

PLURI Online course

Languages in focus: From EU policy to Multilingual education

Project PLURI - Plurilingualism for better education, cohesion and linguistic diversity - CERV-2024-CITIZENS-REM-EUINTEGRATION

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Biographical Sensitisation: Preparing Students for Multilingual Learning

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Languages in Focus: From EU policy to Multilingual education

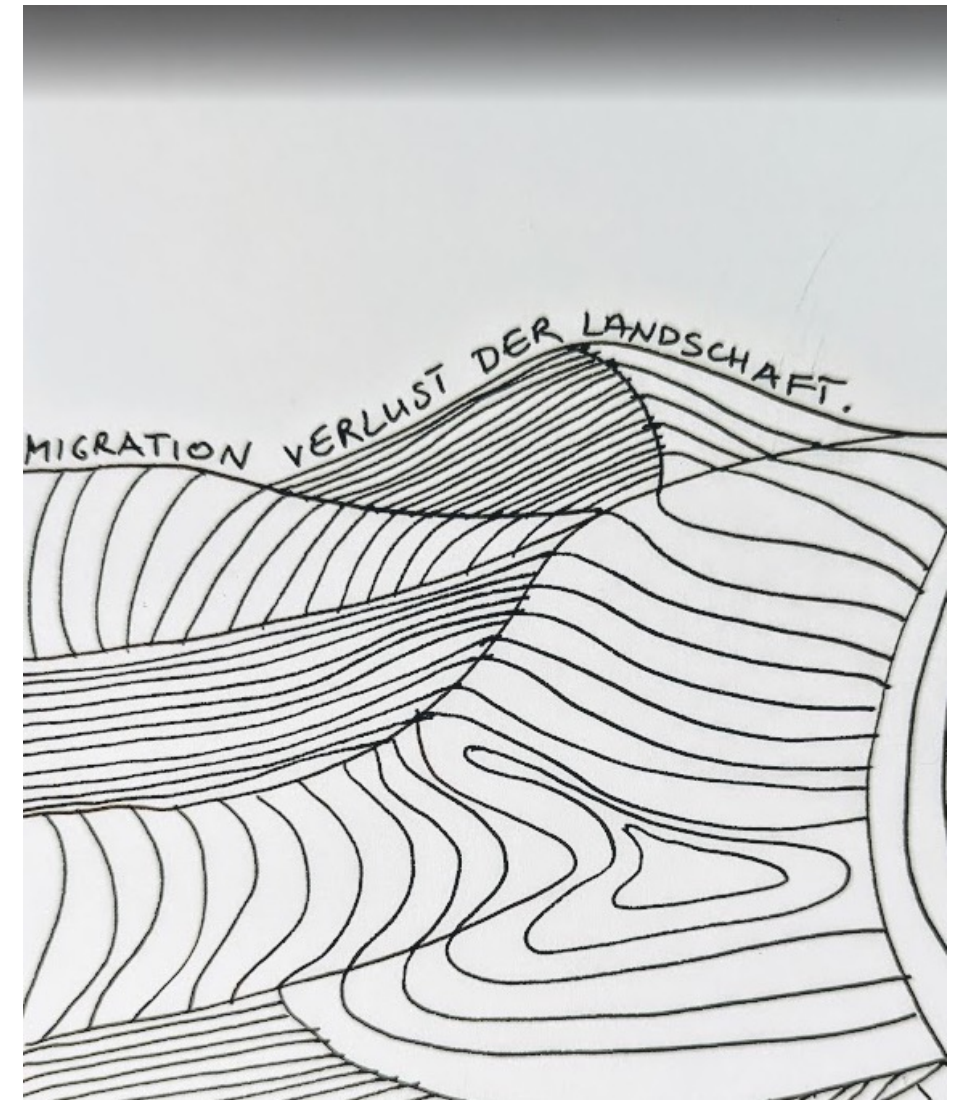


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Why It Matters

- Children often lack cultural and linguistic awareness
- Family traditions are rarely explicitly addressed in school
- Migration reshapes what is passed on and what is lost
- Schools should not ignore this process, but rather support it in a sensitive way.



