementation, all participating practitioners filled in the VLE evaluation questionnaire, and we led a focus group discussion where the main points from the diaries and evaluation questionnaires were discussed. All the participating practitioners reflected that the final focus group discussion was useful in their day-to-day practice and possible follow-up ameliorations.

5.8.2 RESULTS

The sign-in procedure for the VLE was conducted in a diverse way. Animals were used by both some of the practitioners as well as parents. Some participants generated their own written password while others accepted our suggestion. In many cases, I wrote participants the password on the plastic VLE bookmark and gave it to them so it was easily accessible to them.

We are sitting in the room Mrs. Lewis inhabits with the two grandsons in her custody. After entering the VLE, I explain to Ms. Lewis that she will need to change her password so only she knows it. "I don't know what it is, a password?", says Ms. Lewis. I try to clarify it to her with the example of an email, but I do not seem to succeed. So, I suggest a password and write it down for her. Not having a smartphone or other ICT device in the household, the probability she would use it independently is low. Nevertheless, if she visits the community centre and takes the ISOTIS materials with her, Carmen can help her to sign-in and work independently. Unfortunately, the interactive noticeboard has not yet arrived to the community centre, so even there, the probability of independent VLE usage is rather low.

Fieldnotes 7/2019

5.8.2.1 ORGANISATION OF THE VLE

Based on the feedback given in the previous research phase, we used the VLE noticeboard as a guide for the community workers through the suggested topics and activities. They could then independently wander through the VLE and realise as many activities as they liked; they were only instructed to always fill in the practitioner's diary. The key VLE sessions are marked in orange.

Practitioner's noticeboard (the noticeboard includes further links to all activities):
https://vle.isotis.org/course/view.php?id=879
The topics given and activities [LINK] included were:

1. Introduction (how to proceed, including ethical issues)
2. Reflection (relevant reflection cases for practitioners)
   a. She is a Gadjo – Example from the Czech Republic
      [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=3301]
   b. "I Know Them, I Know When They Have More Serious Issues to Deal With."
      [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=2981]
   c. Who Is It? [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=2982]
3. Parents, You Have a Say! (questionnaire form and instructions)
4. *Summary of all Activities that Contain the Romany Language (overview of activities, based on request of practitioners during implementation)*
   a. *Memo Game Online (link 6.a.)*
   b. *Memo Game Offline (link 6.b.)*
   c. *Stano Daniel: Proud to Speak Romani (link 5.c.)*
   d. *Celebrities I. (Roma) [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=2635]*
   e. *Celebrities II. (Multilingual) [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3437]*
   f. *Greetings from around the World (added during implementation) (link 8.b.)*
   g. *International Bakery (added during implementation) (link 8.e., 8.f.)*
   h. *International Kitchen (added after implementation) (link 8.h.)*
5. Two Languages Are Better Than One. And Three?
   a. Two Languages Are Better Than One [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3387]
   b. Pablo Work Sheet
      [https://vle.isotis.org/pluginfile.php/5748/mod_resource/content/1/ISOTIS%20Paul.pdf via Practitioner's noticeboard]
   c. Stano Daniel: Proud to Speak Romani [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3467]
6. Playing with Multiple Languages
   a. Memo Game Online [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/hvp/view.php?id=3445]
   b. Memo Game Offline [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/folder/view.php?id=3681via the Practitioner's noticeboard]
7. Together on the Way to School
   a. Shared Reading (Maddi) [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/page/view.php?id=3098]
8. My Ideas (added during implementation)
   a. Ideas from Katka (Library Visits, Linguistic First Aid Kit, My Way to School) [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/folder/view.php?id=3707 via the Practitioner's noticeboard]
   b. Greetings from around the World [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/data/view.php?id=3712 via the Practitioner's noticeboard]
   c. My Avatar [https://vle.isotis.org/course/view.php?id=952 via the Practitioner's noticeboard, part of Greetings from around the World]

d. International Bakery Online [https://vle.isotis.org/mod/data/field.php?d=2 via the Practitioner's noticeboard]

e. International Bakery Offline
[https://vle.isotis.org/pluginfile.php/5900/mod_resource/content/1/ISOTIS%20pek%C3%A1rna.pdf via the Pratitioner's noticeboard]

f. International Kitchen (to be added, created by the community centre) [… via the Practitioner's Noticeboard]

9. Final Evaluation (practitioner´s questionnaire to be filled in before the final focus group discussion)

5.8.2.2 IMPLEMENTATION

The VLE noticeboard subchapters for cooperation with target families were linked to the three Core Issues as follows:
5. "Two Languages Are Better Than One. And Three?" (Core Issue 1)
6. "Playing with Multiple Languages" (Core Issue 2)
7. "Together on the Way to School" (Core Issue 3)

In sum, six sets of activities, online and offline, were implemented with the accompaniment of the researcher and selected practitioners; these were also complimented by interviews and observations. Below, key observations and reflections are presented alongside the results of the evaluation, which were conducted by practitioners during the implementation. Where relevant, additional activities following the same core issues were incorporated into the observations, reflections and evaluation as well.

RAISING AWARENESS OF MULTILINGUALISM, MULTILINGUAL CARE AND THE POSSIBILITIES TO INCORPORATE MULTIPLE LANGUAGES INTO DAILY FAMILY LIFE

Set of Activities "Two Languages Are Better Than One. And Three?", additional resources
Procedure
The activities were tested in households with individual families as well as in the group sessions at the library. They were also tested by practitioners without the presence of the researcher.
Observations and reflections of the researcher
In order to incorporate both parents and children, the assistance of more practitioners is essential. The sessions were quite vivid, children needed a lot of assistance to stay on track and parents needed a lot of encouragement to get engaged. The topic of multilingualism resonated—in some of the families, it raised curiosity and surprise at how many languages there are in the families. It was obvious from the narratives of the parents the rather assimilative approach towards minority languages introduced in the past (when the parents were children) has had influence on their own choices, so reflective work on their own approach towards multilingual care was needed. Children were keen to learn about multiple languages but were sometimes hesitant towards the Romany language; the supposition is that they shared the perceived social stigma of the language. Nevertheless,

where the practitioner showed a positive approach towards the Romany language, a more open approach seemed to appear among the clients, even if rather cautiously. All the participants, no matter what approach to the Romany language they had, shared the perception that the language is fading away. However, some showed a real enthusiasm to keep the language alive. It seemed like a complete novelty to most of the participants that supporting the heritage language in the family environment may support the future education achievements of the children.

Evaluation by practitioners

Practitioners appreciated the videos, and they were keen to learn about multilingualism. It seemed like a novelty to them, and they lacked competences to incorporate the topic into their daily practice independently.

Reaching the goals

Raising awareness on multilingualism was definitely achieved, as was linking multilingual care to educational achievements. Nevertheless, in order to make support more systematic, more thorough work with both practitioners and families would be needed. At this point, practitioners are well informed and will be positively reacting to suggestions for further development were such possibilities to appeared. Parents appeared rather passive, and the perceived stigma of Roma ethnic-cultural identity in Czech society seemed to be too strong to become more assertive in this respect. Nevertheless, if supported by practitioners, and even teachers, positive development might appear. Children showed great enthusiasm in learning new languages and seemed ready to learn more and more systematically, if available.

SUPPORTIVE INTERACTIONS WHICH HELP PARENTS AND CARETAKERS TO RAISE THEIR CHILDREN MULTILINGUALLY AND PRACTITIONERS TO SUPPORT MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Set of Activities "Playing with Multiple Languages", additional resources

Procedure

The activities were tested mainly in the domestic environment by the accompanying community worker while the researcher was working with the parents. The offline version of the memo game was independently used by families during travel or by a participating teenager to learn more vocabulary in a chosen language with the help of an online dictionary.

