Promoting Social Inclusion: Promising Educational Practices from COSI.ed

Output 5.5

Project information

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Partnership

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P4	FGU NORDVEST (FGU)	Denmark
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Abstract (for dissemination)	This output is a policy brief (long and short versions) highlighting successful practices to strengthen educational relationships and foster co-created education emerging from the analysis of the development of the COSI.ed model to the European level and listing recommendations to upscale these practice through policy processes and developments.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief seeks to upscale successful practices and European common values, by exploring strategies to foster social innovation, inclusion, and equality within educational institutions. This effort ensures that young learners with disadvantaged backgrounds will find their place in education, training and/or work.

This policy brief outlines effective strategies for promoting social inclusion and addressing early leaving from education and training across Europe, drawing on transformative insights from the COSI.ed project. Anchored in three key political/pedagogical dimensions—co-creation, indirect approach, and equality literacy—the project unveils pathways for cultivating shared values among partner countries Denmark, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and Spain. Central to COSI.ed is the principle that co-created education empowers young people, enhancing both their educational attainment and social inclusion. By leveraging the diverse educational landscapes of partner countries, COSI.ed fosters collaboration among a wide array of stakeholders, including teachers, trainers, and the broader community, reducing power imbalances between practitioners and learners.

Additionally, the project aims to influence national and institutional social inclusion policies, extending its model and experiences to new target groups, contexts, and regions, with the ultimate goal of establishing a sustainable policy applicable across Europe.

1. About the COSI.ed project

The project COSI.ed aimed to upscale successful practices from the MaCE - Marginalisation and Co-created Education project implemented in 2017 in response to youth unemployment rates in the EU and concerns about young people who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The project sought to:

- reduce Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET);
- facilitate smoother transitions for young people into adulthood;
- develop co-researching and co-creating methodologies, addressing internal barriers and improving relationships;
- promote a more equitable and effective educational model adapted to the needs of contemporary societies;
- support policymakers to consider the COSI.ed methodology into future inclusive education policies at various levels of governance.

The COSI.ed was developed in countries and specific zones where the ELET rate is high and where more methodological options that keep young people in education and training are needed. COSI.ed was implemented in various institutions across countries, including preparatory basic education and training institutions in Denmark, vocational upper secondary schools in Norway, public primary schools in Poland, second chance schools in Portugal, and non-governmental organisations in Spain. The project aimed to support young people aged 15-25 who were at risk of dropping out of education and training or/and experiencing social exclusion.

2. COSI.ed model proposal

The COSI.ed implementation in diverse and heterogeneous contexts, has evolved from its foundational assumptions established in the MaCE project. The COSI.ed model is based on the idea that practitioners and young people co-create knowledge as part of a community of practice. Practitioners, young people, educators, and trainers work together, learning and developing knowledge and competences. The method integrates three dimensions: **Co-creation**, **Indirect Approach (IA)** and **Equality Literacy (EQL)**.

- **Co-creation** is a process of collaboration between practitioners and young people, assuming they work together, learning and developing knowledge and skills together. Such a balance between building on young people's own competence, reflecting about their own practice and being part of a professional fellowship, is the main principle of the project.

- **IA**, inspired by ethnography and biography, is a conversational approach to grasp the young people's experiences in education from their own voices, getting answers to questions that are not directly asked. A key element is the indirect way of approaching the life world of the participant, making sure not to introduce ideas, concepts or notions into the conversation that are not presented by the participant first. Implemented by role models such as teachers, educators, and higher education students, the IA fosters trust and understanding, through open conversations, enabling a deeper insight into the pathways of young people.

- **EQL Framework,** rooted in sociological constructs of structure and agency, provides an analytical framework to comprehend factors influencing learning and development within and beyond the school environment. The EQL Framework enables a bio-social-cultural, life course, a systemic view of educational privilege and disadvantaged backgrounds, highlighting what can be done to improve the learning environment.

