

# Learning English in the Kiitos project

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## ABSTRACT

This chapter presents *Kiitos@21<sup>st</sup> Century Preschools*, a transnational cooperative Erasmus+ project which ran between 2015-2018 in the Ponte de Sor School Cluster. One of its aims was to promote Foreign Language (FL) acquisition through an integrated pedagogical approach. The identification of the official educational policies for Preschool Education in Europe and in Portugal served as a starting point to describe the role assigned to FLs at this educational level as well as to consider the benefits of the CLIL approach in formal settings for younger children. The collaborative work of the pedagogical teams, the adult-led activities and the child-initiated play are analysed through data collected as part of this case study. The data collected through questionnaires to adults, interviews with children (about their drawings on how they learned English) and through participant observation in the English sessions, provided an insight into the perceptions of adults and children about the FL. It also allowed researchers to identify the specific characteristics of the CLIL approach in the project as well as consider the implications of *Kiitos* for subsequent school levels.

## KEYWORDS

Preschool education; *Kiitos* project; CLIL, Portugal; Foreign Language.

## RESUMO

Neste capítulo apresenta-se o projeto *Kiitos@21<sup>st</sup> Century Preschools*, um projeto cooperativo transnacional, enquadrado no programa Erasmus+, realizado entre 2015 e 2018 no Agrupamento de Escolas de Ponte de Sor. Um dos seus objetivos era

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promover a aquisição de uma língua estrangeira (LE) através de uma abordagem pedagógica integrada. A identificação das políticas educativas oficiais portuguesas e europeias, para a Educação Pré-Escolar, serviu de ponto de partida para descrever o papel atribuído às LEs neste nível educativo, bem como para considerar os benefícios da abordagem CLIL em contextos formais destinados a crianças mais novas. O trabalho colaborativo das equipas pedagógicas, as atividades orientadas pelos adultos e as brincadeiras livres das crianças são analisadas através dos dados recolhidos durante a investigação realizada, sob a forma de um estudo de caso. Os dados foram recolhidos através de inquéritos por questionário (adultos) e por entrevista (crianças) associada à documentação da criança (narrativa multimodal) e da realização de observação participante (sessões de inglês). Os dados obtidos permitiram conhecer as perceções dos adultos e das crianças sobre a LE e identificar características específicas da abordagem CLIL no projeto, bem como as implicações do *Kiitos* para os níveis de escolaridade seguintes.

#### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Educação pré-escolar; projeto *Kiitos*; CLIL, Portugal; Língua Estrangeira.

## 1. Introduction

The aims of this chapter are firstly to introduce *Kiitos@21<sup>st</sup>CenturyPreschools*, a transnational cooperation project designed to stimulate an integrated pedagogical approach to promote 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and foreign language (FL) learning in preschool education in the Ponte de Sor School Cluster (PSSC). This project integrates the official European and Portuguese educational policies for preschool education with the project's aims, and connects the role of FL learning with the overall goals for this school level from an international and a national perspective. The chapter offers an analysis of how these policies materialise in preschool settings in Portugal and describes *Kiitos'* approach to teaching English by presenting data gathered in the case study developed during the project's Erasmus+ stage (2015-2018). It further discusses FL teaching methodologies and their links with the CLIL approach. Finally, we present a brief reflection about the future of English language teaching and learning in the Ponte de Sor School Cluster and, in general, about teaching and learning FLs in preschools in Portugal.

## 2. Context

To understand the characteristics of *Kiitos*, it is necessary to refer to the policies for preschool education in Europe and in Portugal. Then, within the guidelines defined for this educational level, the focus turns to the role of FL learning in Portugal and the CLIL approach.