Observations and reflections by the researcher

The combination of a basic and well-known game with the innovative element of incorporating Romany or another language seemed to work very well. Both online and offline versions were played with joy, and it was easy to encourage adult-child interaction which could be used to foster the issue of multilingualism.

Evaluation by practitioners

Practitioners enjoyed the activities and their easy instructions. Not being complex, they were therefore undemanding to accomplish, so it was easy for them to encourage children to engage in the game. Combined with reflective cases for practitioners and informative videos, it seemed to work rather efficiently.

Reaching the goals

The goal to support interactions was reached efficiently within the chosen activities. In order to foster the interactive potential, it is suitable to make a chain of activities which encourage the interactions to be sustained longer. Librarians showed great potential in this respect, preparing seasonal tasks for clients which could be accomplished one at a time through multiple library visits. This competence may be used while supporting family interactions, especially when cooperating with the low threshold community centre.

KNOWLEDGE OF STRATEGIES TO ASSIST SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, SUPPORT LITERACY AND ESTABLISH A SCHOOL-RELATED WORK ROUTINE

Set of Activities "Together on the Way to School", additional resources

Procedure

A combination of group sessions in the community centre and home tasks. Reflection at the end of task and motivation by purchasing a book of the family´s choice at the end.

Observations and reflections by the researcher

Parents came motivated for the first session. Children were keen to choose pages of the book to read at home. Nevertheless, finding a small amount of time to read together on a regular basis appeared to be a challenge. When we had the opportunity to work with the family on a regular basis, small steps forward appeared. Nevertheless, both practitioners and parents tended to fall into a rather authoritative approach, not giving children space to express themselves and develop their own path towards the topic covered in the book. It seemed that the children were not being listened to much and that both parents and practitioners were not prepared to give the children a voice. They were instead applying a controlling and restrictive approach to them while going through the activities together.

Evaluation by practitioners

Distant testing of the activities showed little understanding of the task and goals by some of the practitioners. This task was most difficult to explain and intense intervention of the researcher to explain the purpose and facilitate the procedure was needed.

Reaching the goals

This was the most challenging goal to accomplish. Despite librarians having competences to support literacy development in early childhood, they lack resources to encourage parents

towards more sustainable engagement in this respect. We reached the goal through a great deal of flexibility and an assertive approach. The intersectional cooperation of community and educational workers is essential, and due to the frequent relocation of low threshold families, coverage across localities, ideally with the possibility to share experiences, is missing. Without it, it seems to be rather complicated to reach the goal, and children tend to end up working with practitioners rather than with parents.

Mini case 1. This is what we do already, but she is running outside all afternoon

This case shows the difference between the stated course of parenting and education support and the demands for day-to-day regular effort to be in contact with the outer world, including prospectively school.

After watching the video *Reading with Maddi* with parents, we having a discussion. "It is nothing new to me", says Thomas Smith, "we read together all the time. She has books in the car as well. Like Peppa Pig." Later children choose books from the library shelves, and we make two pages of copies for each of them. They brought the pages home and parents are asked to read it with the children, just as Maddi read with the daddy in the video. They are asked to ideally devote five minutes to it every day as good and not overly time-consuming practice for the school routine soon about to enter their lives. "But she is running outside all afternoon, and she only wants to watch television when she is at home", objects Thomas. "Give it a try", I suggest, and we negotiate that I will come to visit everyone next week to have a look at how they read together.

The next week I visit the city again. On Thursday morning, Tricia is being brought by another relative to the Family Club, so I have no opportunity to speak with her foster parents. When Mr. Smith picks Tricia up, I ask if I can stop by to see the reading as we agreed upon the week before. "I don't know. Do you have our number?" says Mr. Smith. I take it from him and tell him I will call the following morning. On Friday, I come to the centre and call the number. Mr. Smith does not pick up, so I write a text message and call again two hours later. He picks up and states that Ms. Townson and Tricia are out shopping but should be back in a while. So I say I will call again after lunch. Ms. Townson picks up saying that she is still in the shop and that she will be busy after. I postpone the meeting for the day and ask them to be sure to come to the final session on Monday. Ms. Townson promises to come.

On Monday Tricia does not attend the Family Club. We discuss with Carmen what to do. I state that my assignment is not to force people to participate. Carmen, on the contrary, says that this is part of her assignment, and she visits the household and walks Mr. Smith and Tricia to library for the final session. An hour after, Mr. Smith mentions that he recently got married to Ms. Townson, now Ms. Smith. Perhaps that was why they were this busy. At the same time, reading the activity was meant to be a 20-minute event, maximum, so I assume they just did not prioritise it or did not want me to visit their household alone (I had been there three times with Carmen before).

Practitioners evaluated the VLE as transparent and easy to use, and they expressed a moderate will to use the system again and advertise it.

Chart 1. The VLE evaluation by practitioners, usage of the system

I think that I would like to use this system frequently.
6 responses
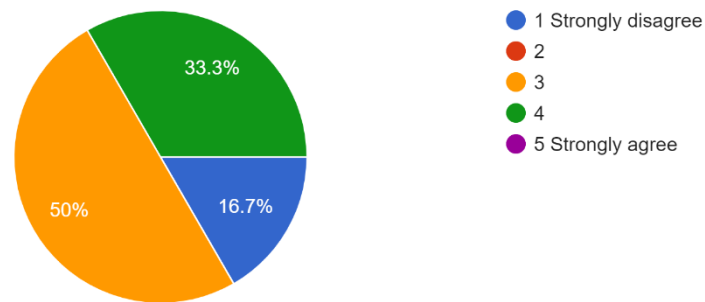
The practitioners mostly valued the informative videos found in the VLE, both for themselves as well as their clients.

Chart 2. The VLE evaluation by practitioners, resources

Resources
6 responses
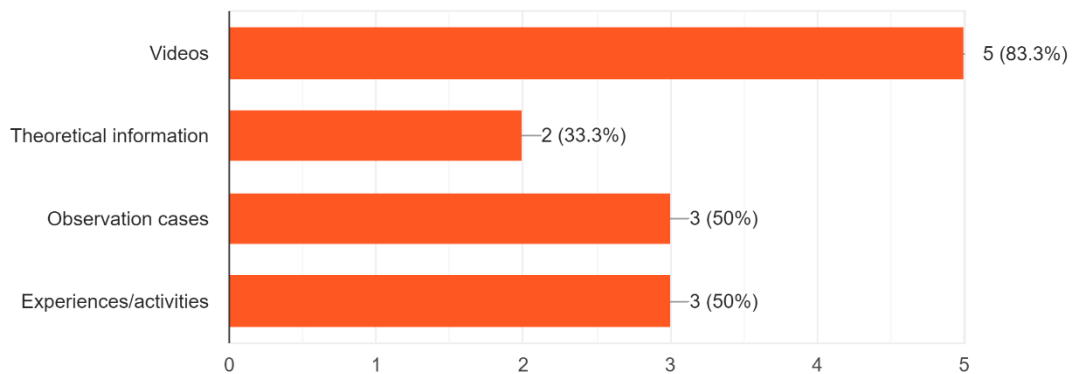
It is understandable, eye-catching, intuitive, sympathetic. Beeba may be very likable for children. The materials are also fine. Stano is motivational! Roma celebrities are fine but difficult.

As a beneficiary, I mainly watch the videos which show specific examples. The benefit for practical use is certain – it influences our clients, suggesting that they talk with their children in their original language.