These dimensions establish a communication platform connecting educational stakeholders and youth, fostering awareness and consciousness about individual paths, challenges, and skills. Through these pedagogical processes, vulnerabilities in the contextual frames of young people are identified and addressed more effectively, while educational stakeholders enhance their skills, leading to the development of co-created schools and educational spaces that promote social inclusion.

The five regional/national working models (Denmark, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and Spain) of COSI.ed were upscaled to a European COSI.ed Model (Graph 1) that focuses on the quality of the relationship between young people and staff in education and training institutions and translates into concrete actions and behaviours. This model may be used by practitioners working with young people and it should be taken into consideration by policymakers for making educational decisions. To counteract the young people's educational and social exclusion, the model aims at:

> Building an equal relationship (IA, EQL), understanding the world of marginalised groups (IA, EQL), providing them with a voice (EQL, IA), giving them agency (EQL), weakening structural mechanisms of marginalisation (EQL), building on and **enhancing youth's strengths (AA),** and building an institutional climate conducive to equality and social justice understood here as (Youth-Adults) **Relationship-Centred Approach (RCA)**" (Markowska-Manista; Tomaszewska-Pękała & Zubala, 2024, p. 17[1]).

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[1] Markowska-Manista, U., Tomaszewska-Pękała, H., & Zubala, E., (2024). Warsaw: Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw. It can be consulted on this link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QhzrkV1cr_k7ctW1lNm58DTCF5MLVBcC/edit

Graph 1 - European COSI.ed Model.
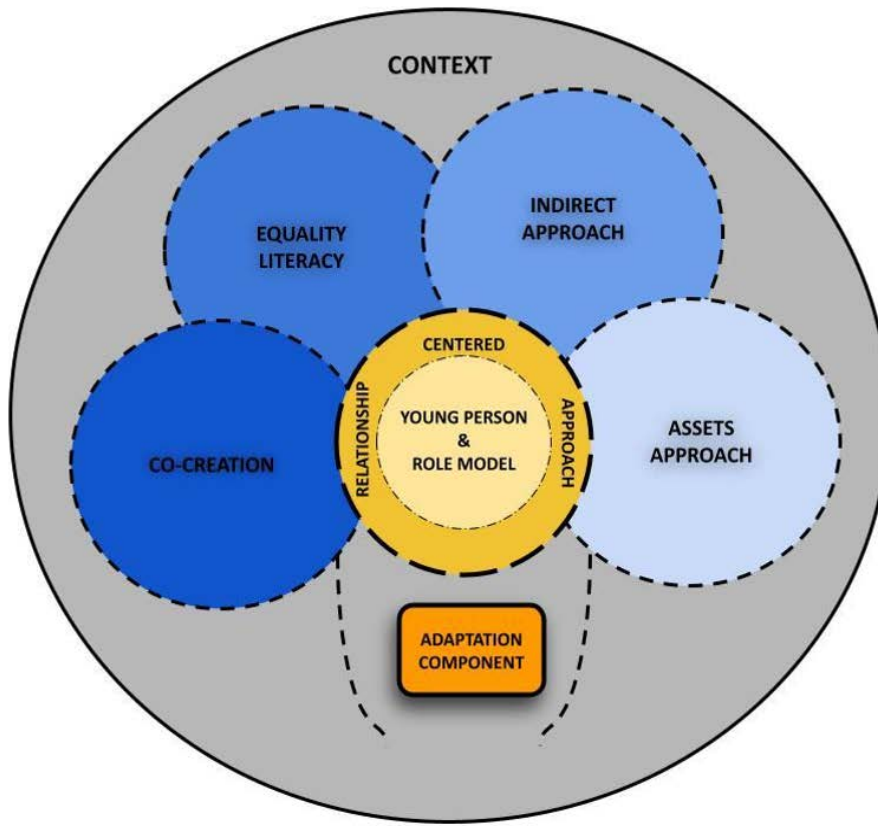
3. Promising practices for social inclusion in educational contexts: strengthening relationships and co-created education

Several promising practices rooted in these three pedagogical dimensions: co-creation, indirect approach, and equality literacy framework come into play as vital to transfer or upscale the model to diverse educational contexts.