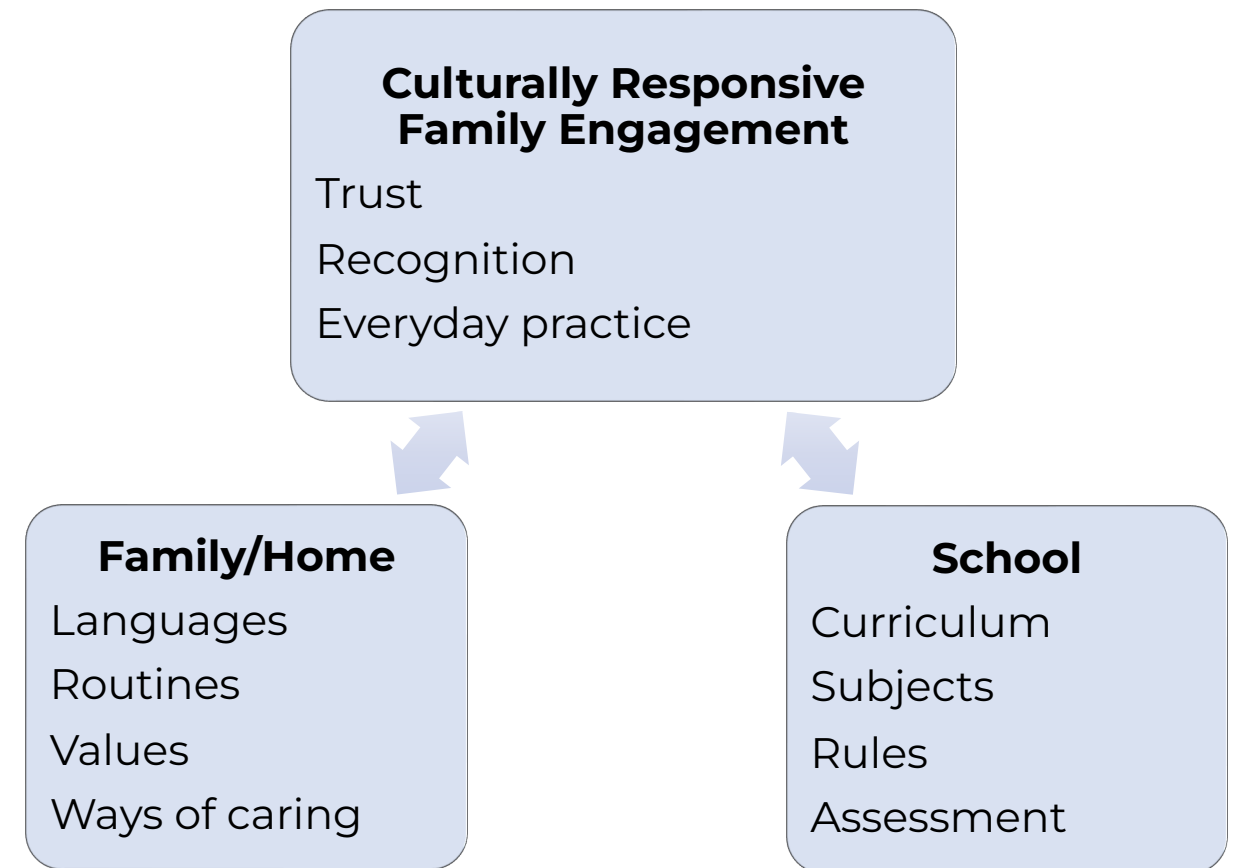
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Learning Objectives

- Explain how children's life stories and family traditions can be used as educational resources in schools and other non-formal learning environments
- Recognise the intergenerational needs and tensions that arise from migration and consider how these influence what is passed on within families
- Design low-threshold biographical activities that respect diversity, privacy and voluntary participation
- Explain how biographical sensitisation can support inclusive and multilingual practices, preparing students for activities such as language awareness or schoolscaping in the future

