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**Dialogue & Argumentation
for Cultural Literacy Learning
in Schools**

Policy Briefing 2

Promoting Cultural Literacy in Schools

Summary

A cultural literacy programme:

- supports children's dialogue and argumentation skills and cultural literacy learning.
- creates spaces for dialogue about cultural diversity and identities.
- develops tolerant, inclusive and empathetic school communities.

Key features:

- Dialogue and argumentation
- Using high quality wordless texts to develop tolerance, empathy and inclusion
- Helping connect communities and fostering a values-led curriculum



Introduction

The EC has stated that cultural diversity is one of Europe's most valuable assets that must be catered for by European educational systems. Cultural literacy is a concrete means by which this may be achieved, by encouraging an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds to develop mutual understanding and respect.

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In DIALLS, we move beyond traditional views that define cultural literacy as knowledge of culture. We define cultural literacy as a social practice that is inherently dialogic and based on learning and gaining knowledge through empathetic, tolerant and inclusive interaction with others. Being culturally literate is about an individual's competences and skills to encounter cultural differences and to elaborate one's own identity in a respectful social interaction with other people, enabling people to live together in a diverse and inclusive society. Talk, or more specifically the development of children's dialogue and argumentation skills, is therefore fundamental to young people's cultural literacy learning.

This policy brief aims to provide evidence, from teachers, teacher educators and researchers, on the practicalities of implementing a cultural literacy learning programme in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. It considers the implications of this for those seeking to implement a programme in schools that encourages children to talk together and develop their cultural literacy learning.

The DIALLS project: implementing a cultural literacy learning programme

In the DIALLS project, schools in seven countries are working with researchers and teacher educators to develop a 'Cultural Literacy Learning Programme' (CLLP). The CLLP seeks to develop an understanding of children and young people's cultural literacy in formal education (pre-primary, primary and secondary) through the teaching of dialogue and argumentation. Promoting tolerance, empathy and inclusion as core cultural literacy dispositions, wordless picturebooks and short films produced in and around Europe are used to stimulate classroom discussions, and children and young people from different countries share their ideas. These wordless texts were chosen to reflect the key concepts for promoting and practising cultural literacy and making sense of Europe (Figure 1).