Practices focused on *Co-creation*

Co-creation practices foster better relationships between practitioners, institutions, and youth. Examples include:

- **Training sessions** meticulously developed by teachers, educators, and university researchers,
- **School activities** innovatively conceived by both young people and practitioners,
- **Co-created narratives** developed by master's students and young people,
- **Collaborative Competence Groups (CCG)** developed nationally and internationally. CCG were used throughout the entire project as a way of co-creating the upscaling of the COSI.ed model by bringing together different stakeholders in collaborative developmental work.

Training sessions

Teacher training and staff continuous professional development (CPD) should involve collaboration between local practitioners and higher education experts (Images 1 and 2). This ensures that teaching methods and content are continually improved and relevant, operating on the premise that all parties learn with each other. Such collaboration is pivotal for extending this co-creation model to the teacher-student dynamic and fostering cooperation across various school levels.

Image 1 – Training and dissemination session at the Norwegian upper secondary school.

Image 2 – Training Session in Denmark.

While this observation is not novel, the findings of the project reinforce the notion that integrating theoretical and practical perspectives will enrich educational policies and elevate the quality of initial teacher training.

School activities

The promising practices related to school activities are based on those conceived and developed by young people and practitioners in co-creation. Two school activities are highlighted as promising practices: co-participated assemblies, and co-created diary.

Co-participated assemblies

In Portugal, the second chance school (E2OM) has monthly assemblies (Image 3) organised by one teacher and two youngsters and opened to all professionals and young people of E2OM. The purpose is to discuss the school issues democratically and provide feedback on ongoing work. Every member of the educational community has the right to express their opinion. Activities are proposed and decided upon by young people and professionals. Together, they determine which activities will be carried out and how.

Image 3 – Assembly in E2OM, Portugal.

*"The assemblies (…) serve as a **platform to discuss problems and report on the work carried out**. The responsibility of organising the assemblies is rotated among **one teacher and two students.** The assemblies are described as **democratic,***

*allowing anyone to speak and contribute as long as they are respectful. It is also a time when the entire **school community approves or rejects new ideas and projects for the school**. For instance, the burning of Judas was proposed by a professional during an assembly and, as it was enthusiastically received by the students, it was carried out." (Field note of a master's student)*

Co-created diary

Another school practice, this time in Poland, involves a **co-created diary** (Image 4) **between practitioners and young people**. The diary's goal was to document individual goals, strategies to achieve them, and to monitor the progress over the academic year, through personalised meetings and discussions. Collaborative developing this diary fosters a balanced approach to managing expectations between practitioners and young people, while aligning educational perspectives and goals.

***Image 4** – Co-created diary in Poland.*

These practices are recommended, as it follows a logic of co-creating between young people and practitioners, and it provides young people the opportunity to express their opinions about issues that affect them directly, with the assemblies, for instance. It is also possible for young people to have more guidance in their learning process, throughout the co-development of a diary where their goals and educational or professional plans are considered.

Co-created narratives

Another noteworthy practice for broader implementation is the **co-creation of educational narratives** between master's students and young people. This initiative was developed in Portugal as a learning practice for the master's students in Educational Sciences, specifically in developing educational tools and approaches to include young people. For them this practice emphasised the importance of articulate theory and practice as a vital strategy for intervening and supporting educational environments. In turn, E2OM young adults were led to feel comfortable to share their testimonies and school trajectories creating narratives about their own lives and experiences.

*"We have access to the information that **youngsters want** to share. We are not forcing them to share anything that they may not be comfortable with. Here, they can **express their thoughts and feelings freely**, which is very important."*

(Interview with a master's student in Educational Sciences)

Collaborative Competence Groups

A notable practice that emphasises both co-creation and co-research is the establishment of **Collaborative Competence Groups (CCG)**. These groups bring together young people, political advisors, researchers, and stakeholders to act as consultants and advisors for project development.

