

dialoguing@rts - Advancing Cultural Literacy for Social Inclusion through Dialogical Arts Education

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Funded by the EU Horizon Programme (2021-2027), dialoguing@rts focuses on arts education and cultural literacy within the framework of Horizon Europe, influenced by the EU Commission's priorities. It aims to explore the causal chain between arts education, cultural literacy, social inclusion, and social cohesion. The project has two main approaches: research and innovation. The research aspect investigates whether arts education impacts cultural literacy and subsequently affects social inclusion. This involves multiple research work packages using various methodologies. On the innovation side, the project aims to implement and evaluate new approaches in the field of arts education. Ultimately, the project seeks to translate its findings into policy recommendations in line with EU priorities.



INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

The project aims to incorporate diverse perspectives, such as the focus on Sami and indigenous education within the Norwegian context. This involves more than just one group addressing the issue; instead, it encompasses multiple layers within the consortium and among individual partners. By intentionally inviting partners with expertise and interest in indigenous education from locations like Uganda and New Zealand, the project seeks to create a comprehensive dialogue. Additionally, within the Norwegian context, individuals with relevant expertise, such as Sami musicians and researchers, contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the topic. The approach involves matchmaking to ensure a holistic perspective and to avoid solely relying on one location or group to address the issue.

WINNING ELEMENTS

Building a good consortium is key. The process involved filling in gaps and adapting to new team dynamics, balancing the familiarity of working with known colleagues with the challenge of integrating new members, each with their own work culture. While initially starting with familiar faces, the project eventually expanded to include individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those in sociology and policy research. The consortium underwent changes throughout, with members joining and departing at various stages. Despite the adjustments, the new additions proved to be invaluable assets to the team during the final stages of proposal development.

Another winning element was that the project aimed to authentically embody its central concept rather than just paying lip service to it. This meant fully integrating the concept into every aspect of the project, even if it required taking a different route, making compromises, or changing approaches. This commitment to authenticity influenced the proposal writing process and collaboration among team members, ensuring that the project would genuinely engage with its key idea.

Finally, the team's commitment to a dialogical approach, involving stakeholders and partners in decision-making processes, contributed significantly. Despite the challenges, sticking to this approach fostered a sense of investment and commitment among team members. Meticulous attention to detail, particularly in aligning various components and ensuring coherence, played a crucial role. Lastly, the project's success was also attributed to thorough preparation, both in terms of meeting regularly as a consortium and taking ample time to craft and refine the proposal.

CHALLENGES

The call text was vague, so the team felt the pressure to meet specific requirements that were not too clearly spelled out. Despite initial vagueness in the proposal's content, the team eventually transitioned to a more precise and engaging narrative, a process requiring difficult decisions to articulate their ideas clearly. This shift from vagueness to precision posed a significant challenge. Additionally, as the project progressed, the team had to transition from an open, dialogical approach to finalizing details independently, a process that required careful management.

Additionally, the challenge of balancing research and innovation was new to the team. While they were accustomed to the technical aspects of research methodology and writing, they found Chapter 2 (impact) particularly challenging. In this chapter, they had to explain how their project would impact future generations of educators while striking a balance between boldness and realism.

In addressing the challenge of predicting project impact, the team resorted to practical methods such as creating Excel files and conducting simple calculations. They gathered data from partners to estimate potential reach and adoption rates among teacher educators in all partner countries. Despite feeling uncomfortable with these estimations, they acknowledged the uncertainty inherent in such projections. In this field, there can be a lack of available statistics, so they emphasized the importance of using available data effectively and making informed calculations to mitigate risks.

LESSONS LEARNED

The collaboration between NGOs and traditional universities proved to be a mutually enriching experience, despite the initial challenges of different systems and approaches. Both sides learned from each other, with NGOs contributing valuable perspectives and expertise in innovation. For the NGOs, project participation can be crucial for their survival, as they lack stable funding from state sources. The grant significantly impacted individuals' lives within several partner organizations, providing job security and opportunities for the future. The varying impacts and benefits are noted, considering the financial disparities between institutions and countries, with the acknowledgment that the grant has a different significance for each participant.

The team demonstrated a valuable balance between qualitative and quantitative expertise, enabling effective communication across different philosophical and methodological approaches. Despite individual strengths lying in different research methodologies, such as qualitative and quantitative methods, the team effectively collaborated to leverage the strengths of each approach. This collaborative effort allowed them to fill gaps in understanding and articulate perspectives that provided a comprehensive view of the project's goals and outcomes.

PROJECT'S IMPACT

The project aims to indirectly impact children and youth engaged in arts activities throughout their lives by collaborating with associated partners, such as those involved in drafting new curricula for cultural schools in Norway. While the project may not directly influence children attending these schools, it seeks to shape policies and practices through dialogue with partners, potentially affecting future educational approaches. Additionally, partnerships with teacher education institutions and non-formal education networks further extend the project's reach and potential impact.

The project encountered a familiar concept in arts education policy documents, which often propose straightforward solutions without considering empirical complexities. Some partners initially questioned their involvement due to skepticism about the efficacy of such policies. However, the team decided to engage as serious researchers, aiming to explore underlying mechanisms. They anticipate that their findings will inform nuanced policy recommendations, addressing both the nature and beneficiaries of arts education. Leveraging resources within the consortium, such as UNESCO chairs, they highlighted micro-level opportunities to influence policy at regional, national, and international levels, demonstrating the depth of their approach.

TIPS for proposal preparation

- Be bold, but realistic.
- Engage all participants in a dialogue throughout the proposal preparation, but at some point, you need leadership and attention to detail to finalize the winning proposal.
- If you are a researcher, and you are involving non-academic stakeholders in the proposal, be open to the logic of the other system. There is so much these groups can learn from each other and therein lies the innovation potential of a project.
- Start early and use all resources at your disposal.

NCPs ASSISTANCE

As newcomers to the field, the team approached the selection of services with cautious optimism, recognizing their lack of experience in discerning which services were most beneficial. They adopted a strategy of embracing all available services to maximize their learning opportunities. This approach allowed them to gain valuable feedback and insights, helping them to refine their understanding of which services were most useful and which were less impactful. The general recommendation is to use as many support services as possible, including NCPs, grant offices, and consultancies, but use them smartly. The team attended a workshop organized by the Norwegian NCPs and received proposal checks, including a session with a colleague from Italy or Spain. These services are free and recommended as they are fairer to the broader community, but due to time constraints and larger communities to serve, they might not offer time for deep engagement. In contrast, longer meetings with other consultancies were more beneficial, but their associated costs give an unfair advantage.

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I think that the dialogical approach paid off, and it meant that the team in its entirety was invested and committed to the work and contributing.