### 2.1. European and Portuguese policies for preschool education

In Portugal, preschool education is the first stage of Basic Education. Although attendance is not compulsory, according to the Portuguese Database in 2020, the overall attendance rate corresponded to 92.8% (Direção Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e da Ciência, 2021). This trend was motivated by a set of social and educational policies confirming the right to education and equal opportunities established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2019) subscribed to by Portugal in 1990, and more rigorously enforced in the country from 1997 onwards. Among the political decisions made are: the expansion and development of preschool education; the publication of the Framework Law for Preschool Education (Lei n.º 5/97); the implementation of the first national Guidelines for Preschool Education Curriculum (GPEC) (Ministério da Educação, 1997); the development of studies analysing the quality of educational practices; and the investment in pre- and in-service professional development of preschool teachers.

The GPEC, originally published in 1997, was submitted to a participatory assessment process which involved comparison with international documents of the same type. In 2016, following the publication of the revised version of the GPEC (Silva *et al.*, 2016), a pedagogy of childhood was proposed that is based on values of respect, tolerance, equality, solidarity, and justice. The child, the central figure of educational action, is viewed as a person with competence, rights, and agency, who should be educated as a citizen open to different cultures (Marchão & Henriques, 2020).

These Guidelines (Silva *et al.*, 2016) set forth more clearly the pedagogical principles that should guide every educational action. They emphasise development and learning as inseparable aspects, identify the child as the subject of the educational process and recognise the need to respond to all children. Preschool education professionals should assume that the child's development takes place "as a whole, in which the cognitive, social, cultural, physical and emotional dimensions

are interconnected and act together” (Silva *et al.*, 2016, p. 10). Learning takes place holistically, and encompasses the world around the child, their understanding of relationships with others, and the way they build their identities.

Despite not being obligatory, the Guidelines (Silva *et al.*, 2016) define three main Content Areas, briefly described as:

- Personal and Social Development transversal to all educational action. This places emphasis on the development of attitudes and values focusing on the promotion of a child-person-citizen.
- Expression and Communication, a core area, which promotes different language forms, essential for the interaction between the child and others, and for learning in other areas. It includes the following subdomains: Physical Education, Artistic Education, Oral Language and Writing, and Mathematics.
- World Knowledge, which should raise awareness of the various sciences and stresses processes for questioning and organising knowledge for a better understanding of the world (Silva *et al.*, 2016).

In the subdomain of Oral Language and Writing, oral language is noted as one of the fundamental objectives of preschool education. The teachers should be positive role models, especially regarding the way they speak and express themselves, who should stimulate the acquisition of vocabulary and its increasingly complex mastery. The same applies to a FL, where oral skills are developed by imitating the FL teacher, often the child's only model of the language.

In recent decades, policies for language teaching and learning have aimed to develop plurilingual and intercultural competences which are increasingly important in the promotion of democratic citizenship in pluralist societies. The European Commission (EC) recommended that every country should encourage the “teaching [of] at least two foreign languages from a very early age” (2002, p. 19), thus beginning a lifelong process. It was recently stated that the curriculum should include, among other aspects, “opportunities for early language exposure and learning through playful activities” (European Commission, 2020, p. 73).

## 2.1. FLs at preschool in Portugal

In the Portuguese context, raising awareness of FLs in preschool education dates from the 90s (Ministério da Educação, 1997, p. 21 and p. 73) and was reinforced in the revised Guidelines (Silva *et al.*, 2016) which mention that it should happen “in the child’s specific context, starting from the proposals, interests and preferences of children and adopting a playful and informal approach” (Silva *et al.*, 2016, p. 60).

The integration of FLs in the curriculum contributes to the development of skills in the three areas defined in the Guidelines above. From a curricular perspective, it is important that the child develops skills to live in an increasingly interconnected world (OECD, 2020), where learning another language affords better opportunities in the context of multicultural societies (Marsh *et al.*, 2020).

The majority of Portuguese preschool groups are monolingual, but there has been no effective policy or state investment to improve the offer of languages at this early stage. Following UNESCO (2012) and EC (2014) recommendations, the Portuguese Ministry of Education made English compulsory in 2015 only from primary 3<sup>rd</sup> grade onwards. English is the only foreign language taught, mainly because Portugal’s policies are subject to financial constraints that inhibit the investment in other European languages, and because of the prestige of English as a language of international communication “established to ensure children are equipped with [a] competitive advantage” (Lucas *et al.*, 2021, p. 478).

