Orbis scholae

Supporting Disadvantaged Multilingual Families in Using Their Own Resources in Education

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Editorial

For decades, researchers, policy makers and education practitioners have been try-ing to eliminate inequality in education throughout the stages of education and across the globe. The research so far proves that the early stages of development are crucial and that it is never too soon to start with support and interventions. Never-theless, the younger the child, the more conflicting with the domestic environment the interventions may appear. Therefore, it is becoming crucial to understand the cultural background on the side of the families in order to set up successful mech-anisms that might help to fill the education gaps, ideally engaging the caretakers themselves in taking effective action. At the same time, the school-attending chil-dren of these days are now, at least in Europe, fully digitalized from the moment of their birth, so it is only natural to consider virtual learning environments as an essential part of the education innovations that might help tackle social inequalities. However, digitalization is not an automatic solution to educational inequalities: it may be quite the contrary if the social and cultural background of its users is not treated with proper regard.

We prepared the special issue *Supporting Disadvantaged Multilingual Families in Using Their Own Resources in Education* in order to explore the contemporary research trends and empirical outcomes in the field of inclusive education and early life care, paying particular attention to social disadvantages in the economic, lin-guistic and cultural sense. More and more children across Europe are entering edu-cational facilities that introduce curricula in another language than is their mother tongue, so the notion of multilingual education research is of special importance. We chose the bio-ecological model of human development by Urie Bronfenbrenner as the general conceptual frame in order to capture the phenomenon of educa-tional inequalities in a complex frame from macro to micro notions, but also to put Bronfenbrenner's model under updated analytical scrutiny. The idea arose from the extensive Europe-wide research cooperation on the H2020 project Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society (ISOTIS), which we were part of within the Institute for Research in Inclusive Education at Masaryk University from 2017 to 2019. Only some of the papers in this issue are directly driven from the ISOTIS empirical data, but they all discuss the topic of education inequality from the complex macro-mezzo-micro perspective and bring innovative insights into the field.

We open the issue with the methodological study called *Institutions and Disadvantaged: Intervention or Oppression? Theatre of the Oppressed at Universities* by Dana Moree and Selma Benyovszky, who analyse the roles and functions of the Theatre of the Oppressed method, originally developed by Augusto Boal to serve marginalized and voiceless groups, as currently more and more often implemented at universities by privileged groups. The authors discuss the potentials as well as limitations of this method when applied in the university environment and as a specific research method and illustrate these on the example of a performance which resulted from cooperation between Charles University students, students from a grammar school in Prague and disadvantaged members of a youth club.

The methodological paper is followed by three empirical studies. The first one is *Roma Children Going to Primary School: The Contribution of Interagency Working to Support Inclusive Education* by Portuguese authors Joana Vale Guerra and Catarina Leitão, who focused on facilitating factors, and the impacts of interagency cooperation between agencies such as education, healthcare, social care and welfare, where local government, neighborhood leaders, volunteers, private as well as public organizations were brought together for inclusive primary school education of children from a Roma community in a low-income neighborhood. The findings of this case study of a Portuguese project indicated that facilitating factors of interagency working included political support, participation of service users in the planning and delivery of interventions, and informal and collaborative working relationships. Positive outcomes were found regarding improved children's school attendance and academic progress, and increased involvement of parents in children's education. Findings pointed out the advantages of a bottom-up approach in guaranteeing adequate social responses and services for the needs of children, young people and their families.

The second empirical study called *Communication as a Means of Development in a School with a High Percentage of International Pupils* by Denisa Denglerová, Martina Kurowski and Radim Šíp presents a case study of one specific school in the Czech Republic, where many pupils with migrant backgrounds are concentrated. Being theoretically informed by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model they draw attention to the importance of communication for the self-development of all main actors participating in the school environment (teachers, management, pupils, parents). The analysis focuses on three main topics – continuous communication as the central value of the school; communication as interaction between microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem; and the field of mutual understanding in relation to operating languages. The authors conclude that regarding the education of international pupils, communication and interconnection between the exosystem and the mesosystem are essential.

The third empirical study called *The Utrecht Virtual Learning Environment Project: Improving Educational Partnerships in Multicultural Preschools* by Ryanne Francot, Martine Broekhuizen and Paul Leseman focuses on educational partnerships between parents with ethnically diverse backgrounds and a preschool as facilitated by

the "Utrecht Virtual Learning Environment (U-VLO)" project. The authors explored the ways this specific digital tool can foster the mutual relationships and identified factors and prerequisites that can play an important role in the process of the implementation, such as importance of parental awareness of the role of preschools and educational partnerships; good start; superdiversity: intergroup relations and sharing experiences; strengthening the intercultural competences of teachers; importance of bottom-up approaches and addressing the technological challenges and requirements. By following the bottom-up design-based research approach they showed the added value of giving voice to parents from diverse backgrounds.

The literature review called *Post-Socialist Czech Education Research on Socially Disadvantaged/Roma Children and Families: Literature Review* by Jana Obrovská and Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků analyses 57 papers based on original empirical research on the education of socially disadvantaged/Roma children and families that was conducted in the Czech Republic between 1989 and summer 2017. The authors elaborated the review in order to make this valuable research stream more easily accessible to the international readership. From the methodological point of view, the results of this review point to the slight predominance of qualitative research procedures in the field. Nevertheless, there is a pervading lack of reflexivity towards the lived world of the research participants – mainly Roma children and families – and a preferred focus on macro (e.g., educational policies) and meso levels (e.g., perspectives of different actors), rather than micro levels (e.g., daily practices of Roma children and families) in the research scope. The most influential published research in the field was identified, as were cross-referencing habits. In general, productivity, as well as cross-referencing culture, have developed intensely since 2009.

At the end of the thematic issue the reader can learn about the international conference *EARLI SIG 5 Conference: Future Challenges for Early Childhood Education and Care* held in 2018 at Freie Universität Berlin; the conference report was elaborated by Yvonne Anders, Julia Johanna Rose, Elisa Oppermann and Franziska Cohen.

The aim of the issue was to analytically grasp the diverse perspectives, activities, practices, and instruments that can become resources in the process of education of socio-culturally disadvantaged children. In this sense, we tried to reframe the chronic and problematic question of how to remove the educational barriers faced by socio-culturally disadvantaged families into another one: what are the potential resources that multilingual disadvantaged families can bring into the education process? We further aimed to gather the perspectives of disadvantaged parents and children in particular as these tend to be supressed in the field of social and educational research, as the review on Czech post-socialistic educational research on socially disadvantaged/Roma families by Obrovská and Sidiropulu Janků demonstrates. The review shows that we are much more informed about the views of teachers, social workers, and other professionals working with disadvantaged children and families than about these actors' perspectives as such. In this respect, we hopefully succeeded in contributing to a more balanced view on the topic and in overcoming the

dominant/dominating dichotomy in majority-minority relationships, which it can be sometimes challenging to avoid.

The international research presented in this thematic issue proves that the effects of social origin on educational opportunities as well as outcomes remain significant across Europe. Therefore, it is crucial to keep looking for innovative solutions and perspectives in this field. Through this thematic issue we intend to contribute to the stream of debates that consider socially disadvantaged families as actors with potential to use their own social, cultural, and linguistic resources to support children's development and education potential. We focused on the inner family dynamics as well as the broader social and institutional context of their daily lives, including possible interventions of support services into the development of disadvantaged/multilingual children. We consider the relationship between families and educational/social institutions as a two-way, multi-layered process, which is evident in the study by two Portuguese authors Guerra and Leitão who focused on the interagency working to support the education of Romani pupils; or in the study by Francot, Broekhuizen and Leseman, who analysed the impact of innovative digital intervention called the Virtual Learning Environment on educational partnerships in Dutch multicultural preschools. Therefore, based on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of personal development, this thematic issue also addresses holistic topics that go beyond the predominant research in the field focused either on inner family dynamics or children's educational performance. Thus, the paper by Denglerová, Kurowski and Šíp addressed the importance of communication in the education environment for the self-development of all participating actors, while stressing the role of meso-level interactions between school and parents.

We hope that the special issue of the *Orbis scholae* journal will contribute both to the innovative research and education practice development, as well as to critical debate among policy makers and the wider audience. On behalf of all the special issue authors, we cordially thank all the families and practitioners that took part in all the research presented in the issue. In their often strenuous life situations or tight professional schedule they took extra time and patience with researchers often asking questions that do not lead to fast bettering of the issues being put under scrutiny. It takes special kindness and faith in the development of scientific knowledge to take part in social research, and to those brave and gracious research participants we dedicate this thematic issue, hoping that the greatest gift will be future positive development leading to elimination of educational and social inequality in the upcoming generations.

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Guest Editors

Institutions and Disadvantaged: Intervention or Oppression? Theatre of the Oppressed at the Universities

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Abstract: Theatre of the oppressed is a method invented for working with disadvantaged groups of population. However, it is more and more often used also at the universities which represent more elite part of the society. This contrast leads us back to the question of Augusto Boal – the inventor of the method and to the core question of the method – where are the people? While universities prepare students also for working with marginalized groups and we know that marginalized population is underrepresented there, we would like to address the same question as Augusto Boal. The aim of the article is two folded: we discuss possibilities and limits of TO for working at the universities. And we share one concrete example of the group which topic was sexual abuse at school environment.

Keywords: theatre of the oppressed, power, universities, teaching methods, sexual abuse

Theatre of the oppressed (TO) was invented by Augusto Boal as a method which served to those, who are voiceless. The audience during performances were those who experience the same situations or troubles (like e.g. peasants in poor neighborhoods in Brasil perform for peasants) (Boal, 2001). However, this method became much more accessible last thirty years and applied in many environments including universities (Christensen, 2014; Desai, 2017; Giesler, 2017; Stahl, 2018).

The aim of the article is to discuss the implementation of TO at the university and share an example of one theatre performance as a source of impulses for this discussion. The reason is that implementation of the method targeted originally at disadvantaged population is very often used in totally different contexts. The question is what are its possibilities and limits at the same time.

1 Introduction to Theatre of the oppressed

First of all, let us have a closer look at the roots – how the method was invented, what were the impulses for its creation. Boal (2001) was a theatre director at the beginning of his career and at the same time he faced a deep political and societal crisis in his country. Given the fact that the audience were mostly representatives of middle and upper class, his driving force was a feeling that he legitimizes power of disadvantaged by means of the theatre if he performs about troubles of those who are powerless. His basic question was – where are the people? Many attempts

10   to solve this dilemma resulted in the theatrical form, which we call theatre of the oppressed today (Boal, 2001).

Department of Civil Society at Charles University in Prague started to implement this method in 2013. Students of the department are prepared for working in civil society and NGOs but at the same time they work in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility or in managerial posts at government institutions. In many of these contexts they should be prepared for working with disadvantaged groups of population or at least with those whose voice is weaker. However, due to the fact that students of the universities do not have much experience with disadvantaged groups of population. It brings their teachers into the same question as Augusto Boal – where are the people?

When we take a critical perspective, we have to ask the question if universities are the place where education should contribute to solving social problems in society (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008). Even if we take a position, which it is not the case, we face two issues: theatre of the oppressed is more and more often used as a teaching method at the universities although it is a method invented for disadvantaged parts of population and graduates of universities will work with those, whom they have never met before – thus – with disadvantaged ones.

When we take broader perspective, we can also have a look at the latest developments at universities and high schools in the Czech Republic. They are facing a new situation as a result of the reform articulated in Act 137/2016. One of the results of this reform is that the country's universities are to be divided into practically oriented and academically oriented institutions. Academically oriented universities increasingly tend to be reduced to producers of highly achieving academic publications, where international competition is seen as more and more important.

When we look at the demographic composition of the university environment, we know that universities worldwide very often reproduce power differences in societies (Mann, 2008) and that students from minority or disadvantaged social and ethnic backgrounds are still underrepresented (Ghofa, 2017; Mann, 2008). Moreover, students are perceived as passive absorbers of curricula, created in a difficult system of accreditations (Mann, 2008). They are not given many possibilities to influence or change the environment they study in or the ways they are taught.

When students cannot influence the curricula, the ways they are taught or the composition of the student population, tailored teaching methods might offer an opportunity to integrate an aspect of reflection, training in the ability to act differently, and support for social skills at university.

We know that learning environment and teaching strategies are closely linked to social skills students can learn. Scholars like Dewey, 1903, 1916, 1938; Freire, 1974; Oser & Veugelers, and others have presented valuable evidence about the necessity of creating a nurturing learning environment and how that can be done. The question is what is the position of TO in this debate. And how can this method contribute to the issue of difficult relation between education and broader societal context (Simons & Masschelein, 2008).

We begin by introducing the theatre of the oppressed and analyzing its potential for implementation at universities and its limitations. We then present the results of the theatre of the oppressed group work, in which students of Charles University (Prague), students from grammar school in Prague and clients of a youth club in Prague participated. Sexual abuse appeared to be a hot topic in the group and so a theatre performance called "Deka [Blanket]" grew out of their collaboration. We conclude the paper with a discussion of this experience and what it shows us about the implementation of the theatre of the oppressed method in a university environment.

1.1 Theatre of the oppressed at universities

Theatre of the oppressed is a method that has previously been explained in many texts (Conrad, 2004; Christensen, 2014; Desai, 2017; Giesler, 2017; Saeed, 2015; Stahl, 2018). We will introduce it only briefly here. When we take a perspective of its practical implementation, we can mention that it works as follows. A group of people who have experienced injustice, difficulties or oppression and express the willingness to work on these topics works together using a wide range of techniques that promote their ability to recall their experiences, express them through their bodies and embody them into new story, which is "translated" into theatrical language. The techniques used have been described by Augusto Boal and his followers (Boal, 1979, 1992).

The resulting theatrical work is performed in front of an audience – ideally an audience that may have had a similar experience. The aim of the performance is to encourage social change. The audience actively looks for ways to address the situation depicted. This stage in the process is known as forum theatre.

The method was originally developed for work with disadvantaged groups in environments like slums, prisons, ghettos, etc. (Boal 1979, 1992). However, when Augusto Boal was forced to emigrate, he adapted this methodology for work with less disadvantaged people, who have not experienced external oppression (like being beaten on the street), but have experienced internal oppression from the voices in their society, family, institutions. In other words, he adapted the method to help people cope with any kind of social pressure. This method was called "Rainbow of desire" (Boal, 1995). Boals looking for people became inevitable part of developing theatrical methods and at the same time, target groups with whom he worked influenced its further development. We can see that the method and its target groups were in constant dialogue.

Being aware of this fact, we adopted several strategies during the last years, which affected especially the way, how we composed the groups working with the theatre of the oppressed method at the university:

1) We started to work with students of the university in a framework of a voluntary part of their studies. Theatre of the oppressed was offered as a voluntary course only to students.

2) Then the stage of "looking for people" started – we started to look for a way how to achieve contact between students and other target groups outside the university. One of the students brought a strong impulse – she wrote theses about identity and citizenship of representatives of young Roma. She was conducting interviews with them and they expressed willingness to try to do something together. The first contact arose. Based on this we invited students and young Roma to make a theatre performance together.

3) Mixed strategy started to be adopted. Sometimes there is an impulse from a concrete target group of disadvantaged population willing to create a theatre performance (like homeless people, NGO working with Vietnamese population etc.) and students do not participate; sometimes we try to react on societal hot topics like during refugee crisis, when we used open call among students and NGOs working together and sometimes we offer students possibility to participate in a project, which is conducted together with other institutions or NGOs.

The fact that there are students working together with people outside university under the leadership of university teachers can be discussed from many perspectives. It could be approach from the perspective of teacher-student relationship and the way how the dynamics of this relation is formulated (Fendler, 2001), from the perspective of deliberative democracy and the whole discussion about possibilities of equality in such a mixed group (Mouffe, 2000) and many others. We would like to offer a perspective of identity building, which we identified as the most important during working with mixed groups and seems to be important also for the way, how the group makes a choice for the topic of the performance (Moree, Vavrova, & Felcmanova, 2017).

When the group is composed of people who are visibly different or whose life experience differs significantly, there might be a strong "we" and "they" dynamics. Students can be perceived as those, who did not experience "real" oppression or they have a feeling that their oppression is not "good enough". But we know from the literature that it necessarily does not need to be as simple. We know e.g. that a significant proportion of students experience some kind of sexual harassment (Christensen, 2014). At the same time students are less free in the university space, because they experience university environment in many ways. There are students, who experienced strictly hierarchical environment, which does not give them much opportunities for a participation. Other students experience safe space for exploring, developing own thoughts and expressing them.

Participants outside the university often bring very clear issue with a strong experience. But at the same time they do not have any previous experience with the university environment, no obligations, and no credits duty in this environment.

Oppression in modern society is very often linked to power issues and equality and it usually happens not as a byproduct of homogeneous environment, but as a result of situation that people come together and are not treated equally, which is very often also a driving force for creating the story in theatre groups. E.g. when a group makes a decision to work on racism, its members experience dichotomy of

we and they, which is crucial perspective for creating the story. The point is not the fact that part of participants experienced racism and others did not. We all know how racism works, but there is different experience in case the concrete person has different skin color and in case he or she is e.g. representative of silent majority (Moree, Vavrova, & Felcmanova, 2017).

But at the same time the group does not experience only this aspect of "divided experiences" because they also experience its growing into a team. Otherwise they would not be able to create something together, experience strong flow of ideas, safe space for creative work (Dewey, 1938). These issues happen only in a safe environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; 2013). It means that something must happen. Dovidio et al. (2007) suggest that one of possibilities how to overcome dynamics of division into *we–they* is so called principle of dual identities. If people in mixed environment experience that they can keep their own identity and at the same time create a new common identity (like theatre group) it gives an opportunity to work together and experience group identity in a new way.

This sensitive issue demands that we ask ourselves several questions with every new theatre group: who is going to participate, how is the participation defined, and what is the result of implementing the theatre of the oppressed? We can look at these questions step by step.

Who is going to participate? In many of the studies that have been published, the participants of the theatre of the oppressed groups were all university students (Desai, 2017; Stahl, 2018). While this certainly has many advantages – the students know each other and it is easier to create a safe space in a well-known environment – it does not overcome the problem of the underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups. What might be reasons to stay in a safe space of students' population and what might be the reasons to make decisions for mixed group composition?

How is the participation defined? If theatre of the oppressed is offered as an optional course, students choose to participate, but must then fulfill the requirements of the course. This can become difficult if the topic is too sensitive (Stahl, 2018) and working on such sensitive issues may harm the students.

What is the result of implementing the theatre of the oppressed? The original method leads to a public performance known as forum theatre, at which the audience can react, try to change the destiny of the main character, and provoke social change. Should such a performance be an obligatory part of theatre of the oppressed when it is implemented at universities?

For further discussion, we made a decision to analyze experience of a group composed originally from students of Charles University, one grammar school and clients of NGO People in Need. Their shared topic was sexual harassment, which they all experienced to some extent.

2 Theatre of the oppressed and research

2.1 Theatre of the oppressed as research method

Theatre of the oppressed was not originally created as a research method. It is a way of working, whose aim is social change, transformation of oppressed individuals' experiences and empowerment (Boal, 1979). However, this method is very intensive and the work generates deep insights into the problem that the group is attempting to solve. It is therefore logical that it attracts researchers wishing to make use of these data. Most often, theatre of the oppressed is linked to action research (Lewin, 1946). The group process is reflected and the results and reflections by the participants are shared (Wrentschur, 2008; Call-Cummings & James, 2015).

We too applied this research strategy for three years. However, because we were working with groups composed of people from different social, ethnical and generational backgrounds, it turned out to be insufficient. Very often we encountered situations in which tiny reinterpretations of well-known theoretical concepts like integration, exclusion, etc. happened as a side product of the group process. And that view of theory, created by the group, was then tested and redefined during their interaction with an audience. We were unable to capture these subtle effects through action research. We needed something more similar to the research analyzing nuanced reinterpretations like those by Dvora Yanov and van der Hart (2013). This led us to look for new research approaches that could be usefully applied to this kind of group process. We began to use a mixed methodology divided into two stages:

Stage 1 – preparing the theatre performance. This stage was perceived as a process of formulating a research question, where the group of participants formulates the question itself. We used ethnography based on field notes during this stage (Moree, Vavrova, & Felcmanova, 2017).

Stage 2 – performing with an audience. This stage was perceived as a process of collecting data that could answer the research question formulated in stage 1. We recorded the performances and code the data created by the audience, combined with field notes.

To illustrate this way of working with the theatre of the oppressed at university, we now share the data and processes of one case, in which a group of students worked on the topic of sexual harassment at school.

2.2 Sexual harassment in the theatre of the oppressed – formulating the research question

In spring 2016 a group composed of Charles University students, grammar school students, youth connected with one NGO and several other young people connected with other NGOs in Prague came together. It is also important to mention that this group worked before the campaign "Me Too" started. This co-operation was initiated by co-operation between NGO and Charles University in one project. The group

was formed, there were decisions made about place where the group would work together and time distribution (they made a decision to work during the weekends in blocks of 5–7 hours). The group process started as part of a course offered in the summer term and university students were offered to be connected with participants from other institutions. These were volunteers participating in the youth clubs of two NGOs in Prague – Člověk v tísni [People in Need] and InBáze. We list the basic characteristics of the participants with their performance names below:

Jáchym – 17-year-old male grammar school student
Anežka – 22-year-old female university student
Policeman and school psychologist – 17-year-old male grammar school student
School principal – 22-year-old female university student with migration background
Psychologist at the police station – 19-year-old female grammar school student with minority background
Policeman – 24-year-old female university student

Schoolmates:
Two female university students with migration backgrounds
One male university student with homosexual orientation
Three female university students

The group started out with 21 participants, but reduced to the above participants after the first part of the group process because the other group members did not want to perform. The decision not to perform was usually due to time pressures.

The group process started as always using Boal's techniques (Boal, 1979, 1992). The first topics of oppression that were raised within the group were: pressure to be perfect, pressure from parents to succeed, unspecified societal expectations of young people, pressure to be heterosexual, pressure to submit to the dominant discourse and its ideas of what is normal.

The oppression mirrored in the theatre of the oppressed techniques (e.g. image theatre) consisted of exclusion from the group based on the above experiences and misunderstandings in the family. Due to the fact that the group consisted with people from different background and life experience, at first sight it seemed that they would not find a common topic. After two months of intensive work the group was not able to find a topic with which to create a story, but they did not want to stop the group process. It was clear that there was another topic hiding in the background of the group's work that had not yet been accessed. Eventually, this intuition was openly mentioned in the group, which resulted in one member of the group pronouncing the topic of sexual abuse during a school trip. In real life he reacted on the situation, contacted police and school leadership. The result was that the police announced their decision to defer further investigation due to a lack of evidence under the argument that if the victim is strong enough to go to police, then he is also psychically healthy enough to express his will not to be abused in real situation. The rest of the group appeared to have a strong connection with the story, because

16   they had experiences of the same sort, albeit not so strong (one girl was e.g. filmed during changing clothes together with other girls from volleyball club by the trainer, one girl was beaten by a teacher at school ...).

After this sharing of stories, the group went through a careful decision making process to establish whether they felt ready to work on the topic publically. In general the participants were very positive. They felt powerless in real life and they wanted to make use of their experience for the wider public and for those who might experience similar difficulties. And so the performance started to take shape.

2.3 Deka [blanket] performance – looking for answers of the research questions

The performance opened with policemen reading a quotation from the real report taken when 17-year old Jáchym came to the police station. He announced that he had participated in a school trip outside Prague and had repeatedly been touched on intimate parts of his body by his physical education (P.E.) teacher during the night.

The schoolmates then came onto the stage and a lesson began. Jáchym came in late and the teacher was angry with him about his behavior in recent weeks. After the class, Anežka – Jáchym's good friend – came over to ask him what was wrong, and Jáchym tried to explain what had happened to him. Anežka helped to communicate his troubles to the other schoolmates and it began to be clear that Jáchym had not been the P.E. teacher's only victim, and that other pupils had been having the same experience. Jáchym made the decision to fight against this, to try to ensure that it would not happen again.

First of all, he went to see the school psychologist. The psychologist was supportive, but explained that he could not do anything and suggested that Jáchym should talk to the school principal. The principal did not trust Jáchym and said that she could not do anything because this was an issue for the police to deal with. But Jáchym did not want to take it to the police, because he was ashamed of what had happened to him and did not want any public attention. He asked the principal whether she could at least be excused from physical education lessons, where he had to spend time with the teacher who had abused him, but this was denied – he was told that he could only be excused if he brought confirmation from his doctor that he could not participate in P.E. for health reasons. In the end Jáchym went to the police station, where he was treated very insensitively. At the end of the performance another quotation from the police report is read, in which the police announce their decision to defer further investigation due to a lack of evidence.

The question the group asked the audience to reflect on was how the situation could be handled such that Jáchym would experience respectful treatment and the teacher would be punished.

The performance was performed in Švandovo theatre in Prague and the audience was of a mixed origin – friends and social network of the actors, which means friends and family members of university students, clients of NGO etc.

At the end of the performance, the audience was asked what they thought about the main character's motivation. Their answer was that he wanted to prevent the same thing from happening to anyone else. This requirement that the situation – and, consequently, the trauma – should not repeat is used as a thesis for our data analysis. The aim is to analyze the process of the audience's re-building during one performance of Deka. An open coding method is used, in which five categories were crystallized: *anonymity*, *loneliness*, *public secret*, *popularity*, and *institutions of power*. In this part, only the scenes requested by the forum will be discussed.

3.1 Loneliness

The main category identified, although it is not the most important, is *loneliness*. At the beginning of the forum, the audience first wanted to try out the scene in which the main character Jáchym tells his schoolmates about the incident and discovers that he was not the only one abused by the P.E. teacher. When intervening in this scene, one audience member tried to persuade a boy who had had a similar experience with the same teacher to talk, but he did not want to be involved. The main motivation of this intervention was to find allies in order to reduce Jáchym's loneliness.

