



An Ethnographic Research Project on the Use of Digital Media for Inclusion in a Challenging Diverse School Context

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ABSTRACT

This research draws from an Erasmus+ project, aiming to recognise inclusive and creative teaching practices with ICT in schools of special difficulty. The main purpose of this article is to generate knowledge on the use of digital media to promote creative teaching practices in especially challenging educational contexts. The specific aim is to identify how teachers are using digital media in the classroom from an inclusive perspective and highlight their experiences and perceptions. In relation to the method, ethnographic research is carried out in a racially and culturally diverse school in a peri-urban area in north-eastern Italy. Participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews are used to collect information. Results show that teachers employed different creative teaching practices that allowed students to use their voices, express their feelings, and enjoy learning. Digital media facilitated interaction among the students and increased their motivation. Dialogue and interaction are key to the transformation and creation of the student's own knowledge. The discussion shows that incorporating students' interests and life experiences is an important factor in achieving inclusive education in today's society and education systems.

Keywords: Digital media, inclusive education, ethnography, creative teaching practices, students' voices.

Un proyecto de investigación etnográfica sobre el uso de los medios digitales para la inclusión en un contexto escolar diverso y desafiante

RESUMEN

Esta investigación se enmarca en un proyecto Erasmus+, cuyo objetivo es reconocer las prácticas docentes inclusivas y creativas con las TIC en escuelas de especial dificultad. El propósito de este artículo es generar conocimiento sobre el uso de los medios digitales para promover prácticas docentes creativas en contextos educativos desafiantes. El objetivo específico es identificar cómo

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el profesorado utiliza los medios digitales en el aula desde una perspectiva inclusiva y destacar sus experiencias y percepciones. En relación con el método, se lleva a cabo una investigación etnográfica en una escuela racial y culturalmente diversa en una zona periurbana del noreste de Italia. Para recopilar la información se utilizan la observación participante, conversaciones informales y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los resultados muestran que el profesorado emplea diferentes prácticas docentes creativas que permite al alumnado utilizar sus voces, expresar sus sentimientos y disfrutar del aprendizaje. Los medios digitales facilitan la interacción y aumentan la motivación del alumnado. El diálogo y la interacción son fundamentales para la transformación y creación de su propio conocimiento. La discusión muestra que incorporar los intereses y las experiencias vitales del alumnado es un elemento relevante para lograr la educación inclusiva en la sociedad y los sistemas educativos actuales.

Palabras clave: Medios digitales, educación inclusiva, etnografía, prácticas docentes creativas, voces del alumnado.

1. Introduction

As the rise in migration and displacement has led to a 26% increase in the number of migrant and refugee children worldwide since 2000 (UNESCO, 2023), UNESCO is now considering the relevance of digitalisation for inclusion (ODS 4) as part of its *Agenda 2030* regarding the building of a sustainable and equitable future (United Nations, 2015). In this context where digital media and inclusion have become a prominent point of reference in our education systems (OECD, 2019; United Nations, 2015), this paper aims to generate knowledge on the use of digital media to promote creative and inclusive practices in particularly challenging educational contexts.

Various studies have highlighted the limitations of using digital media in schools (Sancho-Gil et al., 2020; Swist & Gulson, 2023) by reproducing the same kinds of hegemonic practices offered by conventional textbooks. Furthermore, digital media can be used to reinforce the neoliberal educational approach (Grimaldi & Ball, 2021; Martínez-Martínez & Tudela-Sancho, 2021). However, it is possible to find studies that employ digital media in creative and inclusive ways in vulnerable school contexts (e.g. Jorgensen & Lowrie, 2013; Moreno-Pinillos et al., 2024; Lasheras-Lalana et al., 2024; Vigo-Arrazola, 2021). In this context, this in-depth analysis aims to gain insight into the current use of digital media in schools.

In particular, this article explores the use of digital media to promote inclusion by learning about students' interests and voices for the application of these resources in teaching practices in vulnerable contexts. It aims to explore how teachers employ practices with digital media in schools with a significant migrant population. More specifically, it aims to identify the use of digital media for promoting creative and inclusive teaching practices in challenging educational contexts and the perceptions of teachers about these practices.

