Equality and Inclusion: challenges and opportunities

COFERENCE EQUALITY & INCLUSION
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UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

• 17 partners in 11 countries, including two NGOs.
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• EU Horizon 2020
ISOTIS

• Identifying starting points for policy and practice to increase equality and inclusion in early childhood education and primary education.

• Focus on four target groups: Turkish, Maghreb, Roma, low-income native/non-immigrant groups.

• Several sub-projects:
  • Secondary analysis of international comparative data (e.g., PISA, PIRLS, ...) and longitudinal data sets from six countries (e.g., NEPS, BONDS, COOL...)
  • Reviews and case studies of home-based education programs, intercultural classroom practices, professional development, inter-agency coordination.
  • Design-research into the use of a virtual learning environment to support intercultural and multilingual education at home and in (pre)school.
  • Structured interviews among parents, in-depth interviews with children and parents, and surveys among professionals and policy makers.
Importance of valuing diversity in (pre)school according to immigrant and minority parents (ISOTIS: N=2500)

- High importance attached to respecting cultural diversity in (pre)school.
- Importance of multilingual support less clear, also more variation.
- Equal emphasis on learning the national language.

Heritage language use at home

- Oral home learning activities are mostly provided in the heritage languages in the Turkish and Maghrebian groups, in the Roma group the national language is dominant.
- Literacy-related activities mostly in the national language.
- Parents’ (self-assessed) ability in either language, the importance of religion, and acculturation attitudes are the strongest predictors.
To build trustful relationships with the education system and commitment to the wider society, recognition of the value of the heritage languages and systematic representation of these languages at (pre)school is needed, for example by using digital platforms for instruction and communication. In addition, family-focused education programs can be made available (by or in relation to the (pre)school) for supporting children’s heritage language learning.

What is the view of children? – the ISOTIS children’s study
(Pastori, Pagani, Sarcinelli et al., 2019; N = 331)

• The Children’s study was conducted in early childhood education and care centers, after-school programs and primary schools in eight countries with immigrant children, Roma children and low-income native-born children.

• Several sophisticated tools were used to elicit children’s thoughts about identity, wellbeing and inclusion, including:
  • Focus group discussions on wellbeing and inclusion.
  • Collaborative project making a book of the center for newcomers.
  • A child-guided tour through the (pre)school building.
  • Recommendations to the (pre)school on how to welcome a newcomer.
  • ‘Suns’ and ‘clouds’ to express facilitators and threats to wellbeing and inclusion.
• Focus group discussion during circle time.
• “How would you welcome a new child who doesn’t speak the language very well?”
• “Should this child be afraid that she would lose her own language when coming to this (pre)school?”
Main findings

• Children rarely define their identity in terms of ethnic-cultural background or home language.

• In all studied contexts children identify themselves rather with their (pre)schools, experienced as physical-social spaces where they belong and which, therefore, should be attractive, well-decorated, and offer dedicated spaces to play with other children.

• Continuity between home and school through involvement of the parents in (pre)school was mentioned by all children as desirable and contributing to their wellbeing and feeling being included.

• Children did not doubt that they should learn the school language as a lingua franca, because it allows them to interact with all children.

To support the wellbeing and feelings of acceptance and inclusion in children from diverse backgrounds, and to create a strong basis for children’s later commitment to society, ECEC centers, primary schools and after-school care facilities should be recognized as spaces that are co-owned by the children and are important constituents of their identities, which requires an inclusive, multicultural, child-centered climate, collaborative group activities, participation of parents and fluid, easy to cross boundaries between children’s homes and the institutional settings.
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Relation parent-(pre)school teacher

- On average *rather positive relationships* and no large variation between parents.
- No clear ethnic group differences.
- Country differences.

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Explaining differences in parent-teacher relation

- Experiences of *discrimination or disrespectful treatment* by teachers in ECEC and primary education are a strong negative predictor of the quality of the personal relation with teachers.
- Relationships with *ECEC teachers are perceived as more positive* than relationships with primary school teachers.
- A *positive assimilation/adaptation attitude* towards the national culture and language and the degree of *inter-ethnic contact* are also positive predictors.
- No differences between ethnic groups, controlling for the above, but *strong country differences* which may relate to official national policy.
Teachers’ reported beliefs and practices regarding multiculturalism

- Aggregated to the country level, significant differences between countries (N ≈ 1000).
- England relatively high on multicultural practice, France (and Czech Republic, Greece and Poland) relatively low.
- Greece, France, and Poland relatively high on assimilationism.

Source: Slot et al. (2018), ISOTIS-project

Teachers’ multicultural practice and parents’ appreciation of the parent-teacher relationship

- Aggregated to the country level.
- Positive relation between preschool teachers’ multicultural practices and parents’ appreciation of the relationship with the teacher ($r = .57$).
- Similar trend in primary school, but weaker ($r = .41$).
To strengthen the relationships of parents with the education system, including ECEC, and society at large, to build the trust of parents in the education system and to prevent them from distancing themselves from education and society, an unconditional and sincere embrace of multiculturalism and multilingualism at (pre)schools is pivotal, while at the same time in addition — and not in contradiction to this — a relentless commitment of the education system, from ECEC to primary and secondary school, is needed to support children in learning the national language.