Practitioner's evaluation

During the final focus group with practitioners, the debate was focused around two extreme poles of clients: (1) those who are self-sufficient and cooperative and (2) those who need a lot of assistance and yet results in work which is very fragile and unstable. During our cooperation in the intervention phase, Carmen pointed to the possible practical use of ICT when working with parents. The essential part of her work is to be in regular contact with families, and some of the items could be communicated, in both directions, through the application, if available. Another important issue we discussed was building trust with cooperating families. Mary noted that it takes several years to create trust with a family. Moreover, Romany parents she has had experience with perceive the institutions through their child. If the child comes home happy, they are open to creating a trustworthy relationship. It may also help if the practitioner finds a way to treat family members as resourceful. As Mary explained when describing a situation from her practice, this avoids the usual experience of Roma clients being noisier when visiting the public library:

Mary: Once I asked a Romany grandmother who had children in the library to look after the loan desk for me, because I had to go somewhere briefly. It was probably hasty. And when I came back, everyone was sitting with magazines or were colouring (everyone giggling). There was such silence that I was running the stairs, wondering, "Jesus, what is happening?" (silence). She managed it. There were six Romany children of different ages, and she managed. I don't know, how. Maybe she forced a book on every single one…

Carmen: You don't know how she did it, but she did. (everyone laughs)

Mary: But they were sitting relaxing on pillows, on chairs, painting.

Final evaluation focus group with practitioners

Nevertheless, the sustainability of built relationship with families remains an issue and is also due to the unstable living conditions of many families, who may move from place to place disturbing the built ties.

In general, the practitioners appreciated creating a special time-space for reflection and the international dimension of the ISOTIS project. It also helped them to understand the nature of the work and potential for cooperation with other professionals in the same field and neighbourhood. At the end of the focus group, Carmen agreed to family visits with Daisy, the library manager, who showed interest in learning about the family conditions of the library clients more closely.

The parental evaluation showed slight upward changes in understanding the importance of using an ethnic minority language at home when speaking with children and supporting them with the help of ICT in cases where there was not already a positive climate towards using the Romany language at home. In the case of the Albi family, where the mother speaks Slovakian, the ISOTIS intervention appeared to help her to recognise that using an ethnic minority language in the domestic environment is not actually of value for her. On the other hand, it was the same family which highly appreciated the literacy-oriented activities intended to adopt strategies of assisting school-aged children.

In general, parents appreciated the promotion of Romany language use in activities. However, in order to incorporate a supportive practice in the family routine, the intervention would probably need more time and other tools to help parents to establish new routines.

Mr. Townson: "But when I say 'bread' to her, she doesn't know where to find it, because she does not know how to read yet."

Ms. Lewis: "Bread. So, I will write 'maro' [bread in Romany]!"

Researcher: "That's why we watched the video. The girl in it also did not know how to read yet. So, you are supposed to do the activity together with Tricia—read it for her."

Mr. Townson: "She looks at the pictures. She also creates fairy tales from the pictures at home."

Researcher: "Do you think the children enjoyed the activities? Would they do more?"

Mr.Townson: "I don't know. Lara (Mr. Townson is referring to Tricia using her nickname—a frequent habit in Romany families), what do you enjoy? (Tricia does not respond). I don't know. They go out, play there with dolls."

Ms. Lewis: "Running around outside. Then he comes home, washes his hands, eats, watches a cartoon, and goes out again. And then again, and then all over again."

Final evaluation focus group, parents

In general, parents enjoyed the VLE but were disappointed that there was not much attractive material for pre-school children. Slow uploading and freezing easily discouraged them from exploring the VLE on their own.

They found it difficult to interact with the child on a more regular basis, and in a domestic environment, they expressed an incapability to bring the child to the table to work with them. At the same time, the parents themselves expressed discomfort with regular sessions outside their usual routines (walking a child to the Family Club and picking them up from school at noon). We tried to do the VLE sessions in the neighbouring library, and despite it being only a five-minute-walk, they expressed discomfort with walking elsewhere. In general, any extra investment into child care without visible and fast output was reflected as problematic, and without the support of the community worker, it would probably have been close to impossible to accomplish the VLE implementation task.

Parents expressed interest in the materials which contained the Romany language. Nevertheless, most of them were hesitant to use the language when talking to their children in public, and this did not change over the course of the implementation. Our supposition is that Romany speaking community workers should support use of the language in public by parents as well.

5.8.2.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

In general, cooperating with families and community workers on VLE testing went surprisingly well. People showed curiosity in the VLE, responded positively to Beeba and were keen to learn more. The automatic translations into the Czech language were quite discouraging; people tended to be sensitive to the syntax errors. A lack of connectivity and ICT equipment both in families and community centres appeared to be a serious limitation for its implementation.

> I didn't like that all the parts (features) were not translated in all the offered languages. It can discourage interested people from reading, from studying.
>
> *Practitioner's evaluation*

It can be seen in the practitioners' evaluation that they learned a lot about the multilingual development and approach by watching the ISOTIS videos on the platform. The topic was introduced to parents as current and legitimate. We practiced shared reading and working with ISOTIS work sheets. Nevertheless, it was obvious that in order to gain more sustainability in this respect, ongoing personal cooperation with parents and children would be needed. In the case of librarians, the VLE implementation opened-up new perspectives in their work routine, and more intense cooperation with the community centre was established due to the ISOTIS research cooperation.

It appeared that in order to develop the home environment to be more supportive of multilingualism and education skills, it is most effective to build upon existent networks of cooperation and trust. Low threshold families may be difficult to access, and a well-established gatekeeper is a big advantage in this respect. Also, significant time-space flexibility is the most effective way to approach families. Therefore, work sheets in to-go folders or small objects in plastic covers, which can be put into a pocket and not degrade easily, perform the best as learning tools. It helps to stay associated with the topic if offline and online learning materials have a similar

visual design. The figure of Beeba and the orange "ISOTIS colour" seemed to work well for this purpose. In the case of parents, instructional videos may play an effective role in showing good practice and may make opening up discussion on the topic easier.

During the VLE implementation we did not succeed in emancipating the VLE family users in the Czech context. For some of the parents, it was low ICT competences which presented the barrier, but mainly it was the scarcity of ICT equipment and online connectivity. However, there was also a lack of routine in working with a child on a regular basis on education-oriented tasks. This could, in the long term be surmounted by consistent work with families in cooperation with the community centre and library, which has been empowered thanks to the ISOTIS project.

I think that for persons from socially disadvantaged environments who are taking care of children, it will be very demanding to orientate within this system. It requires a lot of patience and clicking through.

If the application were to be on a smartphone, it would be easier to use regularly in families, as well as those who are socially excluded.

Practitioner's evaluation

One of the unexpected impacts of the VLE implementation was bettering family relationships within the Albi family, as well as cooperation with both the community centre and the library, as demonstrated in the following mini case. Such development may improve the effects of community work with the family and support developing parenting skills.

Mini case 2. One Book at a Time

This case shows one of the unexpected positive side effects of the ISOTIS VLE testing. In low threshold families, one never knows what the trigger for positive change will be or how long the change will sustain itself.

As part of our cooperation, the cooperating families were offered a library card during our second session. Ms. Albi came to library with teenage daughter Ninuš, her preschool son, and baby, stating that she would be interested in getting a card. Ninuš intimated she would like to have one too, but she would be interested in borrowing books for adults. The library branch manager Uma stated that it would be possible if her mother signs a special approval for that. Based on the debt records in the library system for Ninuš's older brother, I emphasise to Ninuš not to borrow too many books because they can get lost in the household and then she would get into trouble, not be able to borrow more books and have debts. Uma notes that it is possible to put a rule into the system that would not allow Ninuš to borrow more than one book at a time, and we agree to do so.