2. Framing Inclusive Education, Creative Teaching Practices and Digital Media

This article places inclusion as the cornerstone to facilitating the participation and learning of all students regardless of their differences and attending to the needs of all (Ainscow, 2020; Allan, 2023). Diversity should be embraced but also used as a vehicle for change (Allan, 2023). While perceptions and practices of politicians and technicians continue to label students (Vigo-Arrazola et al., 2022), teachers must adopt a transformative role centred on building and learning together, encouraging participation, giving students a voice and promoting shared decision-making (Blasco-Serrano et al., 2024; Vigo-Arrazola et al., 2023). In the same way, teaching practices might become more inclusive while finding new and creative ways for students to learn responding to their interests and desires, breaking with the rigid hierarchies within school, and connecting with different people and places (Allan, 2023). In this inclusive environment, the system should respond to the specific needs of all students as a means to achieving social and democratic justice (Ainscow, 2020; Portelli & Koneeny, 2018; Slee & Tait, 2022). Similarly, Portelli and Koneeny (2018) argue that the concept of inclusion is essential to creating a robust democratic community in the classroom. However, according to Slee and Tait (2022), based on studies from different countries, inclusive education is not simple because of the exclusion of some students.

In this regard, the concept of creative teaching practices remains closely related to the attainment of inclusive education (López-Fuentes, 2024; Vigo-Arrazola & Moreno-Pinillos, 2025). Creative teaching practices connect with the students' lives, facilitate interaction with their interests, and foster dialogue to transform and reconstruct knowledge as part of an innovation process (Craft, 2014; Jeffrey, 2006). In 1990, Woods identified four characteristics of creative teaching practices: *innovation*, *ownership*, *control* and *relevance*. Indeed, various authors have followed this same classification over the last 30 years (Jeffrey, 2006; Vigo-Arrazola, 2021).

- **Relevance**—Learning that is meaningful to the immediate needs and interests of pupils and to the group as a whole.
- **Ownership of knowledge**—Students learn by and for themselves rather than depending exclusively on the knowledge imparted by the teacher, examiner or society. Creative learning is internalised and makes a difference to the student's self.
- **Control of learning processes**—The student is self-motivated and not governed by extrinsic factors or purely task-oriented exercises.

- Innovation—Something new is created. A major change has taken place, a new skill is mastered, a new insight is gained, a new understanding is realised, and new and meaningful knowledge is acquired. A radical shift has taken place (Jeffrey, 2006).

Creative teaching practices shift the focus of homogeneous and static teaching practices centred on the problem and individual action towards a more collaborative form of teaching and learning (Craft, 2014; Vigo-Arrazola & Moreno-Pinillos, 2025). Accordingly, systematic activities that favour expression, problem-solving and communication are considered tasks that promote creative development (Vigo-Arrazola, 2021; Vigo-Arrazola & Moreno-Pinillos, 2025). The children's voices are heard, and they are encouraged to talk about their personal experiences and interests (Jeffrey, 2006). More recently, Chappell (2022) has incorporated certain features into creative teaching practices alluding to a transdisciplinary approach, individual and collective activities for change, activities that seek a balance between control and freedom, empowerment and agency, risk, immersion, and play, possibilities of reflecting and raising new questions, and ethics and trusteeship.

Some authors have argued that inclusive education and the use of creative teaching practices may be closely connected to the possibilities of applying digital media in the classroom (López-Fuentes, 2024). However, at the same time, the use of digital media in the classroom is a controversial issue. On the one hand, some researchers consider that digital media have not transformed teaching and learning practices enough and instead have perpetrated traditional pedagogies and, in some cases, exacerbated segregation between students and different school contexts (Sancho-Gil et al., 2020). Moreover, other studies suggest that teaching and learning practices with digital media could contribute to the neoliberalisation of the experience of education (Grimaldi & Ball, 2021). On the other hand, some authors have demonstrated how digital media-based activities can encourage learners to innovate and take control of their own learning (López-Fuentes, 2024) and can facilitate children's creative learning inside the classroom, particularly in vulnerable contexts (Jorgensen & Lowrie, 2013; Vigo-Arrazola, 2021). Digital media have the capacity to shape learning spaces in which everybody can share new ideas and develop new creative experiences (Jorgensen & Lowrie, 2013).

Our research interest is inspired primarily by studies on digital media that focus on harnessing the potential of existing digital media rather than providing students with the latest technological devices (Vigo-Arrazola, 2021), helping to achieve greater social participation, reaffirming children's identity and improving their self-esteem (Ochoa-Aizpurua et al., 2019). Relatively few studies have explored in detail the use of digital media for implementing creative teaching practices in the classroom, and even fewer have studied this topic in schools with high percentages of students in a vulnerable situation (Jorgensen & Lowrie, 2013; Moreno-Pinillos et al., 2024; Lasheras-Lalana et al., 2024; Vigo-Arrazola, 2021). This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by means of an ethnographic research study conducted at a school in the north of Italy.