Universal or targeted?

• Are public universal-unitary systems with early entitlement (as in the Nordic countries) indeed superior?
• Are privatized hybrid systems in all circumstances inferior, especially with regard to access, quality and beneficial effects for disadvantaged groups?
Universal-unitary (public) systems: provocative critical remarks

- Quality of early education and care in Denmark and Norway according to recent studies:
  - Not higher than in hybrid privatized systems, lower especially regarding educational quality (Bleses et al., 2018; Bjørnestad & Os, 2018)
  - Socioeconomic and ethnic segregation occurs too and is associated with lower quality for disadvantaged groups.
  - No compensation (‘catching up’) effects for low SES and immigrant children (Bleses et al., 2019; Zachrisson & Ribeira, 2018)

- Quality of education and care of the universal, publicly funded ‘school-alike’ ECEC systems for 2½ to 6-year-olds:
  - Low cultural inclusiveness, impoverished language environments for migrant children (Vandenbroeck et al., 2017, and Peleman et al., 2019).

Use of ECEC by age of the child: all groups (N = 3948)

- Controlled for covariates at the parent-family level.
- Effect size ($\eta^2$) of group = .083 ($p < .001$; medium sized effect); effect size of group by timing = .075 ($p < .001$; medium-sized).
- Overall, a much lower level of ECEC use in the Roma group.
- Later increase in ECEC participation of the Roma.
Explaining patterns of ECEC use by parent and family characteristics

- **Parents’ education level** is a strong positive predictor, parents’ educational aspirations, mothers’ work status, experienced social support, adoptive-acculturation attitudes and inter-ethnic contact are positive predictors too.

- The **importance of religion** in daily life is a strong negative predictor (pointing to cultural barriers and low cultural inclusiveness of ECEC), the **number of children** in the family and **poverty** are negative predictors too (pointing to financial barriers).

- Participation is lower in some countries and in some localities within countries, controlling for all of the characteristics mentioned above, **due to system and local policy characteristics**.

Use of ECEC by age of the child & study site: Turkish group (N = 927)

- Controlled for family covariates.
- Effect size ($\eta^2$) of study site = .114 ($p < .001$; medium sized); effect size of site-by-timing = .147 ($p < .001$; large effect).

- Overall higher use in London and in Oslo-Trondheim (after age 1).

- Steep rise in both Dutch cities and in the smaller Norwegian towns (between age 2 and 3), and in the Manchester area (between age 3 and 4).
Reflection (1): system and local context effects

- **Norway**: universal, unitary ECEC system for children from age 1 to 6 years, accessible and affordable, with generous public funding.
  - Yet, clear differences between the large urban areas and the small urban/rural areas.
- **England/UK**: split, deeply privatized system, but with a strong tradition of targeted and outreaching measures (e.g., Sure Start) which, however, are nowadays (conservative administration) largely dependent on local policy.
  - Differences between London and the Manchester, Liverpool, Wirral area.
- **The Netherlands**: split system, with work-dependent access to 0-4 services and with targeted preschools and active outreach to disadvantaged communities for 2½-4, and from age 4 universal free kindergarten.
  - A vast majority of the Turkish-Dutch families use the targeted programs, no differences between sites, low use of ECEC in earlier years.

Use of ECEC by age of the child & study site: Maghrebian group (N = 866)

- Controlled for family covariates.
- Effect size ($\eta^2$) of study site = .016 (not significant); effect size of site-by-timing = .206 ($p < .001$; large effect).
- No overall differences in ECEC use between the study sites.
- Steep rise in participation in the two Dutch cities between age 2 and 3, relatively late rise in Parisian suburban areas North and East, and in the Italian cities.
Reflection (2): system and local context effects

- **France**: a universal preschool system (whole week), starting at age 2 years, highly centralized and publicly funded.
  - Differences between Paris-city and Parisian suburbs in the North and East.
- **Italy**: a universal preschool system (whole week), from age 3, run by local municipalities and non-profit organizations, publicly financed.
  - No differences between Milan and Turin regarding ECEC use, relatively late rising use of ECEC by the Maghrebian parents in these cities.
- **Netherlands**: daycare system for 0 to 4, targeted preschool for 2½ to 4 year-old children, universal kindergarten for 4 to 6-year-olds.
  - Relatively early rise in ECEC use by Maghrebian – earlier than in France and Italy – due to use of targeted programs.