Searching for allies occurs in other scenes, too, where the endeavour to overcome the loneliness remains the main topic. *Loneliness* seems to be logically connected with the subject of the story, the main focus of which is the hopeless situation Jáchym finds himself in when he attempts to accuse the P.E. teacher. Simply said, from a legal point of view this is just one person's word against another's word.

During the discussion after this scene, the audience member, who had tried to convince the other abused schoolmate Jarda to go with her to the school psychologist, said: "*I felt like I was not alone and that it would give me courage* [to solve it]."

After several other unsuccessful attempts to resolve the situation by the forum, the participants tried to evaluate the strategies that they had tested. They concluded that when the others do not want to open up and go public with their story, Jáchym's loneliness grows deeper. One audience member, for example, admitted in response to her effort to find allies: "*It is problematic because* [without any ally] *one feels even more alone. I expected that he* [Jarda – the other harassed schoolmate] *would help me.*"

The audience regarded *loneliness* as the primary issue at play, but paradoxically, trying to find allies put the main character in the role of the victim[1] and this creates a dichotomy of Jáchym versus others. This dichotomy is reinforced by the attempt

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[1]   The term victim was understood by the audience not in the legal sense but as a psychological construct with all connotations associated with it, such as feelings of powerlessness (in the sense of power-less) and loneliness.

18   to *help* the protagonist and, on the contrary, weakened by the willingness to *partic-ipate* in solving the situation.

3.2 Public secret and anonymity

During the performance, two closely related categories – *public secret* and *anony-mity* – emerged. After its unsuccessful attempt to find more witnesses, the forum tried to change its strategy. By reworking several scenes, the forum discovered that the students and staff at the school knew about the P.E. teacher's inappropriate behaviour but that no-one wanted to confront him directly.

    While the category of *anonymity* emerged throughout the discussion when the forum was debating which scenes to choose, the category of public secret was re-flected primarily during the scenes themselves. Both categories were reflected the most in the requested scenes with the principal and schoolmates. In the scene when the students speak to the principal, it was obvious that the principal herself was acquainted with the behavior of the P.E. teacher, but it seemed like it was too hard for her to take a strong stand. After this, the forum requested another scene with the principal and the P.E. teacher, in which it was confirmed that the P.E. teach-er's tendencies were commonly known.

    The category of *anonymity* emerged gradually during the evening. The audience first found out that Jáchym's friend Jarda, who was also abused by the P.E. teacher, refuses to admit it publicly. The forum tried to encourage him to help Jáchym, using various tactics: first, trying to persuade him to be an ally (see above on the category of loneliness), then by trying to convince him that he will help himself by coming out with his story, and finally by trying to awaken his empathy. None of the tactics worked, and gradually, the forum adopted the requirement of anonymity, which was most evident in the scenes with the principal and school psychologist where the ac-tors in Jáchym's role persistently refused to make their identity public and refused to go to the police as a result of this desire for anonymity. Their efforts to maintain an-onymity thus increased the public-secret effect. A frame example was a scene where an audience member, as Jáchym, went to the school psychologist, told him that he and another two male schoolmates were harassed by the P.E. teacher, and ask him to convince the principal to dismiss the teacher. The school psychologist tried to explain that he could not do anything and that the only way is to lose their anonymity. The students refused this solution at first and it was only once the other scenes had shown that the situation could not be solved while they remained anonymous that the forum decided it was best to come out with the truth and confront the principal directly.

3.3 Popularity

Power appears to be the most important aspect both in the category *popularity* and in *institutions of power*. The *popularity* category demonstrates that mere popularity can create and construct a major power. The teacher's popularity se-

ems to represent a significant obstacle in the audience's search for a solution. It blocks their path whenever they try to find allies both among the authorities (i.e. the principal, the psychologist) and among the students. Moreover, the forum does not question or even attempt to deconstruct the teacher's popularity, but takes it as given.

When an audience member, acting as Jáchym, wants the other abused school-mate Jarda to talk about what happened to him with the P.E. teacher, Jarda refuses and argues that he cannot do it because the teacher is nice and popular. In another scene, when an audience member acting as Jáchym wants the principal to fire the P.E. teacher, the principal argues that he has been teaching for 30 years and everybody likes him. The popularity of the teacher is used as a confirmation of his credibility. Only in one scene was popularity used with the reverse effect: in a conversation with the P.E. teacher, the principal expressed doubts that someone would make up a story of harassment involving the most popular teacher.

3.4 Institutions of power

Institutions of power include the school and its authorities as well as state institutions, i.e. institutions that have a strong influence on people's lives. Throughout the process the audience expressed a substantial lack of trust in these institutions. For example, in a requested scene with the school psychologist, an audience member acting as Jáchym refused to go to the police. After this, the forum decided to try to convince the school authorities to fire the P.E. teacher. When they failed, they concluded that it was necessary to go to someone "higher", but still not to the police. Contrarily, the forum consistently tried to bypass the police force and preferred to focus on human rights institutions that were considered to be separate from the state and thus more affable. Even when the joker repeated it became clear that no-one but the police could do anything to help, the forum refused to try a scene with the police. Then, joker № 2 intervened:

> I just have a question ... I am asking myself ... It is clear that in accordance with the law, the police play a key role in this event but it is a bugaboo ... So I just want to know what makes us feel like it is so hard to go to the police? Who gives them their power and how is it possible that they do not protect 16-year-olds from this sort of situation?

Forum participant reacted:

> There is a Labor Code for such cases. And just because someone says something somewhere, even if it is true, it is not enough to fire someone. If I want to dismiss someone, he must be punished first. Who will punish him? The police will punish him. So it is necessary to go to the police, this is obvious in this story. It is only when the guilt is proved that the person can be dismissed. If one doesn't go to the police and [the principal] just fires the person, nothing will be solved. The man will go somewhere else ...

20   The joker № 2 intervened:

> *And that is exactly the thing! If the director had fired him, just like that, so what next? The man will go to the next school, he will not have any criminal record or anything. I mean, I understand that it is kind of annoying to you that we look like we know how these people would act. We probably do not know if the teacher would say again whether he was change his shoes or not, which, by the way, was a real thing that happened in that situation, but it doesn't matter. The director tells him "I can't do anything about it".*

The discussion that followed this question soon turned into a debate about what the principal should have done and what power she has. And even after several motions from the joker to try a scene with the police, nobody responded to that suggestion.

This performance has been performed six times during the past two years. The audiences have all refused to question the practices of the police and other institutions that hold formal power in society. The main argument was that common experiences with police are so bad and insensitive that it is almost impossible to go there with such as intimate issue as sexual abuse.

4 Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we wanted to discuss limits and possibilities of theatre of the oppressed as method which is more and more often implemented at the universities. We also wanted to provide a concrete example of one development of a performance, in which university students co-operated with young people from other institutions concretely with clients of youth club in one NGO from Prague. In our conclusions we will begin by reflecting on that practical example, with the performance Deka.

Although the audience stressed the category of loneliness the most during the performance, our data analysis shows that the most important category for them was *institutions of power*. The answer to the research question formulated by the group is, thus, to bypass the police in finding solutions.

The audience perceived the police – as a strong state authority with the potential to use violence – as a core element of the ossified system (in which the school is included) in which rules and bureaucracy are remote from or superior to people. Although in liberal democracy it is clear that the police should be the first place to go in such situations, everyone – including the principal and school psychologist – tried to avoid involving them. The forum did not want to try a scene with the police to change the main character's destiny. Instead, they focused on the character's loneliness, and put the element of power and its legitimacy aside. The legitimacy of the police – which is not unchangeable – was thus uncritically accepted and ignored by the audience. In spite of the jokers' efforts to return the audience to the issues of

power and the legitimacy of the police, the performance ended with the conclusion that the perpetrator could only be condemned morally.

The development of the performance was influenced by the participants' real life experiences of traumatic situations. Theatre of the oppressed seems to be a powerful tool for bringing students into a reflective learning process and thinking about change. The power of using theatre of the oppressed at universities lies in the fact that it enables the students themselves to provoke changes in interaction with their audience. However, we recognise also its limits and challenges:

The single fact that we read and write academic articles makes all of us representatives of elite – middle class, those, who are powerful. However, theatre of the oppressed was created as a method, which should serve to diminish inequality in the society. The first aspect is thus an ethical one. In case we do not implement the method in accord with its original aim, we might also represent those, who reproduce inequality in the society and then we might use the method for the opposite purposes. This aspect worth a separate article, but at the same time it is an important background for further discussion.

We can conclude that there are reasons to use TO at the universities but at the same time there are reasons to look for the way how it is implemented. Then we perceive several important aspects:

1) The probability that students explore very sensitive experiences during the process is quite high. Power relations should be solved with the teacher of the course so that the students' trauma is not reproduced. This requires investing time and energy into creating a safe space and trust in the group and include collective decision making in all stages of the process. In this aspect when a course is built on the TO, there should be a special and more sensitive way how to use it and how to teach.

2) There are reasons to open university and work by means of TO with mixed groups. In such a case careful working on identity of the whole group is crucial to avoid feelings of being less important than the others. Boal (1995) suggests that there are much more aspects of oppression in the society then clear external oppression. And he was very open for adapting the method to all kinds of oppressions. But when we implement TO at the university, we should be careful about the way how every single group and individual is treated. Dual identity of actors provoking societal debate about an issue, which the group identifies as important, might be possible solution.

3) All participants should experience the opportunity of taking part in decision--making during the whole process of theatre of the oppressed. Which means that the whole process might be risky from the perspective of e.g. project outcomes. If the group makes a decision not to perform, institution should be prepared to accept the decision and not to make the group to finish from any formal or practical reasons.

In other words, in our view theatre of the oppressed is a powerful tool and it is possible to implement it also at university level. However, its implementa-

22 tion requires the relevant course to be organized in a rather special way, with a focus on treating participants with sensitivity and enabling their participation in decision-making processes. Theatre of the oppressed very often reopens traumatic experiences and when students and other participants bring these to the process, the courses should be able to offer a corrective experience in contrast with the original traumatic situation.

Acknowledgement

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Roma Children Going to Primary School: The Contribution of Interagency Working to Support Inclusive Education

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Abstract: Inclusive education can be promoted through partnerships between agencies supporting children and families, such as those in the scope of education, healthcare, social care, and welfare. Partnerships, often referred to as interagency working, were found to determine positive children's educational outcomes, and home-learning environment in previous studies. However, evidence on impact and best practices is still limited. The aim of this paper was to study facilitating factors, and impacts of interagency working for inclusive education. Perspectives of service providers were analysed in regard to a Portuguese project aiming to promote inclusive education and academic progress of children in primary school from a Roma community living in a low-income neighbourhood. Findings indicated that facilitating factors of interagency working for promoting inclusive education included political support, participation of service users in the planning and delivery of interventions, and informal and collaborative working relationships. Positive outcomes were found regarding improved children's school attendance and academic progress, and increased involvement of parents in children's education.

Keywords: Choices Programme, education policy, local governance, inclusive education

In Europe, Roma are among the most deprived people, facing limited access to high quality education, labour market barriers, segregation in housing and other areas, and poor health outcomes (European Commission, 2018). The educational attainment of Roma children is lower compared to non-Roma children, and the former tend to be over-represented in special education and segregated schools (European Commission, 2011; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2018). According to a survey conducted in eleven European Union member states[1] (FRA, 2014), on average, 14% of the Roma children of compulsory school age were not attending formal education, compared to 3% of the non-Roma children living close by.

The complexity and interdependence of the problems that affect Roma demand an integrated approach, cross-sectoral cooperation, and social investment in local capacities and strategies (European Commission, 2011, 2018). In line with Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), the provision of services needs to consider all the relevant environments in which children are embedded to effectively support them (Davidson, Bunting, & Webb, 2012). Social policy provisions can support efficient use of human capital, while fostering social inclusion of groups that have traditionally been excluded (Morel, Palier, & Palme, 2016), such as Roma communities.

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[1]   In Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.

1 Interagency working and the Portuguese context

An integrated and holistic approach to support children and their families can be accomplished most effectively through partnerships between agencies, such as those in the scope of education, health, social work, and welfare, among others (Christensen, 2015; Davidson et al., 2012; Statham, 2011). Partnerships and coordination of services have become increasingly recognized as important for the development of effective policies to promote inclusive education (Einbinder et al., 2000; Vargas-Barón, 2016). More than one agency working together in a planned and formal way is often referred to as interagency working (Lloyd, Stead, & Kendrick, 2001).

1.1 Interagency working

Interagency working can include information sharing, and joint assessment of needs, planning and delivery between agencies (Statham, 2011). It may contemplate joint activities involving financial and physical resources, programme development and evaluation, collaborative policies, formal and informal agreements, and voluntary contractual relationships (Dedrick & Greenbaum, 2011). The organization of services can occur at different levels (e.g. national, regional and local), include various policy domains (European Committee of the Regions, 2009; Frost, 2005; Stubbs, 2005), and diverse types and degrees of integration between agencies (for a review see Barnes et al., 2017).

Interagency working can lead to improved provision of services according to the needs of the users, by reducing duplication and gaps in provision, and consulting users (Atkinson, Jones, & Lamont, 2007; Statham, 2011). This contributes to avoid repeated requests to families, as frequently found, and lack of services when families do not reach a specific agency (Barnes et al., 2018; Griffin & Carpenter, 2007). Positive outcomes of interagency working were found regarding children's educational attainment and attendance (Oliver, Mooney, & Statham, 2010; Statham, 2011), and home-learning environment of families with young children (Melhuish et al., 2008).

According to a literature review by Atkinson and colleagues (2007), effective working relationships depend on clear roles and responsibilities, commitment at all levels of the hierarchy, trust and mutual respect (e.g. skills sharing, equal resource distribution), and understanding between agencies (e.g. joint training and recognition of individual expertise). The authors also identified the relevance of effective communication and information sharing, a joint purpose, strategic planning and organisation, what entails ensuring resources, continuity of staffing, and an adequate time allocation.

A review by Barnes and colleagues (2018) also identified the use of a bottom-up approach as a facilitating factor of interagency working. This approach values the input from the local community and the influence of "street level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980/2010), involves an increased participation of non-state actors, and

addresses new forms of public-private partnerships (Stubbs, 2005). Other facilitating factors found in this review were: political support; commitment and shared values about collaborative work between agencies; security of funding; strong leadership and clear governance structure; agreement and commitment at all levels on roles and responsibilities; mutual trust and values (e.g. developed through regular meetings); joint training; attention to data sharing; co-location, which may facilitate communication and a shared vision, but it was not found as essential; positive personal relationships between professionals; and professionals' cultural sensitivity (Barnes et al., 2018).

This brief explanation about interagency working highlights the complexity of the politico-institutional and organizational underpinnings that frames the design of social policies. Facilitating factors and impacts of interagency working can be specific to the context where it occurs. For that reason, the features of the Portuguese context are relevant to frame the present study.

1.2 The Portuguese context

A national study on Roma communities (Mendes, Magano, & Candeias, 2014) identified some heterogeneity in the Portuguese Roma population in terms of lifestyle, social and spatial insertion, and socioeconomically resources. However, the percentage of Roma household members at risk of poverty was 96% in 2011 (FRA, 2018). In 2013, a National Roma Communities Integration Strategy (2013–2020) was set as the first national plan specifically addressed to Roma communities (High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue, 2013). The strategy addressed the need to ensure that all individuals complete compulsory education and have access to further education or professional training.

Data from 2016 (FRA, 2018) showed that the educational attainment of Roma children remained lower compared to non-Roma children in Portugal. The share of children with 4–5 years old participating in early childhood education, and the share of children of compulsory-schooling age participating in education were respectively 42% and 90% in the Roma population, compared to 94% and 99% in the general population. The share of the population aged 18–24 years not involved in further education or training beyond the lower secondary education was 90% in the Roma population, compared to 14% in the general population. The share of Roma children attending segregated education increased from 3% to 11% between 2011 and 2016 (Directorate-General for Statistics of Education and Science, 2017; FRA, 2018).

The report from the European Commission (2019) on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies concluded that the coordination of Roma inclusion policy is not yet consolidated in Portugal. The report refers that this is due to lack of information about the strategic guidelines and commitments undertaken by the ministries among the professionals in the areas of intervention, and deceleration on inclusion processes in some municipalities related to the socioeconomic context and recent economic crisis.

28   In the national study on Roma communities (Mendes et al., 2014), professionals working in the field of social inclusion reported difficulty in meeting all the requests for support, many of which were beyond institutional resources available or involved other sectors, and acknowledged the possibility of replication of services provided across institutions. The professionals also referred the lack of methodologies for approaching Roma communities and promoting their greater participation in community activities, as well as better educational outcomes for children. In this context, partnerships between agencies are relevant to optimize the existing resources.

In Portugal, interagency working on inclusive education and social support has been created as part of a central government strategy to support the delivery of programmes at the local level. The Choices Programme (Programa Escolhas) is a nationwide programme aiming to promote social inclusion of children and young people (with ages between 6 and 30 years old) from more vulnerable contexts, particularly descendants of migrants and from Roma communities. The programme is developed by a public institute (High Commission for Migration) and includes a large number of projects. Interagency working at the local level is a cornerstone of the projects, what gives an innovative value to this social policy. The local partnerships are established in consortia seeking complementarity, resources coordination, and co-responsibility for initiatives, in order to promote the sustainability of actions. Partners from different levels of action and authority may participate in the consortia, namely government institutions, social partners, entrepreneurs, NGOs, education and scientific sector, representatives of the civil society, and others. This organization reinforces partnership practices, both vertically between local, regional, and national levels, and horizontally between local and civil society organizations.

The projects funded by the Choices Programme are subordinated to a set of principles, namely strategic planning, partnerships, participation, intercultural dialogue, mediation, social innovation, and entrepreneurship. The contractual relation between partners defines roles and responsibilities, in terms of financial, human and material resources. Each project identifies areas requiring intervention and local needs, what reinforces the sharing of a strategic vision and compatible targets among partners. All are equal members in a predetermined organizational structure.

In the current national context, more information is needed about the facilitating factors, and impacts of this new policy implementation involving the delegation of competencies between central and local government to support inclusive education. The importance of attending to this need is reinforced by the inexistence of an independent agency responsible for monitoring interagency working aiming to support young children and their families.

1.3 The present study

The goal of the present study was to identify facilitating factors, practices, and impacts of interagency working for inclusive education of Roma children. For this purpose, a case study of a Portuguese project was conducted. The project aimed

to promote inclusive education and academic progress of children in primary school from a Roma community living in a low-income neighbourhood. The project was funded by the Choices Programme, and it was considered a promising case of inter-agency working according to criteria specified next. Perspectives of professionals working in public, private and non-profit organizations were collected, since these sectors are playing an increasingly important role in the implementation of social policies in Portugal. Additionally, multi-actor analysis reflects the philosophy of the Choices Programme.

Identifying facilitating factors, practices, and impacts regarding interagency working can contribute to ensure adequate social responses and services to support the needs of children, young people and their families, as well as of the wider community. Researching impacts of interagency working on children and families is a priority, since the information available is scarce (Barnes et al., 2018).

2 Method

A project aimed at a large Roma community and funded by the Choices Programme was selected for the present case study.

2.1 Participants

In 2017, the project supported 83 children, and 75 parents and other family members. Participants in the focus group and semi-structured interviews of the present study included seven service providers, namely one regional coordinator, one professional of the technical team of Choices Programme, one executive manager, one teacher, one community facilitator and two stakeholders from the private sector. The views of one community facilitator and one activities monitor were also registered through the analysis of dissemination materials of the project.

The project selected was identified as an example of successful interagency working in Portugal (Barnes et al., 2018), based on four criteria. First, the Choices Programme was nationally and internationally recognized as an efficient public policy (e.g. receiving the Juvenile Justice without Borders International Award) and exists for more than 15 years. Second, collaboration was established with a university for evaluation purposes (beyond the internal evaluation within the Choices Programme). Third, the select project was operational for at least two years (it started in 2010), constituting an example of continuity. Fourth, the project used social media regularly to share information with a large audience, and to connect people within and outside the community neighbourhood, providing platforms for civic engagement and action.

2.2 Procedures

The seven participating service providers were invited to a focus group and semi-structured interviews. The questions focused on: perception of the project in terms of interagency working; details of personal experiences of working with other agencies; overall conclusions and recommendations; mission of the project; philosophy of interagency working; articulation between agencies and levels (public, private and third sector); advantages and impacts; facilitating factors, and challenges regarding the interagency work conducted.

Assessment reports (one internal and two external) and dissemination materials (four videos and two articles in magazines) were also analysed in regard to the relevance attributed to leadership, mission, goals and resources of the project. Legislation on the Choices Programme was analysed with a focus on mission, goals, principles, and responsibilities of each partner involved in the consortium.

3 Results

Findings based on the focus group, semi-structured interviews, documents and dissemination materials indicated that all participants, in general, viewed interagency working as positive, contributing to the promotion of social inclusion by developing interventions that took into account the needs of the target users.

> Working with social exclusion phenomena requires integrated and shared actions between the different actors of the society. (…) Work in partnership has been a relevant factor in promoting social inclusion because local actors can identify the needs that local people feel. (Regional coordinator of the Choices Programme)
> We think it is crucial to network and to intervene with other local entities. (Project manager)

Some services worked together towards consistent goals, but maintained their institutional independence, while other services worked together in a planned and systematic way, with agreed shared goals, formal decision rules and a continuum of joint action. The project was an example of multi-partner governance because it was developed together with local government, neighbourhood leaders and voluntary organizations, in order to maximize the community empowerment, feelings of neighbourhood identity and belonging.

3.1 Facilitating factors

Analyses of the focus group, semi-structured interviews, documents and dissemination materials indicated the relevance of the use of a bottom-up approach as a facilitating factor of interagency working. The project recognized the value of considering all perspectives, including from the users of the services, namely chil-

dren, young people and their families, in order to provide more appropriate services, efficiency in delivery, and effective outcomes. Users were asked by the project staff about their views, and participated in the planning and delivery of services to better meet their needs, interests, and expectations.

> Our activities pay close attention to the main interests of our children and youth. We have many activities that were proposed by the residents. I think we are very sensitivity to the local context and Roma culture. (Project manager)

To consolidate a bottom-up approach, the project set up a group of volunteers, and established an informal working relationship with local actors of the private sector seeking to participate in the community life. The bottom-up approach involving numerous actors shaped the final output according to the demands, resources and competencies available at the local community.

Other facilitating factors of interagency working found were shared values and trust between partners involved in the project, and a positive organisational climate, with low conflict and high cooperation. All participants suggested that the organizational climate was the primary predictor of positive service outcomes. Participants referred that agencies and organizations were gaining knowledge about each other, and that there was an increasing need for alliances to address the complex issues of our society. However, in general, informality and adaptability tended to characterize the functioning and overall management, and evaluation model of local partners.

> Everything is quite easy when we know each other and when we can pick up the phone. (Project manager)
> Is quite easy to interact with school because I am going there almost every day. (ICT teacher)

The collaboration with informal partners played an important role because they could participate and invest in activities which brought value to the project goals. For instance, a local corporation financially supported the mission of rewarding 20 children by assigning a gift card based on school attendance and results, adequate behaviour, participation in study activities and in non-formal education activities. When informal partners shared the same values and principles of the project, this cooperation was perceived as good for both sides.

> Our company enjoys a lot to support children. On the other hand, it is gratifying to work with a noble institution with a very important mission. (Corporation member)
> In the scope of social responsibility activities, I consider local corporations contributions a major help to stimulate and create activities for the children we support. (Executive assistant)

The project formal partners developed a relationship based on the principles of good partnership. It was effective because the partners shared a strategic vision,

32   pursued compatible targets, and were all equal members in a predetermined organizational structure.

In terms of barriers regarding interagency working, findings from the focus group and semi-structured interviews indicated financial uncertainty, and potential reorganisation or ending of the national funding Choices Programme. Additionally, identified barriers included local needs at odds with national priorities, diverse agency policies, procedures and systems, professional stereotyping, lack of explicit commitment to interagency working by stakeholders, and reluctance of some important local actors to engage.

3.2 Practices and impacts

The activities delivered in this project focused on academic success and school support throughout the year (for instance, helping children with their homework, and providing lessons on new technologies). Analyses of the focus group, semi-structured interviews and assessment documents indicated improved children's school attendance and academic progress.

The project, installed in the neighbourhood, was able to develop a close relationship with parents, children and families. The systematic school support, with regular activities and focused on empowering personal development, increased parents' interest in their children's academic life. An example is the Wake Up Programme developed by a group of Roma volunteers, who called children in the morning to go to school, going door-to-door, if parents agreed to participate, with the goal of promoting school attendance. Children and families had also access to classes to learn technological skills, music, dance and sports.

> We work in schools with children, and in the relationships between school and the families from the social neighbourhood, in order to identify teachers' and students' problems and difficulties, and do the link with the families. We also work during their free time, with a range of activities just as music, dance and sports classes. (Project manager)
> When residents see local authorities, teachers, "the city" with concerns about safety, issues around children, learning, and health, just as an example, they reinforce their motivations to empower themselves. (Executive assistant)
> We want to open both parties' minds and to help the school and the teachers in their relationships with the families, and to encourage our families to study, giving my own example to their families that is possible for us to study, work and evolve as persons, without ceasing to be who we are. (Community facilitator 1)

The project also promoted parents' empowerment through the provision of support to develop job skills.

> CID@net is open to all the community and we welcome our children's parents for them to develop their abilities in order to get a job. They can also search for job opportunities and improve their technological skills. (Activities monitor)

Another important feature was the proximity between parents and professionals to solve problems or clarify doubts. As the project manager said, "residents request for help to read documents, and present questions related to health, about children's school, social support, among other issues". The professionals involved in the project often played as brokers between the users of the project and other social services. The permanent participation of Roma users from several generations suggested their preference for the project. One important outcome was the increasing number of children attending project activities over time. "I am very proud of been a volunteer, then a community facilitator and now a monitor" (Community facilitator 1).