3. Method

This research (undertaken in 2022) draws from an Erasmus+ Project called *Inclusive Practices of Creative and Innovative Teaching with ICT in Schools of Special Difficulty* (PIECIT.2020-1-ES01-KA226-SCH-095780). It involved the participation of a team of seven partners, comprising researchers from Spain, Italy, Portugal and Cyprus, together with teachers from three schools (rural, urban, and peri-urban) located in these countries. This paper focuses on the Italian school.

Pursuant to the aims of this paper to explore how teachers use digital media in their classrooms and to identify their experiences about it, this qualitative study uses ethnography as a social research method focused on actions and routines that make sense of the world in everyday life (Hammersley, 2018). This ethnographic method serves as a vehicle for understanding people by observing their actions and interactions at close range from a culturally relevant framework (Skukauskaitė, 2017). Ethnography enables the researcher to gain an understanding of reality up close by delving into the daily life of schools from a participatory and critical perspective (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021).

3.1. Collected Information, Timing, Techniques, and Instruments

This research corresponds to a *compressed time mode*, involving an intensive period of research in a specific setting based on observations, interviews and informal conversations (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). The duration of the field stay was seven weeks. The data was collected primarily (but not exclusively) during school time. A triangulation procedure was used to analyse the information and data collected in the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This process helps to define the teachers' perspectives on their practice with digital media.

The data was collected using various techniques. Firstly, this study focuses on participant observation. This observation offers the possibility to effectively address the complex network of events and processes in each education context, allowing the researcher to accurately understand the order of events in a natural way, revisit them retrospectively and establish connections (Hammersley, 2018). The role of the observer/researcher is more or less active, depending on the teacher. Typically, the researcher moves around the classroom, observing every detail and asking the teacher questions about their practices and their reasons for implementing them.

Secondly, informal conversations held with different teachers and teaching assistants provide an interesting source of information about the different teaching practices carried out in the school. According to Swain and King (2022), this approach facilitates "a greater ease of communication [...] and [has] the potential to produce more realistic or naturalistic data with less performativity" (p. 2). Apart from the conversations inside the classroom, one of the key moments from the time spent at the school was at break

time in the playground, where the researcher had the opportunity to engage in informal conversations with the teachers and learn more about the school context and teaching practices. Likewise, a few meetings were held with teachers outside the school, which developed into interesting conversations about the needs of students and the existence of children in vulnerable situations. In this sense, observation and informal conversations took place in a wide variety of spaces considering them completely context dependent. Specifically, out of the class spaces, have been considered important to strengthening ties and collaboration with teaching staff, which has led to a more natural and less hierarchical relationship with teachers (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021). This aims to provide more accurate knowledge about the observation in the classroom field.

Subsequently, five semi-structured interviews were held with teachers based on the observations and conversations about their teaching practices with digital media. These interviews were carried out after the observation period to gather more information and clarify some of the key aspects of teaching practices (Walford, 2007). In this sense, two criteria were considered in making the selection. On the one hand, the selection of teachers contemplated the observation time, giving preference to the teachers from the pre-selected classes. On the other hand, teachers were selected according to their availability to respond to our questions. To ensure the validity of the interviews, the questions were shared with the other two authors of this article for the purpose of producing three independent assessments. Videos of the interviews were recorded. A total of four interviews were held in the school, specifically in the IT classroom, and lasted about half an hour with each interviewee. The last interview took place at the university on a different day and lasted one hour. The interviews were conducted by two of the researchers in two languages: Italian and Spanish.

Different instruments were used to collect information from the observations, informal conversations, and interviews. A research diary was used to record "every tiny detail in case it might be of some particular significance in later analysis" (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004, p.538), which generated useful information. Informal conversations were also carefully written in the diary immediately after taking place. This information was systematised daily and collated on a computer. In addition, several photographs and short videos were taken to capture the various creative and inclusive practices employed by the teachers.

After-school time was also a relevant component of this research study, not least through the acquisition of official school documents (i.e. the school organisation project and teachers' classroom evaluations), which offered further contextual data. Similarly, the Italian context was explored by referring to existing literature. Other data collection methods included reviewing emails and WhatsApp messages. Through the application of diverse research instruments, this research aims to be "analytical" and generate "diverse forms of data" with a focus on the accounts and perspectives of the participants (Beach, 2017, p.18).