The project organised national and cross-national CCG forums (Image 5), fostering connections within sectors and across countries, which contributed to increased interdisciplinarity and alignment between academia, practice, and policy. These knowledge-sharing and co-creation forums played a crucial role in promoting equitable participation, balancing power dynamics, and enhancing project development through collaborative efforts in developing methodological tools for data collection and analysis, discussing project results, and policy recommendations.

Image 5 – CCG in Norway.

Another key goal of CCG is to amplify the voices of young people, as co-researchers of social processes, diminish hierarchies among participants, and foster a more inclusive and equitable exchange of ideas. Providing **preparatory sessions with young people** (Image 6) to support them in the development of tools to actively participate as equals alongside others in broader groups was essential and should be integrated into future projects and policymaking endeavours. Shifting away from perspectives of control, this involves preparing and empowering young people with socio-emotional skills, boosting

their self-esteem and confidence. This enables them to actively engage in meetings, sharing opinions, perceptions, and feelings without fear of reprisal, thereby asserting themselves as informed agents. Portugal, for example, has implemented this practice, highlighting its significance in enhancing youth participation.

Image 6 – Preparatory sessions with young people, in Portugal.

> **This collaborative approach promotes the co-creation of new perspectives on education, particularly inclusive education by enhancing collective understanding and fostering innovative solutions, as well as value young people as active agents in research and design for educational improvement.**

Practices focused on *Indirect Approach*

The indirect approach aims to strengthen horizontal relationships among diverse educational stakeholders, mainly to enhance practitioners-young people dynamics, as an indirect way of approaching the life world of the participant. Several examples illustrate these practices, including:

1. **Informal** and **personal conversations**,
2. **Photovoice** and **collage exercises**,
3. **Indirect Interviews**.

Informal and personal conversations

Image 7 – Informal conversations during workshop together with county policymakers in Norway.

The creation of moments and spaces in schools where young people and practitioners engage in informal conversations during classes or workshops and personal conversations is paramount. These interactions allow for open dialogue and active listening, fostering an environment where young people feel empowered to share their experiences at their own pace. Such informal conversations (Image 7) facilitate the sharing of experiences among young people and practitioners, fostering mutual trust and understanding.

Meanwhile, personal conversations (Image 8) offer personalised support to young people, enabling practitioners to closely follow young people's pathways. These interactions are powerful in establishing a balanced relationship.

Image 8 – Personal conversations, in Denmark.

Photovoice and collage exercises

Other useful practices to enhance the connection and interaction between young people and practitioners are **photovoice** and **collage exercises**. These activities facilitate the sharing of meaningful information and personal experiences, providing individuals with a platform to express themselves through visual media rather than solely on verbal communication. Individuals are encouraged to share their stories through images or captured moments, fostering deeper understanding and empathy. For instance, in Norway, the practitioners used **photovoice** (Image 9) as a tool of indirect approach to collect data on and with young people and, in Denmark, the tool was **collage exercises** (Image 10).

Image 9 – Photovoice in Norway.

In both cases, the practitioners considered the tools, and indirect approach itself, a valuable opportunity to gain insights into their young people's lives and preferences, enabling the introduction of innovative teaching in their daily practice. Practitioners expressed that they feel more comfortable interacting with young people without intruding upon their personal space.

Image 10 – Collage exercises in Denmark.