The following day Ninuš comes in the morning to the community centre. She accompanies her younger brother Norbert to the Family Club (for the first time) carrying the book with her. She says she plans to go to the library and read. I have the feeling she is happy to have another living place other than her household where she can be with herself. Nevertheless, it is too early, so we suggest she stay in the centre until the library opens. Later, over the course of several weeks and while the ISOTIS research is being realised, Uma reports that Ninuš comes to the Library for both reading and borrowing other books when she is done with one. Carmen told me that Nina, the mother of Ninuš, mentioned that her relationship with Ninuš has improved recently because she brought home a book Nina had read before and Ninuš was surprised her mom knew it – all of the sudden they had a shared topic of conversation.

5.8.2.5 OUTPUTS OF THE RESEARCH

The research resulted in developing and adjusting numerous VLE activities. Based on the fieldwork results, several offline work sheets were developed. In order to sustain the efforts in the Czech context, it seems crucial to edit the automatic translations since users react strongly to the imperfect language within the VLE. Organising the VLE into thematic streams seemed to be efficient, and in cases where they are combined with more open possibilities of use and finding one's own way through the VLE, this should be optimal.

Parents missed more first-hand attractive content for pre-school children a lot. In the Czech target families, we seemed to be in competition with television, not other ICT driven entertainment for children. The figure of the Beeba helper resonated well, and using this visual identifier for ISOTIS materials seemed to support the more general message of the ISOTIS educational efforts.

5.9 DISCUSSION

The aims of the VLE within-family co-design and testing as well as family-care supporting surroundings seemed highly relevant within the Czech context. The very existence of some customised content which reflected the needs of practitioners and the fact that it would be co-designed based on their input proved to be motivational for the cooperation and further professional development of the community workers. Nevertheless, online support should be followed by face-to-face interactions and training, otherwise practitioners tend to fall back into their prior work routines and habits, like the monolingual approach to activities.

In terms of supporting multilingual development, it appeared that a supportive, but not normative approach is most effective. Czech Roma families we worked with showed a great diversity of in-home practices considering multilingual family care, and imposing a presupposition of using non-majority languages in interaction with children would be irrelevant. At the same time, when the researcher showed interest and demonstrated the positive value of using multiple languages, including the Romany language, it resonated well. Nevertheless, it seems that without more systematic support on different levels (community centres, public institutions, schools), parents tend to suppress the use of the ethnic minority language in order to spare the child integration difficulties. Well-prepared professionals in family care and non-school education facilities seem to be crucial in supporting families in this respect.

In the context of Czech fieldwork, it appeared that ICT equipment and connectivity is a crucial and highly underdeveloped issue. Online data rates for cell phones are some of the most expensive in Europe and low threshold families could not connect themselves to the platform outside of the community centres. Furthermore, the families we worked with often have one cell phone per household, sometimes not even of the smartphone variety, so it is not realistic to assume they would use ICT in their domestic environment unless the community worker brings an ICT device with her. The community centre we worked with also had very limited connectivity (there was no wi-fi in the building). The use of offline digital tools, such as an audio pen which could be used to programme activities (Albi pencil/Tip-Toi), could help overcome these limitations.

Based on the experiences in the Czech fieldwork, we highly recommend a combination of offline and online variants in activities, such as the usage of work sheets, small papercraft creative tasks for children or having both online and offline versions of the same activity, using the interactive aspects of both formats (memo game on screen + printed memo game in a plastic cover with the possibility of adding multiple languages with a permanent marker).

Last but not least, a lot of patience, flexibility and sometimes courage is needed when attempting to settle interventions within low threshold families, as is shown in the last mini case presented below. The results clearly proved that innovations can be fostered in socially marginalised surroundings and present welcomed impulses for children as well as caretakers. The biggest challenge—bigger than the lacking ICT equipment—is fitting into the time-space patterns of low threshold families. The Czech fieldwork demonstrated that cooperation with qualified community workers is the best way to do so as these are the people who know their clients' time-space habits best and can therefore estimate how the intervention can be implemented most effectively.

Mini case 3. Shared reading on the entrance door stairs

This case shows how improvisational and ephemeral constant work with pre-school children in socially disadvantaged families may be. It is difficult to estimate at what point micro-management work would transform into more stable social structures. Definitely, the assistance of non-family resources, which would nevertheless be flexible enough to follow the family´s time-space pattern, seem to be essential. ICT may help (making tasks more attractive), but it needs to be accompanied by constant face-to-face interactions.

After the session in the library, I am about to visit families in their homes to check on them and see how they read with their children. It is Thursday afternoon and we walk to the lodging house neighbourhood to visit the Lewis family. Luke didn't come to the community club today, the practitioner says he is sick. Carmen suggests we stop by in the afternoon. I am not sure if it is not inappropriate, the boy is sick. "I am sure he will be running out on the street when we come", says Carmen. When we come in the afternoon, Ms. Lewis is not home. Her neighbour tells us she went to the post office. "She cannot be far", states Carmen, so we hang around, waiting for her to appear. In the hall leading to her room, we run into a man moving erratically. He asks who we are looking for and why. He seems to be in his twenties, and Carmen is trying to end the conversation promptly. He asks about the business we have with Ms. Lewis and Luke. We explain quickly that we are helping Luke to get ready for the school. "It was her son", states Carmen. I am surprised because he seems quite young for the estimated age of Ms. Lewis. "Heavily on drugs at the moment", says Carmen. "He has nothing to do here. I will complain to the owner and ask for relocation", says a senior woman sitting in front of the hall leading towards the rooms. We walk slowly down the street (it had happened before that Carmen would hang around longer than I would as I feel inappropriate, exposed and little unsecure), and it is worth it—we actually meet Ms. Lewis and Luke a few minutes later. But before that, there is a small incident. All of a the sudden a trash bin area is set on fire. No one seems to react (there are numerous local people on the street). Carmen runs there, calls for help, water, considers calling the fire department. One mother, after being addressed directly, goes into the house and brings a bucket of water. I help Carmen pour water onto the burning carton. After the mother is asked for another bucket, she asks me to look after her pre-school daughter and I get into a bit of small talk. Then, we all walk together and find Ms. Lewis walking with both her grandsons. She is carrying a grocery store bag, eating as they walk. Carmen stops her and I ask if I can come in and read with Luke a bit as we had agreed upon last week. "Did you do some reading?" "No, but I have it with me." "Perhaps we can read now?" Ms. Lewis seems unhappy about the idea of us going in today. Perhaps it is her awareness of her son being around? "You can do it here, sit on the stairs outside." We sit on the curb. Ms. Lewis takes out the paper from her handbag (to my surprise she has it with her) and Luke is syllabifying. Then I ask him about the new words, and we speak about the rail signal. Then he draws it. They then go home. I ask him about the new word next time we see each other, at the last session in the library, and discuss with Ms. Lewis the importance of repetition.

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CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

KATHARINA EREKY-STEVENS & MIRJAM PARDIS

This final chapter of the VLE report brings together the work done across the four countries taking part in the WP3 VLE task. Following the structure suggested by logic models (W.K. Kellog Foundation, 2004), we focus on three areas when discussing how the interventions worked: context, implementation and findings (related to programme outputs, outcomes and expected further impacts). During the exploratory phase, we investigated resources and needs in each community to develop programme aims, and to understand and plan the resources needed to operate the interventions. Here, we refer to the findings of the exploratory phase to discuss **context questions** –

- What were the factors that led to the need for the programme?
- Which resources were identified to be of relevance for planning and running the interventions? Could sufficient resources be activated? Were resources sufficient in all areas?
- Which context characteristics most shaped our ability to do the work we set out to do in the community?

By focusing on **implementation**, we assess the work that was done in the four communities. The leading questions are: What did we accomplish in terms of intervention inputs? Here, we evaluate if and how resources were used to bring about intended changes. We describe and assess programme activities and in doing so, we focus on events/processes, tools/technology, and actions. We discuss the following implementation questions:

- How were resources used to accomplish activities? In particular, how was the VLE tool used in implementing intervention activities?
- Were planned activities accomplished (to the level intended)?
- Were there deviations from the original plan? What were these deviations?