In accordance with the Choices Programme, a positive approach was used to promote social inclusion, focusing on the problems, but also on the opportunities, and resources of the communities. At the organizational level, the selected case evolved in order to strengthen the relationship with the residents of the neighbourhood and with the local community. For instance, private corporations prevailed in its financial support.

The project aimed to promote the conditions necessary for children and young people to maintain and develop their cultural heritage, using their own resources, together with the promotion of school attendance and academic progress. In the scope of the project, young people participated in the production of videos aiming to reduce stereotypes associated with Roma communities, which were then disseminated on the social media of the project. Young people also conducted sessions presenting Roma history and cultural heritage, and children and young people were involved in artistic events, presenting Romani dances and songs. These activities also had the goal of enhancing the relationships between Roma and non-Roma persons. The project organized youth assemblies to potentiate the active participation of young people in processes of decision-making concerning the planning and implementation of activities. A constant focus of the project was on children's and young people's empowerment.

> I really think that raising their self-esteem is very important, because they sometimes feel ashamed and are not aware of their multiple abilities that go way beyond working in fairs. Going to school is very important. I also run an animation activity during break time whose goal is to improve the relationship between Roma and non-Roma persons. (Community facilitator 2)

4 Discussion

The present case study was focused on a Portuguese project funded by a national public policy aiming to promote school integration of Roma children in a low-income neighbourhood. The project built on the theory drawn from the interagency working as a valuable instrument to overcome weaknesses of the national policy to support Roma children and families. Local government, neighbourhood leaders, volunteers,

34 private and public organizations were brought together. The results of the study supported that interagency working with multi-actors can constitute a strategic plan to support Roma children and families by promoting inclusive education. As reported in the national study on Roma communities (Mendes et al., 2014), multi-disciplinary teams were perceived as essential to work on the promotion of social inclusion.

Findings pointed out the advantages of a bottom-up approach in guaranteeing adequate social responses and services to the needs of children, young people and their families. Despite the advantages associated with this bottom-up approach, some concerns arise when the government transfers to the private sector some roles or services that usually were central State-directed (Donahue, 2006; Verma, 2016). That is why there are benefits to discuss the Portuguese example, considering that it tried to bridge the gap between top-down and bottom-up approaches by incorporating the insights of both perspectives. In this context, political support has been a critical facilitator to provide services with adequate conditions and funding.

Local government agencies have historically functioned as institutions using vertical lines of communication, top-down decision making, differentiation of tasks, hierarchical supervision, and formal rules and regulation. As such, it is common for professionals and administrators to be predisposed to a "chain of command" rather than a shared way of thinking and doing. Professionals and organizations often are highly motivated to form partnerships, but flounder because of the structure, confusion about roles, or expectations for outcomes.

The shifting configuration of actors at the local level gaining significant power can contribute to ensure the exercise of democracy and citizenship. In this scenario, the participation of Roma in the design of initiatives that aim to support them can contribute to their empowering, use of own resources, and to successful policies implementation (European Commission, 2018; FRA, 2018). Area-based partnerships provide a mechanism for local organizations to work together and adapt their policies to better reflect the needs of people at the local level (OECD, 2015).

The organisational climate and the establishing of informal working relationships were also found in the present study as important facilitating factors when developing interagency working. In the national study on Roma communities (Mendes et al., 2014), factors such as adequate professional training, support or patronage to guarantee a certain continuity of time, and monitoring of the projects were also identified. However, according to the European Commission (2019) report on Roma integration strategies, in Portugal the number of measures with funding allocated was below the average of the Member States. According to the same report, one of the key recommendations for the country is that ministries should focus on the training and qualification of their professionals and other key players in fighting discrimination in partnership with civil society organizations (Roma associations and other associations working directly in this field). Another recommendation is the need for municipalities to assume a key role by engaging in local needs assessment, planning and implementation.

Concerning the practices implemented in the scope of the project under study, these had a strong focus on promoting positive attitudes in regard to school, supporting children to develop study and learning practices, providing extra-curricular activities, and reinforcing school-families partnerships. Community facilitators had also an important role to establish links between Roma and non-Roma communities, and, more particularly, between children, families, and schools. According to the national study on Roma communities, organizations and services should also work with the non-Roma community to integrate the Roma and non-Roma persons in different activities and projects (Mendes et al., 2014).

Findings suggested that the project had positive impacts on the Roma families and community. The community was very collaborative with the project in order to motivate their children to academic achievement, learning of technological skills and occupation of leisure times with music, dance and sports. Children's school attendance and academic performance were also reported as higher.

The follow-up strategies to support Roma children and their families in the community reduced school dropout to zero and improved school performance. Parental understanding about the benefits of school attendance, preparing their children for the unpredictability of the future, and above all securing job opportunities and future skills requirements, contributed to this achievement. According to the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (Council of Europe, 2018), 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that do not yet exist. In Portugal, the Roma community is also tackling economic restraints due to the consumerism profile of the modern societies that undermined the traditional economic activities. Parents are facing the idea that ignoring the school compulsory education is to compromise their children's future.

Various practices implemented in the project followed the recommendations to improve Roma persons' life provided by the national study on Roma communities (Mendes et al., 2014). The project aimed to develop a more systematic and structured networking with Roma children and families, and a broader and more effective dissemination of their references and cultural repertoire to institutions and the population in general. The project sought to combat stereotypes found in Portugal, such as disinterest by Roma communities in regard to education. According to the same national study, organizations and services should decentralize interventions to involve other populations, as well as the wider geographical environment, and not overly focus on Roma and residential spaces that promote Roma isolation (Mendes et al., 2014).

Local governance is crucial for the effective implementation of strategic action plans to improve the enrolment of Roma children in compulsory schooling. At the local level co-operation is needed between key stakeholders: schools and Roma school mediators, the local authorities responsible for education, multi-disciplinary teams and families.

The partnerships between services working for and with children and families, due to their multi-actor and multi-form structures, were observed in many cases to

36 lead to indeterminate outcomes (Verma, 2016). However, the evidence collected in this case study can contribute to reinforce information to policymakers and professionals about the best strategies to ensure inclusive education.

Acknowledgements

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Communication as a Means of Development in a School with a High Percentage of Foreign Pupils[1]

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Abstract: The text presented is a case study of one specific school in the Czech Republic, where many pupils with migrant backgrounds are concentrated. On the theoretical level, the study is based on experiential epistemology, which emphasizes interactions over the states and essences of actors or environments. This approach enables researchers to put the Bronfenbrenner's model of the ecological system in a broader context of Chicago School (interactions) and Palo Alto School (communication). Bronfenbrenner's concept of the mesosystem (in our case of the school) draw attention to the importance of communication and to specify three significant themes. The themes detect conditions that support and deepen the self/development of all actors involved (pupils, teachers, management, parents, etc.). In the methodological part, the themes have used as the frame for the frame analysis. In this way, the data collected in the school by observations, field notes, interviews are analysed. Although there are not many such schools like the one the authors research, they play an essential role in the integration of migrants into Czech society. That is the reason why the authors can discuss the outcomes of the study in a broader context and offer specific recommendations for state policies on the migrants' inclusion.

Keywords: experientialist epistemology, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, mesosystem, communication, education, inclusion policy, migrants

In this paper we present the results of a case study undertaken at one government funded school for students aged 6–15 in the Czech Republic. This study focuses primarily on the first five years of education (age 6–11). Due to the school's history and location it has a high concentration (over 60%) of students from different socio-cultural backgrounds and with different mother tongues.[2] This specificity influences the internal mechanisms and functions that affect the educational processes. Due to the breadth of the data collected it is not possible to present all the findings in one paper, therefore we decided to focus primarily on communication and on the mechanisms and functions that facilitate communication within the school.

 We derived the importance of communication from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. The essence of the environmental approach is an emphasis on interactions between actors within peculiar environment strata (micro/meso/

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[2] In this paper, we are using the term foreigners or foreign pupils for migrants, immigrants, incomers, etc. By the term learner with a different first language, we mean all school-age learners whose mother tongue is not Czech. In the context of the school, this concerns mainly learners with foreign citizenship or learners with at least one parent who is a foreign national.

40   macro-levels). By communication we do not just mean the exchange of information through language. We perceive communication in a broad sense, as an exchange of information as well as materials leading to a structuring or restructuring of the milieu in which actors live. Before we describe the theoretical background, it is important to understand the specific context of the school in terms of Czechia and the city where the school is located.

1 The context

The Czech Republic is seeing a steady increase in the number of foreign residents. In 1980s, the number of foreigners in Czechoslovakia was constant and showed a negative net migration rate. In 1990, just after the fall of Communism, the total percentage of foreigners in the country was a mere 0.3%. Following the opening up of the Czech economy and entry to the EU in 2004, by 2015 the percentage had risen to 4.3%, which is the same percentage recorded in countries such the Netherlands and Portugal. More recently figures have risen even more sharply. As of December 2018, there were a total of 566,931 foreigners in the Czech Republic, which is 7% more than at the end of 2017.[3] Foreigners now make up approximately 5% of the total population of the Czech Republic.

The right to education is one of the fundamental human rights that belong to all children regardless of difference. Providing compulsory schooling for children with a migration background[4] is part of Czech legislation and is in accordance with international agreements to which the Czech Republic is a signatory. This means that migrant children are entitled to the same basic education as Czech children because education is mandatory for everyone. However, the Czech education system leaves much to be desired when it comes to catering to the educational needs of foreign pupils and many features are lacking when compared to systems from abroad (Hamilton & Moore, 2004, pp. 2–7). For example, there is no official language support to help with interpretation for parents, there are a lack of the teaching assistants and intercultural workers and there are minimal additional language courses available.

Due to structural conditions and historical circumstances, children of foreigners are concentrated in a few schools throughout the Czech Republic, usually in large cities. These schools are independent of each other and therefore each of them creates an entirely original mesosystem with different approaches to communication.

The city is located in one of the most important migrant destinations in the country. In 2018 it recorded 32,000 foreigners living there, most of whom were from countries outside of the EU. The largest groups of migrants were from Ukraine, Slovakia, Vietnam and Russia and this distribution corresponds with statistics at

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[3]   Czech Statistical Office (2019). Data – number of foreigners. Available from: https://www.czso .cz/csu/cizinci/4-ciz_pocet_cizincu#cr

[4]   In the frame of the Czech law, most of these children are long term or permanent residents; they are not considered citizens of the Czech Republic.

a national level. Foreigners are motivated to migrate to the Czech Republic mainly by the job market and an open tertiary education system, which is not only of high quality but also affordable.

The school that we focused on is located in a city where 1,034 foreign pupils were enrolled in schools (age range 6–15) in 2017/18, which amounts to approximately 3% of all primary school pupils aged 6–11. The majority of foreign pupils (65%) attending schools in the city are within the 6–11 range.

In 2018 the school had 214 pupils from foreign countries, which amounted to 67% of the total number of students. This situation is the product of several factors that culminated in close cooperation of the school mesosystem with other systems that directly influence the schooling of learners from foreign countries. In 2005 the number of children living in the school's locality or 'catchment area' began to decrease and the school was in danger of being closed down. Following negotiations with the Mayor of the city and the Education Department of the Regional Authority (which coordinates the schooling of children of foreign nationals), the principal was able to secure a grant from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (henceforth the Ministry) to support the teaching of Czech to citizens of third countries. The school therefore began teaching children of foreigners regardless of the location of their home or whether they were in the school's 'catchment area'. Schools from other parts of the city then responded to the school accepting foreign pupils from outside of its 'catchment area'. "[T]hey have facilities for you at XY, courses, you should go there. They are recommending us, so that's OK." The school has been cooperating with the Regional Authority on teaching Czech to learners from third countries.[5] It also collaborates with the Education Department of the City Hall and non-profit organisations. Cooperation with these institutions does not only revolve around learners with a different first language, but focuses on teaching all learners with specific learning needs, or on the implementation of cross-cutting themes of the school educational programme.

2 Theoretical framework: Bronfenbrenner's human ecology theory and communication

We are using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as the base for our theoretical framework. At the heart of this approach is the effort to find a research model that would allow a shifting of the focus from the actors (persons, institutions) to the interactions between them and especially to the quality of their transformation (their development). Ontologically speaking, this shift represents a broader paradigmatic shift from essentialism or objective realism to processualism or experientialist realism (Lakoff, 1987; Johnson, 2007). Experientialist realism enables us

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[5] We consider a third-country citizen to be a person who is not a citizen of the Czech Republic, nor any other EU member state, nor is the family member of a citizen of the Czech Republic or an EU member state.

42 to concentrate on the relations and transactions amongst actors and between actors and their environment without the prejudices of objectivism. Objectivism favours states and essences and examines them as though these states and essences have not undergone constant change and reconstruction. On the contrary, experientialism assumes that everything is in continuous evolution and that states and essences are only temporary platforms that shape the time-limited situations in which the actors find themselves and act (Dewey, 1939; Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Johnson 2007).

This paradigmatic change is beneficial for us for two reasons: Firstly, it is more suited in the nature of social science research, and secondly, it allows us to perceive communication as being central to interactions. Communication intensifies the interactions and possible changes and adaptations. In the concept of communication, we are inspired by the tradition of the Chicago School (Mead, Dewey, and their contemporary followers, e.g. M. Johnson and G. Lakoff). This tradition sees all interactions as events that gain meaning in communication through an exchange of symbols. Communication is primarily a social issue. In Dewey's words it is, contrary to animal actions, not "ego-centric" but "participative", allowing actions to be governed by the exchange of tokens. Symbols define events and enable the sharing of their meanings. Thanks to the control of actions by communication, we can change both the subsequent steps of the actors and their environment (Dewey, 1958, pp. 166–207). Therefore, communication "is a means of establishing cooperation, domination and order" (ibid., s. 202). Restoration of order creates dynamic homeostasis that enables actors to act deliberately and negotiate common goals and then achieve them.

If we wish to divert our research from examining the states and essences of the actors, institutions and environment, and instead emphasize the interactions, processes, and changes that affect the quality of development, we must seek new methodological tools. Bronfenbrenner's approach is one of the ways we can implement the introduced ontological base into a specific type of human sciences research. Although Bronfenbrenner does not directly refer to the ideas of the Chicago school, there are occasional references to Dewey's thoughts on education (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 23; Hayes, O'Toole, & Halpenny, 2017, p. 152). Nonetheless, his approach is in accord with the main ideas of the School. In the thoughts of the School, as well as in the Bronfenbrenner approach, interactions are a crucial concept. For example, *primary dyads* (the most straightforward interactions between two actors) and *molar activities* (conduct which is of such a nature that any development takes place during it – cf. ibid., pp. 45–48, 58–60), in the ecological approach, are the base of all other operations leading to development. The base is created neither by actors as such nor by settings, but by interactions. Interactions intensify communication amongst actors and re/construct roles they are required to play. Communication and roles influence their personalities. The quality of these factors enables or slows down their development. The quality of the interactions therefore strongly influences the possibilities in which the actors may develop. This is the reason why Bronfenbrenner concentrates primarily on interactions and not on essences, truths or fixed qualities.

Systems of overlapping interactions are the basis of social platforms – the so-called settings. Settings are constructed via the activity of participants and depending on their location, they can constitute microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 22–27). Every activity, actor, or relationship is therefore nested in many levels. A pupil can be a member of microsystems – family, close friends, school clubs, etc, as well as mesosystems – school, peer groups, or the cultural communities from which the pupil's family comes. However the pupil is also indirectly affected by exosystems, e.g. a system of experts engaged in a dialogue in favour of or against inclusion, and even by the macrosystems of the educational, cultural and social policies of the host country or international legislation that pertains to the status of foreigners. The pupil's development is determined by the configuration of relationships at all levels.

The notion of meso-level is key to our study, as it best describes school as a specific organisation where most of the pupils' education takes place. Moreover, it has significance in more general terms, since the meso-level is where the greatest shifts in each participant's developmental potential occur. Bronfenbrenner primarily relates human development to a mesosystem (ibid., pp. 209–236). A mesosystem emerges where the molar activities of individuals and whole groups cross their boundaries into multisetting participation. This creates a new situation – a meso-level setting, which hosts participants who are also active in various micro-level settings. This new setting requires coordination of the original and the new roles, with communication between settings and a new quality of experience. The individual crosses the boundaries of microsystems and is forced to assume roles in a more complex arena. They must adjust to more indirect linkage. Indirect linkage means that new actors bring the horizons of their microsystems into other participants' field of operation and indirectly expose them to the demands of unfamiliar settings. Each pupil therefore brings into the classroom (microsystem) and school (mesosystem) the values, attitudes and habits that they acquired in the family, in various clubs, during telephone calls with grandparents, etc. And in this way, values, attitudes and habits are brought into the system of the school by teachers and other actors. This developmental niche is described in detail by Harkness and Super (2002, pp. 272–273). Intersetting communication becomes denser and creates a new, specific type of knowledge – intersetting knowledge (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 209–211).

A child's transition (Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2012, pp. 59–60) from the original microsystem into the mesosystem progresses from primary socialisation towards secondary socialisation. This transition has a critical potential, in that there are two kinds of complications. The mesosystem is affected by microsystems, as actors who shape the mesosystem carry on to a higher level the habits and expectations that they acquired at a lower level. Within education, the values, attitudes and habits of families, social groups, peer groups and other microsystems enter the school environment and the school must respond to them constantly. However, the claims of the microsystems they place on their members can be questioned. Some determining values, attitudes and habits, which are crucial for the given microsystems,

44 may conflict with the values, attitudes and habits of a mesosystem (e.g. the school). This complex situation places great demands on both the individual actors and the settings at all levels (micro/meso/macro-levels), making communication that much more important. The ecological principle operates on the basis of perpetual fine-tuning, or achieving a dynamic (homeostatic) equilibrium (Damasio, 2018).

The increase in the complexity of mesosystem situations in turn multiplies and complicates interactions and raises the difficulty of coping with any given situation. The mesosystem exposes individuals to unprecedented diversity and intensifies the requirements for understanding and managing diversity. This makes the mesosystem crucial for human development. Bronfenbrenner defines human development as follows:

> The process through which the growing person acquires a more extended differentiated, and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27)

This development has two-fold manifestations – in the perception of the situation and of the acting within it. A developing individual is able to perceive contexts that go beyond the boundaries of a certain situations and following a successful understanding of the situation, can act at various levels (micro, meso, and macro) with a greater complexity and success (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 28). For "situation" as a crucial term for the experientialist epistemology, compare Švec, Nehyba, Svojanovský et al. (2017, pp. 47–52).

Bronfenbrenner (1979, pp. 211–242) developed 17 hypotheses which determine the ideal conditions for an individual's development at the meso-level. He indicates that these hypotheses are derived from previously conducted investigations, based on which prescriptive definitions of processes were formulated. They are therefore definitions or hypotheses of sorts, which stipulate the conditions under which the development of each actor participating in the mesosystem progresses the best. This way of constructing an ideal model prompts researchers to employ abductive reasoning during their research. Besides other things, abduction means that researchers do not use the ideal model as a fixed measure of the right or wrong configuration of the real processes within a mesosystem. When they discover that some of the properties of the ideal model need to be modified, they will modify them.

We had to do such modification when moving from an idea of *an operational language* as a key term for this paper to an idea of *a field of mutual understanding*. By operating language, we meant a language in which we achieve, exclusively or at least dominantly, mutual understanding, and in which teaching takes place. We continue to work with this definition. However, we found that there are several operating languages in our ethnically, religiously, and nationally diverse school – Czech, English, Ukrainian and Russian. These languages are switched according to situation. For instance, a teacher tries to teach in Czech, but if a learner fails

to grasp a key piece of instruction even after several repetitions, she will briefly switch to English and then return back to Czech. Most of the time, the teachers use Czech to speak with the children, but when communicating with parents, they need to find another common language. The presence of several operating languages poses the question of how one can reach understanding while switching from one language to another or how it is possible to translate one language to another when few actors know both or more languages. This is why we needed to define a broader environment that would allow us to explain how to switch from one language to another while creating a common understanding. In this situation, we, as researchers, realized that we had to look for a common denominator, which, in addition to the operating languages, has other elements that allow translations from one language to another. Thus gradually, the idea of *the field of mutual understanding* began to emerge. Finally, we realized that this concept is more consistent with situational ontology and the epistemology of experientialist realism. (For more on this concept, see the following paragraphs.)

We chose those Bronfenbrenner's hypotheses which are relevant to the circumstances of educating learners with a different cultural and language background.

The developmental potential of settings in a mesosystem is enhanced when *the demands placed on roles within the different settings are compatible and when the roles, activities*, and dyads in which the developing person engages encourage the *development of mutual trust, a positive orientation, goal consensus between settings*, and an evolving balance of power in favour of the developing person. When there are *structurally different settings in which the developing person participates in a variety of joint activities and primary dyads with others*, particularly when the others are more mature or experienced. When *the settings occur in cultural or subcultural contexts* that are different from each other in terms of ethnicity, social class, religion, age group, or other background factors. When *the system supports trans-contextual dyads*[6] that cross the boundaries of various settings. When *there are so-called supportive links between one setting and others*.[7] When *there are indirect links between settings* that support the same goals as the supportive links. When *two-way communication between settings occurs with ease*, during which the inclusion of the family in the communications network is key. When, prior to entering a setting, the actors receive relevant information, when *this information is continuously accessible in other settings*, when this information is as personal as possible (face-to-face conversation, personal letter, telephone call, announcement).

We included one more element or hypothesis into this description of the meso-level, one which Bronfenbrenner's hypotheses, though implied, do not mention explicitly. From a certain level of interaction, the participants of individual

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[6] Bronfenbrenner's trans-contextual dyad is a system of interaction between at least two actors acting within one setting that enters into a new setting; e.g. friends who start school together, friends who emigrate together and apply for asylum together, etc.

[7] A supportive link is such a link between settings that ensures that the same activities, their goal and focus, are supported within all the settings involved (cf. Ibid., p. 214).

46   scenes cannot do without long-distance communication,[8] and interactions that are coordinated and carried out in a *field of mutual understanding*. The results of our research show us how important it is to define a language/s in which all actors share a common understanding and can act meaningfully, intentionally, and in accord with other actors. Following the Chicago School tradition mentioned above and the Palo Alto School, we understand such a language/s more comprehensively as a complex field in which mutual understanding takes place. We are inspired by the work of Watzlawick and his colleagues. Moving the focus of our interest from the family as a field of understanding (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1962, pp. 134–147) to the school as a more complex field, we enter an environment where understanding is more challenging to achieve. This field evaluates both the verbal and non-verbal components of the different languages and the characteristics of the environment in which interactions occur – such as properties of physical objects, negotiated standards, spoken or unspoken rules etc. The higher the number of different mother tongues or operating languages in a given milieu (in this case, our school), the more important environmental characteristics become.

In an ideal scenario, there would be an operating language that is understandable to all participants of the scene as well as scenes directly or indirectly linked with the central scene (in our case, the meso-level of a school). However, these circumstances cannot be met, even in a linguistically and culturally homogeneous class. There are so many differences amongst habits, ways of acting, expectations or values, which the actors bring from their microsystems (in our case, e.g. from their families or neighborhoods) and these factors affect the quality of the operating language, splitting it into several different forms, which need to be translated to be mutually intelligible. Therefore, one operating language is not a sufficient condition for the interactions to be of adequate quality and to lead to the successful development of all actors in the mesosystem. In such cases, it is necessary to create an environment in which all actors can translate and then understand different expectations and conduct. Those features of the environment that are not strictly tied to language and cultural heritage are essential in seeking translation and understanding. The material characteristics of the environment, the standards that the school presents and further negotiates, the principles and rules, the consequences of our actions, etc., become such a means of understanding. In the case of a multilingual and multicultural school or class, building such an environment is even more critical. In such classes, there may be a situation where there are more than one operating languages. For example, the teacher speaks to some of the pupils in Czech and to some in English and to some of the parents in another language). This type of situation can deepen cultural differences even more and therefore the existence of these elements in the environment, rules and norms is becoming crucial.

The availability of one operating language in the school is highly unlikely. This is why our research recognizes the key role of strategies that allow the school to re-

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8   For more on the significance of long-distance communication in modern societies, see (Noiriel, 2012).

spond to the need to communicate in cases where virtually no shared communication language is available. Strategies which enable several communication languages to overlap and facilitate information transfer. It is this respect for the role of a field of mutual understanding that we identify the following three research themes:

Theme 1 – Continuous communication as the central value of the school

Theme 2 – Communication as interactions amongst microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem

Theme 3 – The field of mutual understanding in relation to operating languages

3 Methodological framework

We decided to use a case study approach as the research strategy since the school we focused on has specific features which can help us understand the processes of inclusion of children with a migration background to the Czech education system (e.g. Yin, 2012, pp. 141–155). Based on Bronfenbrennner's approach, we can more easily demonstrate how the dynamics of interactions between microsystems and the mesosystem is going on. The obtained data was analysed using framework analysis. The use of framework analysis was based on the fact as researchers we are able to gather and sort in a meaningful way the collected data and subsequently articulate and map the phenomenon under investigation (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009, pp. 75–76).

3.1 The frame for analysis

In the following paragraphs, we define the three themes that characterize the phenomenon. These themes were derived from the Bronfenbrenner's 17 hypotheses (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 211–242) and our concepts of the operating language and the field of mutual understanding which complement Bronfenbrenner. Focusing on the themes helps us to structure the phenomenon and focus on the data that articulates the phenomenon.

Theme 1 – continuous communication as the central value of the school. The central value of an ideal school is continuous communication. Communication focuses mainly on the sharing of information, articulating of personal, group, and institutional needs and goals, negotiating common goals, and negotiating joint activities to achieve those goals. This theme is articulated by questions such as: What value does the school ascribe to communication? What communication strategies can the school use to learn about the goals and needs of individuals and microsystems? What communication strategies does the school use and negotiate to articulate these goals and needs?