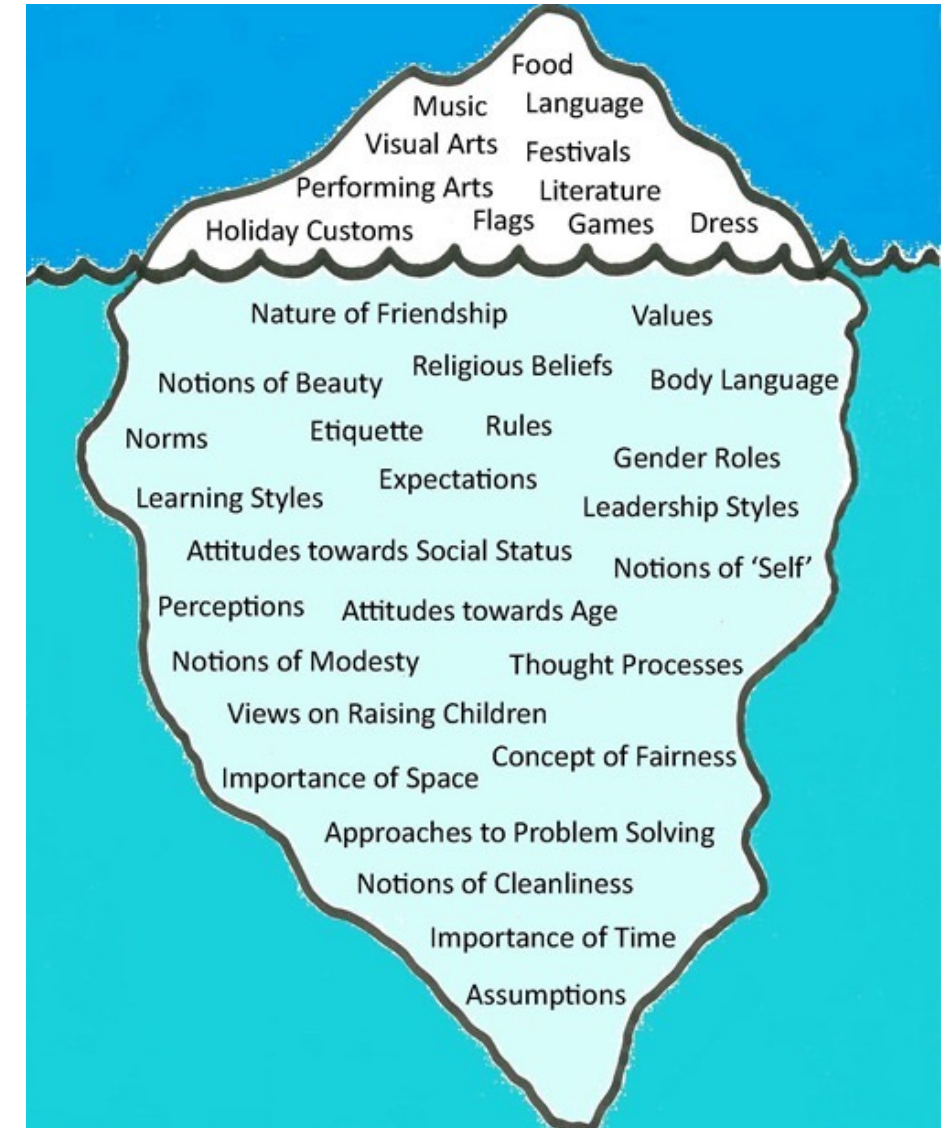
Culturally Responsive Family Engagement

- Schools recognise families as knowledge holders
- Engagement goes beyond events and celebrations
- Focus on relationships, trust, and everyday practices



Funds of Knowledge – households as sites of expertise

- Skills, routines, values, histories
- Often invisible in school
- Strongly shaped by migration



The iceberg Model Of Culture. By James Penstone
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Intergenerational Transmission After Migration

Intergenerational transmission is not a single, shared goal

- **Grandparents** often seek preservation and continuity
- **Parents** tend to negotiate between heritage and integration, sometimes prioritising protection from exclusion
- **Children** focus on belonging, peer acceptance, and future orientation

Why Use Biographies for Learning?

Biographical learning helps students to:

- Connect new learning to lived experience
- Reflect on and make sense of change
- Develop language and storytelling skills
- Strengthen their identity and well-being
- Learn empathy and perspective-taking



Photo by M. Markova © Koopkultur e.V.

Why Integrate Biographical Practices Into School Routines?

For students

- Strengthens motivation and engagement
- Normalises diversity without exoticising it
- Supports identity development and a sense of belonging

For teachers

- Deeper understanding of students
- Improves classroom relationships
- Cross-curricular learning opportunities
- Prepares students for multilingual and intercultural learning activities

For families

- Recognition of home knowledge
- Stronger school-family relationships

Conditions for Safe and Effective Biographical Work

Biographical learning is effective when:

- participation is voluntary and structured (choice what information to disclose and what to keep private)
- reflection is structured and guided (carefully design prompts and follow-up discussion)
- multiple modes of expression are offered (oral, writing, visual, digital)

Create safety and predictability:

Before starting biographical work, the group should agree on norms such as:

- 'You decide what you share'
- 'Listening is as important as speaking.'
- 'No one has to explain or justify their story.'
- 'We talk about practices/activities/dishes, not judging families.'

Benefits:

- Expectations are made explicit.
- It signals that the activity is not about performance.
- It builds trust, especially in diverse or multilingual groups.

Turn experience into thinking:

Instead of: 'Tell us about your family' - may lead to unstructured, uneven or overly personal sharing

Use:

- 'Choose one small practice/activity/dish/tradition in your family that feels important to you.'
- 'What is something that people in your family often do, not only on special days?'
- 'Where did you learn this practice/activity/dish/tradition?'
- 'Are your grandparents doing it the same way as your parents and you?'

Benefits:

- It narrows the focus.
- It encourages analysis, not personal disclosure.
- It helps students move from story to reflection.

Move beyond 'my story':

After individual or small-group work, the focus shifts from the personal to the shared experience.