By focusing on the **findings**, we assess the benefits resulting from the work done in the communities. Here we focus on programme outputs, outcomes, and how these might link to further impacts. With regards to *outputs* we assess:

- How participants engaged with activities and how this engagement created the experiences specified? (e.g. What worked for whom and how? e.g. personal reflections, group exchanges, trying/preparing for activities at home, exchange of experiences)
- How engagement in activities was linked to and supported by engagement with the VLE?
- Which practical outputs (products, artefacts) were created (e.g. documentation, materials for reflection and learning)?

With regards to **outcomes** we assess whether those experiences led to the learning processes that were specified. Here we focus on:

- Immediate changes in participants' behaviour, knowledge, beliefs, skills (including knowledge transfer)
- Further changes that might occur in the organisations, communities or the system as a result of programme activities

- Issues that need to be addressed/realised in order to ensure sustainability of benefits

6.1 CONTEXT QUESTIONS

6.1.1 FACTORS LEADING TO THE NEED FOR THE PROGRAMME

Organisations and institutions involved in this research all work with families with other cultural and language backgrounds and offer interventions which focus on support for child learning, school preparation and parent school communication. All organisations expressed recognition of the value of heritage language and culture. Yet, a focus on actively supporting heritage language maintenance and bilingual children's development was either relatively new in our participating organisations, or not at all part of their parent support work. Traditionally, parent support work in this context focuses predominantly on teaching parents about the school system, and on support for learning of the school language and learning in school. In some contexts, parent support work focuses on teaching parents certain skills, behaviours or strategies, without reference to parents' pervious experiences, and their beliefs and values.

Teachers in schools saw the maintenance of heritage language with ambivalence, and viewed parents' lack of skills in the school language as a barrier to parental involvement in child learning. In line with this, parents expressed concerns about their children's learning in school, and saw the demands of learning two languages as a disadvantage. Parents expressed that their children's success in school is important to them and that they are open to communication with school. They wanted to learn about the education system and about what is expected from them. In general, many parents perceived that schools are welcoming and less discriminatory than other environments. Yet, parents expressed their wish for more recognition of their language and cultural background in pre/school, and their- wish for more communication from school. There was variation in teacher knowledge of the cultural, linguistic, religious backgrounds of their students.

Despite the presence of multiple languages in families, parents did not necessarily experience multi-lingual development as a value, but expressed the challenges they face. There was huge variation in parents' skills and knowledge in the heritage and school languages. Despite this fact, most parents want their children to learn the heritage language as well as the school language. This seemed motivated on the one hand by the wish to maintain and strengthen family connections, and on the other hand by the wish to ensure that their children fit in and do well in school.

Parents perceive that the responsibility of heritage language maintenance is theirs. Some parents shared that they find support in a community of people who share their language background. Yet, even in those circumstances, many parents reported difficulties they have with the task of bringing their children up with more than one language. Heritage language loss seemed the reality in many families. Parents reported that many children expressed preference for the school language and that finding resources for heritage language learning can be difficult. This includes finding time, and physical resources (e.g. books). The situation is clearly challenging for parents,

yet parents receive little support in working towards their dual language goals.

Nevertheless, when taking part in parent support interventions, parents did not seem to make heritage language maintenance the main goal of their involvement. Much more, they expected and wanted to learn about the education system, or wanted to practice their language skills in the majority language. Finding a peer group to connect with, and a practitioner who is emotionally supportive, appeared to be additional motivators. Despite the fact that parents were expressing motivation to be involved in children's learning and in school, practitioners expressed challenges in motivating parents to engage in home activities (outside session time), and teachers perceived parents as rather passive when it comes to communicative exchanges.

In taking part in the study, practitioners and teachers wanted to stimulate parent engagement with programme content and aims outside their contact time, and they wanted to increase exchanges and sharing of experiences that would support good teacher-parent relationships (in the case of school) and reflective practices and learning (in the case of parent support work outside schools). They hoped that in taking part in this study they would find and practice new and helpful strategies, and that the digital tool in particular would help them to reach out to and actively involve parents.

6.1.2 RESOURCES OF RELEVANCE FOR PLANNING AND RUNNING THE INTERVENTIONS

Involvement in this study was not a small task for organisations and practitioners and thus, recruiting organisations for this research was not always straightforward. Organisations needed to allocate time to team meetings, for feedback, and the design of activities for the interventions, as well as time for the training of practitioners on the ISOTIS VLE platform. The amount of time and support that was planned and allocated by the management side influenced practitioner engagement in the study.

In England (semi-)professional practitioners participated, with much experience in running parent programs with related aims and thus could rely upon many of their competences for engaging and working with parents in these new activities. In the other contexts, practitioners were either volunteers with only little training, whose main asset was to have a similar background as the parents in question (CZ, DE), or teachers who were very new to the topic (IT). This presented different challenges, especially with regards to time needed for 'training' and the distribution of responsibilities during programme delivery. The following aspects were essential in delivering the interventions: expressing value of heritage language and culture, readiness to learn about parents' perspectives, and flexibility – adapting to the skills and knowledge of parents. Practitioners taking part in this study were either aware of, or ready to take on the message about the benefits of bi/multi-lingual development and the importance of heritage language learning and maintenance. Yet, experience and skills in working with parents towards these aims, and the support practitioners received within their organisations/institutions in doing so, varied. If professional competencies were low, and especially if there was a lack of team and management support, the researcher had to take a very active role in delivering the intervention (e.g. CZ).

Parents had to find time and motivation to be involved in the study. Practitioners were essential in recruiting parents – and personal connections and relationships were important, as well as providing services for parents – including creches, taxi services (EN), and offering children

educational support alongside parent sessions (CZ). In order to engage in the sessions, parents had to be ready to anchor their learning in the sharing of experiences and in shared reflections. In order to ensure parents attendance and engagement in these processes, practitioners needed to build trustful relationships with parents in our target groups.

Parents wanted to learn new strategies. In the context of our research aims and the aims of our interventions, knowledge of the school system, knowledge of factors supporting parent school communication, and knowledge of strategies parents can use at home to support learning in school and learning of the heritage language were important. Practitioners were more confident in working with parents towards supporting child learning of literacy skills in general, or in literacy skills in the school language, than on working towards goals of bilingual development or in teaching strategies parents could use at home to support heritage language maintenance.

Time was a crucial issue. The most precious and pressured time was the 'contact time' practitioners had with parents. Parents had limited time for their involvement in interventions, and practitioners had many issues they wanted to address with parents, with parents adding their requests and wishes as well. Parents had to find time, confidence and motivation to engage with the intervention content and aims independently and outside direct 'contact time' with practitioners – for example at home when interacting with their children, or when interacting with the platform. Ensuring parent engagement with intervention content is not an easy task, and practitioners were hoping that the ISOTIS VLE would be one way of monitoring and documenting parent engagement with out-of-contact-time tasks, and help to motivate parents to engage in those (e.g. EN, CZ, IT).

Yet, practitioners had either very little experience in using ICT in this way to support their parent support work (CZ, IT, DE) or had previously met challenges when trying to do so (EN). In addition, parents expressed some ambivalence towards the potential of digital technology to support them in bringing up their children and were more concerned about getting support in monitoring 'screen time' at home. Another factor that was important here, was practitioners' confidence and motivation to engage with the platform. ICT skills varied hugely between practitioners involved in this study, and even for those who were most skilled and experienced, independent work on the platform was challenging. This became even more crucial when it came to parent engagement with the VLE: In order to engage parents with the platform, additional time had to be allocated to introduce parents to the VLE and to teach them how to interact with the platform. Allocating this time was challenging. Finally, access to ICT was essential to the delivery of the interventions. Our fieldwork confirmed those challenges identified during the exploratory phase: Stable internet connection and available technology were both issues affecting the engagement with the VLE during sessions. In addition, parents had to have access to digital devices and an internet connection, and the confidence to access the platform independently at home. This proved to be difficult in all contexts.