Theme 2 – Communication as interactions amongst microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem. Communication enables actors to achieve what Bronfenbrenner called *multisetting participation*. This means the ability to emerge from micro-

48 systems to mesosystems and work in both without collisions. This ability is met by coordinating micro-level interests with meso-level interests. The majority of communication on the meso-level takes place over distance (via documents, rules, norms, email or postal correspondence) and quality of this remote communication facilitates indirect linkage with other parts of the system (microsystems, exosystems, macrosystem). Questions relevant to the restructuring of the second theme are, for example: In what ways does the school coordinate and balance the interests of microsystems and macrosystems? How does the school establish communication between microsystem settings? Are these techniques conducive to the participation of all individuals in joint activities in different settings? Are there any limitations in the microsystems that prevent pupils from joining in activities in different settings and what is the school doing to reduce these limitations?

Theme 3 – the field of mutual understanding in relation to operating languages. A crucial condition for the smooth flow of communication is the blending of different operating languages, which bond together all the settings that make up the mesosystem (directly or indirectly) and which make it easier for an individual to be engaged in the mesosystem's functioning. In order to make flexible use of operating languages, it is necessary to use other elements that are part of this field of understanding – the properties of physical objects, negotiated standards, spoken or unspoken rules etc. This theme is articulated by questions such as: What are the operating languages that are important for communication in the mesosystem? Are these languages available and usable in all settings at the micro-level and other meso-levels linked with the school? What strategies can the school use to remove barriers that prevent communication in all the given settings? How does it convey the requirements of the macrosystem to those actors who cannot access this information in the operating language?

3.2 Methods of collecting data

Our dataset consisted of notes taken during observations of 25 lessons in the autumn of 2018. We also conducted several interviews with the school principal, school counsellor and teachers of both primary and lower secondary level teachers (the 6–11 and 11–15 age groups). Lastly, we obtained a sample of information from focus groups with teachers across all years. The school psychologist was also present. In total, we obtained 320 minutes of sound recordings, whose detailed transcription underwent frame analysis, during which we were constantly reflecting upon each frame theme.

4 Results

We present the results in the order of three previously defined themes.

4.1 Continuous communication as the central value of the school

The first area concerns general communication strategies that the institution employs internally as well as outwardly.

Communication becomes important even before a pupil enters the school. When *a new pupil is being integrated into the education process*, the school follows a proven procedure. The school management (mostly the principal or their deputy) take the necessary administrative steps, learning as much as they can about the child's learning history and based on his or her language competence, and enrolls the pupil in the year corresponding to his or her age, or one year lower (with consent of the child's legal representative). Research from abroad (see Appa, 2005; Cassity & Gow, 2005, pp. 51–55) highlights the importance of accessing information about the child prior to his or her enrolment in a new school if better and more sensitive care is to be provided. The school investigated employed a special *communication assistant* to help the new learners and their parents adjust to the new school. The communication assistant had a high language proficiency and helped foreign parents register their child into the school and with other educational administration where the Czech language is necessary. The communication assistant is at hand mainly to the principal, helping with emails and written correspondence with parents, as the principal is not language qualified. It is interesting how the role of the communication assistant has transformed since it was introduced to the school in 2014. Originally the communication assistant was hired to help cope with an increased administrative load. The role changed when the number of foreign pupils began to increase and typically, their number does not increase only at the beginning of the school year, but also throughout the whole year. Other teachers usually do not use the communication assistant's linguistic abilities because they are not always available. "She's too far for us on the second floor, so we usually discuss translations with the psychologist or the English teachers."

As the school has a significant culturally diverse student base it appears to make an effort to foster *maximum respect for cultural differences*. For many children with different mother tongues, the primary goal is to learn the language, but experts also point out that it is essential to pay attention to other needs, including knowledge of one's own cultural identity (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007, pp. 283–300). When we encounter a different culture, we can attribute different meanings to some behaviours. Intercultural sensitivity is of great importance when communicating with one another, which places demands on the reflection of possible misunderstandings arising from otherness and efforts to prevent them. The teachers are used to certain specifics that originate from certain religious traditions and as long as other participants of the educational process are not inconvenienced by this, they facilitate these differences (pursuant to agreement with the management). For instance, if a religious practice disallows some children from drawing or singing, the teachers assign them alternative activities. The teachers are mindful of national, ethnic and religious dif-

50   ferences during normal teaching as well. In this context, we can suggest that there is a high level of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2013) within the teaching workforce which is necessary for further communication in the classroom and avoidance of the misunderstanding. We heard pupils from different countries sing their respective folk songs during a lesson on local folklore. The children talk freely about the features of their original countries and culture. The school holds an annual running contest in which pupils of different nationalities race each other around the school. Otherness is perceived as a natural fact as a teacher says: "It's so varied here; we have a Roma, an African, an American, Argentinian, Indian, etc. Nobody cares if there is a Roma kid sitting here or not. No one's bothered." It may seem that reinforcing an individual's own ethnic or religious identity might clash with the main goal of the school – for example to emancipate the individual and empower him or her toward responsible behaviour. However, in this context the idea of identity has two facets. This approach is in keeping with contemporary social and developmental theories (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Feuerstein, Feuerstein, & Falik, 2010). *Recognising and accepting one's own identity* is a prerequisite for constructing a positive and anxiety-free relationship towards the identities of others, which applies to intimate partner relationships and identities of broader groups alike. In the broadest terms for the whole of society human, universal rights for all are what matters most, and one pathway towards gaining this might be having a good knowledge of one's own identity. This makes it possible for each of us to properly understand what makes us different and what may provoke criticism from others and make them see us as less equal. "The greatest good [gained from knowing one's identity] is not the development and respect for a special group culture, but non-discrimination, equal rights, truly equal opportunities" (Barša, 2011, p. 104).

The contact between teachers and parents is intensive, but also governed by certain rules. At the primary level (age 6 to 11) teachers encounter parents on an informal basis almost daily when the children arrive to or leave the classroom and have an opportunity to discuss needs individually. When necessary, pupils take home written messages for parents in their journals or notebooks in an appropriate language. Parents are invited to parent/teacher meetings and in some cases to private consultations, but always by invitation or appointment. An interviewee's experience suggests, and the international research supports (Epstein, 2018, pp. 397–406), that *the children of parents who communicate with the school regularly and actively, tend to perform better*. "Some parents are proactive, they want to know, and then you can see that they really work on it with the child. They want to know if there is a problem, what sort of problem it is, and then try to remedy it." We consider this observation to be crucial because it is helpful for teachers as well. The knowledge that frequent communication with parents has a direct benefit for the child helps them overcome awkward moments of misunderstanding that occasionally arise with some parents.

However, during observations at the school we were informed that any unannounced visit from parents presents a security problem as in common in all Czech

schools. Families immigrating to the Czech Republic from a different country often have a radically different experience with schooling, as illustrated by an interviewed teacher "it can be difficult talking to some children or parents; some have a completely different idea of some things, like coming to school prepared. (...) The parents must trust the teacher." The school needs to step forward and involve the parents in the functioning of the school. Teachers and the management have several means available (consultations, extracurricular events, parent/teacher meetings etc.) and given the local cultural customs, this should not present any cultural barrier. Hek (2005, pp. 157–171) states that if parents feel welcome in the school, it will positively affect the learners and improve their performance as well.

The school also holds *community events for pupils and their parents* several times a year outside of the regular teaching day. However, these events do not always fulfil their purpose, i.e. to bring all parents together. Sometimes only one of the ethnic groups from the school attends the events, or parents form groups according to their native language during the event. "Czech parents often just drop off their children and leave." For instance, at the last event held by the school (Halloween), Indian parents formed their own temporary community and communicated only among themselves.

4.2 Communication as interactions amongst microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem

The second theme observes the means of communication both within the school and outside it and describes the trans-mesosystemic links that affect the school. These include relations with institutions or specific means of communication between mesosystems in the school (e.g. teachers, parents, class, language communities, etc.).

The teachers *do not want the public to see their school as a school for foreigners*. They believe such "pigeonholing" would provoke undesirable public opinion and Czech parents would stop registering their children in the school, preventing the learners with a different first language from hearing natively-spoken Czech, which the teachers stated that they rely on the Czech children for. "We want to be a school for Czechs that can teach foreigners as well." The teachers and the school counsellor claim that "an easy to manage" number of learners with a different first language is 25–30%. However, the principal stated: "I'd like to stick to fifty percent, but it's true that two thirds are coming here from different parts of the city." It appears that principals of other schools in the city, as well as other non-Czech parents, want to send their existing pupils or children to the school due to the school's reputation. They are asking for children to be enrolled even if language isn't a barrier and instead it might be children who are merely encountering initial study problems, which tend to stem from behavioural issues, adjusting to the new environment and problems with the learning process. The school's principal has to accept these applicants, as if there is capacity in the school, they cannot legally turn them down.

Teaching at this school is without a doubt very difficult. However, *teachers can rely on the support of their colleagues.* "Luckily, at least we who teach grades one to five (I can't speak for the rest, I don't know all the details), have a great team here, so we can always get help or advice." *The school management works hard to build good relationships with and within the staff*, which also affects the hiring of new employees, who have to fit in well with the others. Their financial motivation can also be increased by means of the many projects the school is involved in. However, this also means that the teachers have to cope with a larger administrative load. The principal gives all of the teachers enough freedom and has confidence in their teaching skills. They do not stand in the way of their using alternative methods (e.g. techniques of the Dalton plan), every teacher chooses the classroom layout for their lessons, they have no trouble obtaining funds for additional training, etc. Their job satisfaction and contentment can also be seen in the fact that *virtually none of them resign their position, with* teachers only leaving the school when they retire or start maternity leave. Staff fluctuations are generally very low there.

The teaching is made easier when the children of foreigners attend Czech preschool. In 2018 the school also organised a preliminary class, in which there were 6 learners with a different first language out of a total of 15. *Primary-level teachers mentioned the benefit of preschool or the preliminary year on several occasions,* however, most children arrive throughout the year from a primary school in a different country.

Another mesosystem that interacts with the school consists of *secondary schools and the system of admissions.* The teachers and the school psychologist have a tendency to recommend less difficult fields and caution the pupils against studying at gymnasiums (academic-oriented secondary schools), which they defend by referring to language barriers in academic terminology (this will be discussed in more detail in the third theme).

The school's mesosystem contains a number of interlinked microsystems, which make up a fluid whole. We can illustrate this fluidity using the example of a newly arriving pupil and their integration in the class. We understand integration in terms of Berry's (2006, pp. 27–42) adaptation strategies; i.e. as an ideal way of fitting into the host society, in which the minority retains its original identity while simultaneously adopting the identity of the host culture. According to Montgomery (1996, pp. 679–702), the psychological and social adaptation of children with a different first language is influenced by the age of the child, size of the town where the family has settled, any traumas the child may have suffered and their level of education. According to an interviewed teacher when a new pupil arrives, the mutual adjustment between them and the rest of the class, combined with the family environment, is critical. Knowledge of the curriculum comes last. *The socialisation of the newly arrived child is therefore superior to all other learning goals.* "If there's anyone with the same native language, they can surely be a kind of guide at the beginning ..." The positive influence of peer mentoring programmes[9] and the preparation of the class

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[9]   Which means the support of the experienced classmate in the beginning of the school attendance.

team for the arrival of a new classmate is also evidenced by other authors (MacCullum, 2009, pp. 3–4). Taking into account the individuality of each child, integration into the school team must take place in the context of all the specifics of the child, family and school. Only after all circumstances have been taken into account can we speak of achieving a homeostatic balance.

4.3 The field of mutual understanding in relation to operating languages

In this ethnically, religiously and nationally diverse school we noticed several *operating languages* used for communication – Czech, English, Ukrainian and Russian. These languages are switched according to situation. For instance, a teacher tries to teach in Czech, but if a learner fails to grasp a key piece of instruction even after several repetitions, she will briefly switch to English and then returns back to Czech. Most of the time, the teachers use Czech to speak with the children, but when communicating with parents, they need to find another common language. Not only does it emerge where the other languages overlap, but it also puts greater emphasis on the non-verbal aspect and the aspect of codified rules and behaviours that ensue. It has also been shown that in the case of transition from one operating language to another, other environmental features that facilitate understanding become more critical.

We observed especially that younger children can easily establish social contact in spite of the lack of a common verbal language. Their openness and spontaneity is much more effective. One of teachers put it: "They're friends, even when they can't understand each other yet, they're just friends. You'd have to see it. They play games like normal during the break, like 'pairs' and such." We noticed that the more experienced teachers speak in a very calm and slow voice, annunciating clearly and trying to be a good speech model for their learners. They also explain the meaning of many words, concrete or abstract, repeating them several times in several ways to improve the chances of understanding as much as possible. One of the teachers commented on the importance of rules: "Most important is probably to always try to find common language. And I don't mean language for talking. If you want the children to be in a calm space, there must be rules, dignity, discipline … And then, when there's a pleasant positive atmosphere, where the children follow the rules, you can start teaching … The parents must have trust that the teachers know what they are doing …" Basic agreement on rules to observe can prevent many conflicts caused by misunderstandings that may occur when communication takes place in several operating languages. This is how *the basic core (non-verbal and paralinguistic components and an emphasis on common rules) is formed and effectively takes over the functions of an operating language*. The individual languages (Czech, English, Ukrainian …) appear to be essential facets of something more primary – the field of mutual understanding.

54 The task of this school is to develop language skills mainly in Czech. Research shows (Cummins, 1984, 2000) that people use *two types of language* at school: *communication language* (for everyday conversation during breaks, in changing rooms, during lunch, group work, etc.) and *academic language* (understanding terminology, sorting information, reading textbooks, writing assignments, taking notes, testing). Both these languages have their rules and specifics. Communication language is often based on the context of the situation, is less grammatically complex, and is therefore easier to master. The counsellor who is in charge of solving educational problems noted that "during breaks our children speak (…) what we call breaktime Czech". While important for successfully passing examination at various levels, the ability to read complex texts that feature unknown cultural details and use academic terminology, is difficult to acquire for learners with a different mother tongue. Generally speaking, children who are learning Czech as a second language, can hold a fluent conversation after two to three years of study, depending on how different their first language is (other theories say six months to two years). However, it takes them five to seven years, even ten in some cases, before they have caught up with their schoolmates in academic language (Cummins, 2000). It can be assumed that in the school discussed here, given its high degree of language heterogeneity and the fact that pupils with a different first language make up almost two thirds of all children, *acquiring Czech by osmosis will take longer*. We observed that the pupils often seek friends with the same mother tongue. When the learners achieve a sufficient level of academic language, they often leave the school, mostly because of a long commute, and start attending a school nearer their home. However, some remain because of the ties they made and because they are familiar with the system. "I call them 'acting as Czechs', those who stay and speak well. Many of the foreign children look up to those who learned better and faster."

When differentiating between communication and academic language it is necessary to mention the complications that may arise in later years. Children who seem well adapted, i.e. with a good command of the communication language acquired during preschool or early years of school, may encounter difficulties with academic language, which becomes more difficult when the learning content advances during later school years. *Proficiency in academic language strongly limits the choice of secondary school*. Even during professional aptitude tests administered by the school psychologist, many of the children score poorly in verbal tasks (their results correspond to reduced IQ). These results are part of the reason why it is recommended for the children to pursue *less difficult secondary schools, mostly vocational schools*.

Mastery of Czech thus strongly determines the pupils' future education career. Both the teachers and management are well aware of this. *The school offers several ways of boosting progress in the language*. The teachers are also aware of the limitations of the existing system, "We're having Czech for the whole class and it is actually a foreign language for the kids; often even English isn't as foreign as Czech, which we would need to split into groups." This claim is logical as there can

be learners of several levels of language proficiency present in the lesson, making its preparation and execution more difficult. At present, the school offers the following assistance to learners with a different first language:

> 1. Group courses of Czech for complete beginners (A0–A1 proficiency). They take place in the morning, which means the learner misses certain regular lessons (typically subjects that require a high level of comprehension, which the child may still lack) – a separate model. (Eurydice, 2004)
> 2. Group courses of Czech taking place in the afternoon in collaboration with the Regional Centre for the Support of the Integration of Foreigners.
> 3. One-to-one tutoring in subjects with which the learners need help (in learners with a different first language, this means lessons of Czech) in collaboration with City Hall.

Although the pupils receive intensive language support, it is hindered by some *limitations as a result of the way the macrosystem is set up.* For instance, there is the inconvenient fact that the morning courses are funded by the Ministry on a calendar-year basis and do not follow the school year. This means that every year the management has no guarantee of knowing whether their grant application will be approved and therefore the courses are not taught in January and February due to a lack of funding.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Our findings relate to one particular school, which in the last ten years has become a school in which the number of pupils from families with a migrant background predominates. As a result, a school that wanted to be inclusive became a school where the importance of Czech as the main operational language is significantly weakened. This places increased demands on actors and forces them to create a more sophisticated environment in which mutual understanding can be achieved despite all obstacles. To understand this correctly, we introduced the concept of mutual understanding and based on this concept and the 17 hypotheses of Bronfenbrenner, we defined three themes that became the basis for the framework analysis.

In the first theme, while discussing communication as the central value of the school, we identified certain important topics. The unusual position of the communication assistant helps to manage the process of admitting new children to the school throughout the year. Being respectful and sensitive to cultural and religious differences encourages the children to form their own identities and the high level of intercultural sensitivity of the teachers supports a positive class and school climate. This data mirrors the tone of other foreign research dealing with cultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2009, pp. 2–7). The school understands that it is important to communicate with parents on a regular basis if the children are to have good results. The school offers communication in several formats. There are clear definitions of what the parents must not do (e.g. enter the school without appointment) and these rules are understood.

56   In relation to Bronfenbrenner's approach and the notion of trans-systemic linkage (theme two), it is a basic tenet of the school that it has transformed from a traditional school into one that can accept the children of foreigners. The current state of the mesosystem – 65% of children of foreign nationality – has received strong support from the policies of the macrosystem (a decision of the Department of Education of the municipality; the Ministry and its grant strategy). However, the participants do not view this situation positively. They want to be a school for everyone, while retaining a good ability to work with learners with a different first language. They consider the ideal percentage of foreign children to be 25–30%. The school boasts strong interpersonal support, both among the teachers themselves and it is also inherent within the personnel policy – it is important that the teachers feel good and their independence, initiative and creativity is rewarded. The teaching team is stable. The school is characterized by an increased awareness of and care for the quality of linkage between the following mesosystems – transition from preschool to school, and from primary school to secondary school. When a new child arrives in the school, there is a strong emphasis on the smooth progress of the adaptation process, taking into account all the cultural and religious specifics of the child's family.

Theme three explored the field of mutual understanding in relation to operating languages and there are several operating languages in the school. The high percentage of foreign pupils allows for a considerable degree of support in learning Czech by various methods, however, it slows down the process of spontaneous acquisition as the school lacks enough native speakers in peer groups. In the situation when only every third child is a Czech language native speaker there is limit to the number of occasions the students can hear and speak the language of their education.

Communication difficulties highlight the importance of non-verbal and paralinguistic means and of following simple shared rules which facilitate comprehension regardless of mother tongue. It is these aspects that are part of the field of mutual understanding. A good command of the communication language does not automatically mean good results in the academic language (UNESCO, 2016) and this complicates the educational trajectory of learners with a different first language.

The results of our case study show that centralizing children from a migratory background into one school brings many problems and does not correspond with the modern concept of inclusive education. Other schools need to be more closely involved in the whole system of education of foreign pupils, where children from large cities, in particular, could study in the "catchment area". These schools, understandably hesitant to admit foreigners, need intensive support from their founders, not just material and financial, but also ideological and methodological (sharing practice). In this context, the school under investigation can help by providing background for practice as well as by sharing experiences with other schools. Therefore, communication and interconnection between the exosystem or macrosystem, on the one hand, and the mesosystem, on the other, are crucial for the successful building of an inclusive environment.

Acknowledgements

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The Utrecht Virtual Learning Environment Project: Improving Educational Partnerships in Multicultural Preschools

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Abstract: The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in European countries leads to new challenges for current education systems. One important challenge is establishing trustful educational partnerships with parents from diverse backgrounds. This holds especially true for Early Childhood Education and Care centres (ECEC), where parents are introduced to the education system for the first time. The *Utrecht Virtual Learning Environment (U-VLO)* project is a small-scale project that explores whether an educational digital tool can help to improve the educational partnerships between parents and a preschool in a multicultural environment in the Netherlands. The digital tool in the current study aims at (a) improving the engagement of parents by incorporating parents as important resources for (b) enriching the preschool practices with a cultural and multilingual focus. The current project follows the principles of Design-Based Research and describes the iterative process of designing and implementing the digital tool, together with the preschool (two preschool teachers working in four classrooms) and parents, to collaboratively create intercultural content via the digital tool. These bottom-up implementations, combined with the results of observations and evaluations amongst teachers and parents, show that it is possible to implement a digital tool in the specific local context. However, many factors and prerequisites, both social and technical, need to be taken into account before the tool can impact the existing partnerships. Clear implications for theory and practice focusing on improving educational partnerships in multicultural and multilingual settings for young children, and the use of innovative digital tools herein, are provided.

Keywords: educational partnerships, preschools, ICT, intercultural approach, design-based research

European societies experience increasing cultural and linguistic diversity. As a consequence, education systems are faced with new challenges: How can we do justice to this diversity, and how can we ensure equal opportunities for children from diverse backgrounds? One important strategy to combat inequality and to increase inclusiveness in education for all children from various backgrounds, is to strengthen the connections between the child's school and home environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009; OECD, 2015). However, it can be difficult for schools and preschools to communicate with and to actively involve parents who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Bossong & Keller, 2018; Putnam, 2007). This can be due to language barriers, cultural differences, or insufficient intercultural competences. Therefore, it is important to focus on innovative strategies that can overcome these barriers and possibly support educational partnerships in multicultural preschool environments, hereby using the cultural and linguistic diversity as an educational resource. The current study is part

of the *U-VLO* project, which stands for *Utrecht Virtual Learning Environments*. In this study, we focus on the educational partnerships between the parents and the preschool in a multicultural environment, and explore whether a digital tool can help to promote this educational partnership.

1 Introduction

1.1 Educational partnerships

Educational partnership refers to the belief that both the (pre)school and parents are responsible for creating an optimal environment for the learning and development of the child (Christenson, 2004). The aim is to establish meaningful communication and collaboration in which both parties help and support each other to promote the learning and development of children (De Wit, 2005). Although the term educational partnership is becoming increasingly popular in research and practice, previous studies have been more inconsistent in their terminology. Educational partnership, parental involvement, and parental participation are used interchangeably, though each term refers to different parental behaviours and practices. For instance, parental participation is often defined as the involvement of parents in (pre)schools, but this disregards the involvement of parents in children's learning and development in the home environment. Moreover, the term parental involvement suggests that solely parents should take a step towards the school, instead of both taking a step towards each other (Prins, Wienke, & Van Rooijen, 2013). Several theoretical frameworks show that parental involvement can be considered a multidimensional concept (see for example Epstein's, 1992, 2001, typology or Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's, 1995 typology). These frameworks often distinguish between the involvement in school and at home, and between different levels of involvement, such as pedagogical involvement, focusing on the child's development, or democratic involvement, focusing on the decision-making at school. It is important to note that parents and preschools fulfil complementary roles because of their different competences, interests, and responsibilities, such as emotional involvement versus professional involvement. However, they share a common interest, namely creating an optimal environment for the child's learning and development, and have not so much an equal but *equivalent role* in serving this interest (Oostdam & Hooge, 2013). In the current study, we involved the parents from the start, and called on their cultural and linguistic expertise to collaborate as partners with the teachers (see also Young & Hélot, 2007).

The importance of an educational partnership between parents and (pre)school can be traced back to the bio-ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The child's personal development is central in this model and results from the recurrent interactions (i.e. *proximal processes*) of a child with his or her immediate environments, the so called *microsystems*, such as

the family, peer group, and (pre)school classroom. These microsystems are embedded in larger meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems that directly and indirectly influence the child or his or her immediate environment. For optimal development of the child it is essential that there is coherence and continuity between the microsystems, such as the (pre)school and the family context (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This coherence requires common aims, shared understandings, and reciprocal actions (Tayler, 2006). When (pre)schools and parents coordinate their practices, they can complement and strengthen each other.

Much research has been conducted on the positive consequences of educational partnerships on individual child outcomes. Supporting vulnerable parents and stimulating parental involvement and participation are seen as important strategies to improve the academic outcomes of children (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Respler-Herman, Mowder, Yasik, & Shamah, 2012). A positive relationship between parents and school may stimulate children's self-regulation skills, learning attitude, homework practices, and the educational ambitions (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). Studies on partnerships with vulnerable or disadvantaged parents have shown that the number of children who have to repeat a class, drop out, or are referred to special education, is lower when these parents are more involved in the education of their child (Barnard, 2004; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Temple, Reynolds, & Miedel, 2000). Other studies have shown that when parents are more involved, this can mitigate the negative influences of poverty, low parental education level, and ethnic minority status on the academic outcomes of children (De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004; Eamon, 2002; Schreiber, 2002). Also for very young children, a good relationship between parents and the (pre)school has a positive influence, especially on the early language and social development of the child (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2005).

1.2 Challenges for establishing and improving educational partnerships

Researchers have claimed that parents and school used to be more aligned, but that nowadays discrepancies in their beliefs and practices lead more often to mistrust and non-collaboration (Dusi, 2012). This has several reasons. First, parents are nowadays better informed and more critical, and thus more strongly positioned towards the (pre)school. This might be due to the individualisation of society, the increasing education level of parents, and increased access to information (Oostdam & Hooge, 2013). Second, most of the European countries experience a large variety of cultures and languages that, moreover, constantly change, a phenomenon for which the term *superdiverse society* is coined (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015). As a consequence of this superdiversity, there is less self-evident alignment between parents and schools regarding their educational norms, values, aspirations, and actions. Research focusing on ECEC has shown that early childhood professionals differ significantly from

62 migrant parents in their values, developmental aspirations, and beliefs (Bossong & Keller, 2018). Hence, parents perceive differences between the home environment and the school environment, and can choose to withdraw from interactions with teachers (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Kim, 2009). To restore and strengthen parent-school partnerships, professionals working in these educational settings should acknowledge the diversity in (pre)schools rather than ignoring it, and be responsive to the needs and beliefs of the culturally diverse group of parents. Moreover, it implies that the teachers should acquire or strengthen their intercultural competences in order to cope with the diversity of parents and children (Van Gorp & Moons, 2014; Michel & Kuiken, 2014; OECD, 2013; Young, 2014).

