

## Editorial

For decades, researchers, policy makers and education practitioners have been trying 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. Nevertheless, 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 mechanisms that might help to fill the education gaps, ideally engaging the caretakers themselves in taking effective action. At the same time, the school-attending children 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, linguistic and cultural sense. More and more children across Europe are entering educational 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 educational 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.

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6 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 suppressed 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

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8 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