The widely held belief about the limited offer of FLs in preschool education in Portugal was confirmed in 2016 in a survey carried out by Ferreirinha and Mourão, which included all mainland public and private preschools. Data revealed that public preschools only offer English. In 96.5% of cases, an English language teacher hired by Municipalities or parents’ associations visits the school once a week and works with the children for half an hour in 85% of cases (Ferreirinha & Mourão, 2016). Research shows that these ‘dripfeed’ language programmes do “not result in long-term advantages over children who start learning an FL later” (Mourão, 2021, p. 456).

In Portugal, in preschool and primary education, a generalist teacher is responsible for a group of children and specialist teachers visit the classroom to work on areas like FL, music, drama or physical education. At preschool, some of these ‘visitors’ have no training to work with very young children and do not work in collaboration with the educators responsible for the group. As a consequence, the FL appears as an isolated subject with no connection to daily activities and ways of learning at this age-level (Mourão, 2019, pp. 429-430).

At preschool level, listening and speaking are the main skills focused on in the foreign language. It is extremely important to create an encouraging learning environment where time spent working and playing in the FL is seen as a means to learn about the world and do amusing, stimulating activities which relate to children's interests.

### 2.3. The CLIL trend

In 2011, the EC published a policy handbook, *Language learning at pre-primary school level: making it efficient and sustainable*, in which it is stated that "Young children's second/foreign language acquisition is similar in many ways to the acquisition of their first language/mother tongue, which is natural and effortless" (p. 7).

Krashen's language acquisition theory (1982), and the socio-constructivist approaches of Bruner (1983) and Vygotsky (1986), underline that in order to develop communication skills, children have to experience social and playful situations adapted to their age level in a caring environment. The activities proposed should put the child at the centre of the process and make them *acquire* rather than *learn* the FL in a natural way by using it and being supported or scaffolded to go further. The means by which people acquire the language through exposure and use is connected to the approach known as *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL), the term which was coined in the 90s and "refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focussed aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language" (Marsh, 1994, p. 2). This means "CLIL centres on using language *with* and *through* content, rather than treating language *as* content" (Anderson *et al.*, 2015, p. 142).

Research on CLIL at preschool level is still very scarce and models or examples of its application are difficult to find. Sometimes good practices in Early Language Learning are linked to CLIL, although CLIL requires further teacher training, the teachers' conscious intent and a change in mindset which enables teachers to integrate the learning of content and foreign language.

European Union policies have consistently referred to CLIL for almost three decades. Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou (2011) published guidelines intended to support teacher training and the creation and use of CLIL projects for both pre-primary and primary education with the support of the European Commission. But FLs are still making their first steps in the early stages of formal education in Portugal, "one of the few European countries where CLIL has not been

implemented in the public-school system" as a compulsory component (cf. the *State of-the-Art Report* from CLIL for Children Erasmus project, regarding primary school settings in the countries involved (C4C, 2016).

Ellison (2019) noted that "children best acquire language when they are immersed in contexts where there is natural exposure and opportunities for authentic use of it for other learning, rather than when it is taught as a separate and sometimes 'isolated' subject" (p. 247). Pondering on the same topic, Marsh states that "There are two ways to learn a language: we can learn *in* a language, or we can learn *about* a language. *In* is the natural way – just like we learnt our first language. *About* is the unnatural way – what we call traditional language teaching" (2021).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Inspiration for the Kiitos project

Ponte de Sor, situated in the Alto Alentejo, is the seat of a Municipality with nearly 17,000 inhabitants. The aim of teaching English to every child attending preschool in this Municipality derives from the political vision for a more inclusive school for all children living there. The Mayor "had a dream" which was to mitigate the disparities among children from small rural communities and those in bigger cities.