3.2. Scenario and Participants

In Italy, all children attend ordinary schools regardless of their capabilities and physical and intellectual conditions. In this regard, there are no special educational needs schools in the country. Different authors support the Italian education system, arguing that it is an environment of collaboration and interaction that fosters inclusion (Giangreco et al., 2012; Sandri, 2014). Two crucial moments took place in the 1970s that stand out in the history of educational inclusion in Italy. The first was the passing of Law 118/1971, which granted students with disabilities the right to enter mainstream schools and be educated in ordinary classrooms. A few years later, in 1977, a second remarkable moment took place when 'special schools' were abolished (Law 517/1977).

Therefore, based on this context, it seems appropriate to conduct research in a specific Italian school with a focus on inclusive education. This study analyses an Italian state primary school with students ranging from ages 6 to 11 years old. Since the 1950s, the socio-cultural structure and identity of the local area have been characterised by significant migratory flows. The school is in a town on the border between two prominent regions considered a peri-urban area of a medium-sized city in the north of Italy. It is separated from the city by a water channel. As such, the school is referred to in this research study as the *Water Channel School*.

The local area around the school comprises a large number of social housing occupied primarily by medium-to-low-income families. This area has a very strong community culture that responds to the needs of the population. Due to its characteristics, this school was highly relevant to fulfilling the main objective of the Erasmus+ project mentioned above, within which the research is framed (Walford, 2001). The central objective of the project is to recognise inclusive and creative teaching practices using ICT in schools facing particular difficulties.

In compliance with ethical requirements, the appropriate permission to enter the institution was granted prior to entering the school, and the activities to be carried out were informed by letter.

The Water Channel School has a total of 206 students, 32% of whom are migrant students from almost 20 different countries. There is also a group of students from the Sinti community, and 7% of students have some form of disability, as well as other students with special educational needs. It is worth mentioning that "the national prevalence of the school-aged population certified as disabled is only approximately 2.0% to 2.5%" (Giangreco et al., 2012, p. 113). Therefore, the percentage is significantly higher in this school. Similarly, the student body comprises children from different cultures, races, ethnicities, and religions.

Students are distributed in eleven classrooms according to their age. In this context, this research study assessed a total of seven classrooms. The first criterion adopted to entry these classrooms was the willingness of the teaching staff to begin a process of research on the topic of interest. After observing these classrooms on a rotational basis for the first couple of weeks, the researcher (first author) decided to focus on three classrooms: one third-year classroom (3A) and two fourth-year classrooms (4A and 4B). This decision was based on the prominent use of digital media and creative teaching practices of the teachers in these classrooms after a first exploration in the different classrooms of the school.

The daily workings of the school were examined in the spaces most frequented by the teachers and students, i.e. the classroom, the playground and the entrance and exit gate. The fourth-year students were observed mainly inside their usual classroom and in the playground. Meanwhile, the third-year students were observed inside their usual classroom and in the technology classroom.

The three classrooms reviewed in this ethnographic research presented the following characteristics:

Table 1

Classroom context. Author's own elaboration

Students	3A	4A	4B
Number of students	18	20	22
Number of Diagnosed students (certified as disabled under Law 104/92)	3	4	3
Number of students with special educational needs (BES)	3	2	4
Number of students with Specific Learning Disorders (DSA)	1	2	2
Number of foreign students	1	4	10
Number of pupils from the Sinti community	1	2	1
Number of teachers during the observation	1 teacher, 1 special educational needs teacher and 1 teaching assistant	2 teachers, 1 special educational needs teacher and 1 teaching assistant	2 teachers, 1 special educational needs teacher and 1 teaching assistant

3.3. Analysis

The data presented in this article underwent inductive analysis with qualitative interpretation with a view to elucidating meaning (Miles et al., 2019). The criteria followed to analyse and organise the information are based on the characteristics of the creative teaching practices defined above. The collected information was systematised, classifying the different creative teaching practices supported by digital media. More specifically, the information was classified based on the two main aims of this research, i.e. identifying how digital media are used by the teachers in their classrooms to facilitate creative and inclusive teaching practices and highlighting teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding the use of digital media in their lessons. Following the analysis, at first, a series of key aspects from the field and practical experiences were considered. Secondly, a preliminary selection of categories was established based on the key aspects of the observation and the theory previously described in the article. Finally, the final categories that guide the structure of the results were established. The following table (Table 2) represents this process to achieve the final categories.