6.1.3 CONTEXT CHARACTERISTICS THAT SHAPED THE INTERVENTIONS

To conclude, the context characteristics that most shaped our ability to do the work we set out to do in the four contexts were:

- The level of support practitioners received within their organisation (peer support, management support, time)

- Practitioners' professional experience, knowledge, motivation and skills
- Parents' time, motivation, skills and openness to share their experiences (and documentations of those)
- Parents' and practitioners' access to ICT, ICT confidence and skills, and a digital platform that is attractive and user-friendly
- And finally, researcher involvement – especially if there was a lack in any of the resources mentioned above

6.2 IMPLEMENTATION QUESTIONS

By focusing on **implementation**, we assess the work that was done in the four communities. We focus on describing what we accomplished in terms of intervention inputs and activities – the structure and level of work with parents that was carried out, how resources were used to accomplish intervention inputs and activities, and changes/adaptations that were required due to certain context characteristics.

6.2.1 THE USE OF RESOURCES IN IMPLEMENTATION

This section describes how resources were used to accomplish intervention activities in the four contexts. A particular focus will be to critically assess the use of digital technology during implementation – in particular the ISOTIS VLE platform.

In all contexts, research participants were involved in designing and planning intervention activities. During the co-design phase individual and group meetings were carried out to receive feedback on content ideas for activities, ideas for supportive materials to prepare for the VLE, and the VLE functions. Resources given to this co-design phase however varied between countries, and were determined by the readiness and motivation of the organisation to be involved (and support for their practitioners to be involved) and the availability and motivation of parents to be involved. In all contexts, practitioners were involved with researchers, but there were significant differences between countries, with most having to proceed with no (or minimal) involvement of coordinators or parents in this phase, and some having very little opportunity to train practitioners to become familiar with navigating the digital platform and using its functions. Parent availability for feedback and VLE training was challenging in all contexts.

Experiences during co-design phase led to changes, adaptations, development of new materials for the digital platform and planning of delivery. Practitioners in some contexts were more experienced, and had more knowledge and skills with regards to the intervention aims in each context. To ensure activities could be carried out as planned, researchers had to take the lead during sessions in some contexts. (CZ). Parent trust was seen as an issue in some contexts. To strengthen parents' belief in the integrity of the digital platform, much focus was given in one context to introduce parents to the platform at the beginning of the intervention (EN). In another context, the researcher presence was seen as an issue for parent trust, and researcher presence during delivery was planned to be minimised (DE). While peer support between parents was seen as an important facilitating element in some contexts (EN, DE), in other contexts issues of trust between parents were expected and parent support work was planned on an individual rather than group basis.

ICT access was going to be challenging, and (depending on the resources in each context) accessing the platform during parent contact time needed to be feasible on smart screens, desktop computers, parent mobile phones and on researcher equipment. Parent engagement was also challenging, as whilst parents found some aspects of the platform attractive, navigation and making use of functions was difficult, especially on parents' smart phones. Where possible, activities were 'simplified' and the functions parents had to become familiar with to participate in activities on the digital platform were reduced. Because the uploading of content was not an easy task, some content was prepared by researchers in advance for parents to engage with during implementation. In many cases, activities that were prepared included the development of supportive materials which could either be used directly in the platform, but also gave 'print out' options to practitioners and parents.

For our target groups, a focus on the school system in the country, and preparation for school was important in some contexts, and in some contexts, additional materials were prepared to meet this need. Finally, in terms of amount of time given for implementation, and in terms of the amount of involvement of coordinators in these processes, there were significant differences between countries. Thus, the amount of contact time between parents and practitioners, and between parents and researchers, would have to vary between contexts. Due to differences in context characteristics, the structure of parent support work was planned differently between the four contexts. A requirement for implementation in WP3 was to fit ISOTIS intervention activities in with the structure of the organisations' ongoing support work. In England and Germany this meant integration of activities in centre-based parent programmes and courses for groups of parents. In the Czech Republic there was a need for a more individual approach – with practitioners supporting individual parents and their children in local community centres and at home, rather than offering courses for groups of parents. In Italy, intervention activities were realised by teachers in school contexts. To improve parent-school communication and involve parents in projects aiming to use multi-lingual and multi-cultural resources, teachers invited all parents of the children in participating classrooms to engage with the platform. Direct contact time with teachers was rare and not considered as part of the intervention.

For all topics, the following types of resources were prepared to be used during the interventions: theoretical background information, material which stimulates reflection in the group, and descriptions of activities for parents to do. While the development of those resources was building on the ideas and feedback provided by the participating organisations, researchers in each context developed these 'initial' materials. All interventions included plans to carry out activities that involved parents – in interaction with practitioners, children, teachers, the VLE and the researchers. Emphasis varied between countries, but in all countries activities were focusing on:

- Reflections on issues related to the presence of several languages in life, with a focus on child engagement with languages at home and at school
- Stimulating the use of heritage language in parent-child interactions
- Thinking and talking about learning in school in England, expectations regarding parent involvement and about what parents can do to support learning in school

In preparing materials for the interventions, there was a focus on combining attention for both

heritage language and the dominant country language/school language, and portraying the message that all language resources were valuable, should be mobilised and made use of. In most interventions, a number of activities were prepared for parents to do at home with their children (e.g. storytelling, memory game); all with a common focus of practicing the different languages that are present in the home.

In all contexts, the ISOTIS VLE was a major component in the intervention plans. The VLE was designed as a tool that should be used by practitioners supporting parents – in collaboration with other practitioners and in collaboration with groups of parents or individual parents. An important aim was to involve practitioners in the development of new resources when carrying out the intervention activities – in collaboration with other practitioners and families in the community. Making use of family resources was an important principle - when creating materials for the VLE or when asking parents to document experiences to reflect on.

In different contexts, different aspects of the platform were most attractive to practitioners. In Italy (where the platform was used in the school context), the use with parents for communication was what was liked best. The motivation to use the VLE with parents was to share documentations of activities between home and school, to strengthen parent school partnerships and increase collaboration and parent involvement in school/learning. In England, practitioners' motivation to use the platform was to engage parents in the programme beyond the given contact time during sessions, and for parents to create and share resources (documentations) that could be used to support learning and reflections during sessions. Practitioners in Germany were most interested in the digital tools of the platform, and in parents adding content that could be used interactively to support learning and reflection. The Czech practitioners were motivated by the hope to increase parent engagement with the intervention content and aims through the use of the tool (and the possibility for them to monitor this engagement).

6.2.2 REALISATION OF INTERVENTION PLANS

This section assesses the level at which intervention plans could be realised in the way that had been planned.

In an initial step, parents were recruited for the study. Recruitment relied heavily on existing relationships practitioners had with parents, and existing networks between parent support organisations and community centres, preschools and schools. Despite this strategy, finding motivated parents to be involved in this project was challenging in all contexts. In Italy, where all parents of children in a classroom were invited to participate, the number of participating parents was slightly bigger. In all other contexts the groups were smaller than was planned for or expected. Group sessions usually took place as planned and parents were committed. Nevertheless, parent absence from at least some of the sessions was common. In the Czech context, parents would not commit to contact time with practitioners, or to involvement with intervention content if it involved changing their daily routines.

Parent introduction to the VLE happened at the beginning of each intervention. The time that could be allocated to parent training on the VLE was not sufficient to enable parents to access the platform independently, to navigate on the platform, and to work its functions when creating

and sharing content. For practitioners, engagement with the platform was challenging too. In contexts where practitioners had some experience with using a digital platform (EN) or where they had a good level of technical support (IT), practitioners were more likely to access the platform independently, and use it to prepare for sessions as well as for communication with parents.