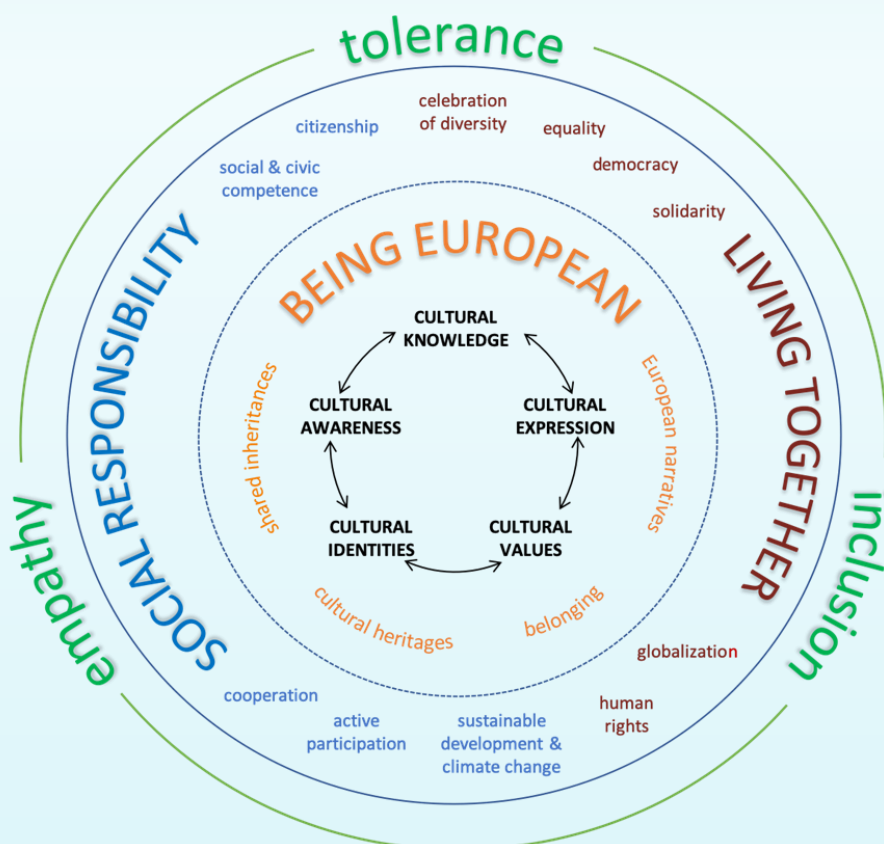


Figure 1: The DIALLS Cultural Analysis Framework (CAF) crystallizes the key concepts for promoting and practising cultural literacy and making sense of Europe.

Source: DIALLS 2018, Cultural Analysis Framework



Data were collected through interviews with researchers and teacher educators coordinating the implementation of the CLLP in seven countries: Cyprus, Germany, Israel, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and the UK (n=11). All countries worked with teachers across three educational settings, with the exception of Cyprus who worked with two (pre-primary and primary). Evaluation data from teachers implementing the CLLP in each country were collected after every lesson (n=595).



The importance of dual objectives

Each of the 15 lessons in the CLLP has two objectives. One objective focuses on dialogue and argumentation and the other on cultural learning, linking to different cultural concepts from the CAF. Learning the skills of dialogue and argumentation enables children to communicate effectively, understanding each other’s perspectives as they explore the different cultural heritages and values of people who live in Europe. Collaboration is developed as children share their opinions whilst listening to, and respecting, the opinions of others.

Evidence from teachers suggests that the majority of children successfully engaged with these dual objectives in pre-primary, primary and secondary classes (Figures 2 and 3). 74% of secondary teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their children engaged in dialogue and argumentation, and 80% agreed or strongly agreed that their children engaged with the cultural objectives. Engagement was highest amongst primary children (85% and 80% respectively) and lowest amongst pre-primary children (71% and 64% respectively). Very few teachers reported that children did not engage with these dual objectives. Across all age groups, between 3-4 % of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that their children engaged in dialogue and argumentation, whilst for the cultural learning objective this was between 5-6%.