- 'What kinds of practices came up often in the group?'
- 'What differences did you notice between experiences?'
- 'What surprised you?'
- 'What stayed similar across different stories?'

Benefits:

- It de-personalises sensitive content.
- Encourages pattern recognition.
- It builds sociological thinking.
- It supports intercultural learning without alienating anyone.

Connect experience to learning goals:

After sharing, the teacher explicitly links reflection to the curriculum or learning objectives.

- 'What can we learn from this about how traditions change over time?'
- 'How do family practices connect to language use?'
- 'Why might some practices be easier to maintain than others when people move countries?'
- 'What role could the school play in acknowledging these practices?'

Benefits:

- It prevents biographical work from remaining anecdotal.
- It anchors it in learning objectives.
- It helps students to see the relevance beyond themselves.

Support quieter or multilingual students:

Instead of open discussion only, offer individual reflection activities. Use visual reflection as well.

- 'One thing I learned about families is...'
- 'Something that changed my thinking was...'
- 'Why might some practices be easier to maintain than others when people move countries?'
- 'What role could the school play in acknowledging these practices?'
- 'One question I still have is...'

Benefits.

- It reduces linguistic pressure.
- Allows time for private reflection.
- Supports different learning styles.
- It makes reflection visible without public disclosure.

What Teachers Can Do

Examples of classroom practices

- Family practices/activities/recipes/gestures/sayings research (7+)
- Object-based storytelling (8+)
- Family biographical timelines – highlight what was important (9+)
- Family interviews (real or imagined) (9+).
- Biographical theatre – collective scenes based on shared themes (11+).

Key principles:

- low-threshold and voluntary
- age-appropriate and flexible
- connected to everyday learning

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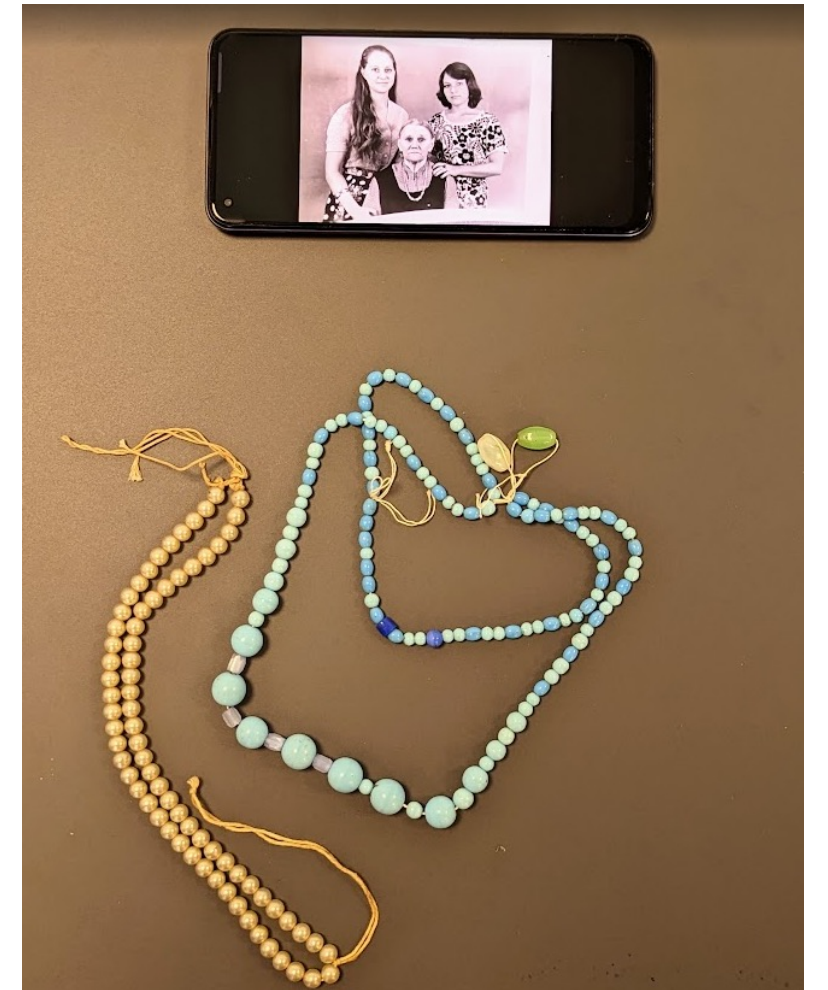


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Wrap-Up and Reflection

- What family practices are already present but invisible in my setting?
- What small biographical activity could I introduce safely?
- How might this support multilingual awareness later?



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List of references:

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Thank you for watching!

Visit the PLURI project website to find more activities, links and inspiration.