Accessing the platform during contact time with parents did not always go smoothly. Processes had to be adapted, depending on whether it was possible at all to access the platform during a session, or depending on the devices that were used to access the platform. Nevertheless, during parent contact time, all parents had at least some access to materials that had been developed on the platform. In most contexts, researcher observations and feedback from practitioners confirmed that materials that had been prepared, provided opportunities for parents to learn about content, and to reflect on their own experiences with and beliefs about multi-lingual development, language practices at home and (support for) learning in school. In most cases, parents were engaged in those reflections, and open to share their experiences, but in the Czech context there seemed to be more hesitation from parents to get engaged in these processes. Where parents met and worked in groups, there was good peer support (DE, EN).

Parent engagement with intervention content and aims at home varied between activities and contexts. Practising during sessions what they were expected to do at home with their children supported task engagement at home (EN). In some cases, it seemed to be easier for parents to do home activities without the involvement of children (e.g. Treasure box activity, England and Germany). In Italy, some of the parents in one classroom were able to access the platform to upload photos they had taken in the holidays, and to share stories in a foreign language, or they translated a video proposed by a teacher. Documenting home activities through taking recordings on mobile phones worked well in some contexts and for some activities – in England parents were ready to share documentations of parent-child storytelling and retelling activities.

6.2.3 DEVIATION FROM INTERVENTION PLANS

As a result of difficulties that were experienced when delivering the interventions, some changes had to be made to intervention plans.

Due to difficulties in parent recruitment, practitioners worked with smaller numbers of parents than had been expected. Due to the lack of commitment from parents in the Czech context, practitioners and the researchers had to adapt to the daily routines and habits of individual parents and families in order to achieve any parent involvement in the intervention.

Not in all contexts were practitioners committed to the project. Even where practitioner commitment was high (EN), researchers had to take a more active role than had been planned. Researchers played an active role in delivering intervention activities (CZ, DE), organising group meetings (IT), and setting up the VLE – e.g. moving materials into group spaces, setting up the noticeboard for communication (all countries). Practitioner experience and confidence was an issue – either in working on the particular topics (CZ), or in making use of ICT. The platform was complex and practitioners experienced difficulties when interacting with the platform.

In most contexts, parents explored the multi-lingual tool on the VLE and had opportunities to access material translated into their languages. The multi-lingual character of the platform was seen as attractive. Yet, whilst parents expressed interest in materials that included their language, in some contexts parents felt there was no need for translations (and perceived this option as a critique of their competencies, DE). As a consequence, the multi-lingual tool was rarely used in practice, especially in the context of parent group sessions (EN, DE).

A general feature across contexts seemed to be that parents did not independently upload materials onto the platform, but that this mainly happened when researchers and practitioners were present to actively support or take on this process. Parent access to the digital platform could not be relied upon. Thus, even in cases where practitioners used the platform to send messages to parents, communication in-between contact time also happened through other modes – e.g. text messaging, using WhatsApp. In addition, parents communicated with each other via WhatsApp groups rather than making use of the group space they had on the VLE (England). Since parents struggled to upload materials onto the platform, they sometimes used email or WhatsApp to send photos to practitioners, so that they could add those to the platform and/or use them during sessions (EN, DE). Uploading video-clips that had been taken on mobile phones onto the platform was particularly difficult. As a result, and where parents had taken recordings of home activities (e.g. storytelling) on their mobile phones, parents would use their phones during session times to share those recordings. This worked well during session times, but limited how these valuable resources could then be used further to support collaborations and networking.

6.3 QUESTIONS FOCUSING ON THE FINDINGS

By focusing on the **findings**, we assess the benefits resulting from the work done in the communities. Here we focus on programme outputs, outcomes, and how these might link to further impacts.

6.3.1 OUTPUTS

Despite the many challenges that were met, many of the activities that had been designed for the interventions were indeed carried out during contact time between parents and practitioners (and researchers). Often, this would involve accessing materials that had been prepared on the VLE. If there were not issues with ICT access for the (group of) parents, engagement with the materials that had been prepared on the VLE worked well in initiating shared reflections. If there were difficulties in sharing resources on-screen with the group, this quickly led to parents and practitioner disengaging with the materials.

In general, participants engaged well in activities that had been designed, and appreciated materials that had been developed. Parents who attended sessions responded to activities and materials in asking questions and thinking, talking, and reflecting on cultural and language resources in the home, and their experiences of making use of those resources. In some contexts, some of the informative resources on bilingual development raised curiosity and surprise. Often, practitioners used these moments to emphasis the value of the heritage language and the value of parents communicating with their children in their first language. However, practitioners did not

actively engage parents in planning or finding strategies for parents to manage the task of making sure their children learned more than one language, and how to integrate this task into their everyday lives.

In some contexts, activities and materials also initiated shared reflections on parents' own experiences with schooling, reflections on child learning in school (CZ), the importance of parent inclusion in the school (IT) and how parents can support child learning (EN). In England, parents shared concerns about their children achieving, and strategies they use at home to prepare their children for tests. In Italy, parents expressed the wish for more integration of their heritage languages in the curriculum. Practitioners sometimes followed shared reflections up with informative resources and teaching of strategies. This was successful and much appreciated by parents in the English context, and more of a struggle in the Czech context – possibly to do with the lower level of professional experience of practitioners working with parents. Finally, in some cases, shared reflections also included parents sharing thoughts on the benefits and risks of ICT to support child learning (CZ, IT).

Two further points seem worth mentioning: First, if there was little contact time between parents and practitioners/teachers/researchers (IT, DE), and if that time was taken up by the struggle to access and interact with the platform (DE), such shared reflections really only took part during the final group discussion meetings. Second, engaging in activities during sessions involved parents speaking the majority language and listening to each other. In England, opportunities to use and practice the majority language were much appreciated by parents and played a significant role in their motivation for engagement.

Parent engagement in home activities clearly varied, with some parents engaging more reliably than others. Where engagement lead to documentations of home activities, these were useful in initiating further reflections on topics, sharing of experiences, and enriching the curriculum. However, where activities involved parents uploading content, parents were very unlikely to engage. In general, tasks were too difficult to achieve on the platform, and only very few parents succeeded in some of the tasks. When parents were involved during sessions in accessing and interacting with the platform, this often lead to confusion, took up valuable contact time, and created some tensions (EN, DE). Interestingly, while adding content was very difficult for parents, engaging in some of the interactive activities worked in some contexts and was appreciated (EN, CZ). It also has to be noted, that despite the many problems, at least some parents actively contributed to the platform and added content (translating stories, recording and sharing stories in a foreign language, uploading holiday photos; IT). In addition, other ways were found to document home activities. In all contexts, at least some parents used their phones and WhatsApp to record and share content, or created documentations and materials using pen and paper. Where this was done, practitioners made use of those resources in creating further valuable opportunities for reflection and the celebration of heritage culture/language (EN). Finally, in Italy, participation in the study lead to some parents being actively involved in multilingual and multicultural classroom activities, which were used to enrich child experiences. All of those findings are positive, however such 'product outputs' were more commonly the exception rather than the norm, with only a few parents getting involved at such levels.

Finally, in some contexts (mainly IT, to some extent EN, CZ), children were actively involved in creating multi-lingual 'products'. These were very valuable resources which supported parents' motivation to engage, and stimulated discussions and shared reflections on topics relevant to the interventions. The supportive role of children's involvement as 'mediators' or 'motivators' in parent interventions was also found in the WP3 Family Skills case study (Cohen et al., 2017) and warrants further attention.