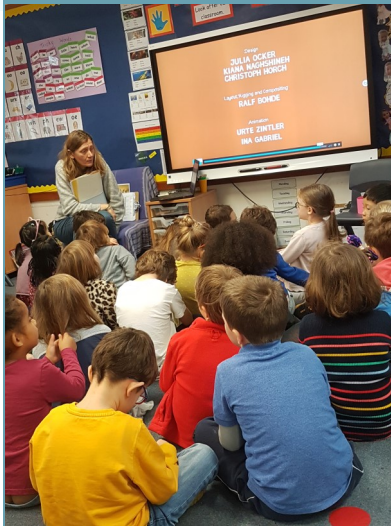
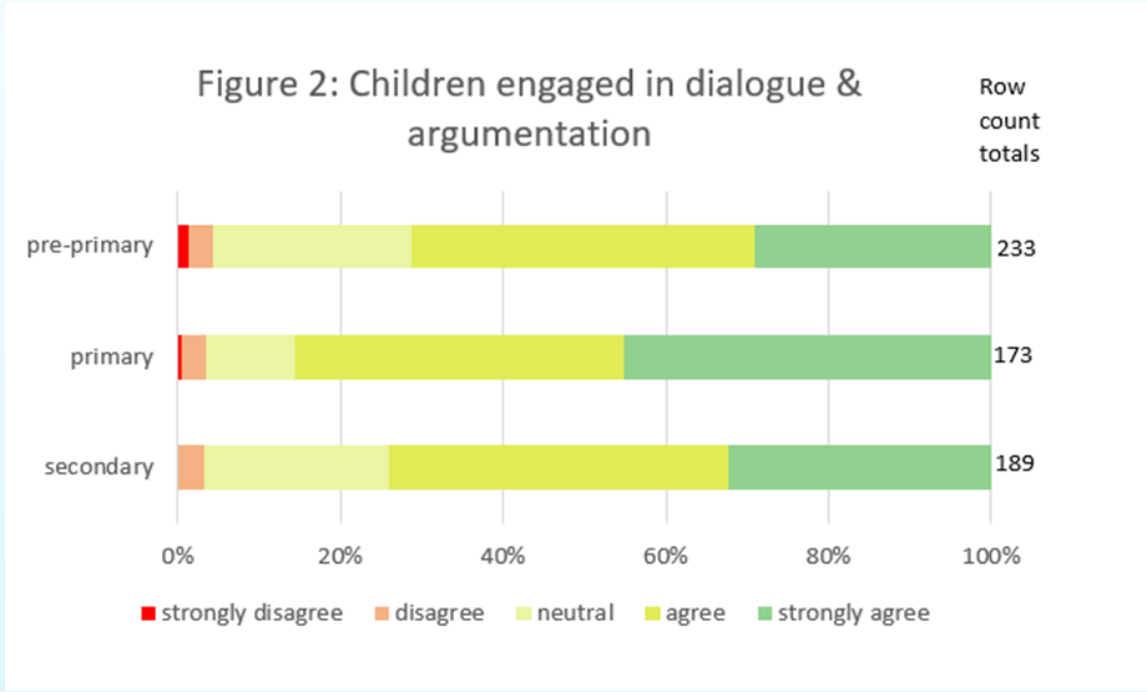
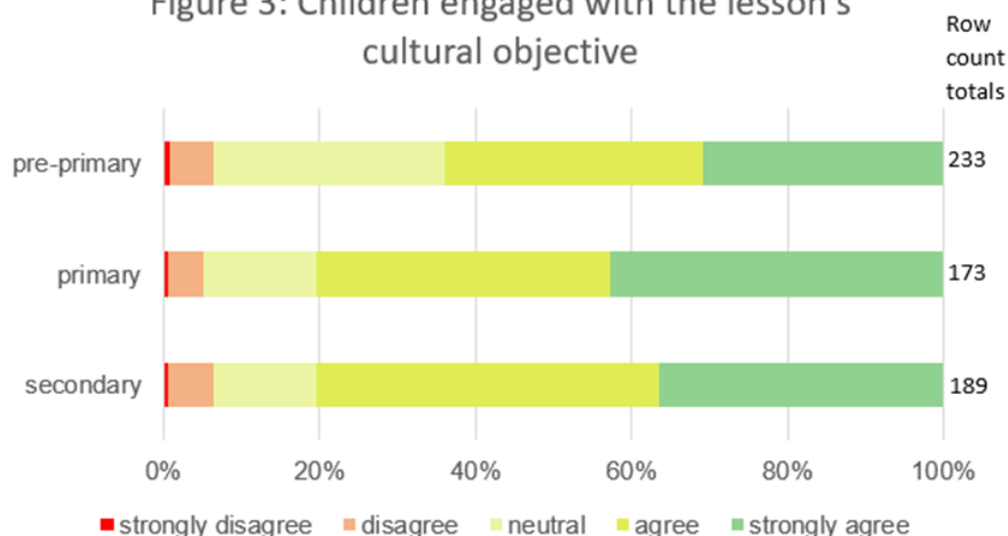