In September 2006, the Mayor, councillors for education and technical staff visited schools in Finland and, captivated by the quality of the learning environments and children's skills in English at preschool level, tried to replicate them in the Ponte de Sor School Cluster (PSSC). The Cluster already had experienced preschool teachers and modern classrooms with plenty of light, adequate furniture, and many appropriate teaching and learning materials. As a consequence of the trip, the Municipality, in partnership with PSSC, promoted and coordinated the 'Kiitos' project, which means *thank you* in Finnish. *Kiitos* included all children attending public preschools (n=213 in twelve classrooms in 2017) and a pedagogical team composed of thirteen preschool teachers employed by the Ministry of Education, six English language teachers, six Music teachers and two Physical Education teachers hired by the Municipality through the Parents' Association.

One of the aims of *Kiitos* was to promote the integrated acquisition of both the mother tongue and the FL. CLIL was mentioned in the ERASMUS+ application form as an approach which would be developed in the project.

### 3.2. Case study

Data collected for this case study were retrieved between January 2016 and June 2018 by a team of researchers from the Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre. The research took the form of an essentially qualitative and interpretive case study (Marchão *et al.*, 2018), complemented by quantitative data in twelve classrooms, five in town and seven in the neighbouring villages. For researching FL teaching it included the collection of data provided by the PSSC Coordinators, data collected through questionnaires to parents on the socio cultural characteristics of families, and parents' perceptions of the project; questionnaires to preschool teachers and English language teachers on professional characteristics and their perspectives on the project; and the observation of FL practices in four preschool classrooms (three in town and one school in a rural area) over two subsequent school years (using observation grids for identifying adults' and children's attitudes during activities in English). To ascertain children's perceptions of their FL experience, multimodal narratives were used, including drawings, and interviews with children which enabled researchers to describe the meanings children ascribed to the way they were learning English (Coelho *et al.*, 2019).

All the preschool teachers and English language teachers were Portuguese which seems to be an advantage instead of a problem. In the case of the English language teachers:

It has been found that some of the most suitable CLIL teachers are those who speak the majority language as their first language, and the CLIL language through the whole process. This is particularly important when dealing with young children because these teachers are often sensitive to the ways children learn in the first language, and are familiar with the points of transference which come about from using the CLIL language. (Marsh, 2000, pp. 13-14)

All teachers were women, and all were qualified education professionals with Bachelor of Arts or Master's degrees.

The first thing to underline about the project is the *time of exposure to English*, one of its most differentiating traits from common practice in Portugal. *Kiitos* has the enormous advantage of envisaging language learning from an integrated perspective, assigning two hours for activities in English every day during the whole school year. This was a completely different setting compared to the very low

exposure in most preschools in the country. Research about language development by psychologist Meredith Rowe (Rowe, 2012; 2017) points to the importance of quantity but especially to the quality of input in interactions established with children which is of great significance in the child's later production.

In *Kiitos*, children had a type of natural semi-immersion in the FL consisting of two hours' work a day with a FL teacher performing all the tasks in English with the intertwined support of the preschool teacher. Even if the English language teachers had no previous training in the CLIL approach, as trained professionals they recognised that language teaching could not adopt the same didactic approaches used in the subsequent cycles of the formal educational system. Activities in English were prepared in tandem by preschool and English language teachers to achieve integration of the FL in the current preschool activities and ensure coherence in their work. The English language teachers also formed a network with weekly meetings to reflect, discuss, plan, and share their work within a community of practice.

To meet their linguistic and educational objectives, all teachers in the project selected and produced teaching materials and were involved in teacher training workshops developed by English and preschool experts with hands-on CLIL activities promoting collaboration and creativity in Science and Arts to improve their CLIL skills.

#### 3.2.1. Results of the questionnaires

Both the educators and the English language teachers stated their appreciation of mutual support to create meaningful learning moments for their groups. Evidence of this was revealed in the answers to the questionnaire to all teachers which included one question to evaluate teacher satisfaction with the 21 training sessions' and their impact on their professional development. From a total of 27 answers, most teachers chose "Foster collaborative teamwork" (n=20), followed by "Improving scientific and pedagogical skills for the promotion of integrated learning of English in preschool education" (n=16).