6.3.2 OUTCOMES AND FURTHER IMPACT

With regards to **outcomes** we assess if and how participants benefitted by engaging in those intervention activities that were implemented, in particular if the experiences stimulated during the interventions lead to the learning processes that were specified.

In reference to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1 and the aims of the interventions, we want to first attend to changes that were observed with regards to *participants' values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations and knowledge*.

In all contexts, it appeared that parents gained knowledge about bilingual development. This was connected by increased awareness of the presence of multiple languages in their lives (and how this related to their everyday interactions). Parents felt their heritage languages and cultures were valued, and were ready to listen and believe in the benefits of bi/multilingual development and multi-lingual practices. Many parents seemed ready to take on the message that communicating with their children in their first language is important. In some contexts, parents were more able to recognise and appreciate their children's language competencies, and interest in the heritage language and culture (IT, EN). During discussions and shared reflections, parents had opportunities to express their concerns and find reassurance about children's competencies to learn more than one language, and the parents' competencies in supporting child language learning and learning in school.

In addition, in some contexts parents also learned about the school system, child learning in school, and classroom activities. In Italy where many of the classroom activities parents learned about were multi-lingual and multi-cultural, this increased how valued they felt. It was rewarding and motivating for parents to experience and take part in multi-lingual school practices.

While all interventions included some reflections about the value of ICT to help parents in supporting their children's learning, parent experiences with the VLE did not help to change parents' rather negative attitudes which were mainly about monitoring and limiting 'screen time'.

With regards to practitioners, many commented on the fact that participating in the study and the shared reflections with parents increased their knowledge, both regarding the culture of the families, and the use of different languages at home. Practitioners learned more about the complexities of language practices in multi-lingual families, the challenges families face, and how they might feel about these issues. In Italy, practitioners also increased their recognition of the importance and benefits of parent inclusion in the school context.

In some contexts, parents expressed more optimism about finding ways of using and practicing

both the heritage language and the school language (EN). Especially if they had *opportunities to practice skills* during sessions, parents felt they knew better how to engage children in valuable learning activities at home. However, if parents were taught new strategies, this usually focused on children's learning in general and the support of learning in school. Whist parents expressed challenges in how to plan, motivate and realise heritage language practices at home, there was no opportunity for parents to practice or learn new strategies that would help them with this task. Here, interventions were clearly more focused on beliefs, values, and knowledge rather than on skills and actions. Nevertheless, in England parents reported that since attending the course they had started to do a number of things differently to support heritage language maintenance at home and shared the strategies they used with other parents in the group.

Some practitioners reported that taking part in the designed intervention activities with parents increased their intercultural sensitivity and reflective skills, and would help them in the future to plan and implement activities which take account of family backgrounds (IT, EN). In Italy, where interventions took place in the school context, teachers learned to recognise parents as competent and knowledgeable partners; they increased efforts to recognise family backgrounds and make families' linguistic experiences visible in the school and classroom context. This contributed to more equal parent-teacher relationships. In the school context, children also expressed how they enjoyed parents' involvement in multi-lingual activities in classrooms. It was observed that as a consequence of interventions in school, children were more motivated to practice their heritage language in school.

Finally, and even though many challenges were met when using the ISOTIS VLE tool in practice, practitioners expressed interest and motivation to continue using the tool and/or the content that had been prepared during co-design and implementation. In Italy the participating school has specific plans to carry on using the platform. In England, content that has been created for the ISOTIS VLE is currently copied over to the organisation's internal Moodle platform. The aim is for practitioners to be able to access these resources in the future, and to add new resources to facilitate shared practice.

As a final platform output, ISOTIS researchers will write up 'stories' of successful implementation that will be available on the ISOTIS VLE to demonstrate to future users how the resources provided can facilitate experiences and activities.

6.4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude, we present some key messages which focus on what we learned in carrying out the ICT-facilitated interventions in four different contexts. Key messages address design and implementation, and focus on characteristics which we identified as those that most shaped our interventions: organisational support; practitioners' professional experience, knowledge, motivation and skills; parents' time motivation, skills and openness to share their experiences; participants' access to ICT and ICT confidence and skills, and a digital platform that is attractive and user-friendly. We connect key messages with recommendations for practice and policy.

6.4.1 Key messages

1. The organisation plays an important role in the success of an intervention, especially if it is complex and relies on the involvement of different stakeholders (e.g. parents, children, teachers). Across our four sites, we found significant differences in how organisations got involved in the interventions, and how much resources, support and leadership was offered to those practitioners who were planning and delivering the interventions. Relatedly, we found differences in practitioners' motivation, knowledge and skills to get involved in design and implementation, and in the use of the ISOTIS VLE.

2. All organisations expressed recognition of the value of heritage culture and language. Yet a focus on actively supporting heritage language maintenance and bilingual child development was either relatively new in our participating interventions, or not at all part of their usual parent support work.

3. Children's skills, their enjoyment of activities, and their motivation to participate can play an important role in facilitating parent involvement. The preschool has the potential to play an important role in sharing documentation which enables parents to see their children in 'action'.

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

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

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

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

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

6.4.2 Recommendations addressing intervention design

1. Design parent support which expresses recognition of the value of heritage language and culture.
2. Within organisations, develop a clear vision of the intervention, its aims and its implementation, and a strategy of leadership.
3. Provide practitioners with sufficient resources including training, time for planning and preparation, time to build networks and ensure collaboration with other institutions, time for face-to-face contact with parents, and a climate of collaboration where all members support each other, reflect on their practice, share good practices, and are aligned in their mission.
4. Select qualified staff with sensitivity for multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism, who are able to relate to parents and create trustful relationships.
5. Ensure parents experience recognition of the value of heritage language learning and multi-lingual development from the side of the school too. Build close links to those educational institutions which the children are attending, and make plans for collaborative work, which ensure that everyone involved is aligned to the mission of the intervention.
6. Seek new ways in which children, through their own involvement with the aims and activities of interventions, can motivate and guide parent involvement.
7. Design resources which invite reflection and the sharing of experiences, and make sure that documentation of experiences is an integral part of activities.
8. Design resources and plan activities which help parents to learn and practice how to make best use of the several languages present in the families' homes when interacting in everyday routines.

6.4.3 Recommendations addressing intervention implementation

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

6.4.4 Recommendations addressing the ISOTIS VLE

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

1. Resources: Ensure practitioners have sufficient time, training and ongoing support to engage with the platform and add to its recourses. Plan time to ensure parents have sufficient opportunities to engage with the tool, while supported by practitioners. Ensure parents and practitioners have the material resources to access the platform reliably and without losing valuable time (e.g. stable internet connection, appropriate screen to share content with groups of parents, personal devices for parents to use at home).

2. Platform improvements: Ensure the tool is attractive and user-friendly and is well aligned with the ICT skills and confidence practitioners and parents have. Base improvements on careful considerations of how parents are already using ICT in their day-to-day life, and how the use of digital technology to support parent interventions can best match (or be integrated with) the tools that they choose to use and the ways in which they use them. Ensure all digital functions work reliably on all devices available to users (e.g. an interface that works with a smartphone). Improve communication tools the platform offers. Improve the multi-lingual functions of the platform.

3. Consider and plan for the supportive role children can play in facilitating parent engagement with the platform. Consider at the same time, that especially parents with younger children are hesitant about using ICT to support their children's learning, which can create tensions and work against parent motivation to engage with a digital platform.

4. Consider the role of the platform and engagement with it during face-to-face time with parents, and plan in advance how to combine and balance (independent) parent work on the platform with a pedagogy that focuses on hands-on activities and collaborative group learning.

5. Ensure parents have opportunities to learn to engage with the platform and its functions/tools, and opportunities to gain the confidence, motivations and skills needed to explore and use the VLE independently at home.

6.4.5 Policy implications

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

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

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

REFERENCES

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