Figure 3: Children engaged with the lesson's cultural objective



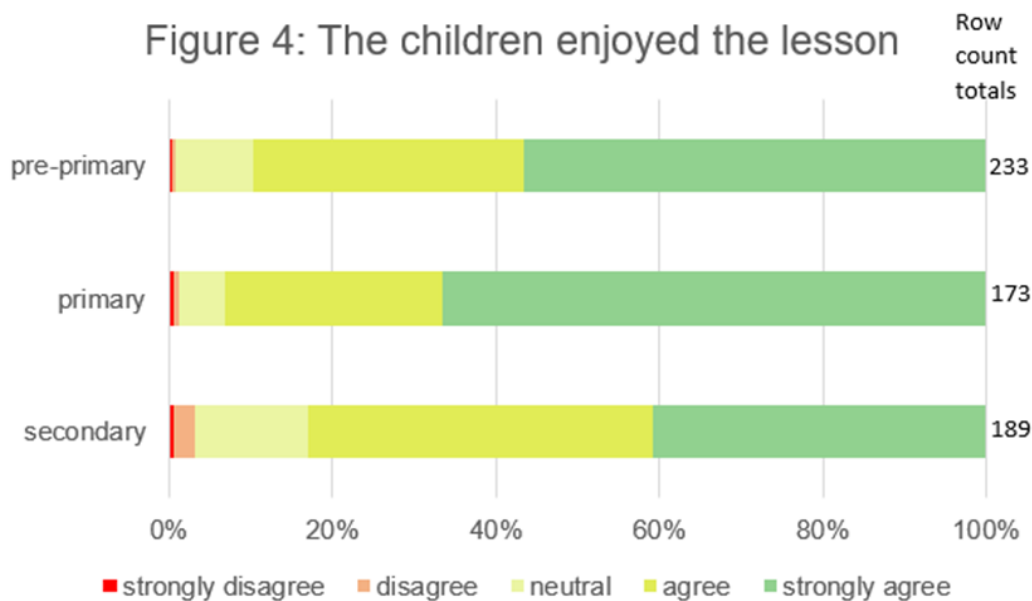
In their reflective comments after each lesson, teachers commented on the importance of establishing and following ground rules for talk with their classes. These ground rules helped to encourage respectful and inclusive interaction between children, encouraging them to think together as they expressed their opinions whilst listening to, and respecting, the opinions of others. Teachers noted the progression in children's dialogue and argumentation skills over the course of the programme, describing how a 'democratic atmosphere' was created in the classroom as children encouraged each other to share their opinions. A curriculum that prioritises talking together may be especially pertinent in the wake of COVID-19, as teachers encourage children to care about each other and listen to each other as they move back to school.

Children's enjoyment of the lessons

Evidence from teachers suggests that the vast majority of children enjoyed the lessons in pre-primary, primary and secondary classes (Figure 4). 83% of secondary teachers, 90% of pre-primary teachers and 93% of primary teachers reported that their children enjoyed the lessons.



Figure 4: The children enjoyed the lesson



This evidence is supported by teachers' reflective comments after each lesson, where it was frequently reported that children specifically enjoyed using the wordless picturebooks and films. These wordless texts were inclusive resources that children found both novel and thought-provoking, promoting discussions between children. Teachers also reported that their children were highly motivated by the prospect of talking with their peers in different countries. In DIALLS, these discussions were facilitated using an online platform. Having studied the same wordless texts, children in different schools were able to share their ideas asynchronously and co-construct meanings together.

Embedding the CLLP

Evidence from researchers and teacher educators coordinating the implementation of the CLLP suggests that sufficient time must be allocated to the programme. The importance of having enough time to implement the lessons was pertinent across all educational settings. Furthermore, given that secondary teachers frequently have less flexibility than their colleagues in pre-primary and primary, situating the programme within the correct place in the secondary curriculum was especially important.





Implications

For those seeking to implement a programme to support the development of children's dialogue and argumentation skills and cultural literacy learning in their own schools, we recommend that:

1. A dialogic pedagogy underpins children's cultural literacy learning. In addition to giving children the opportunity to have broader discussion about cultural themes, it is important that children are taught how to talk together through the skills of dialogue and argumentation. A programme that has dual objectives, focusing on dialogue and argumentation as well as cultural objectives, is therefore key to promoting tolerant, inclusive and empathetic interaction with others.
2. Wordless picturebooks and films are inclusive resources that can be used as springboards for developing tolerance, empathy and inclusion. With careful prompting by teachers, wordless texts can stimulate an open and respectful exchange of views between individual and groups, developing mutual understanding about the pluralities of cultures and associated identities. These wordless texts are inclusive resources, with the emphasis of the visual over the verbal appealing to a transnational and transcultural readership.
3. Children value the opportunity to talk to children from another school. Various platforms, such as eTwinning, may be used to promote effective communication and develop mutual understanding with children from schools around Europe.
4. The decision to implement a programme of cultural literacy learning should form part of a coherent school strategy. The links between a programme and a school's values, policies and curriculum should be clearly explicated, as well as links with any ongoing programmes. Communicating these links to teachers prior to implementation will help to secure their ongoing commitment to a programme's goals. It is also important to consider what time will be allocated to support the planning and delivery of a programme, including teachers' professional development.

Further Information

For more information on DIALLS, please visit:



www.dialls2020.eu/



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DIALLS 2018. Cultural Analysis Framework:

<https://dialls2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/resubmitted-cultural-analysis-framework-with-coversheet-.pdf>