When compared to primary education, preschools are facing additional challenges regarding educational partnerships. Preschools are parents' first encounter in their role as parents with the educational system, and for first-generation migrant parents this is often the first contact with the education system of the host country (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2005). Here, an educational partnership is established that may serve as a long-term model for the relationship between parents and school throughout the school career of the child. However, at the start of preschool, parents often do not know what to expect from the preschool or what is expected from them. This makes it hard for parents to initiate the partnership. Moreover, children going to preschools are still very young without strong verbal skills that could support the communication between parents and preschool (e.g., by telling about the day at the preschool). In many countries preschool starts at age 3. In some countries children are entitled from age 1 or before. In the Netherlands, the ECEC system is complex with full-day daycare for 0 to 4-year-olds, universal kindergarten for 4- to 6-year-olds (part of the primary school system) and half-day preschool for 2½ to 4-year-olds. The present study focused on the latter system. Furthermore, in the specific context of the Netherlands, children only go the preschool for a limited amount of time (maximum 1.5 to 2 years for ten hours per week). More research on these challenges, and how to overcome them to enhance the educational partnership in preschools, is needed.

1.3 Digital tools as support

The research reviewed above shows that good communication between preschool and parents is important. It should be noted that the nature of the communication between parents and schools has changed over the past decades due to new technologies (Palts & Kalmus, 2015). There are now multiple ways of exchanging information via ICT. Parents often receive e-mails from school, can check the school website, follow the school on social media, are member of a WhatsApp group with the teacher, and can find the academic results of their child in the digital tracking system. Based on these developments, we assume that digital tools can support educational partnerships in various ways.

First, digital tools can support and improve the *communication* between parents and schools, and especially make it easier for parents to be informed about the

daily practices of their child (Jewitt & Parashar, 2011; Kraft & Rogers, 2014). Grant (2011) examined the experiences with the use of digital tools to enhance the educational partnership in secondary education. She found that both parents, teachers, and children were convinced that digital tools, such as email or text messages, can enhance the communication, since it can take place more regularly and more directly. Moreover, when parents or teachers use digital tools, they report that they use more time to rethink and carefully formulate their question or message (Byron, 2008; Thompson, Mazer, & Flood Grady, 2015). Blau and Hameiri (2017) have shown that the teacher should initiate the online interactions between the school and the parents: if the teacher is more active via a digital communication tool, parents will also increase their online communication.

Furthermore, digital tools can help to overcome *language barriers* between parents and schools in a multicultural and multilingual setting (Davies, 2004; Webb, 2006). Many translation apps, such as Google translate, or multilingual apps have been developed that can help to understand each other or to learn another language (Van Laere et al., 2017). Non-verbal aids, such as emoticons, speech messages, and pictures facilitate understanding of the message. Because of the worldwide use of social media, many people are familiar with the features and possibilities of online platforms such as Facebook, which makes it easier to introduce and implement similar platforms, despite language differences.

Finally, given the challenge of understanding other cultures and languages, digital tools can be a source of information to learn about other cultures or to enrich classrooms with *intercultural* and *multilingual practices* (in line with Banks, 2015). It has become easy to explore the world with all its cultures, languages, traditions, norms and values, types of food, Holidays, geography, et cetera, from your own classroom using ICT. Professionals in educational settings can use ICT tools to support their intercultural competences, and to reflect upon their attitudes, knowledge, and practices, in order to improve their collaboration with parents. Intercultural and multilingual practices using ICT send off the important message that the preschool accepts and celebrates the pluralism of cultures and languages, focuses on the inclusion of all views and strives to strengthen the relations between the different cultural and language communities (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009).

Although digital tools seem to have several advantages for supporting partnerships in a multicultural context, it should be noted that the use of digital tools in educational settings has also raised some concerns. For instance, the privacy and safety of the exchanged information by digital tools, especially when young children are involved, is a serious issue (Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Garstka, & Clark, 2011). Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to the knowledge of and the attitudes towards the use of digital tools, both on the part of the parents and the preschool teachers (Hollingworth, Mansaray, Allen, & Rose, 2011). Preschool teachers' views and attitudes regarding ICT influence the use and implementation of ICT in the classroom. These attitudes themselves are influenced by a range of factors, for instance, years of service, knowledge of ICT, ICT usage at home, confidence in ICT ability, and

64   completed relevant in-service training (Kerkaert, Vanderlinde, & Van Braak, 2015; Petrogiannis, 2010). Wang, Hsu, Reeves, and Coster (2014) implemented a professional development programme to improve the ICT practices of secondary school teachers, following a Design Based Research approach. They concluded that teachers can improve their ICT skills, but that it requires a long, thoughtful implementation, an elaborate training, instruction, and evaluation process, the inclusion of all stakeholders, and scaffolded ICT experiences. Furthermore, certain prerequisites are needed when digital tools are implemented, such as devices in both the home (e.g., smartphones, tablets, computers) and preschool environment (e.g. laptops, digital white boards), and stable (and strong) internet connections. Because of these factors, it should be thoroughly explored on beforehand whether digital tools can be implemented in a particular context, and how the stakeholders are expected to respond to the implementation (Plowman, Stevenson, Stephen, & McPake, 2012).

1.4 The present study

Previous research explored the role of digital tools in different educational settings, ranging from preschool to higher education (e.g. Blau & Hameiri, 2017; Hatzigianni & Margetts, 2012; Liu, Toki, & Pange, 2013). However, to the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to focus on the use of digital tools for building educational partnerships in a preschool setting. The present study was set up as Design Based Research to explore whether the educational partnership between parents and a preschool in a highly multicultural urban environment in the Netherlands can be improved by the use of a digital tool. The Design Based approach implies working closely together with the stakeholders (i.e., parents and preschool teachers) in a specific local context, hereby giving a voice to parents from diverse backgrounds. The digital tool had two aims: 1) improving the engagement of parents with the preschool by acknowledging them as an important resource for intercultural instructional content and support to children's multilingual development, while referring to them as a partner; and 2) enriching preschool classroom practices with intercultural content and multilingual support in collaboration with the parent, thereby including and celebrating cultural and linguistic diversity.

2 Method

2.1 Research design

The overarching methodology used in this study is the design-based research (DBR) approach, which informs design, theory, and practice concurrently through iterative implementations (Hoadley, 2004; Sandoval, 2014). DBR has a different approach than experimental research since it acknowledges the difficulty of ensuring experimental control over factors and interactions between factors in complex field situations.

It includes theoretical knowledge in concrete actions and materials, involvement of stakeholders and researchers, adjustment to local contexts, and use of repeated formative evaluations based on observation and interviewing (Hoadley, 2004). Its ultimate goal is "to build a stronger connection between educational research and real world problems" (Amiel & Reeves, 2008, p. 34).

The current study meets the five requirements of a DBR study (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012): (1) the study is situated in a real educational context; in this case a preschool in a multicultural neighbourhood in the Netherlands; (2) focuses on the design and testing of an intervention; a digital educational tool; (3) adopts a mixed-methods approach to provide better guidance for educational improvement; focus group-studies, content analyses, observations, and a parent survey; (4) involves multiple iterations to test the best design of the intervention; two full iterations were completed; and (5) promotes collaboration between stakeholders; that is, the researcher, practitioners and parents were working closely together to identify general ICT principles and educational partnership principles for the future.
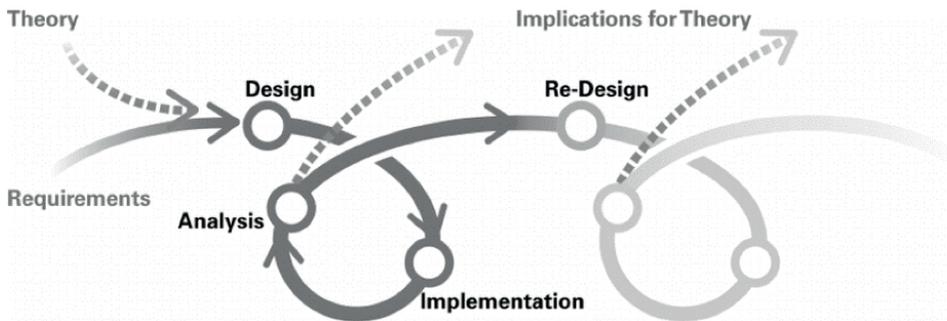
Figure 1 Design-based research approach

2.2 Procedure

A preschool in an intercultural neighbourhood in Utrecht, the Netherlands, participated in this study. Table 1 provides the design-based research timeline, including the data collection, divided into four phases. Phase one entailed the exploration and preparation phase. First, a core research team was established – two preschool teachers, two parents and a researcher – who worked closely together during the study. The local context was explored in a focus group session with the core team. After this, a possible digital tool was evaluated together with the core team. Based on this, the first implementation cycle was started and the tool was implemented in the two classrooms where each of the preschool teachers worked. The implementation was observed and documented. This led to further improvement of the implementation and a second cycle in two other classrooms, in addition to the two original classrooms, was started. The second implementation cycle was more successful. Focus groups, classroom observations, content analyses of the posts on

66 the digital platform and a parent survey were conducted throughout this second implementation. Parents and preschool teachers signed informed consent forms and data were anonymized. The last phase in the DBR approach involved evaluation and reflection to generate design principles for future research, and to provide recommendations for the improvement of educational partnerships for policymakers and practitioners. These design principles and recommendations are summarized in the discussion and conclusion.

Table 1 Time schedule of DBR study

		Apr – Jul 2017	Sep – Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr – May 2018
Phase one	Exploration and evaluation of context with core team	■							
Phase two (first implementation cycle)	Implementation in two classrooms		■						
	Analyses, evaluation and redesign for second iteration			■					
Phase three (second implementation cycle)	Implementation and data collection in four classrooms				■	■	■		
	Analyses							■	
Phase four	Evaluation and reflection to generate design principles								■

2.2.1 Intervention with a digital tool: Padlet

Given the small scale of this study, it was not feasible to design a new tool. Therefore, the core team explored an existing, though adaptable, digital tool: Padlet. Padlet (www.padlet.com) is a free, multi-device, educational tool. Padlet enables to create an online bulletin board (also called a *padlet[1])* that can contain messages, photos, audio files, movie clips, presentations, web links, drawings, locations and other files. Collaborators who have access to this padlet (here: parents, teachers and the researcher) can add content, comment upon, like, or edit the content.

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[1] Note that we use capital letter P of Padlet when referring to the name of the digital tool, though a small letter when referring to the actual group bulletin boards that have been created during this study.

Collaborators can have different rights, and the padlet can be password protected. Moreover, the bulletin boards are untraceable for online search engines.

An interactive process between parents and preschool was started via the tool, see Figure 2. As a first step, a group-padlet for the parents and the preschool teacher was created. The parents gave input to the padlet that exposed the cultural and linguistic richness of the families (e.g., pictures, songs, movies, stories, web links, et cetera). Second, this content was used in the classrooms by the teachers to implement intercultural teaching practices. Third, parents received information on these classroom practices and their outcomes via the padlet, so they could continue with these practices in the home environment. By stimulating parents to provide input for the classroom practices that derives from their own cultural and linguistic background, it was hypothesized that the educational partnership would improve.
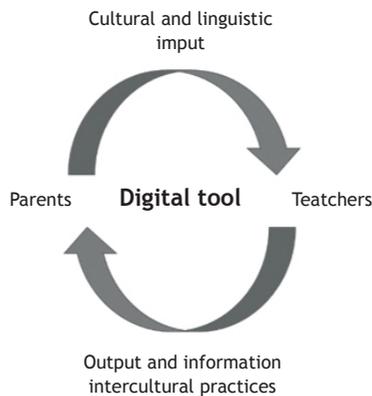
Figure 2 Interaction process with the tool Padlet

2.3 Participants

Two preschool teachers (both female), each working in two classrooms (total $n = 34$ children in four classrooms), participated in the study. Both teachers have worked in this preschool setting for five to six years. Two parents, one father and one mother, both with a Moroccan background, joined the core team. The preschool has nine classrooms in total, where young children in the age of 2.5 to 4 years old are enrolled for maximum 1.5 year before their transition to kindergarten, which is part of primary education. The children and their parents had diverse backgrounds that mirrored the multicultural composition of the neighbourhood in which the preschool is located: the traditional immigrant groups, such as Turkish and Moroccan families, who originally came to the country as guest workers, expat families, such as Chinese and Indian families, and refugee families from countries such as Syria.

2.4 Data collection and analyses

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2006) to collect and analyse the following data: focus group-studies with the core team, content analyses of the use of the digital tool, observations of the use of the digital tool, and a short survey among the parents.

Focus group with core team. The researcher met with the core team approximately every six weeks to evaluate and refine the process. Both the first and the last meeting were guided by semi-structured questions in order to map the multicultural context of the preschool (the first meeting) and to evaluate the study and to generate conclusions and recommendations (last meeting).

Content analyses of Padlet. One month after the second implementation, the content posted on the digital tool was analysed. The extent to which the tool was implemented was examined: to what extent was it used, by whom (teachers and parents), what was the content, and did the content provide intercultural enrichment.

Observation on the use of Padlet. Similar to the content analyses, classroom observations of the use of the group-padlets by the preschool teachers were conducted during the phase three, the second implementation. A semi-structured observation scheme was used (see Appendix A), focusing on the content of the bulletin boards (e.g. *What is the focus of the teacher? Is there attention for the cultural diversity in the content?)* and on the communication while using the group-padlet (e.g. *How is the interaction between the teacher and the children when using the padlet?*)

Parent survey. At the start of the second implementation, a short survey was conducted with parents from two classrooms. The goal of the survey was to receive more information on the parents' perspective on the educational partnership and the multicultural richness within the preschool. The survey is based on the structured parent interview study of the ISOTIS project (Broekhuizen, Ereky-Stevens, Wolf, & Moser, 2018), but adapted together with the core team for this specific DBR study. The survey had three scales with items on (1) the communication and relation with the preschool, (2) parental participation within the preschool, and (3) stimulating activities and language use in the home environment. Furthermore, the degree of attention for their own heritage language and culture at the preschool and parents' feelings about this was assessed with open questions. Parents could fill out the short survey by themselves, since it was available in English, Turkish, Standard-Arabic and Dutch, and included visual aids for the response scales. Parents could also get support from one of the Moroccan-Arabic or Turkish-speaking research assistants that were present during the data collection.

3 Results

The results from phase one (the inventory phase), phase two (the first iteration) and phase three (the second iteration and analyses) are described below. The evaluation

and resulting implications and recommendations (phase four) are described in the discussion and conclusion section.

3.1 Phase one: Exploration of the context and evaluation tool

As a first step, an inventory of the local context was conducted through a focus group with the core team. This inventory examined the needs, possibilities, and wishes of the parents and the teachers, in order to ensure that the digital tool and the implementation of the tool were adapted as much as possible to the local context. The most important points from this inventory are discussed below. After the inventory, the digital tool, Padlet, was piloted and evaluated.

Cultural and linguistic diversity. As stated in the method section, the participating preschool has a superdiverse population. Many parents have a low proficiency and use of Dutch and are low educated, especially the mothers. As a consequence, many children do not speak Dutch when they enter the preschool. There is no official intercultural, nor multilingual policy at the preschool. It was stated that Dutch is the main language in the preschool for all children, parents, and teachers. Teachers stressed that this is a daily issue for them; children should learn Dutch, but children should also learn to socialise and express themselves. They acknowledged that when the child does not speak Dutch, it is perhaps better for the child to use the mother language (at least sometimes).

Parents and teachers stated that they were open towards other cultures and that they valued other cultures. Different feasts and holidays were celebrated at the preschool, sometimes also engaging the parents, such as Christmas and Eid al-Fitr. Moreover, some of the preschool teachers had an immigrant background themselves, which facilitated the communication with parents who have similar backgrounds.

Educational partnership. Parents are stimulated to be involved at the preschool in multiple ways. There is a parent board, teachers go on home visits, and there are regular activities and courses for parents (e.g., language courses). During the year, parents have individual talks with the teacher to discuss the progress of their child. Moreover, during the preschool-primary school transition, parents and teachers worked closely together to ensure a smooth transfer for both the child and the parents.

Despite the aforementioned activities, the core team stated that the communication was mostly uni-directional; from the preschool to the parents, and not vice versa. They also experienced language barriers and cultural differences, which sometimes led to frustrations on both sides. According to the teachers, parents were not really engaged in the preschool and many of them did not attend meetings, despite the attempts of the preschool. Parents were usually enthusiastic about the cultural activities that they could celebrate together, but not so much regarding other organized activities, such as creative activities or preschool excursions.

70   **ICT possibilities.** Parents and teachers have a WhatsApp[2] group together, in which photos of activities, general messages, and reminders are shared. Parents stated that they liked the WhatsApp group as an informal way of being updated about the daily activities of their child. However, the direction of communication via WhatsApp was also predominantly from the teachers to the parents. To the knowledge of the core team, all parents have smartphones, but not all parents have access to a tablet or a computer. In addition, the preschool teachers had recently received Digi boards[3] with internet access in their classrooms, which could be used for the current study.

Evaluation of the digital tool Padlet. The Padlet tool was evaluated together with the core team. There were several reasons why we chose to use Padlet. First of all, the app is suitable for Digi boards, smartphones, (laptop) computers and tablets. The tool is also linked to the camera of smartphones, which makes it easier to up-load pictures. Second, Padlet creates an interactive platform that stimulates mutual communication and collaboration. Parents and teachers have more or less equal user rights, meaning that they can both upload and comment on the content (though teachers can delete items, parents cannot). The tool scores high on inclusiveness: it is pictorially rather than textually oriented with many colours and pictograms, and people can switch between multiple languages. Another important characteristic is that the group-padlet of each classroom can be secured with personal accounts, accessible only via a password, and that the padlets are not traceable by search engines such as Google. To further ensure security, the core team drafted a contract for the parents, to ensure that nobody would use the uploaded content by other parents outside the padlet, and to stress the ethical aspects of the use of the tool and this study.

3.2 Phase two: First implementation cycle

After the inventory and evaluation, the tool was implemented in two classrooms (out of four). In total 16 parents were invited to the information meeting, of which nine parents came, seven mothers and two fathers. They received information about the study and the manual for the tool, the contract was discussed, and they were assisted in downloading and accessing the tool. After this meeting, parents should have had access to their group bulletin board so they could upload content, inspired by the themes of the preschool (e.g., the theme "family"). However, during the implementation of the tool, many barriers and issues emerged that hindered the parents in accessing and using the tool. These issues are listed below and guided the improvements for the next iteration.

Linguistic and educational barriers. Parents' knowledge of Dutch was even more limited than we expected. The invitation letter, manual, and information meeting, in which only the Dutch language was used, were too difficult for most of the parents. As a result, parents did not fully understand the information about the study and

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2   A popular messaging app that can be used to send messages, photos, videos and other files.
3   A digital school white board that teachers can use for ICT purposes.

were unable to download and use the tool. For the second iteration, the invitation letter and the manual were translated into English, Turkish, and Standard-Arabic. Furthermore, Turkish, Standard-Arabic and Berber speaking assistants helped during the information meeting to ensure that all parents understood the information.

Cultural barriers. It turned out that parents did not have much contact with each other outside the preschool, especially if parents had different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, they were not used to to share personal experiences with other parents or with the teacher, and also not open to do this. Second, during the information meeting, the issue of gender arose, since some mothers were not comfortable with being in the same room with men they did not know. When adapting the implementation, it was decided together with the core team that the themes on the bulletin board should not be too personal (e.g. *autumn* is less personal than *family*), and that the teachers should upload content on the padlet first to show the feasibility and possibilities of the tool (i.e., modelling), and to encourage the parents to use it as well.

Technical barriers. During the information meeting, several technical issues emerged. Many parents did not have a 3G/4G internet connection on their smartphone; they tended to use only Wi-Fi connections. The preschool, however, did not offer free Wi-Fi to the parents, so they were unable to download the tool and to ask questions regarding the tool during the information meeting. Moreover, some parents could not recall their own e-mail address, so it was not possible to create a personal account for them on the tool. For the second iteration, we established an internet connection during the information meeting, so the parents could directly download the tool, and new e-mail addresses were created on the spot for the parents who did not have an e-mail address or could not recall their personal email address.

3.3 Phase three: Second implementation cycle and analyses

In phase three, the second implementation, two other classrooms also participated, in addition to the two previous classrooms. In total 16 out of 18 parents of the two new classrooms were invited to the information meeting by means of letter in all relevant languages. Two parents were not invited because one child would go to primary school soon and the other child's family had planned to move house to another neighbourhood soon. Eight parents, only mothers, came to the meeting and were provided with the improved manual and received information in their own language from multilingual research assistants. During the information meeting, mothers of the two new classrooms also filled out the parent survey. Since the other two classrooms already participated in the first implementation of this DBR study, only the mothers from the two new classrooms filled out the survey. During this phase, content analyses of uploaded content and classroom observations were conducted in the two new classrooms. Parents from the previous classrooms participated in an improved information meeting and continued with their own padlets, but it was

decided to focus on the two new classrooms for the analyses. All experiences from the four classrooms were taken into account for the evaluation phase. Despite the relatively low number of mothers attending the meeting, the second cycle of implementation was more successful than the first cycle since more parents understood the aims of the tool and afterwards accessed and used the tool. However, again some issues emerged (e.g., lack of thorough intercultural focus on part of the teachers) or remained (e.g., hesitance of the parents to share experiences with each other), which will be discussed below.

Parent survey results. In total, nine mothers (M_{age} = 36.11 years, 4 from classroom A and 5 from classroom B) filled out the questionnaire; eight mothers during the information meeting and one mother afterwards. Two mothers were second-generation migrants from Turkey and Morocco. The other seven mothers were first-generation migrants and born in Turkey (one mother), India (three mothers) or Morocco (three mothers), and migrated to the Netherlands between 1976 and 2015. Eight mothers stated that they used multiple languages at home, including both the mother language and Dutch. There was a large variation in education level. Two mothers did not finish primary school and two mothers obtained a Master's degree. Table 2 shows the descriptive results for the three scales on the communication and relationship with the preschool, parental participation at the preschool, and the provision of stimulating activities in the home environment.

Table 2 Results of parent questionnaire (n = 9)

		M (SD)	Range
Relationship with preschool teacher[a]		3.87 (0.40)	3–4
Parental engagement[b]			
	Helping in the classroom	2.22 (0.79)	1–3
	Helping with school trips	1.89 (0.93)	1–3
	Attending parent-teacher meetings	2.56 (0.82)	1–4
	Attending events at preschool	2.89 (1.05)	2–5
Activities in the home environment[b]			
	Reading	4.56 (0.48)	4–5
	Conversations	4.33 (0.53)	4–5
	Educational activities	3.67 (0.69)	3–5
	Cultural activities	2.11 (1.15)	1–5
	ICT activities	2.78 (1.27)	1–5

Notes: a Answer scale 1–4, b Answer scale 1–5

The scale *Communication and Relation with the preschool* consisted of five statements (e.g., *My child's teacher sees me as an important partner of the preschool*), measured with a four-point scale, ranging from disagree (1) to agree (4). When mothers scored higher, they were more positive about the relationship. On average, mothers were very positive about the relationship, showing a low variation.

Parental engagement was measured by asking the mothers how often they partici-pated in four parent-preschool activities (e.g., *helping in the classroom, by reading to the children or cleaning the toys*). This was measured by a five-point frequency scale, ranging from never (1) to more than once a month (5). There was large vari-ation between the different items and between the mothers. The mothers scored lowest on the item *helping with school trips* and highest on the item *attending events at the preschool*. In addition, some mothers indicated that they were never engaged in preschool activities, while other mothers indicated that they partici-pated at least three to five times a year. For *Activities in the home environment*, the frequency of and language use during five parent-child activities (e.g., *shared reading*) was measured on a five-point scale, ranging from never or rarely (1) to everyday (5). Mothers scored quite high on reading and conversation activities, with relatively low variation. In addition, all mothers stated that multiple languages were used during these activities; both the mother tongue and Dutch, or even English (for the Indian mothers). There was more variation between the mothers regarding the educational activities item, and mothers indicated that Dutch was used more than the mother language during these activities. In contrast, the mother language was mostly used during cultural activities. There was a large variation between the mothers in performing ICT activities with their children. Some mothers reported to use ICT in their activities with their children every day, while other mothers an-swered that they never did this. Both the mother language, Dutch, and English were used for these activities.

Next to the three scales, we asked the mothers in the survey how they perceived the attention at the preschool for intercultural and/or multilingual practices, and how they evaluated this. Most mothers indicated that there was some attention for multiple cultures at the preschool, and that they liked this. However, two mothers stated that there was no attention for this. This could mean that not all mothers are aware of the intercultural focus of the preschool, but also that they perceived little or no attention for their own culture and language. Five mothers indicated that there was no multilingual support at the preschool. Two mothers said that there should be more attention for this, however, the other three mothers stated that they liked the focus on the Dutch language. One mother even responded: *They should learn Dutch here, they have the other languages at home!*

Content analyses of the group-padlets. One month after the information meeting, content analyses of the posts on the group-padlets were conducted. Table 3 provides the user statistics from both classrooms A and B. Classroom A had eight children, of which four parents signed up for the Padlet tool after the information meeting. Three parents actively posted one or two pictures and a movie clip, the other parent was passively involved by liking and commenting on content, but not uploading her-self. The preschool teacher was more active, posting 20 content items on the padlet. She posted pictures of daily activities and educational content that fitted the theme of the preschool at that moment. Classroom B consisted of ten children, of which seven parents signed up for the group-padlet. Four of these parents were actively

using the tool, posting 14 items in total. The other three parents were passively involved. Also here, the teacher was more active by uploading 23 content items.