Table 2

Established categories for the analysis

1. Key aspects from the observation period	2. Pre-established Categories	3. Final Category
— Considering students' lives (Risks from digital media) — Expression of feelings — Freedom of speech — Communication of interests and likes — Topics to work chosen by the students	Give voice to students: "Relevance"	Incorporating Students' voices and interests
— Ways of learning and rhythms respected — Find knowledge for themselves — Interaction among the students' interests and lives — Experimentation	Encourage autonomy and construction of knowledge by themselves: "Ownership of knowledge"	Facilitating Students' Interaction with Their Interests
— Exchange life stories — Collaborative approach — Participation of everyone — Open activities and critical reflection — Sense of freedom — Cooperation — Dialogue and transformation	Promotion of collaboration, and learning in a context of freedom and self-motivation: "Control of learning processes"	Promoting Students' Interaction and Dialogue for Transformation

Finally, the data was regrouped, including the information collected through field notes, informal conversations and the five semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed by the two researchers who conducted the sessions. Two transcriptions were produced in Spanish, and the other three in Italian (i.e. in the same language in which the interviews were held). The excerpts from the interviews presented in this article were subsequently translated into English. Furthermore, for the purpose of anonymity, the interviewees were assigned the following pseudonyms: Tami, Temi, Timi, Tomi, and Tumi.

The following results were obtained based on the existing literature and the collection and analysis of the data.

4. Results

Following the analysis, the categories identified previously will serve as the common thread running through the results presented in this section. Furthermore, it should be noted that the three main categories arose in a final level from the characteristics of the creative teaching practices and considering the aims of this study. Those are: 1) *incorporating students' voices and interests*, 2) *facilitating students' interaction with their interests*, and 3) *promoting interaction and dialogue among students*. Each section represents a specific characteristic of creative teaching practices.

4.1. Incorporating students' voices and interests

Freedom of speech is achieved in the Water Channel School by means of digital media. In one case, the teachers in the 4B classroom created a civic education session to study the dangers of the internet. The teachers (two teachers and one teaching assistant inside the classroom at the time) and students discussed the risks posed by the internet, social media, applications, and various video games from their own experiences with the help of a PowerPoint presentation. The students' voices were heard as they described their likes and dislikes related to using the internet and playing video games, as well as situations in which they felt scared by certain elements of online risk. Children's voices and feelings were considered, and they could express themselves freely in a safe space. The following remarkable situation occurred during this activity on the dangers of the internet:

One of the kids was moved by one of the internet risks discussed in the session, and she had to go outside the class for a few minutes. When she came back into the classroom, she talked about how scared she was about a character that scares children on the internet. The students and teachers listened to her carefully, and other students empathised with her. The class became a unit—a group—a sense of cohesion between all the students was achieved (Field notes 29/3/2022).

Students were empowered by freedom of speech. In the same vein, another relevant practice was carried out with the fourth-year students based on the creation of PowerPoint presentations in a free manner in which all could participate. This practice provided another opportunity for the students to have their voices heard. The students were given the following instructions:

The students were encouraged to create a PowerPoint presentation on the design of a robot with only two conditions: they had to include three slides and use geometric forms to create the robot. The slides should contain small dialogues in text balloons about what the robot is doing and thinking. The group produced several interesting presentations. One of the girls made a robot that represents her cat, who lives in Pakistan. An enriching conversation about Pakistan followed, enabling the teachers to integrate another culture into the classroom and create a debate about the origins of the students (Field notes 27/04/2022).

This free PowerPoint presentation exercise gave the children the opportunity to communicate their interests and likes to their classmates and teachers. The topics chosen by the students included basketball, cars, animals, pets, and robots designed in meaningful locations for the students, such as at their house, in the mountains, or on a beach. Based on their experiences, the teacher reinforced the idea of creating a secure space in which the children felt free to talk and express their feelings. In this environment of inclusive learning and creative practices, digital media not only facilitates an exploration of student likes and interests but also serves as an interactive educational resource that promotes learning. However, in these practices it is possible to observe that the teacher is the one that chooses how to use digital media and the activity to do inside the classroom. In this way, the role of the teachers seems to be reinforcing a hegemonic sense in which teaching practices are marked and pre-established by the teacher as the only voice considered for the development of the educational process.

4.2. Facilitating Students' Interaction with Their Interests

Knowledge ownership is fundamental for integrating inclusive education and implementing creative learning in the classroom in order to make a difference in the teaching and learning process. The ownership of knowledge is characterised by promoting contact with the interests of students. This process is promoted by means of digital media in the Water Channel School based on the perspectives and teaching practices of the teachers. One teacher argues the following:

The very positive thing about the technology is that it is multi-channel, so it allows us to present, let's say, the stimulus through different channels, which can be visual, auditory, and even tactile for certain cases, and, as we said, it allows for considerable personalisation (Tami, 29/04/2022).