Indirect Interviews

Another promising practice is **conducting indirect interviews with pupils** aiming to highlight the pupils' own stories to better personalise their educational and/or professional plans. For instance, in Denmark, FGU used three possible pathways to guide the conversation with pupils based on them sharing their stories. The aim of the conversation is to make it informal and indirect yet help guide the young person towards a personalised plan. For this purpose, the teacher/counsellor can make use of the model's instructions which are based on three possible pathways for the conversation (designated as goals for the pupils' course at FGU: education, employment or undefined) (Image 11).
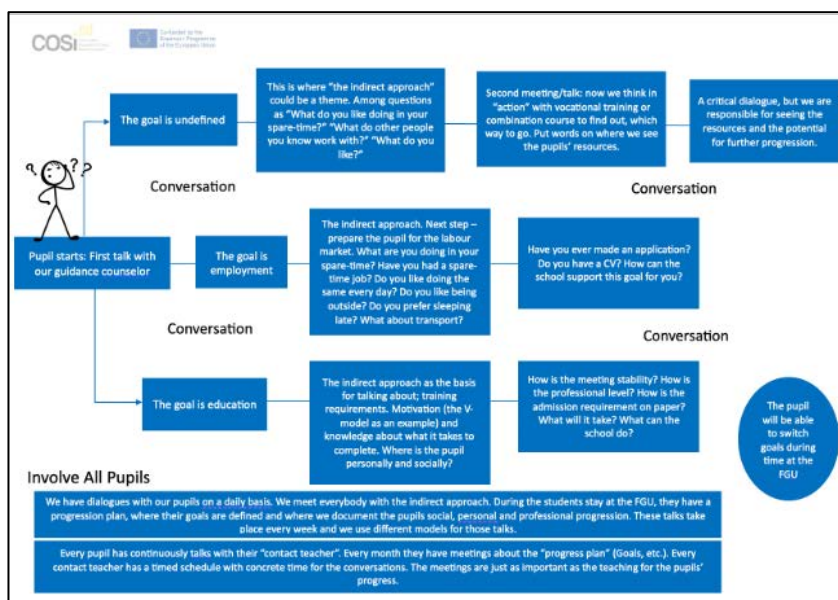

Image 11 – Indirect approach model in Denmark.

These practices enhance communication between practitioners and young people. It gives practitioners the opportunity to learn pedagogical tools and methods, and young people the opportunity to express themselves.

Practices focused on the *Equality Literacy*

The EQL considers that people need different approaches to education to provide them with an equitable chance of success. Some of the practices that align well with this framework can serve as valuable and practical tools to assist practitioners in gaining a deeper understanding of young people's circumstances that may act as both push and pull factors for ELET:

1. **Drawing exercises** about young people's lives and experiences,
2. **"Burn of Judas"**, focused on reflecting about life experiences and challenges,
3. **Individual** or **group conversations** through *sikkhona* card method.

Drawing Exercises

The **drawing exercises** (Image 12) are a dynamic tool to support young people in articulating their life narratives, encompassing their educational trajectories, through visual representations depicting various phases, individuals, circumstances, and obstacles they have encountered. Beyond providing young people with a means to introspect on the influence of past experiences on their present circumstances and academic performance, or the therapeutic aspect of visually processing

Image 12 – Example of drawing exercise in Denmark.

these experiences, these exercises offer practitioners invaluable insights. By delving into their own pathways and life experiences, young people can understand the context they were in. In turn, for practitioners, this practice brings invaluable insights and a deeper understanding of young people's lives and challenges, and on their school experiences of inclusion/exclusion fostering empathy and prompting critical reflection on the suitability of current educational practices for the diverse needs of young people. These insights are a valuable opportunity to further develop the informal conversations about inclusion/exclusion experiences of young people.
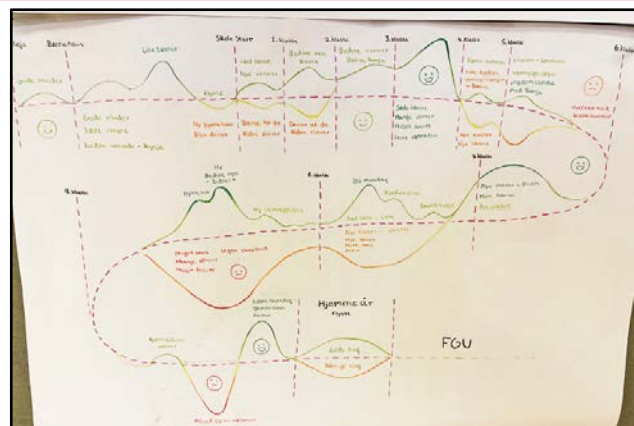