Table 3 Content analyses of the group-padlet during second iteration

	Classroom A	Classroom B
Children in the classroom	8	10
Parents who signed up for padlet	4	7
Parents participation on padlet		
Actively involved – Uploading content	3	4
Passively involved – Only responding to or liking content	1	3
Posts by preschool teacher	20	23
Posts by parents	5	14

More content was uploaded in classroom B than in classroom A. This is probably due to the influence of the group of parents: when more parents uploaded more pictures, other parents were more inclined to do so as well. The three active parents in classroom A were more hesitant to post something than the active parents in classroom B. The topics of the content did not differ per group, but differed between the teachers and parents. The teachers uploaded content that was related to the specific preschool theme during that month (e.g., how to play together, what is illness, what are the words the children learned that week), while the parents uploaded general content items that were more often related to the upcoming feasts and holidays (e.g., Saint Nicholas and Christmas). Sometimes, teachers uploaded content in different languages (Turkish, Standard Arabic, English and Dutch), to ensure that more parents would understand the meaning.

Observations in the classroom. Short observations in the classrooms were conducted to examine how teachers used the tool and its content, how the children responded to the tool and to which extent there was an intercultural focus. The observations took place on the same day in the morning between approximately 9 am and 10 am and were guided by a short semi-structured observation scheme (Appendix A).

Observations classroom A. Children had an active role during the activity; they were placed around the Digi board and could touch the board themselves. The teacher showed each item on the board and asked many (open and closed) questions: "Who do we see here? What were you doing?" She showed recent and older pictures on the digital tool, mainly of preschool activities. She tried to connect the pictures by repeating the educational content of that activity: "Remember this, we learned about … and then we went to …" One child saw her grandfather on one of the pictures and called him "grandfather" in her mother language. The teacher responded to this in Dutch, asking her to repeat that word, and a short multilingual conversation started. During the Padlet activity, the children were very enthusiastic about touching the Digi board and seeing the large pictures. They were completely focused

on the content and wanted to tell about the pictures they recognized. The Padlet activity lasted 15 minutes.

Observations classroom B. In contrast to classroom A, children were sitting in a circle in the middle of the classroom, and there was a distance between them and the Digi board. The teacher asked many questions, mainly closed questions, and the children responded. However, the children were less actively involved compared to classroom B, and probably therefore less enthusiastic, and they did not start to tell about the pictures themselves. Hence, it did not lead to a deep mutual interaction between the teacher and the child. The teacher asked whether the children could see some similarities between the pictures and tried to emphasize the resemblance between the pictures that the parents had uploaded. The activity lasted about five minutes.

It should be noted that these two observations were only short snapshots. Nonetheless, it can be concluded that there were differences between the two preschool teachers: their use of the tool, the extent to which they tried to involve the children, the open versus more closed questions they asked, and the responses and engagement of the children. It became clear that it was difficult for the teachers to grasp the different cultural aspects of the content of the tool and to use this for intercultural educational practices.

4 Discussion

Schools, and especially preschools, face the challenge of establishing trustful educational partnerships with parents from diverse backgrounds. The current small-scale design study explored whether an educational digital tool, Padlet, could improve the educational partnerships between parents and a preschool in a multicultural urban neighbourhood in the Netherlands. The study followed a Design-Based Research approach to optimally adapt the tool and its implementation to the local context, and to involve all relevant stakeholders. Results from the focus group discussions with parents and teachers, the classroom observations, and the analyses of the uploaded contents showed that it was possible to use an existing digital tool in a superdiverse context by taking a bottom-up approach and adjusting the implementation of the tool to fit the local context. However, although the second implementation was more successful, the digital tool was still not used to its full potential. The group-padlets were used to some extent by both the teachers and the parents, but not enough to make a real difference for the educational partnerships, according to the core team. The content analyses showed that only around 60% percent of the parents engaged in using the tool (both actively and passively). During the last phase, a focus group discussion was held with the core team to evaluate the tool and reflect upon the entire process of the study (phases 1, 2 and 3). In addition to this, general principles regarding educational partnerships and the involvement of digital tools were generated. Below we list and discuss six implications for theory, policy, and practice that focus on strengthening educational partnerships

76   in culturally diverse and multilingual settings for young children, and the use of innovative digital tools herein.

4.1 Principles and implications for theory and practice

Importance of parental awareness of the role of preschools and educational partnerships. According to the core team at the evaluation session, some parents enjoyed the tool since they could see the daily activities of their child, but they were not motivated to be more actively involved. Furthermore, it was stated that a substantial number of parents consider the preschool to be more like a daycare facility, where the parents can drop off children to play with other children, but that they do not perceive any educational benefits for their children there. This is in line with findings from other studies (Degotardi, Sweller, Fenech, & Beath, 2018; Manigo & Allison, 2017). Fenech (2017) stresses that preschools should build parents' understanding of the importance and quality of ECEC. If the educational opportunities of preschool are not brought to their awareness, it is plausible that parents do not feel committed to be involved at the preschool. This might be an explanation for the lower motivation of the parents to invest in the educational partnerships. As a first step, the importance of the preschool for children's development should be emphasized more strongly to these parents. This includes the possible positive effects of parents being more involved in the education. Then, as a next step, strategies can be introduced to enhance the partnership, but parents should understand the value of a partnership first.

   Good start. Preschools strive for a smooth transition to primary school. This helps the child and parents to build a warm relationship with the primary schools from the very start. However, there is no smooth transition to the preschool itself, according to the core team. Vandenbroeck, Roets, and Snoeck (2009) stressed the importance of a warm welcome in the preschool setting for parents and children. They found the first few weeks prior to and following upon the start in the preschool to be crucial for creating a sense of belonging and establishing reciprocal relationships, both for children and their parents. This is related to the first principle, a warm welcome can shape parents' feelings of (importance of) being involved.

   Superdiversity: intergroup relationship and sharing experiences. One of the reasons why the tool was not fully used by the parents, is the lack of strong intergroup relationships, according to the core team. Parents did not have much contact with each other inside nor outside the preschool context. Inter-ethnic group relations were virtually absent. Research has shown that a superdiverse environment can increase trust in other groups, but only if there is enough intergroup contact (Schmid, Ramiah, & Hewstone, 2014). When intergroup relations are not strong, people are less likely to share personal experiences across groups. Moreover, we should be aware of the fact that the focus on self-expression and sharing personal thoughts and experiences with others might be a Western cultural construct (Vandenbroeck, 2007), with which migrant parents are not familiar and to which they are not imme-

diately attracted. Therefore, it is essential that there is a sense of community within the preschool or classroom context and that parents know and trust each other, before inviting them to actively contribute and share experiences and expertise.

Strengthening the intercultural competences of teachers. Results from the observations showed that there was no clear intercultural and multilingual focus in the ICT practices of the preschool teachers, despite the intercultural and multilingual contents made available through the digital tool. According to the teachers, this can be explained on the one hand by the limited input from the parents. They stated that if more personal experiences had been shared on the tool, teachers could have used this more systematically to introduce an intercultural perspective in the classroom. On the other hand, the teachers admitted that they themselves found it difficult to seize the opportunities for enriching their education with intercultural and multilingual content. The preschool's diversity has been increasing over the last years, and this adds to the complexity of providing intercultural and multilingual practices. Therefore, the teachers would prefer a training to strengthen their intercultural competences, especially to learn to critically reflect on their own intercultural attitudes, knowledge and actions. This would help them in their work in a superdiverse environment (Deardorff, 2006).

Importance of bottom-up approaches. The current study has shown the importance of adapting both the digital tool and its implementation to the specific linguistic, cultural, and cognitive competences, needs, and wishes of all stakeholders. By giving voice to the parents in this bottom-up approach, the implementation was clearly improved. Both the parents and teachers expressed to enjoy this approach and to prefer it over a top-down approach. For instance, special attention was given to the multilingualism aspect. The tool and its implementation should be multilingual and rely on visual aids as much as possible, to increase the inclusiveness of the approach. Parents appreciated it that the tool could be adapted to their own mother language, that content was translated, that the survey was translated into different languages and that there were multilingual research assistants to support them. Note that this does not imply that ECEC settings should become fully multilingual regarding their educational practices. Results of the parent survey showed that several parents explicitly valued the emphasis on Dutch language in the preschool and used Dutch themselves for educational activities in the home environment. Some of the parents did not think it was important that children should be supported in their mother language at the preschool. Preschools should therefore collaborate with parents, to 1) understand their wishes and needs, to make an adequate adaptation and 2) to call in the expertise of parents when multilingual or cultural resources are needed.

Technological challenges and requirements. Previous studies concluded that in order to successfully implement a digital tool, certain practical and psychological factors should be taken into account, such as the attitudes of the stakeholders regarding ICT, teacher training regarding the digital tool, and a sufficiently long timeframe (Kerkaert et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2014). The current study provides some additional practical principles for ICT tools: an individual account for the digital tool

78 is necessary to guarantee the privacy of data, but results of the first implementation also underscore the importance of using a simple login procedure that requires parents to login only once. Teachers could support the parents by providing them with personal e-mail addresses and accounts. Furthermore, it needs to be assured that both parents and teachers have a stable 3G/4G connection or a Wi-Fi connection to be able to use the digital tool. Results of our first implementation showed that, although all parents have smartphones and regularly use ICT, this does not imply that they have access to a stable internet connection. Moreover, future research should provide a thorough training for the teachers in using the software (the digital tool) and hardware (the new Digi boards). Although the preschool teachers were confident about their ICT skills and practices, they appeared to struggle multiple times with the tool. Since it is likely that the use of ICT in (pre)schools will increase in the future, more attention should be paid to these technological factors that will eventually determine whether a digital tool can be successfully implemented.

4.2 Conclusions

This is, to the best of our knowledge, one of the first studies to explore whether innovative ICT-based strategies can enhance educational partnerships in a multicultural and multilingual preschool environment. The study showed the feasibility and added value of a bottom-up DBR approach to give voice to parents from diverse backgrounds and to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Laleka & Rasheed, 2018). Given its explorative nature, there are several limitations to this study. We only included one preschool in the Netherlands, hence, the number of teachers and parents and the variety of perspectives is small and the generalizability of the results is limited. Note that the current explorative study was conducted within a short timeframe (one year from phase 1 to phase 3), when compared to other DBR studies focusing on implementation of digital tools. In the current study, we only had limited time to implement the tool, whereas Wang and colleagues (2014) stress the importance of a long time span to implement ICT in educational settings. Results of the fourth phase showed that there are many recommendations to improve the implementation. It is plausible that more time could have led to more improvements, more refined cycles, and therefore better results. It should be noted that the limited time for this study stresses the complex reality many early education and care settings face: They often have only little time to build a trustful educational partnership with parents, regardless of digital tools. This research provided a first step in the demonstration of the use of ICT for educational partnerships, and pointed out remaining questions and critical issues regarding the complexity of intercultural educational partnerships for future research. Although this was a small-scale study, the results underscore that a DBR methodology is a promising approach for future research on this topic. The implications outlined above can likely be transferred to other contexts to continue and further refine this innovative approach.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A.

Semi-Structured Observation Scheme for Classroom Observations

Content Related	
	Which pictures are described?
	How are the pictures described?
	Is there attention for the different cultures?
	Is there attention for the different languages?
	Are the relations or similarities between the pictures described?
	How is the content from the digital tool integrated in the practices?
Communication Related	
	Where are the children located during the activity?
	How is the interaction between the teacher and the children while using the digital tool?
	To what extent are the children actively involved while using the digital tool?

Post-Socialist Czech Education Research on Socially Disadvantaged/Roma Children and Families: Literature Review

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Abstract: The literature review analyses papers presenting results of original empirical research on the education of socially disadvantaged/Roma children and families that was conducted in the Czech Republic between 1989 and summer 2017. Our intention to elaborate this study was to make the existing research results and procedures accessible to the international scientific community, but also to support further development of the field, including disciplinary intersections and cooperation among different research institutes. After searching through seven research databases and using knowledge of the research field, 57 studies were selected for further analysis. The review study presents five research question categories focusing on the development of the selected research field, prevailing topics/themes that are researched, research settings in which the data were collected, main methodological approaches, and primary research subjects/objects. The results of our analysis pinpoint dynamic development not only in the relevant research field but also in the practice and educational policies concerned. From the methodological point of view, the slight predominance of qualitative research procedures in the field is evident. Nevertheless, there is a pervading lack of reflexivity towards the lived world of the research participants – mainly Roma children and families – and a preferred focus on macro and mezzo levels in the research scopes. The most influential published research in the field was identified, as was cross-referencing habits. In general, productivity, as well as cross-referencing culture, have developed more intensely since 2009. In conclusion, we suggest further development in both the practice of research, as well as the development of databases, so more integrative work may support tackling education inequalities in the Czech Republic.

Keywords: the Czech Republic, education, literature review, Roma children, Roma families

In recent decades, Roma have become frequently contested in the media and state policies as well as lay pub discussions.[1] Numerous European institutions and national governments have started to warn against the worsening situation of this significant European ethnic minority. Many Roma are trapped in social and spatial exclusion; they are strikingly impoverished, low-educated, and increasingly face discrimination in access to labor markets as well to quality education (FRA, 2012; 2016; Szalai & Schiff, 2014). Nevertheless, for a long time in the post-socialist development of social and educational science, the topic of the Roma was not reflected as requiring special analytical attention. With the birth of the post-socialist social order, new social issues were reflected in social sciences, and the discourse of interethnic relations, where Roma were for a time somewhat invisible or the interwar medicalized discourse persisted (Schmidt, 2018), only emerged later.

1 Roma minority in Czech and European context

One of the first publications reflecting on the Roma living in the Czech lands was an overview volume by P. Víšek (1999). Nevertheless, this publication, focusing on the social and political aspects of the Roma minority in the Czech lands since 1945, was not based on original field research. In the European space, Roma have long been considered a target of racialized violence and oppression (Mayall, 2004; Stauber, Roni, & Vago, 2007). In the Czech Republic, the iconic historical publication by C. Nečas (1999) introduced the topic of the Roma holocaust that took place during the Second World War. In general, there was a missing historical awareness among the Czech population of the fact that most Roma living in the Czech Republic are of Slovak Roma origin and therefore have a specific linguistic domestic situation, different from that of ethnic majority families and, in this respect, similar to immigrant families. Even though the Czech and Slovak languages are similar, they are far from the same, particularly when it comes to academic competences like proper grammar use, which plays an essential role in the education process. And that is not to mention the huge linguistic difference of the Romany language, which, despite

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[1] There is an ongoing discussion among the Czech social science community regarding the use of the term "Roma". Looking at the term from the emic perspective, it happens to be problematic and replaced by the offensive exonym "Gypsy", which had been dominant in the Czech lands until the 1990s, even in professional discourses. As a lived term, the denomination "Gypsy" prevails, and the term "Roma" is, on the contrary, sometimes perceived as alienating and offensive, so the lived terminology has entirely reflected the ambiguous nature of Czech-Roma relationships to the present. Moreover, discussions about othering and essentialism appear in the field (Barša, 2008; Skupnik, 2009). In this study, we henceforth use the term Roma without quotation marks, but we are aware of the complex and problematic nature of the term. The purpose of this study was not to evaluate or elaborate on use of the terms "Roma" and "socially disadvantaged". This field of meaning is under dramatic development and could serve as material for independent study. Also, discursive discussions about the term are somewhat absent in the reviewed studies. Therefore, we reflect on the terms used by individual authors, including choices that are unclear as is, in this respect, the case of some reviewed studies. More on that in section 1.2 discussing the terminology of this paper.

often being used only as a supplementary communication means in Roma families (Červenka, 2009), contributes to a situation where parents are not fully competent in the dominant language being used in school while their linguistic competences are overlooked by teachers as they are not considered as valuable to the education process (Pastori et al., 2019). If the Roma were not recognized as structurally different, they could not be considered as deserving of unique research attention in education research. In the following years, the situation changed, partly due to EU accession processes that triggered a closer look at the issue of how ethnic minorities are treated in the Czech Republic. In recent decades, confirming the European pattern, Czech research has also reported a growing number of socially excluded localities and a persistent reproduction of the meager social status of the Roma minority across generations (GAC, 2006; 2009; 2015). Because education is considered the precondition to progress in other areas of life (housing, employment, and so on), activists and policymakers, especially in eastern European countries, have attributed blame to the high percentage of Roma students segregated to individual schools or ethnically homogeneous schools. In several European countries, including the Czech Republic, strategic litigation in favour of the Roma minority has resulted in judgements from the European Court of Human Rights criticizing national governments and their educational systems respectively,[2] with education becoming one of the most debated issues concerning the Roma minority. This is evident as well in the academic discourse, where the education of Roma students/children has recently garnered increasing attention. There are many contributions to the topic framed by different, often contradictory paradigmatic/discursive positions (see, for example, Čechovská, 2014; Trubeta, 2013), defining the research problems from diverging vantage points. Despite the increasing and diversified field of literature about Roma education, there has only been one highly erudite systematic review of the topic published in English (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018), while a review specifically focused on the Czech context was, at the point of elaborating this literature review, non-existent.[3] This fact was essential for our motivation to conduct this literature review.

The topic of education research regarding Roma families is not new to us. While J. Obrovská's dissertation focused on interaction rituals in primary school classrooms and their role in the ethnic identity dynamics of Roma students (2018), K. Sidiropulu Janků's long term interest lies in ethnographic research of ethnic urban marginality and methodological innovations in the analysis of interethnic relationships in Czech--Roma families (Nedbálková & Sidiropulu Janků, 2015). Later we collaborated on the research project Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society (ISOTIS), which focuses on understanding and tackling education inequalities at an early age in ethnic-cultural minority or socially disadvantaged families and educatio-

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[2] See e.g., *D.H. and others versus the Czech Republic* (Council of Europe. Court of Human Rights. Grand Chamber, 2007).

[3] During the review, the critical review study of Fónadová, Katrňák, and Simonová (2019) on the effect of ethnic origin on achieved education was published.

88   nal systems in eleven European countries. When we started to cooperate with colleagues from other European countries on an international comparative study focused on parental views of the education of socially disadvantaged Roma children within the European Union, we realized that it is challenging to share relevant scientific resources based on empirical data from the Czech Republic with an international audience because most research outputs are written in Czech. The ISOTIS project is committed to critical revision of similar presuppositions, and therefore we also aim to thoroughly review the position of Roma in education research in the Czech context. We also analyse the power perspectives of the reviewed studies, trying to determine whether the research participants (Roma children, but also others such as family members or teachers) are treated merely as research objects or whether they are actively drawn into the process as its subjects, in addition to how the power relations of researchers and research participants are reflected upon. One of our primary goals is to elaborate a review reflecting the Czech context for the international scientific community. The only existent review on Roma education in European countries (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018) states nine studies from the Czech context on Roma education published in English in the last two decades. It is important to note that with the exception of Cviklová (2015), Jarkovská, Lišková, and Obrovská (2015), and Němec et al. (2015), the remaining six studies published in English were written by authors presumably not fluent in Czech and were therefore limited in the use of contact research methods (e.g., Igarashi, 2005) and focused mainly on policy discourse comparisons (e.g., Brüggermann & Friedman, 2017; Rostas & Kostka, 2014). Therefore, we remained with the original plan to review exclusively studies written in the Czech language.

Original empirical Czech research on Roma education usually does not extend beyond the national/local scope. With this literature review, we hope to make the actual results accessible to a broader audience and suggest further inquiry into research trends and possible development in the field of socially disadvantaged/Roma children education based on deeper collaboration with the international community of scholars.

1.1 Review goals and functions

Our literature review summarizes original empirical research on the education of socially disadvantaged Roma children in the Czech Republic between 1989 and summer 2017.[4] The goal of the review is to identify key topics which are crucial to the current state of knowledge in the field and contrast them with topics that seem to be at this point marginal. At the same time, we strive to reflect on the practical methodological approaches which are usually followed in this field and the ordinary objects/subjects that are the focus of researchers. Following these goals, we formulate five main research questions for the literature review on original empirical

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[4]   To have a complete selection sample, we did not include studies published after the second half of the year 2017, despite some new relevant studies that appeared during the course of the review.

research concerning the education of socially disadvantaged Roma children and families in the Czech Republic between 1989 and summer 2017:

1. How has the research field developed, including inner relations between authors and research institutions?
2. What current research topics/themes can be derived from the research questions formulated in the reviewed studies?
3. What are the main methodological approaches and data collection techniques in the research?
4. What are the current settings in which the data is collected?
5. Who have been the main studied subjects/objects in the research on the education of socially disadvantaged Roma children in the Czech Republic between 1989 and summer 2017?

Following J. Mareš's typology of functions, a review study can provide for the development of the research field as well as for other researchers (2013, p. 436, Table 2). We suppose that our study classifies the following: research traditions, schools, and trends; identifies critical topics and blind spots in the field; places the research into historical as well as an actual research context; constructs criteria which allows for the differentiation between important and less relevant studies; recommends directions for further research; helps to understand the research structure; provides methodological insights into the research field; and categorizes the research results in that field.

We want to identify the prevalent topics as well as the blind spots in the field from a thematic as well as a methodological point of view – which topics, methods, settings, subjects/objects are relatively marginal in current research? With our background in the discipline of sociology, we also strive to enhance interdisciplinary dialogue on the topic between scholars coming from different research fields as we have anticipated proving from the beginning of our review endeavour that the debate on the topic among authors from different disciplines is rather scarce, although the topic as such has by its nature a strong interdisciplinary character (education, special education, social education, sociology, anthropology, and ethnology are engaged in the studies). We also want to provide a critical assessment of the present research in the Czech Republic and suggestions for further development in order to enhance the comparative potential of research from the Czech context in a European scope.

1.2 Terminology

Before proceeding further, we will discuss the terminology used in the reviewed studies. On the one hand, the inconsistencies or ambiguities we recognize in the reviewed texts reflect the dynamic development of research and educational policies focused on the Roma in recent years, on the other hand, they also confirm the somewhat isolated approaches and procedures of individual researchers in the field.

1.2.1 Roma and Socially disadvantaged

The reviewed studies use both the term Roma and socially disadvantaged, in many cases, interchangeably (e.g., in Bartoňová, 2008). The latter term was introduced legally as a reason to set up support measures (e.g., teacher assistants) for students of an ethnic minority or low-status background during reforms to the Czech education system. However, the indicators of social disadvantage have never been clearly defined, and teachers, as well as other pedagogical professionals, struggle to categorize specific students as socially disadvantaged. Although an amendment to the Education Act No. 82/2015 Coll. (Ministerstvo, 2015) brought changes in the logic of distributing support measures among students with special educational needs and disabilities, social disadvantage remains a contested term. There is an ongoing debate about what social disadvantage means, how to use the term, and how to measure it. Sometimes it is associated with the term social exclusion or socially excluded localities, which are defined, in addition to characteristics, as settlements populated with socially disadvantaged people (GAC, 2006, 2015; Hurrle et al., 2016).

The reviewed studies are not united in denominating their research subjects/objects in this respect. On closer examination, we find the reflexive approach towards the term Roma exclusively in resources written by authors with an anthropological or sociological background (Bittnerová et al. 2011; Fatková, 2013; Fónadová, 2014; Gabal & Čada, 2010; Jarkovská et al., 2015; Kašparová & Souralová, 2014). Only rarely did we find references to the conflicting terminologies also acknowledging the emic terms used in the research field, and this is mostly linked to researching domestic, not school settings. Thus, it can be stated that Czech education science is not in much contact with the sociological and anthropological conceptual debates on denominating the Roma and the methodological and epistemological consequences of possible choices in this respect.

1.2.2 Practical, Special, and Segregated school

As we mentioned in the introductory section, the Czech Republic is being criticized for the segregation of Roma students to public schools other than mainstream, especially to so-called practical schools with curricula adjusted to students with learning or behavioral disorders or mental disadvantages as well as to special schools for students with severe physical or mental handicaps or behavioral disorders. The numbers of Roma students attending special streams of public education do not statistically correspond to the distribution of mental handicaps in the population, and we can find a massive overrepresentation of Roma students in these types of schools. Another serious problem is the concentration of Roma students in ethnically and socially segregated schools, often localized in socially excluded neighborhoods. Although these schools formally follow the same Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (Ministerstvo, 2017) as the regular basic schools,[5] their curriculum is reduced, and teaching practices are adjusted to the specific needs of

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[5] The compulsory school education within the Czech educational system is divided into primary and lower secondary levels. The primary level is composed of five grades, while the lower secondary

Roma students. It is good to keep these facts in mind when reading the presented literature review study.

2. Method

2.1 The selection process of reviewed studies

The selection process of the studies to be reviewed was conducted in the summer of 2017,[6] and consisted of several steps. Initially, we constructed five main selection criteria to search the databases: (1) the publication is based on original empirical research, (2) the data for the study was collected in the socio-spatial context of the Czech Republic, (3) the study was published in the Czech language, (4) the study was published between 1989 and summer 2017, and (5) the study deals with the education of socially disadvantaged/Roma pupils and families. Later, we formulated more specific formal as well as content selection criteria. From our list of searched publications and based on an analysis of their abstracts, we eliminated conference papers, bachelor and master's theses which did not undergo a standard anonymous peer-review process,[7] and theoretical publications, as we concentrate on publications based on primary original empirical data. We then excluded publications that had a focus other than the education of socially disadvantaged Roma students.

The search was conducted in the following research databases:

- Katalog Masarykovy university Aleph (Catalogue of Masaryk University Aleph)
- Theses.cz – Vysokoškolské kvalifikační práce (Theses.cz – Repository of final theses)
- Katalog Moravské zemské knihovny (Catalogue of the Moravian Library)
- SKC CASLIN – Souborný katalog ČR (SKC CASLIN – Aggregated Catalogue of the Czech Republic)
- ANL – Výběr článků v českých novinách, časopisech a sbornících (ANL – Selection of Czech Print Daily News, Journals, and Proceedings)
- JIB – Jednotná informační brána (JIB - United information gate)[8]
- CEEOL – Central and Eastern European Online Library

In the first phase, we combined various keywords in order to find the most suitable combinations, and in this way, we determined the best combinations with the most productive results.