This perception was confirmed during the observations, where the students' ways of learning and rhythms were respected and personalised in the teaching practices with digital media. Another teacher explained how the digital practices promoted interaction with the students' own interests:

The fact of placing the student at the centre of learning motivates her a lot; it makes learning have an emotional connotation and, therefore, creates significant learning because the student carries it with her [...] there is a lot of room for creativity and above all for the possibility of discovery. We help students find knowledge for themselves (Tami, 29/04/2022).

This notion was observed in a third-year class activity, which facilitated innovation and imagination and helped the students develop their own knowledge by interacting with their interests. The children worked with the video game Minecraft in a calm manner. Minecraft is a world-famous video game that was familiar to all the children in the class, many of whom play it at home. During the dangers of the internet activity described above, the children talked about this video game and how they spent many hours playing it at home. It is a building game that has different play modes, some of which can involve violence. However, the teacher enabled 'Creative' mode so that the children could only build and collaborate with each other. The teachers endeavoured to promote experimentation with the game to provide a new vision of the possible uses of video games. Three of the teachers interviewed highlighted their concern with the overuse of video games outside school and, therefore, decided to tackle this issue directly. In this regard, the students were guided by the following instructions:

In the game, all the students participate and play in the same world, and they must create a house with the following conditions: it must contain at least two floors, windows and a door, a balcony with flowers, and a lake. It is forbidden to destroy the houses of others. All these instructions were clearly presented and explained at the beginning of the lesson. Innovation and creativity are the norm in this practice. The students enjoyed their time playing with the video game, something that they usually do outside the classroom and something they noticeably like (Field notes 28/04/2022).

This practice is directly connected with knowledge ownership as the teachers promote experimentation with the video game in an open and safe way, and the children could learn with an enjoyable resource, i.e. a real video game that they frequently play at home in their free time. This practice yielded very positive results, which were reflected in the teachers' experiences:

During a workshop, we decided to use Minecraft, a video game in which the children could build a house with certain characteristics. For them, it was a game and almost like a party. If I had given them a piece of paper and a pencil with the same requests, they would have done it, but probably not with the same results (Tami, 29/04/2022).

In this regard, the students managed to construct their own knowledge, and the teachers promoted the participation of the entire class. Through digital media, the teachers managed to establish a connection between the students' lives and interests and a new area of knowledge.

4.3. Promoting Students' Interaction and Dialogue for Transformation

The exchange of life stories mediated by digital tools is a common practice carried out with students at the Water Channel School. This practice enables the teachers to ascertain their students' interests and learn more about them. Moreover, the students are encouraged to take risks and not to be afraid of being wrong. In the words of one of the teachers:

We employ a type of learning that is constructive, participatory and collaborative, where the child is at the centre of the learning process. The student learns through discovery and by making mistakes. In fact, mistakes are not bad but fundamental elements of the learning path, where you exchange with others. Therefore, you also acquire the relational strategies required to work together, which are fundamental in the labour world (Tami, 02/05/2022).

It should be noted that although the teacher's discourse aims to promote critical and free learning, her last sentence shows that her interest in these practices lies, in some way, in the performative ideal of producing students who are better prepared for the labour world. However, we observe that the digital media practices carried out at the school promote dialogue and collaborative control of learning by the students. In this regard, the activity on the dangers of the internet provided a space for dialogue, exchange, and reconstruction of knowledge among the students supported by the guidance of the teachers. The activity was carried out as follows. A single sentence was displayed on each slide of a PowerPoint presentation, such as 'The internet has no rules', 'The internet is perfect for playing jokes; you shouldn't be angry', 'I can chat with anyone', 'I saw it on YouTube, so it's true', etc. The kids were encouraged to write the sentences down and whether they agreed or disagreed with each one. The teacher (Tami) tells them that they should reflect on the reasons for their answers and give arguments to justify their opinions. Tami emphasises that there is no right or wrong answer. Thereafter, a debate was established between the whole group. The students participated in an orderly manner, raising their hands and listening to the opinions of their classmates. The students' answers were valued by the teachers and respected by the group. The

teacher encouraged the students to reflect on their answers and opinions. All the students participated in an equality-based dialogue based on an environment of trust and a sense of freedom to express their experiences. The teachers' perceptions about this practice foresee how control of the learning processes is present in the way they promote the students' collective reflections on the topic, as shown in the following words:

We try to make our students reflect critically on the fact that the internet has great potential but also great risks, and therefore, together with them, through brainstorming, the construction of billboards, and so on, we think precisely about what the potential is and also what the critical aspects of the internet are (Temi, 29/04/2022).