"Burn of Judas"

Another promising practice is to rethink the transferability of practices among educational contexts based on young people's experiences and traditions. For instance, in Portugal, ESOM developed an activity called "Burn of Judas"[2] (Image 13), where young people share (and get rid of) their fears, challenges, negative experiences, insecurities, tragic moments while building a puppet that is burned at the end. This is a traditional Easter celebration that E2OM transformed into a reflective and meaningful one.

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[2] "Burn of Judas" is a catholic and orthodox tradition, where a puppet, representing Judas, the traitor, is burned as a symbol of society's evil. In the case of E2OM, this tradition is adapted to provide a moment of reflection for young people, during which they burn a "Judas", representing their fears, insecurities, issues, and tragic experiences.

Image 13 – "Burn of Judas" by students of E2OM, in Portugal.

Sikkhona card method

Another promising practice is promoting individual or group conversations through *sikkhona* **card method** – a method to facilitate the learning process by improving interpersonal communication and the establishment of relational bonds. This was implemented in Spain, Palma de Mallorca (Image 14), where educational professionals implement this with immigrant young people. Through images and direct/indirect questions, young people felt free to express their feelings and talk about their experiences. This practice allows young people to feel more comfortable and less awkward in sharing their stories, because they are in a trustworthy environment; and allows practitioners to improve their pedagogical practice by implementing new methods.

Image 14 – Sikkhona card method in Spain, Palma de Mallorca.

These practices foster better relationships between young people and practitioners. It is intended to develop personalised programmes to support young people, implement reflective and tailored activities.

4. Recommendations to upscale COSI.ed practices

The research findings and insights highlighted the need to:

Foster Positive Relationships: Facilitate the development of positive relationships with and among young people through engaging group activities, collaborative projects, and shared leisure pursuits. Strengthening interpersonal connections enhances the co-creation process and promotes a supportive learning environment.

Promote Community Collaboration: Encourage cooperation among diverse stakeholders within the community to co-create strategies aimed at fostering meaningful educational practices throughout the educational and research processes.

Engage Families and External Actors: Extend the practice of co-creation beyond the classroom by involving young people's families and other relevant stakeholders outside of the school environment.

Establish Bottom-Up Partnerships: Foster partnerships between schools and external institutions, such as universities, in a bottom-up approach. Use existing resources to identify common objectives and collaborate on educational initiatives, mainly in the co-design and implementation of training processes.

Encourage Self-Monitoring: Empower practitioners and practitioners to self-monitor their practices and remain flexible to adapt as circumstances evolve. Continuous reflection and adjustment are essential for effective co-creation.

Implement Collaborative Competence Groups (CCG): Encourage the involvement of young adults as co-researchers in various processes and as a powerful contribution to rethink *academic* **roles** in vulnerable contexts.

Improve the access to educational toolkits: Empower and support school staff (trainers, teachers, psychologists) in their daily interactions with young people.

Revise curricular and pedagogical frameworks for both initial and ongoing teacher development training, by strengthening staff competencies, particularly in interpersonal and communication skills, while also prioritising career counselling and guidance services.

Create safe and welcoming environments: Encourage natural and informal conversations, employing the indirect approach.

Enhance communication channels and affection between practitioners and young people through expanded activities and resources aimed at fostering dialogue.

Develop individualised support programmes for young people requiring additional assistance, tailoring interventions to their specific needs.

Expand the range of extracurricular activities available to young people, enabling them to explore and develop their interests and passions.

Implement preventive and compensatory measures: to enhance public and education systems' responses to ELET by assessing and evaluating the risk of educational exclusion among young people, enabling proactive measures to address potential challenges.