Use of ECEC by age of the child & study site: Roma group (N = 690)

- Controlled for family covariates.
- Effect size ($\eta^2$) of study site = .088 ($p < .001$; medium sized); effect size of site-by-timing = .083 ($p < .001$; medium sized).
- Overall, higher use of ECEC and earlier increase in use by Roma families in both Portuguese urban regions and in Brno.
- Late rise in ECEC use in both Greek areas and in Ústí nad Labem and the smaller towns in Czech Republic.
Reflection (3): system and local context effects

- **Czech Republic**: limited provision for 0 to 3-year-olds, universal free preschool from age 5, decentralized policy with local NGOs actively involved in targeted local programs for Roma.
  - Difference between Brno and Ústí nad Labem & rural areas.
- **Greece**: limited provision for the 0 to 3-year-olds, universal free preschool from age 5, but with limited national resources and limited local action – only highly-targeted socioeconomic support for the poorest groups.
  - No differences between the two sites, relatively low and late increasing ECEC use.
- **Portugal**: limited provision for the 0 to 3-year-olds, universal preschool for 3 to 6-year-olds, targeted programs for Roma at the local level, increasing role for municipalities.
  - Porto seems more successful than Lisbon: role of emancipatory objectives.

To summarize

- Participation in ECEC for 0 to 2-year-olds is overall low, but higher in countries with early entitlement and generous public spending to ECEC.
- Participation in ECEC for 3 (or 4) to 6-year-olds approaches the maximum, related to the onset of universal publicly funded preschool-kindergarten systems in most countries.
- National systems explain part of the differences in ECEC use, while local targeted policies explain use in the early years and also strong increases in participation by the target groups.
- Local context effects suggest an important role of local organizations and local policies.
To increase early use of ECEC by disadvantaged groups who will benefit from early attendance to ECEC, either early entitlement to universal (unitary) provision together with targeted measures to reach-out to disadvantaged groups, or, alternatively, implementation of early-onset targeted programs is needed that are specifically adapted to the needs, preferences and possibilities of disadvantaged children and families, acknowledging that ‘not one size fits all’.

Differences within groups – polarization?

- The higher educated, more integrated parents within the ISOTIS groups have higher educational aspirations for their children, provide more stimulating home environments, experience higher wellbeing and belongingness, and use more often ECEC.

- The downside is that the lower educated, unemployed, socially more isolated parents with less command of the school language, a strong in-group orientation and strong religious commitment, are not reached and tend to distance themselves from education and society.

- A strong emphasis on assimilation of the national language and culture risks to widen the gap within groups because it places parents for a binary choice.
Creating safe multicultural spaces in our ECEC and school systems

• The importance of the continuity of time-space-identity-belonging-citizenship requires:
  • Inclusive centers and schools, where cultural and religious preferences are respected and embraced.
  • No or easy to cross boundaries between home-neighborhood-preschool-school, where all languages are valued.
  • Concerted commitment of parents and professionals to children’s learning, development and upward social mobility.

• Universal or targeted? – *Not one size fits all*: we need programs adapted to local needs and preferences, and we need the commitment of professionals to provide extra high quality.

ISOTIS – children’s suggestions to create a linguistically inclusive (pre)school

(Pastori et al., 2019)

• To overcome obstacles in communication, children mentioned the use of posters, pictures, symbols and signs, and some suggested lists with key words and their translations in different languages to support communication.

• The older children specifically mentioned that forbidding children to use their own language, or not treating children as resourceful regarding multilingualism, would harm their wellbeing.
To reach-out to groups of families with a separationist or even marginalized acculturation profile, targeted ECEC programs need to be implemented that maximize trust, recognition of parents’ (religious) values and concerns, bridge communication difficulties (by employing educators of the same background or by using digital platforms), and that are provided locally, close to where the families live.

The ISOTIS Virtual Learning Environment
(Pastori, Mangiatiordi, Ereky-Stevens, Slot et al., 2019)

- A common digital platform with shared and separate sections for:
  - Home-based working with parents.
  - Educational activities with children in pre- and primary school classrooms.
  - Professional development.
- Multilingual support, creating an intercultural curriculum, promoting multicultural attitudes and competences of teachers.
- Providing content and co-creating new content.
Main structure of the VLE

SOCIAL NETWORKING

REPOSITORY OF RESOURCES

PERSONAL WORK SPACE

Integration of different tools and functions

Multilingual videos

Short theoretical texts and other selected resources

Guidelines for observation, reflection and action

Documentation of the activities in action

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Formative evaluation

• Technical and legal difficulties:
  • Parents were sometimes unable to upload or download content.
  • Internet connection were sometimes feeble, bugs in the platform.
  • Legal-ethical issues and complex data management due to the GDPR.
• Parents: not always convinced of the importance to support the heritage language (rather preferring focus on the school language), but when their input was connected to classroom practices of their children more positive.
• Teachers: mixed, depending on ICT-skills – in the professional development program of the VLE teachers were most enthusiastic when activities could be directly implemented in the classroom.
• Children: very positive and highly engaged, driving the implementation in the classroom.

To conclude

• Educational and social disadvantages are on the rise (Rözer & Van de Werfhorst; ISOTIS D1.2).
• Interaction of system characteristics and national policies with family characteristics.
• Most parents in all groups want the best for their children and they try to provide home environments that are conducive for children’s development and learning.
• There are risks, such as poverty, within-group polarization, public discrimination.
• Professionals in ECEC and primary education hold the key to connect children and parents to society, technology can help.
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- We wish you an inspiring conference!