The purpose of implementing this practice is to combat an external situation related to the overuse and misuse of digital media and the internet. It is an activity that responds to a need of the specific group and a practice that connects with the students' external realities.

A different example was carried out with the third-year students using the LEGO WeDo application. This activity captured the interest of all the students in a profound way through a collaborative approach. As the teacher commented, the children had been waiting eagerly for this activity for a long time. The students know that the school has LEGO WeDo robotics kits and are always keen on using them. The observation describes this creative teaching and learning practice:

From a transdisciplinary approach, storytelling and robotics are combined in one practice that promotes interaction among the children and with their interests. Firstly, we watch a YouTube video about the story of "*Pezzetino*" (a fable about the search for identity). After the viewing, the students choose a scene from the story and write it down on a piece of paper. Then, the scene is represented with the use of LEGO pieces, creating *Pezzetino* (the protagonist of the story) as a robot. In groups of three, the students collaborate with each other and discuss how to construct their scene. They really enjoy playing with LEGO while learning at the same time. Finally, they present their creations to the rest of their classmates (Field notes 21/04/2022).

The teachers highlighted the role of freedom and student agency in this practice. For example, Tumi commented that "here it is up to them to decide what to do and how to do it, always with our guidance but not with our control" (21/04/2022). It is an open activity in which the students can decide how to represent the character of the story and their favourite scene. The children experiment with the LEGO pieces and the LEGO WeDo program in a collaborative way. In this regard, digital media facilitates the participation of the entire class. Another example arises from one of the topics mentioned in the five interviews, namely the possibilities offered by technologies for children unfamiliar with the Italian language. This was the case of the Ukrainian refugees who arrived at the school at the time of the ethnography research. Examples of this situation were observed in the field:

Using tablets, the new Ukrainian classmates can communicate with the other children. However, while carrying out the LEGO WeDo and Minecraft activities, they are also able to participate without any problem. The classroom becomes a space of creativity and collaboration while adhering to the strategic learning guidelines proposed by the teachers (Tomi, 2/5/2022).

These kinds of teaching practices promote dialogue and transformation. The children create a space of otherness in which everyone can collaborate. Dialogue and interaction are key to the transformation and creation of their own knowledge. In this context, it is possible to see how digital media could facilitate this pedagogy of inclusion.

5. Discussion

The United Nations (2015) and the OECD (2019) declare that digitalisation is a key to achieving inclusion and cohesion. Increasing diversity in the classroom, while challenging for teachers, can also increase respect for diversity and provide an opportunity to learn from others. This article demonstrates how digital media is employed at the Water Channel School to transform the experiences, lives, and backgrounds of children into learning resources in the classroom (Jeffrey, 2006; Vigo-Arazola, 2021).

The results of this research highlight how the teaching staff in the Water Channel School develop diverse teaching practices designed to foster interaction among students and promote inclusive education. Accordingly, creative teaching practices with digital media proved to be effective tools for developing children's voices, generating new knowledge based on their interests and creating collaborative dialogues for transformation (Slee & Tait, 2022; Vigo-Arazola et al., 2022).

Far from labelling students (Vigo-Arazola et al., 2022), the teachers drew from the children's own experiences and interests (Jeffrey, 2006) to achieve a democratic community inside the classroom (Ainscow, 2020; Portelli & Koneeny, 2018; Slee & Tait, 2022). In this regard, diverse cultures, interests, and opinions were welcomed into the classroom to enhance the students' learning and transform pedagogies to capture the attention of the entire class (Allan, 2023). The teachers managed to create spaces of openness and collaboration in which they explored the interests and life stories of their students (Jorgensen & Lowrie, 2013). For example, the activity on the dangers of the internet was a creative practice that combined "public and private, formal and informal, [and] school and out-of-school contexts" (Woods, 1990, p. 35). This teaching practice is considered creative as it implies a shared dialogue to address a problem, generate autonomy and promote self-transformation (Chappell, 2022). Teacher-student dialogue is central to this practice as it "sets out to break down barriers that are limiting the engagement of some learners" (Ainscow, 2020, p. 20) and makes the student the protagonist (Chappell, 2022).