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has four grades. Students start basic school education when six years old and should leave lower secondary school at a maximum age of 15.

[6] Therefore, only studies published before summer 2017 are included in this review study.

[7] We only included post-master's and PhD dissertation theses, which, by definition, have to reach high academic standards and include original research results.

[8] The operation of this database finished at the end of the year 2018 and the database knihovny. cz replaced it. These databases encompass catalogues of thousands of Czech libraries.

92   Finally, we analysed the results of the following keywords, entered into search catalogues and databases, using the Boolean operator AND:[9]

- "Roma"
- "education" AND "Roma"
- "socially disadvantaged groups" AND "education"
- "educational inequalities" AND "ethnicity"
- "educational inequalities"
- "education" AND "ethnicity"

Apart from this, we also searched for other possibly relevant publications by authors who were already found in the catalogues/databases search.

The total number of identified publications based on the analysis of the titles was 150, out of which, and based on the analysis of their abstracts, we selected 63 which met our selection criteria. Later on during the analysis of the whole texts, we decided to eliminate another six publications (one publication included data which was analysed in another publication by the same author;[10] the second did not focus specifically on the education of socially disadvantaged Roma students; the third, as well as the fourth one, had rather theoretical focuses; the fifth focused on socially disadvantaged students, however, not on Roma specifically; and the last one used special education diagnostic methods). The final number of studies in our sample is 57 in total. In order to detect the formal as well as the content characteristics of the original list of publications, we first analyse the abstracts. In the second step of the analytical process, we analyse full publications thoroughly in order to identify (1) development of the field aimed at inter-references among the publications – in other words, if and to what extent the author(s) of the selected publication refer to other (older) publications from our list; (2) the research design (qualitative, quantitative versus mixed-methods research designs), including the methodology and methods (e.g., ethnography, case study, interview, observation);[11] (3) the subject/object of the research (e.g., teachers, parents, students, NGO professionals, teacher assistants); (4) the research setting (e.g., NGO, home setting); and (5) the main research questions.

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[9] In most databases, we entered the combinations of keywords both in Czech and English languages. We entered the combinations only in the Czech language in the Catalogue of final theses and ANL database as these primarily encompass resources published in the Czech language. We further entered the combinations only in the Czech language in the CEEOL database as we are focused on publications published in Czech journals, and the keywords entered in English brought only English-written results.

[10] J. Mareš (2013) notices that it is a frequent mistake of research literature reviews to count several publications based on the same data set. We faced such a challenge, for example, with the work of M. Levínská (2013). The author used data obtained from three Roma female respondents that were utilized in a more comprehensive book (Bittnerová et al., 2011), and so we decided to include the book instead.

[11] Reflecting the fact that in most of the reviewed studies no consistent methodological approach (such as ethnography, case study, phenomenology) was systematically followed and only partial methods (such as interview, observation) were applied, we gather methodologies and methods into one analytical category for the review. Nevertheless, we reflect on the difference between methods and methodologies in Section 3.3.

We want to stress that by following these search/analytical steps, we constructed a specific sample of publications which does not represent the complete list of texts published so far on the topic in the Czech language. There is a considerable number of closely related monographs and other studies which either did not fulfil the criteria of being based on primary empirical data; dealt with pedagogical-psychological diagnostics, interventions, or methodical/didactical processes without coherent evaluations based on primary data; or presented their research results in a format which is not standard for scientific publications (e.g., case interpretations without the rigor typical of case studies). We are also aware of the methodological limitations of searching through the selected databases as these sometimes omit some (even critical) results which do not fit the specific combinations of keywords entered in the databases (e.g., we received a publication by GAC, 2009 as the result of database searches, but we did not receive similarly relevant publications by GAC, 2006; GAC, 2010; and GAC, 2015, which we decided to add to our list of analysed publications). We are also aware of the limited number/character of databases involved in the selection procedure. We did not include any field-specific database (e.g., for Czech research in education, it would be https://www.npmk.cz/knihovna) as we consider the character of this research topic multidisciplinary. At the same time, many of the reviewed Czech journals are indexed in the database CEEOL, which was also the reason we included this specific database. In conclusion, the list of publications we analysed is inevitably selective and does not have the ambition to represent a comprehensive/systematic review of studies on the education of socially disadvantaged Roma students published in the Czech Republic from 1989 until today. At the same time, it does safely introduce the international audience to all the original empirical research accessible in the databases within the given timeframe and presents an elaboration of methodological scope, as well as mutual relationships between studies, authors, and research institutes.

2.2 Analysis of the studies

In order to facilitate such extensive analytical work, we used Atlas.ti, version 7.0 to analyse the studies, focusing on the methodological aspects (nature of the research, methods used, subject/object outline of the research, research setting, and research questions). With this focus, we coded all relevant parts of the texts covering the focused aspects explicitly. To analyse the publications selected for this study, we developed a coding tree combining inductive and deductive coding strategies. In the first run, we invented a coding tree based on categories that we assume to be taken for granted (e.g., quantitative versus qualitative versus mix methods design to identify the primary methodological approach). Later, we revised the coding tree with newly emerging categories inductively derived from the analytical work as such (e.g., officials as a code representing the subject/object coding family). Finally, we arrived at a total number of 114 codes divided into five code families (including the analysis of research questions). Some of the codes were not used in the end for

the analysis of the final set of analysed studies but were kept in the coding tree because they are part of the hermeneutic map of meanings that create the final analysis and interpretation.

3. Results

3.1 Development of the research field

When we launched the database search, we learned that the first text with original education research on the topic in the post-socialist period was written in 2002, and the first year with numerous outputs was 2007 (Figure 1).
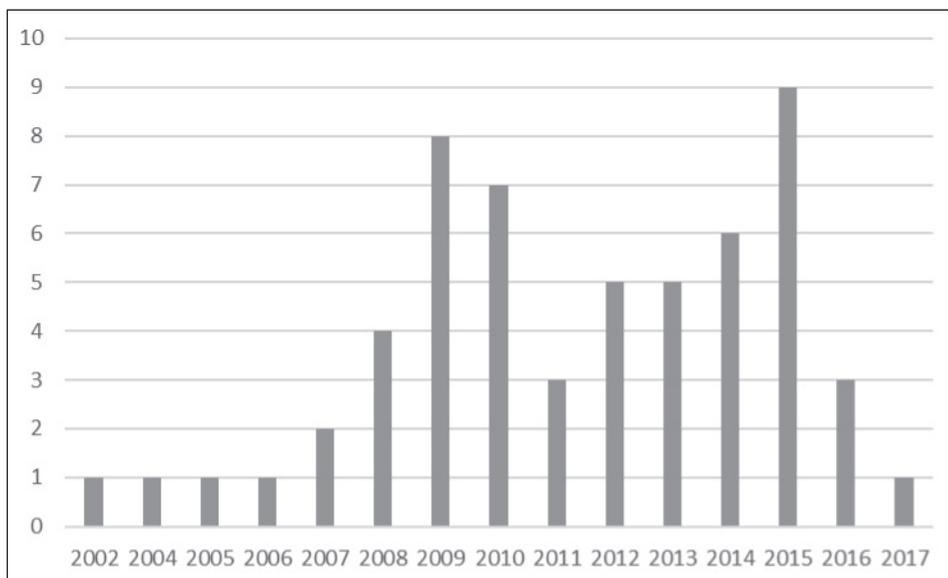
Figure 1 Number of reviewed studies published between 2002 and summer 2017

These findings follow general trends in the area of social research focused on issues associated with the Roma in the Czech Republic. The first overview of socially excluded localities requested by the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was published in 2006 (GAC) and state-funded qualitative research on such localities appeared first in 2008 (Kašparová et al.). It seems that Roma-related issues had not been recognized as a research topic before then.

The following analysis elaborates the issue closer as we analyse and cluster the number of cross-references in the reviewed texts. A total amount of 22 studies out of 57 analysed texts do not refer to any of the published available studies that we analysed at the time, and only two studies refer to more than 20 per cent of the analysed texts available at the point of their publication, with a maximum rate of

28 per cent. That is to say, the general habit of cross-referencing to the existing field of knowledge is, based on the analysis of chosen studies, not very common in Czech research on education needs and the performances of Roma students.

Table 1 Available cross-references in the reviewed texts

Possible cross-reference rate	Number of studies
Over 20%	2
16–20%	2
11–15%	16
6–10%	8
1–5%	7
0%	22

To understand the cross-referencing patterns in the field, we examined the data more closely, trying to answer the question of whether the studies published later quoted the colleagues in the field more frequently. The results are displayed in the Figure 2, showing the average frequency of quotations from reviewed studies in the timeline.
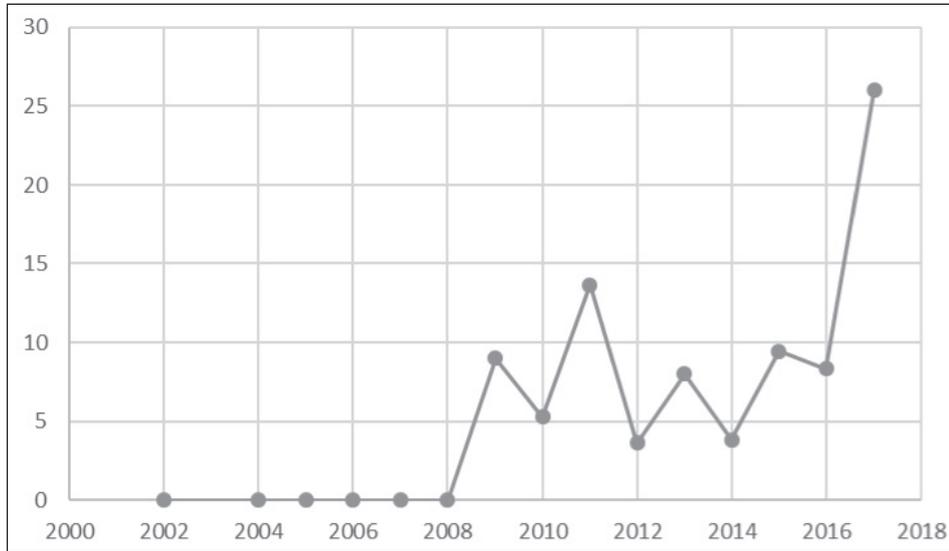

Figure 2 The frequency of quotations from reviewed studies, average by year of publication

The data shows that during the first phase, until 2008, there were no references to the works of other colleagues from the reviewed studies even though there were very few studies available. It could therefore be assumed that the community of

researchers must have been in intense contact,[12] whereas from 2009 on, referencing other texts in the research field becomes more of a habit. In spite of the fact that the development since 2009 has been uneven, we may expect less terminological fragmentation in the future. After analysing the cross-referencing of analysed texts, we then outlined the most influential studies in the field from the researched period, which may help international readers to understand developments in the Czech domestic context of the research field.

Table 2 Most quoted studies of the literature review sample

Study	Research Institute	Cross-references
GAC (2009)	Gabal Analysis and Consulting	46% (21/46)
GAC (2006)	Gabal Analysis and Consulting	28% (15/54)
GAC (2007)	Gabal Analysis and Consulting	27% (14/52)
Bittnerová et al. (2011)	Charles University	26% (8/31)
GAC (2015)	Gabal Analysis and Consulting	25% (3/12)
Jarkovská et al. (2015)	Masaryk University	25% (3/12)
Kaleja (2011)	University of Ostrava	19% (6/31)
Kašparová, Souralová (2014)	Masaryk University	17% (3/18)
Straková, Tomášek (2013)	Charles University	17% (4/23)
GAC (2010)	Gabal Analysis and Consulting	16% (6/38)
Kaleja (2013)	University of Ostrava	13% (3/23)
Souralová (2008)	Masaryk University	12% (6/50)
Gabal, Čada (2010)	Gabal Analysis and Consulting	11% (4/38)
Svoboda (2010)	Jan Evangelista Purkyně University	11% (4/38)
Nekorjak et al. (2011)	Masaryk University	10% (3/31)

Note: The studies are listed in descending order according to the most frequently quoted in relative numbers. The numeric expression in parentheses shows how many times the study was quoted in reviewed studies, followed by the possible quoting opportunities due to the publishing year.

When we look at how often the reviewed studies quoted other studies from the sample, we find a very different frequency, as well as representation of the research institutes. The only exception are studies delivered by the GAC research institute – all six studies from the analysed selection are present in the overview of most quoted studies. As we already mentioned, the GAC analysis of socially excluded Roma localities in the Czech Republic belongs among the pioneering research works in the examined field. The generally high standard of analysis delivered by GAC combining qualitative and quantitative methods and easy accessibility of the results due to their well-organized online archive, as well as the national scope of the research,

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[12] The works published before 2008 referred to legal documents, demographic resources, international resources, compilatory works, and resources from related subject fields, such as ethnology, social anthropology, and psychology.

made the work of GAC one of the most quoted in the field. Nevertheless, other institutions are quoted as well, and we did not find any significant trend in citing works from diverse research institutions. The most frequented research workplaces that published relevant studies on the analysed topic in the observed time period are Masaryk University, Faculty of Education, Department of Social Education (9 studies); Masaryk University, Faculty of Social Studies, Department of Sociology (8 studies); Masaryk University, Faculty of Education, Department of Special and Inclusive Education (7 studies); Charles University, Faculty of Education, Department of Psychology & Charles University, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences Module (4 studies); and the University of Ostrava, Faculty of Education, Department of Special Pedagogy, Centre for Educational Research (4 studies).

The development of the research field on the education of socially disadvantaged/Roma children and families was considerably influenced by several publications that did not meet the selection criteria of our study. Nevertheless, their influence was significant at the time, so we will briefly introduce them as well. One of the iconic publications of the early 2000s is T. Šišková's overview study on ethnic minority and immigrant groups living in the Czech Republic (2001). Her overview of ethnic minorities living in the country became one of the first resources to be highly cited across disciplines. In our selection of 57 original research studies, reference to T. Šišková appeared ten times. Two other texts, which are not original education research studies, were also extensively cited in the resources we analysed. One is a study on the Roma ethnolect of the Czech language by M. Bořkovcová (2006, cited 5 times); the second is a paper on education research in the Roma environment by L. Gulová (2010, cited 5 times).

3.2 Analysis of methodological approaches

In this section, we present the analysis of research questions/goals, methods, research settings, and subjects/objects that we depicted in the review studies. Before we elaborate on specific topics of the methodology analysis, we present an overview of the results in the summarizing Table 3.

3.2.1 Research questions

The analysis of research questions/goals in the selected studies render several categories of topics most covered, which range from macro to micro phenomena related to the education of socially disadvantaged Roma students and families. It is important to note that in some studies, the research questions follow more topics from the same category (e.g., some studies followed the perspectives of different kinds of actors within one research project) while others deal with topics from different categories (e.g., they focused on support measures as well as on the perspectives of a specific kind of actor at the same time). Therefore, some of the studies are counted within more than one category of research questions. We have listed the numbers of studies encompassed in respective research question categories so the reader may identify respective studies (see Table 3).

Table 3 Analysis of methodology of the reviewed studies

No.	Autor	Year	Research strategy	Methods	Research subject/object	Research setting	Category of research question
1	Amnesty	2009	Qual	Case study, interview, observation	Helping professions, office employees, teacher assistants, teachers, Roma parents, Roma students, school directors, teachers in segregated schools	Non-profit organization, school, segregated school	Macro factors
2	Bartoňová	2002	Quan	Questionnaire	Teachers in preparatory classrooms	Preparatory classroom	Support measures
3	Bartoňová	2008	Quan	Interview, questionnaire	Counselling workers, education materials, teacher assistants, Roma students, socially disadvantaged students, teachers in preparatory classrooms	Preparatory classroom	Support measures
4	Bartoňová	2010	Quan + Qual	Interview, observation	Preparatory classrooms graduates, socially disadvantaged students	Socially excluded locality	Support measures
5	Bartoňová, Pipeková	2008	Quan	Interview, questionnaire	Teacher assistants	Preparatory classroom	Support measures
6	Bittnerová	2009	Quan + Qual	Documents analysis, emic and etic perspective, ethnography, focus group, interview, questionnaire	Helping professions, Roma vs. immigrants comparison, counselling workers, parents of socially disadvantaged students, pedagogical workers, teachers, socially disadvantaged students	Assisting institution, non-profit organization	Support measures
7	Bittnerová, Moravcová	2005	Qual	Ethnology, interview, observation	Ethnic majority inhabitants, localities, Roma	Home, non-profit organization, informal situation, office	Micro-processes
8	Bittnerová et al.	2011	Quan	Questionnaire	Roma vs. immigrants comparison, Roma parents	Research setting not explicitly stated	Perspectives

No.	Autor	Year	Research strategy	Methods	Research subject/object	Research setting	Category of research question
9	Bittnerová, Doubek, Levínská	2011	Qual	Ethnography, interview, introspection	Helping professions, ethnic majority inhabitants, teachers, Roma, Roma children, Roma mothers	Home, informal situation	Micro-processes/Perspectives
10	Bočková, Klenková	2009	Quan	Questionnaire	Helping professions, teachers, teachers in practical schools, teachers in preparatory classrooms, teachers in special schools	Practical school, preparatory classroom, school, segregated school (uncertain), special school	Outcomes
11	Buchtová et al.	2010	Qual	Uncertain	Helping professions, teacher assistants, teacher assistants from segregated schools, teachers, teachers in special schools, university students	School, segregated school (uncertain), special school	Support measures/Perspectives
12	Caltová Hepnarová	2015	Qual	Grounded theory, interview, observation	Helping professions, Roma parents	Home, non-profit organization	Micro-processes
13	Doubek et al.	2015	Qual	Ethnography, interview, introspection	Helping professions	Assisting institution	Support measures
14	Dřímal	2004	Qual	Interview	Roma children, Roma parents	Home	Micro-processes
15	Fatková	2013	Qual	AV technique, case study, ethnography, interdisciplinary approach, interview, methods uncertain, observation, PAR	Teachers, Roma children, Roma families, Roma parents	Socially excluded locality	Micro-processes/Perspectives
16	Fónadová	2014	Qual	Interview	Roma	Work setting	Outcomes
17	FRA	2014	Quan + Qual	Interview	Roma vs. majority comparison, educational chances, inequalities, Roma	Informal situation, school	Outcomes

No.	Autor	Year	Research strategy	Methods	Research subject/object	Research setting	Category of research question
18	Fučík et al.	2009	Quan	Questionnaire	Roma vs. immigrants comparison, Roma vs. majority comparison, Roma students, Roma teenagers	School, segregated school	Outcomes/ Perspectives
19	Gabal, Čada	2010	Quan + Qual	Secondary data analysis	Inequalities, integration tools, educational chances, educational results	Socially excluded locality	Outcomes/Support measures
20	GAC	2006	Quan + Qual	Record sheet	Helping professions, office employees, localities, Roma	Non-profit organization, office, school, socially excluded locality	Macro factors
21	GAC	2007	Quan + Qual	Enquête, intervention, interview, secondary data analysis	Class teachers, teacher assistants, teachers, Roma children, social workers	School	Outcomes
22	GAC	2009	Quan + Qual	Documents analysis, interview, record sheet	Roma vs. majority comparison, educational results, Roma students, school directors	"Practical" school, school, segregated school, special school	Outcomes/ Perspectives
23	GAC	2010	Quan + Qual	Interview, record sheet	Helping professions, Roma vs. majority comparison, teachers, Roma students, Roma teenagers, school directors	High school, home, non-profit organization, school	Macro factors/ Outcomes
24	GAC	2015	Quan + Qual	Case study, documents analysis, evaluation, focus group, interview, observation, questionnaire, record sheet, secondary data analysis	Helping professions, localities, office employees, teachers, Roma, schools	Lodge housing, non-profit organization, office, school, socially excluded locality	Macro factors

No.	Autor	Year	Research strategy	Methods	Research subject/object	Research setting	Category of research question
25	Gazdíková	2012	Quan	Questionnaire	Roma students from special schools	Assisting institution, non-profit organization	Perspectives
26	Gulová	2012	Qual	Uncertain	Teacher assistants, teachers, Roma, university students	School, university	Support measures
27	Gulová et al.	2007	Qual	Focus group	Teachers in preparatory classrooms	Preparatory classroom	Perspectives
28	Janák et al.	2015	Quan + Qual	Case study, documents analysis, focus group, interview, questionnaire	Helping professions, ethnic majority inhabitants, office employees, teacher assistants, teachers, Roma parents, school directors, teachers in preparatory classrooms	Non-profit organization, office, preparatory classroom, school	Macro factors/ Perspectives
29	Jarkovská et al.	2015	Quan + Qual	Ethnography, questionnaire	Attitudes of teachers, Roma vs. immigrants comparison, integration tools, parents of socially disadvantaged students, teachers, relationships in the school and in the classroom	School classroom	Macro factors/ Micro-processes/ Perspectives
30	Kaleja	2010	Quan	Questionnaire	Roma parents	Research setting uncertain, socially excluded locality	Perspectives
31	Kaleja	2011	Quan	Questionnaire	Attitudes towards education, educational results, Roma parents	Research setting not explicitly stated	Perspectives
32	Kaleja	2013	Quan	Questionnaire, system of unfinished sentences	Roma students, Roma students from special schools	Research setting not explicitly stated	Perspectives

No.	Autor	Year	Research strategy	Methods	Research subject/object	Research setting	Category of research question
33	Kaleja	2015	Quan	Questionnaire	Teachers, teachers in practical schools, teachers in segregated schools	Practical school, school, segregated school	Support measures
34	Kaleja, Krpec	2013	Quan	Questionnaire	Roma students	Practical school (uncertain), school, segregated school (uncertain)	Perspectives
35	Kaleja et al.	2015	Qual	Documents analysis, ethnography, interview, observation	Teachers, relationships in the school and in the classroom, students	School, segregated school, special school	Micro-processes
36	Kašparová, Souralová	2014	Qual	Case study	Parents, teachers, relationships in the school and in the classroom	Segregated school	Macro factors/ Perspectives
37	Klapko	2014	Qual	Discourse analysis, interview	Teachers in practical schools, teachers in preparatory classrooms	Practical school, preparatory classroom	Perspectives
38	Marada et al.	2009	Qual	Focus group, interview, observation	Teachers, Roma parents, Roma students	Segregated school	Macro factors
39	Nekorjak et al.	2011	Qual	Case study, focus group, interview, observation	Helping professions, office employees, teachers, Roma parents, Roma students, teachers in practical schools, teachers in segregated schools	Non-profit organization, office, school, segregated school, socially excluded locality	Macro factors

No.	Autor	Year	Research strategy	Methods	Research subject/object	Research setting	Category of research question
40	Němec	2009	Qual	Focus group, interview	Education students, teacher assistants, teachers, Roma parents, teachers in preparatory classrooms, tutors	Preparatory classroom, segregated school (uncertain), university	Microprocesses / Perspectives / Support measures
41	Němec, Štěpařová	2008	Qual	Focus group	Teacher assistants	Segregated school (uncertain)	Support measures
42	Národní institut dětí a mládeže	2010	Qual	Documents analysis, focus group, interview	Helping professions, informal education, Roma teenagers	Informal situation, non-profit organization	Support measures
43	Nová škola	2012	Qual	Focus group	Roma mothers	Non-profit organization	Micro-processes
44	Obrovská	2017	Qual	Ethnography	Relationships in the school and in the classroom	School classroom	Micro-processes
45	Pavlíčková	2012	Quan + Qual	Documents analysis, enquête, focus group, observation	Education students, Roma parents, tutors	Home, university	Micro-processes / Perspectives / Support measures
46	Presová	2012	Quan	Documents analysis, education results	Roma students	School, segregated school (uncertain)	Outcomes
47	Rácová, Čechovská	2015	Qual	Interview, introspection	Roma parents	Non-profit organization	Perspectives / Support measures
48	Rádl	2013	Qual	Interdisciplinary approach, interview	Roma parents	Home	Micro-processes

No.	Autor	Year	Research strategy	Methods	Research subject/object	Research setting	Category of research question
49	Smetáčková et al.	2015	Quan + Qual	Case study, intervention, interview, questionnaire	Attitudes of teachers, class teachers, inequalities, teachers, students	School classroom	Micro-processes/ Perspectives
50	Souralová	2008	Qual	Ethnography	Helping professions, Roma vs. majority comparison, teachers, Roma parents, Roma students, School directors, teachers in segregated schools	High school, non-profit organization, school, segregated school, socially excluded locality	Macro factors/ Outcomes
51	Straková, Tomášek	2013	Quan	Education results measurement, questionnaire, secondary data analysis	Educational results	Segregated school (uncertain), special school	Outcomes
52	Strobachová	2016	Qual	Documents analysis, phenomenology, interview	Roma vs. majority comparison, Roma students	School	Perspectives
53	Svoboda	2010	Qual	Quasi-experiment	Teachers, teachers in practical schools, teachers in segregated schools	Practical school, school, segregated school	Perspectives/ Support measures
54	Šafránková	2014	Quan	Questionnaire	Teachers	School	Perspectives
55	Šormová	2016	Quan	Questionnaire, test of reading literacy	Roma vs. majority comparison, educational results, teachers, Roma students, teachers in segregated schools (uncertain)	School, segregated school (uncertain)	Outcomes
56	Štěpařová	2009	Qual	Case study, focus group, introspection	Educational results, education students, integration tools, teacher assistants, Roma families, Roma students, tutors	Home, school, preparatory classroom	Support measures
57	Vorlíček	2016	Qual	Ethnography	Relationships in the school and in the classroom	School, school classroom	Micro-processes

The first category is related to *the macro factors underpinning the education of this specific group of subjects*, such as educational policy (no. 1, 23, 29), structural conditions (no. 20, 24), or causes of school segregation as well as de-segregation (no. 28, 36, 38, 39, 50). Several studies reflect different factors in educating socially disadvantaged Roma children in their complexity. However, they use rather vague definitions of research questions and thus overlap with other categories we identified.