The training workshops aimed at stimulating the type of knowledge and skills required by *Kiitos'* curriculum dynamics of quality practices streamlined through teamwork, integrated learning of English and recognising the child as the central figure. Five workshops related to CLIL covered the following topics: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and CLIL in Preschool Education; Maths through English or English through Maths?; CLIL, an effective and motivating way of teaching and learning English; CLIL in Preschool; and Development of CLIL activities and resources. Nineteen English language teachers and preschool teachers answered the questionnaire and the majority considered these workshops important.

### 3.2.2. Participant observation

The data presented hereafter were collected during participant observation and registered in the observation grids produced for this case study. *Kiitos'* interactions, input and output opportunities were natural and authentic, and therefore in accordance with national and international policies for preschool education. The FL was used to communicate everything including routines and classroom tasks by English language teachers and one of the preschool teachers. Activities prepared by teachers planning and working in tandem gave particular attention to the ways of using clear language and making communication meaningful, as children were learning from what they *heard* and *saw*. A panoply of prompts was used: voice modulation, rhythm, facial and bodily expression with “parentese” traits (slow, articulate, high-pitched, repeated speech parents use with their babies); visuals – flashcards, pictures, picture-books, toys, realia – presenting redundant nonverbal semantic information in forms which aid vocabulary learning (Rowe *et al.*, 2013). The comprehension of the children was confirmed through, for instance, Total Physical Response activities or *listen and do* instructions for different types of activities, facilitating interaction for less confident children who could imitate their peers. Children were also learning with and from each other, as advocated by constructivist theories, and which research in the neurosciences has reinforced (Khul, 2010). The preschool teachers observed were active and helped children whenever necessary. There were few records of children spontaneously talking in English, but they understood and reacted to questions, instructions, and suggestions, although their oral responses were mainly in L1 in situations involving play.

The main areas for preschool education (Personal and Social Development; Expression and Communication and World Knowledge) were developed in the FL, and “play”, as a central form of development of all competences, was inevitably part of integrated FL activities, inside and outside the classroom in the various learning centres, through different games and imaginary play. The balance between adult-led activities with specific objectives and child-led supported activities created the conditions for learning in a natural way.

An example of an adult-led activity related to CLIL took place in one of the planned sessions observed. The FL teacher read the story *Splat and the cool school trip*, about a visit to the zoo (Scotton, R., 2013) and the children learned about a new topic – animals, their habitats, and characteristics – included in the Knowledge of the World guidelines. Before reading, the teacher prepared and motivated the children to listen and understand using her famous “magic bag” containing all types of materials and introduced the new vocabulary. Then the teacher checked if the children had understood the story by making suggestions with which the children agreed or disagreed. The pretext to relate with the children’s experiences

was inviting them to share the animals they had seen; some talked about having seen penguins in Lisbon’s Oceanarium or movies with penguins. Then they learned the “Penguin” song and, subsequently, cut and coloured an animal. Some children were humming the song while cutting, making a collage or colouring, following the FL teacher’s suggestions. The story was a springboard for these learning activities, and both teachers involved tried to draw on children’s knowledge and their own awareness of their interests. English was used to learn and communicate about the new content and children were challenged to integrate it in their former knowledge and experience of the subject.