The activities proposed by the teachers are accessible and open-ended, providing the students with opportunities for independent learning and discovery (Ochoa-Aizpurua et al., 2019). The teachers ensured that the application of the available digital media (Vigo-Arazola, 2021) facilitated a flexible learning context suitable for all (Allan, 2023), in this case, moving away from the more conventional and segregated role of digital media (Sancho-Gil et al., 2020; Swist & Gulson, 2023). This approach provided opportunities to promote relevance, knowledge ownership, control of the learning processes, and innovation on a daily basis. With the Minecraft and LEGO WeDo activities, the teachers created a controlled environment in which the students could explore their interests (Craft, 2014) while learning to use video games and robotics in a safe and educational way. Student agency is also reinforced through the freedom they are given to co-design these activities.

However, this research also reveals the hegemonic trend of the teacher being solely responsible for determining the activities that shape the teaching and learning process (Grimaldi & Ball, 2021). The tastes and interests of the students are catered to, but they are not given a say in what the media should be used for or how (Sancho-Gil et al., 2020). Indeed, the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom might continue to be more vertical than horizontal. It should be also noted that, in some cases, teachers' perceptions are linked to preparing students better for a not-too-distant future labour career (Grimaldi & Ball, 2021). In this sense, it would be enriching to consider the children's opinions and ideas regarding the design of classroom activities and projects to foster more inclusive ways of working (Ainscow, 2020). Some strategies that may be helpful are: introducing practices based on exploration, experimentation, and research (Lasheras-Lalana et al., 2024) or advocate for processes of reflection and negotiation within the classroom: "children can embrace creative stewardship toward collective good, they can reflect on how responsibly ideas are exercised and they can pose the questions 'why?' and 'why not?'" (Chappell, 2022, p. 12). In this regard, the freedom shown in the observed classrooms in terms of the educational practices demonstrates the beginning of a transformation towards this sense of inclusion, albeit with certain limitations.

Regarding *Agenda 2030* (ODS 4) and considering the relevance of digitalisation for inclusion towards a sustainable future (United Nations, 2015), the Water Channel School serves as an example of how digital practices are able to promote moments of creativity and openness (Jeffrey, 2006), in which all the students participate, interact, exchange information, and transform their way of seeing the world (Slee & Tait, 2022). In this context, the teachers facilitate the participation and learning of all students irrespective of their differences and attend to the needs of everyone (Ainscow, 2020; Allan, 2023). Consequently, the classroom becomes a space of collaboration, exchange, and social interaction (Jorgensen & Lowrie, 2013). These ideas and teaching proposals contribute to the design and development of authentic learning based on inclusion and participation.

6. Conclusion

In a world shaped increasingly by the influence of digital media and in which children are impacted by exclusionary and inclusive scenarios, it is worth considering how teachers promote creative and inclusive teaching practices in especially challenging educational contexts with the support of digital media. This article has endeavoured to respond to this issue by exploring the practices that take place in schools and the perceptions of teachers regarding those practices from the perspective of an ethnographic research study that provides contextualised and detailed knowledge on the topic.

We have explored how creative and inclusive teaching practices were applied in a context of vulnerability. This has enabled us to observe and learn about the teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding the use of digital media in their classes. In particular, this research has shed light on the possibilities of digital creative teaching practices in challenging school areas and how these practices can facilitate the incorporation of student interests into the classroom, the development of open activities and the promotion of freedom. Nevertheless, this study presents certain limitations, such as the limited time and space for research. It is advisable to strengthen these elements in order to increase the practical and analytical value of the research topic. Data cannot be generalized as only one school is represented in the study and investigated for a limited period. The limited time at school greatly restricted the role of ethnography from a more critical and transformative perspective. However, the school's participation in the Erasmus+ project abovementioned enabled meetings outside the school that also promoted reflection on teaching practices with digital media. Even so, subsequent research *in situ* should attempt to compensate for these drawbacks.

The observations and the perceptions of the teachers pinpoint the high level of student motivation as one of the main accomplishments of the teaching practices. Indeed, all the students were included and actively engaged in the activities. However, it is also crucial to listen to the suggestions and ideas of students regarding the transformation of education and classroom practices with a view to forming a more inclusive model. Nevertheless, the relevance of the content led the students to engage in the activities and feel valued for sharing their experiences and interests. The creative practices presented in this article offered the students the possibility to use their voices, express their feelings, and enjoy learning. Ultimately, the results demonstrate how the students' interests, dialogue, and the reconstruction of knowledge form the foundations of teaching practices at the Water Channel School as a means to fostering the development of an inclusive environment and overcoming the challenges posed by an unequal society.

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