The second category of research questions/goals discusses the *support measures provided for Roma children, students, parents, or families to enhance their success/results in the educational system*. Studies from this category focus on the effects of preparatory classes for socially disadvantaged Roma students (no. 2–4, 56), experiences and problems faced by teaching assistants for socially disadvantaged students (no. 5, 11, 26, 40, 41, 47, 56), the preparedness of teachers for the inclusion of socially disadvantaged Roma students (no. 2), the evaluation of tutoring programs provided by future teachers to socially disadvantaged Roma families (no. 45, 56), or monitoring of (informal) educational activities provided by state and non-governmental organizations in socially excluded localities (no. 6, 13, 19, 56).

The third research questions/goals category includes studies which focus predominantly on the *school outcomes of Roma students*, comprehended as being either from a static or a dynamic perspective. The first subcategory encompasses studies that analyse the results (usually grades, school attendance) of Roma students on a one-time basis (no. 17, 18, 51) and often focus on reading literacy or language comprehension (no. 10, 55). The second subcategory of studies monitors factors influencing school trajectories and outcomes of Roma children from a complex and longitudinal perspective while taking into account diverse actors as well as factors (no. 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 46, 50).

The fourth substantial category of research questions/goals reflects *the perspectives of different actors involved in educating socially disadvantaged Roma students and families*. These are represented by the discourses/opinions of teachers of Roma students, including teachers from preparatory classes (no. 9, 15, 27–29, 36, 37, 40, 49, 53, 54), perspectives of future teachers or students of social education on the education/tutoring of socially disadvantaged Roma students (no. 11, 40, 45), beliefs of Roma parents related to school and the education of their children (no. 8, 9, 30, 31, 40, 45, 47), or meanings Roma children/students themselves construct in relation to school or their future aspirations (no. 9, 18, 25, 32, 34, 52). There is also one study devoted to the opinions of various experts on educating socially disadvantaged Roma students (no. 11).

The last category of studies, as far as their research questions/goals are concerned, focuses on the *everyday micro-processes related to education, either in school or in a family context*. There is a substantial batch of studies reflecting the micro-social processes constituting childhood in a Roma family/socially excluded locality (no. 9, 12, 15, 14, 40, 43, 45, 48). There is another study explicitly focused on the negotiation of identity by Roma informants (no. 1). Other studies apply an inter-

actional perspective and ethnographic approach to the role of ethnicity in school settings (no. 29, 35, 44, 49, 57).

Even if all of these five categories are saturated approximately evenly, we can observe more significant stress on the macro factors if we posit that the categories 1–3 predominantly represent the broader conditions and factors influencing the education of socially disadvantaged Roma students (policies, curriculum, support measures, school results). The two remaining categories of research questions/goals (the perspectives of actors and everyday micro-processes) cover both the opinions of diverse actors involved in the education of socially disadvantaged Roma children as well as everyday practices which comprise the experience of being a Roma child educated/raised in a Roma family, a socially excluded locality, and/or a segregated or a desegregated classroom. We can conclude that the more micro we look, the fewer studies we find. This pattern is further supported by the following analysis of methods utilized by researchers in the selected studies.

3.2.2 Methods used in the studies

The analysis of research methods shows a slight predominance of qualitative design in the research on socially disadvantaged Roma children and families. There are 27 studies in our sample which use solely qualitative research methods, 16 studies use only quantitative methods, while the remaining 12 apply a mixed-method design, combining both qualitative as well as quantitative methods. Numerous studies follow a sophisticated methodological approach, including a thorough epistemological and conceptual base for the conducted research (9 studies apply an ethnographical approach, 8 studies follow a case study design, 1 study was phenomenological, 1 affirms the grounded theory approach, and 1 drew on discourse analysis standpoints); many other studies, however, mentioned only a single method/data collection technique, such as interview or observation.

In the realm of qualitative research, we encounter the prevalence of the interview as the primary research method (27 times), followed by the focus group (12 times), and observation (10 times). Document analysis is exploited in nine studies, some of which are quantitative, while others are qualitative.

Within the quantitative/mixed-methods studies, the questionnaire was the primary research instrument (18 times), followed by secondary data analysis[13] (3 times), usage of different kinds of observation sheets (2 times), or tests to verify specific knowledge of Roma students in different areas (reading literacy, a test of unfinished sentences; 2 times).

The dominant position of the interview as a method often applied in research on the education of Roma children and families corresponds to the specific type of research questions which prevails in this field. The analysis shows that almost half the studies in our sample focused on the perspectives of different actors on education

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[13] Secondary data analysis was applied in several studies as a procedure to analyse previously collected large data sets within other research projects with specific focus on Roma pupils (e.g. as PISA in Straková & Tomášek, 2013).

(28 times), for which the interview as a method fits this purpose perfectly. As we suggested above, a stronger emphasis was put on macro factors, support measures, school outcomes, and/or perspectives in this field, and the frequent application of interviews or questionnaires corresponds to this research pattern. On the other hand, the use of methods focused on everyday lives and the first-hand experiences of researched subjects and other micro-processes is marginal despite increasing in recent years (14 times). The effort to capture the complex nature of the education of socially disadvantaged subjects calls for research designs such as ethnography, case study, and participatory or action research. Because these methodologies are more time and cost consuming, it is not surprising that research based on questionnaires or interviews with the most accessible actors (teachers usually) remains dominant.

3.2.3 Research setting

Schools and other educational institutions are the prevailing research settings where researchers collect data for their studies. In sum, study data was collected 94 times in schools and school-related settings. Very often, research is conducted in a public primary school (23 times) while further settings include ethnically segregated schools (10 times), preparatory classrooms (8 times), so-called practical schools (6 times), individual schools (6 times), classrooms (4 times), high schools (2 times), or universities (3 times). In some studies, the setting is indeterminate as the authors do not state explicitly whether the school is ethnically segregated or not (8 times) or whether it is a practical school (1 time), although there are some indicators to assume this. In four cases, the research setting is uncertain. Typically, it is research based on distributing questionnaires among Roma parents without specification of the setting where the questioning is taking place. Other school-related settings identified in the studies were non-profit organizations (13 times) and office settings (6 times).

In contrast, the natural settings of Roma informants are underrepresented in our sample. A socially excluded locality as the primary research setting appears in eight studies, while eight other studies took place in a home setting. Informal situations are mentioned four times by authors of several studies as relevant contexts where they collect their data. One study mentioned lodge housing, and one researcher visited the informant at work. In total, research settings other than school-related were chosen 22 times.

The prioritization of education-related institutions in education research is understandable; however, we identified a tendency to focus mainly on pedagogical professionals as the main subjects of the studies (see above) and/or the use of teachers and other pedagogical professionals as gatekeepers securing access to Roma parents/students. This fact can have a significant impact on whether a rapport between researcher and informant is/not established. If a Roma parent considers the researcher as part of the school institution, the validity of the collected data can be jeopardized. A parent may choose to answer a questionnaire in a socially desirable

way because they perceive the researcher as exerting control over their child, and therefore, the issue of the validity of conducted studies emerges.

3.2.4 Subject/object of the research

The patterns, which concern, as mentioned earlier, the most common research methods in the field studying the education of socially disadvantaged Roma children and families, bring us to the dominant subjects/objects of the analysed texts. The position may be shown in the research design, including procedures for generating research questions, but also for elaborating on the results. Therefore, on the one hand, there are highly structured research tools that include only short term and structured contact with people in the research field versus anthropologic and participative co-creative research tools that explore participants' perspective within a broader context and take into account their suggestions for problem solving and interpretative frames (Fay, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As such, methodologies may symbolically reproduce interpersonal relationships in the social field, and therefore the objectifying research tools can be criticized for being in danger of symbolically reproducing social inequalities (Fine, 1994).

The most frequent subject of research are teachers in public primary schools (23 times),[14] in ethnically segregated schools (6 times), in so-called practical schools (5 times), in preparatory classrooms for socially disadvantaged children (6 times), or in individual schools (2 times). Furthermore, a substantial number of studies focus on other non/pedagogical professionals working with socially disadvantaged Roma children and students, such as school directors (5 times), teacher assistants (11 times), student teachers (5 times), tutors (3 times), and other helping professions (e.g., social workers from non-profit organizations and counselling workers; 15 times). Five studies reflect the views of office employees representing institutions in charge of formulating educational policies or grant schemes supporting this common area. In total, pedagogical or non-pedagogical professionals directly or indirectly working with socially disadvantaged Roma children or families are at least one of the targeted subjects/objects 86 times.

On the other hand, Roma subjects/objects are the focus of studies from our sample much less often – Roma parents (17 times), Roma in general (8 times),[15] Roma students (15 times), Roma children under the age of six years (4 times), Roma teenagers (3 times), Roma students in individual schools (2 times), and preparatory classrooms graduates (1 time). In total, different kinds of Roma actors are the target of the selected studies 50 times.

Some studies compare educational results/perspectives or voices of Roma students with those of majority students (6 times), while others contrast Roma with

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[14] Some of the public primary schools may be ethnically segregated. However, this could not be identified clearly in numerous analysed studies.

[15] We used the code "Roma" to specify the subject/object of the study in cases where it was not possible to identify which subcategories this category encompassed (e.g., Roma parents or children or families or both).

migrants (4 times). Sometimes, ethnic majority inhabitants are mentioned as being part of the study (3 times), students without the adjective Roma are mentioned in two studies (2 times), parents of socially disadvantaged children are also included (2 times), and one study included only parents without further specification (1 time). In these cases, we were not sure whether they should be included in already existing coding categories or whether they indicate a mixture of Roma as well as majority socially disadvantaged subjects being part of the studies. This brings us back to the difficulties of many authors in defining who is/not a Roma for their research, and as a result of which, some of them worked with the more general term socially disadvantaged student/parent, and so on. (see section 1.2 Terminology).

We may conclude that in the research of socially disadvantaged Roma children and families, the attitudes, perspectives, experiences, or strategies of actors representing the ethnic-majority society are present much more often than the perspectives of Roma subjects. This implies a danger of reproducing biases and ethnocentric assumptions; ethnic-majority actors avoid this only with difficulty. Majority researchers are also in danger of unintentional reproduction of ethnocentric viewpoints or outcome-driven discourses. Even though they strive to critically reflect on them and/or distance themselves from them, most of the researchers have a habitus that is too far remote from the life experiences of their Roma informants/respondents. This is in accordance with the finding that the gender dimension, often researched using the intersubjective approach, is reflected in the research design of reviewed studies rather rarely.[16]

4 Discussion and conclusion

The main incentive to develop this literature review was to make Czech education research on socially disadvantaged/Roma children available to the international community. During work on the ISOTIS research project, we learned that it is challenging to share general research results but also proceedings within the Czech context. Some international projects on education tend to compare the education of immigrants from western European countries with the education of Roma in southeastern European countries (ISOTIS, 2019; Marada et al., 2009). National research projects often have more independent agendas that more accurately reflect the demographic and cultural situation in the respective country. Therefore, it is important to share as many resources as possible, not only within the international research projects consortia.

Silence had prevailed in Czech education science until 2007, and the topic of the educational needs of Roma children was non-existent before then. To a certain extent, it reflected the silence in the general public discourse, but it also partly seemed to be due to a lack of up-to-date research methodology. It is essential to

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[16] Only one study includes gender in research questions formulation (Smetáčková et al., 2015), and two in research findings (Jarkovská et al., 2015; Souralová, 2008).

stress that a more intense publication activity in this area started only 12 years ago, a short period of time in scientific research. As we had expected, most of the critical research in the field is produced by a few research institutions. At least they are spread across the country, and therefore a systematic research endeavour has been conducted in Prague, Brno, and Ostrava. Moreover, the role of nationwide research carried out by the research institute GAC has been irreplaceable in the past decade. It seems that over the course of time, the researchers have started to refer to each other's work, and therefore, we can expect a more significant synergic effect in their work in the future. Despite that, we see a structural barrier in that there is no database/repository of published texts in this field written in the Czech language, which would help catalyze interdisciplinary debates and support cross-referencing habits among diverse institutions. Especially in the case of the studies published in reviewed journals not indexed in SCOPUS or WOS databases, it is challenging to reach them systematically through Czech library catalogues and databases – and that is not to speak of the research reports and other publication outcomes not highly evaluated by the standard academic metric system.

The analysis of research questions in 57 selected studies generated five categories. These are macro factors, support measures, education outcomes, perspectives, and micro-processes. Despite the relatively even distribution, it can be said that the lowest attention is paid to micro-processes. The pervading preference of using questionnaires and interviews with pedagogical professionals as research tools not only reflects how research methodology is taught and practiced in education research institutions but also limits the possibilities of culturally sensitive analysis of the issue. The usage of the Romany language as a supportive research tool is practically absent in Czech education research since Roma researchers/academics are represented in the field only marginally (for an exception, see studies written, e.g., by M. Kaleja, M. Rácová, & E. Štěpařová);[17] therefore, we may assume some meaning layers remain hitherto uncovered.

The education research concerning the education of socially disadvantaged/Roma children and families takes place predominantly in formal, school settings. This, in combination with the preferred methods of research, supports the objectification of Roma students and families as rather passive, non-competent, "unsuccessful" products of specialized efforts of specialized professionals. Reproducing the hierarchical scheme of teacher/expert and student/product does not help support Roma families in taking over responsibility for their education or using family resources to achieve a better education.

The abovementioned systematic review of Lauritzen and Nodeland concludes that "Roma is primarily perceived as either the problem or the victim and rarely as a resource" (2018, p. 164). To support the development of research on the education of socially disadvantaged Roma children and families, we recommend the utilization

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[17] Some research projects put emphasis on data collection solely by Roma interviewers (see Slovo 21, 2014); however, this is to our knowledge, and based on the analysed studies, rather exceptional.

of more participatory methodologies as these are sensitive to emic perspectives of research participants and thus enable better management of the undesired subject-object power effects; concentration on the everyday experiences of the most marginalized subjects in this field – Roma children, students and teenagers; and last but not at least the involvement of Roma researchers/interviewers in the research designs. A reservoir of texts published in this field concentrated in some repository/database would help to enhance cross-referencing in academic papers. However, it also develops support measures targeted at socially disadvantaged Roma children and families based on more robust scientific proofs.

Hopefully, after another decade of education research and social development in the Czech education system, more good news and promising practices will be presented, and the worrying trend of an education gap between the ethnic majority Czechs and the Czech Roma population will be stopped or even reversed. We seem to be still far from finding the proper tools to tackle ethnic-based inequalities in the Czech educational system, and based on the literature review study results, we can only support investing more efforts in the field to see more curricular results in the future.

Acknowledgments

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EARLI SIG 5 Conference 2018: Future Challenges for Early Childhood Education and Care
Berlin (Germany)
29th to 31st August, 2018

The EARLI *Special Interest Group (SIG) 5* is one of the 27 Special Interest Groups (SIG) of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI), which is the biggest educational association in Europe, representing over 2000 members in more than 60 countries. The SIGs represent researchers who study one or more parts and/or aspects of the field. The SIG 5 focuses on learning and development in early childhood from birth to the age of eight years.

The interest and investment in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is growing, not only because early childhood experiences have long-lasting impacts on the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development of children in general (Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, & Siraj, 2015), but also because recent societal, educational and technological changes create new challenges and opportunities within ECEC (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009; Haslip & Gullo, 2018). Therefore, the theme of the SIG 5 Biennial Conference in 2018 was *ECEC 2.0 – Future Challenges for Early Childhood Education and Care*. It took place from August 29th to August 31st at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, represented and organized by Yvonne Anders (Department of Education and Psychology, Chair of Early Childhood Education). With this conference theme we invited researchers to discuss (1) the increasing emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education in general and the use of technology in ECEC in particular, and (2) the importance of social-emotional and motivational developmental aspects for children's educational pathways. Furthermore, the conference provided a platform for international collaboration, the exchange of ideas and evidence-based discussions about early childhood research from both the educational and the developmental sciences.

As the result of the review process, which included 56 reviewers assessing 120 submissions, the conference program included 16 posters, 49 single papers, 25 symposia and two workshops for the 240 participants to engage in. The participants covered a wide range of content in their presentations and represented 30 countries, including Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Kenya, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, the UK, Taiwan, and the United States.

In addition to these diverse contents, three keynote speakers presented their research on different aspects of the conference theme:

(1) Deborah Stipek (Stanford University, US) discussed features of math instruction that promote self-confidence and engagement in young children and how these fit within debates about child-centered, "play-based" instruction versus educator-directed instruction. She described the qualities of instructions that capitalize on both: the motivational benefits of child-centered instruction and the positive effects on math skills associated with educator-directed instruction. Furthermore, she emphasized some challenges of measuring different dimensions of young children's motivation related to math, e.g. children's varying concepts of "math". She then shared her experience with a newly developed instrument that addresses these issues. Additionally, she summarized the research on the psychometric properties of the method and associations with children's math skills and observations of teachings.

(2) Andrew Manches (University of Edinburgh, UK) examined the role of physical interactions in early STEM. Specifically, he discussed the advantages of physical representations of abstract concepts to support learning (manipulatives). He highlighted the importance of these tools, as recent theoretical arguments claim that cognitive processes such as learning, memory, and comprehension are grounded in bodily processes of action and perception (embodied). Furthermore, he stressed the importance of physical interactions for learning, which should be taken into consideration when designing and evaluating new technology-based tools. He also discussed the trend from current screen-based representations (virtual manipulatives) to digitally-augmented physical objects (digital manipulatives) and drew attention to ways through which we can leverage embodied learning mechanisms in the design of emerging technologies or the way we gesture when communicating with children.

(3) Liselotte Ahnert (University of Vienna, Austria) emphasized the importance of social processes in children's learning. She argued that social processes and adult-child attachments which assure emotional security promote children's exploration of the environment, their pleasure in learning and their willingness to perform. She presented findings that indicate why children in secure provider-child and educator-child relationships tend to develop a greater motivation to learn and thus become better learners and how children's pre-school experiences with care providers have sustained impact on their later success in school. Finally, she discussed gender-based differences in learning strategies and discussed the need for gender-sensitive learning environments.

Beyond these keynotes, there was a multitude of conversational formats, such as the panel discussion with Iram Siraj (University of Oxford, UK, Chairperson), Janna Pahnke (Stiftung Haus der kleinen Forscher, Germany, Discussant), Andrew Manches (University of Edinburgh, UK, Discussant), Jerry Andriessen (Wise & Munro, Netherlands, Discussant), Klaus Fröhlich-Gildhoff, (Evangelische Hochschule Freiburg, Germany, Discussant) on *Challenges and risks of ICT (Information Communication Technology) in Early Childhood Education and Care*.

Furthermore, among others, two invited symposia were offered: Firstly, Martine Broekhuizen (Utrecht University, Netherlands, Chairperson) organized a symposium

on *Educational partnerships in ECEC in a context of cultural diversity*. Even though the establishment of strong educational partnerships between parents and ECEC settings clearly is crucial for the socio-emotional and cognitive development of children, establishing this partnership, especially in a context of cultural diversity, might bring challenges. This symposium highlighted some of these challenges, such as language and cultural differences, but it also emphasized possible opportunities. The studies focused on (1) mothers with a Turkish and Maghrebian background and their experienced trust, communication, involvement and participation in ECEC provisions in multiple European countries[1], (2) educational resources, experiences and aspirations of Roma families in three European countries[2], (3) the Portuguese *Play for Inclusion* program, which targets 0–4 year-old children and their caregivers that are not participating in regular ECEC services[3], and (4) a project that aims to alleviate language minority families' distress through the empowerment of early childhood professionals in their use of internet applications when approaching language minority parents[4]. The four contributions were discussed by Tove Mogstad Slinde (Ministry of Education and Research in Norway).

The second invited symposium on *Emotion knowledge, emotion regulation, and development in young children* was organized by Antje von Suchodoletz (New York University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Chairperson). The first two papers aimed to sort out associations between emotional skills and cognitive skills, i.e. self-regulation[5] and language[6]. The third and fourth paper described two innovative intervention approaches, *Papilio*[7] and *Thinking Emotions*[8], which aim to improve emotional skills in young children. Manfred Holodynski (University of Münster, Germany, Discussant) subsequently discussed the four papers and their implications

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[1] *Family-preschool partnerships: mothers with a Turkish and Mahgrebian background in Europe*, by Martine Broekhuizen, Ryanne Francot, and Paul Leseman (all from Utrecht University, the Netherlands).

[2] *Roma mothers' resources, experiences, and aspirations in the Czech Republic, Greece, and Portugal*; by Konstantinos Petrogiannis (Hellenic Open University, Greece), Cecília Aguiar (IS-CTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal), and Jana Obrovská (Masaryk University, the Czech Republic).

[3] *Playgoups for inclusion: Impacts of development, temperament and behavior of minority children*; by Joana Dias Alexandre (University Institute of Lisbon – ISCTE-IUL, Portugal), M. Clara Barata, Catarina Leitão, Bruno De Sousa (all from University of Coimbra, Portugal), and Vanessa Russo (University Institute of Lisbon – ISCTE-IUL, Portugal).

[4] *Promoting early multilingualism in childhood and childcare in Flanders*; Orhan Agirdag (KU Leuven, Belgium / University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands).

[5] *Young children's emotion knowledge and self-regulation*; Maria von Salisch (Institute for Psychology, Germany); Marieke Wubker and Katharina Voltmer (both from Leuphana University Lueneburg, Germany).

[6] *Functions of language in children's development of emotion regulation*; Catherine Gunzenhauser, Berit Streubel (both from Leipzig University, Germany); Gerlind Grosse (Early Childhood Education Research, Germany), and Henrik Saalbach (University of Leipzig, Germany).

[7] *Papilio program and "Paula and the Pixies in the Box" in supporting children's emotion regulation*; Marja-Leena Laakso and Merja Koivula (both from University of Jyväskylä, Finland).

[8] *Behavior vs. knowledge: Keys to improve socio-emotional skills through longitudinal interventions;* Beatriz Lucas Molina, Renata Sarmento-Enriquez, Laura Quintanilla, and Marta Giménez-Dasí (all from University of Valencia, Spain).

120 for theory, policy and practice while adopting the perspective of dynamic systems theories.

Overall, the sessions highlighted important issues within ECEC such as cultural diversity, digitalization, gender, and inclusion. Further, a wide range of discussions on how to integrate these findings was triggered, thus, for example, the challenges and possibilities arising with the increasing technologization of our society and our educational systems. While these tools offer new opportunities, for instance to support the children's development and their learning experiences and to improve the communication between the parents and the educator, they also require a new skill set, which has rarely been recognized in the education and training of educators practicing in ECEC settings. Learning about and using new technologies to promote diverse competencies necessitates not only technological but also developmental and socio-emotional expertise. This became very clear in the panel discussion with Iram Siraj on *Challenges and risks of ICT (Information Communication Technology) in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Specifically, the importance of different socio-emotional aspects that influence children's motivation to learn and success in doing so where also highlighted in Deborah Stipek's and Liselotte Ahnert's findings. While Liselotte Ahnert stressed the importance of emotionally secure attachments between educator and child as a basic prerequisite to learn, Deborah Stipek pointed out that, in order to promote learning, educators have to utilize different types of instructions (child-centered and educator based) in consideration of the child's individual needs. In addition, Andrew Manches considered another aspect when he brought up the importance of integrating developmental and pedagogical knowledge (such as the impact of physical action in learning) as well as technological possibilities in the design and the evaluation of new tools.

These types of discussions, in addition to the wide range of formats and topics, contributed to the success of the conference. In fact, according to the feedback survey, 89.6% of the 58 questionnaire respondents rated their overall experience as "excellent" or "good". The ratings of specific areas such as *Organization before and during the Conference*, *Conference program* and *Social program* were high as well. On average 43.1% rated aspects of the *Organization before the Conference* as "good" and 42.9% as "excellent". Similarly, facets of the *Organization during the Conference* were scored as "good" by 34.3% and "excellent" by 57.9% of the questionnaire participants. The *Conference program* itself was perceived as "good" by 38.8% and "excellent" by 39.3%. Additionally, three *Social activities* gave opportunities for further cohesion of the think tank within the community. Only a few participants rated these. Nonetheless, those who did appreciated them because 38.2% scored them as "good" and 58.7% as "excellent"[9].

In conclusion, the conference successfully brought together experts and provided a platform to discuss the current challenges within ECEC. Important findings on topics such as digitalization, STEM, and the inclusion of families and children have been

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[9] Missing values and the answer "n/a" were excluded from the data analysis.

shared. The exchange resulted in the development of recommendations and added to the overall research quality in the field. Following this conference, the SIG 5 will be represented at the 18th Biennial EARLI Conference at RWTH (Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule), Aachen, Germany, which takes place from August 12th to August 16th 2019. Above all, the invited symposium *Who benefits most? Differential effects of Early Childhood Education and Care on child outcomes*, organized by Dr. Lars Burghardt, will highlight continuative discussions on (1) *Universal ECEC as a protective means for children from disadvantaged families in Norway?*[10], (2) *Compensation or Matthew-Effect? Relations of child care, family and child development*[11], (3) *Lasting preschool quality effects and the moderating role of potential risk factors*[12], and (4) *The longitudinal effect of the quality of early teacher-child interactions on child outcomes*[13]. Prof. Dr. Wilfried Smidt (University of Innsbruck, Austria) will take the role of the discussant. Moreover, the next Biennial EARLI SIG 5 conference at Bar-Ilan University, Israel, from July 14th to July 16th 2020, will provide another platform for further scientific exchanges and new emerging discussions within the ECEC research.

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Thanks to Reviewers

The Editors of the Orbis Scholae journal would like to take this opportunity for thanking the following colleagues who reviewed articles submitted to Volume 13:

Simoneta Babiaková
Dana Bittnerová
Martha Burkle
Karel Čada
Jan Činčera
David Doubek
Veronika Francová
Francesca Gobbo
Mariusz Granosik
Sabine Hoidn
Hana Horká
Martin Chvál
Vladimír Jůva
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Jiří Zounek