With regard to child-led activities, the children would play in different play stations, alone or, most often, in small groups. Children heard the sounds of the FL, its rhythm, emphasis, intonation, pronunciation, while imitating their English language teacher during art work, projects, songs and rhymes repeated over and over again, and in pretend play with the English language teachers’ participation. They heard and learnt different words and sentences which were useful for their overall learning outcomes and skills in English. Focus is here given to the two most used learning centres during the observations:

- In the house, children played in small groups. They learnt about colour, shape, size, location, function of different objects (clothes, dolls, body parts, cooking utensils, vegetables, fruit); they also learnt new words by listening to the names of new things, sometimes to their descriptions; they improved social skills because they had to negotiate roles, exchange and share toys; they learnt to ask for things and sometimes categorise and sequence them. The phone proved to be a great device to encourage speaking, and even if they did not often speak in the FL, they were praised whenever they did, both teachers highlighting the children’s efforts and motivating them to go further.
- The garage was also chosen by many children, but here the communication needs are much lower. While dolls and housekeeping require a lot of verbal communication, here they could simply play by making onomatopoeic noises of cars and trucks. However, they also learnt about maths-related concepts, for instance when they arranged the toys, learning through English how to classify by assembling vehicles according to size or colour, following the instructions of the teachers.

- In one of the classrooms, children developed individual projects related to their personal areas of interest supported by the preschool teacher. Each child could research or build something they were interested in. In this group, a 5-year-old girl was building a car. She had planned the sequential steps to accomplish it from drawing the car to observing a real car, checking if the design needed adjustments, choosing the materials to assemble it, cutting, assembling and painting. This project honed observation, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and motor and social skills. This educator's advanced English skills allowed her to converse with the children in English whenever she felt appropriate and with the FL teacher when she addressed her.

The 4Cs of CLIL (content, communication, cognition, and culture) were observed during these activities: *communication* was developed in the planned adult-led activities and interactions but also in free play with the English language teachers or when older children supported younger ones in their exchanges; *cognition* was developed when learning about subjects through active engagement in group and individual tasks, understanding and accomplishing work instructions, engaging in their own experiences, and *content* covered many different subjects like the characteristics of the seasons, healthy diets, dinosaurs, and also at play covering all the curricular areas. *Cultural learning* was more evident when children engaged in traditional English games, songs and rhymes and with children working together.

### 3.2.3. Multimodal narratives (drawing and interview)

**FIGURE 1.** Drawing of Child I, Classroom C.



To ascertain the children's perception of how they were learning English, the research team used multimodal narratives. Data were collected from 48 children, aged 5 and 6 years old, who belonged to the groups previously observed. When asked to represent themselves learning English, apart from the child herself present in all but one drawing, the "Teacher" was the most important social category, portrayed by 79% of the children, demonstrating the teacher's importance in the children's perception of the experience.

**FIGURE 2.** Drawing of Child E, Classroom A.



In the drawings and subsequent individual interviews, the children always identified themselves in the group or alone with the teacher, predominantly at school (83%) in the classroom (as in the figures included) but also in the playground.

As for the teaching practices, children's narratives suggest that playing (Figure 1, playing with the teacher and the mascot), singing, and listening to stories (Figure 2) are equally important (10 drawings in each category) followed by activities such as games, dancing, drawing (n=14) and learning (n=7). Their perceptions meet the results of our observations as we registered a combination of adult-led with child-led activities, and they also confirm the CLIL trend of learning *in* English. See table 1 below.

**TABLE 1.** Coded data and their frequency in children's drawings.

Learning contexts	Frequency (48)
School / classroom	40
Home	4
Others	4
<b>Social identities</b>	
The child	47+1
The teacher	34 + 4
Friends	21
Members of the family	3
<b>Learning and teaching: pedagogical activities in English</b>	
Play	10
Sing	10
Listen to a story	10
Learn	7
Speak	6
Play games	5
Others (dance, draw, walk around)	9
<b>Resources / Materials</b>	
Kiitos' mascot	10
Story books	6
Games	5

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

In the Portuguese preschool context where specific content is not formally taught, it is nonetheless the authors' opinion that the *Kiitos* project had pedagogical characteristics consistent with CLIL, as illustrated. The very fact that there is no compulsory curriculum for preschool education creates unique opportunities for the children to learn about what is happening around them, about everyday life and about what interests and is meaningful to them. The use of a participatory pedagogy focused on the actors constructing knowledge together, a flexible and holistic pedagogy based on play can provide simultaneous learning of content and language in an integrated way.

The *Kiitos* project accommodated national and international policies for preschool education and experimented with FL teaching and learning. Its child-centred approach respected children's interests but also encouraged teachers to analyse and stimulate other needs. The rich FL input relied on pedagogical hands-on and game-like activities planned to motivate active learning and social play.

Alongside the improvement of communication skills, learning in a FL at preschool also promotes the child's cognitive development and intercultural awareness. Of course, when learning through English, the child's education becomes more relevant if the experience is centred on their interests. It is important that such practices are integrated holistically and articulately in the curriculum and based on the principles of early childhood pedagogy. Learning in a FL contributes to the child acquiring more tools to interact with other people and other cultures, to being more attentive to diversity, more tolerant and supportive, and more understanding about otherness.

We certainly learned from this project that the cooperative work of the preschool and the FL teachers is crucial to the success of their work; the thorough planning of activities with common aims prepares the foundation where children can achieve progress at all levels mentioned in the *Guidelines for Preschool Education*, promoting learning both in the mother tongue and in the FL.

Marsh (2012) argued that "early language learning, whether at kindergarten, preschool or primary, inevitably involved forms of CLIL" (p. 133), which seems logical after observing *Kiitos* classrooms for two years. The path to communication in English was being developed under the same principles that guide inspiring language learning in the early years, as defined by the European Centre for Modern Languages: active, holistic, meaningful, continuous, and integrated, an ongoing learning process, relying on the child's language repertoire and interests (Council of Europe, 2021).



By the end of the Erasmus+ phase of the project, teachers had gained theoretical and practical knowledge about the CLIL approach and were more aware of the implications of what they wanted to achieve through the activities they designed related to all content in the FL. However, further training in CLIL and investment in teacher collaboration is of the utmost importance for these professionals but mostly for those who will take charge of the children at primary and second cycle schools, in order to guarantee continuity in the learning processes.

Children's progress in English in subsequent educational cycles should be monitored carefully to evaluate the outcomes of the effort and investment made at preschool level. Change is difficult to implement and accept, but it is necessary to adapt the English curricula in the subsequent cycles, to increase language skills and maintain motivation. Without this follow up, all the funds and energy spent and hard work done in Kiitos' will be irrevocably jeopardised and children's motivation to learn English could decrease.

Comparative diachronic studies of English language skills between children involved in the project and children from preschools with the traditional weekly English sessions would be extremely useful to help encourage the development of a national policy for FLs at preschool level based on significant data.

From *Kiitos* we can take the lesson that it is possible for children to learn English in an integrated way during preschool education. In this sense, it is important that the educational environment and the organisation of the space itself reflect the presence of English in the child's daily life, providing as many occasions as possible for learning contents in English, at play and in the playful situations designed by adults. The use of Portuguese and English learning tools (time, attendance and tasks tables, room rules, birthday table, canteen menu, etc.) integrate English in the environment and facilitate its "natural" learning. Listening and understanding stories in English, for example, is a strategy for learning content associated with the areas of the Curricular Guidelines for Preschool Education. Helping, being available, guiding, communicating and collaborating are essential attitudes and competences for both adults and children in a preschool environment, and they are indispensable for progression in learning

Of course, not every municipality will consider investment in education as a priority. Without hiring FL teachers with the appropriate training for working with very young children, learning English through CLIL at preschool level would depend on other options. One of them would be relying on well prepared kindergarten teachers with good scientific and pedagogical skills, a good knowledge of young children and good practice in early childhood pedagogy and, in addition, with good English language skills and training in the CLIL approach. Policies for the initial and continuing development along with the internationalisation of training of preschool teachers focusing on FL and CLIL, its potential and strategies, are

part of the solution. All of this requires further professional support in the FL and in teaching and learning strategies rooted in a supportive environment for all the actors in the field. It is a lot to ask, but it is also a conscious and sensible claim for the future.

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The translations from Portuguese into English are the responsibility of the authors of this chapter.