Buddy-Culture Goes Viral
Meaning and Potentiality of the Buddy-Approach in and Outside Formal Educational Settings

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Abstract *The buddy-system is a concept which has become quite popular in the last few decades, although a systematic review of the scientific literature regarding it still does not exist. This chapter seeks to close this gap and investigates the characteristics of the buddy approach and the goals towards which the buddy-system has been oriented. In order to do so this chapter builds on findings from a systematic literature review on peer buddy systems and integrates them with empirical data collected on buddy-schemes in Germany. These inform recommendations for the development of buddy systems in different educational contexts (formal, informal, and non-formal). In order to consider the most recent application of the buddy-system, the chapter displays the hybrid concept developed by the Horizon 2020 project KIDS4ALLL (Key Inclusive Development Strategies for Lifelong Learning) in order to disseminate the buddy-culture transnationally. Particular attention will be given to the strategic potential of the buddy-system for fostering social inclusion of migrant youth.*

Keywords *Buddy; Peer-Learning; E-Learning; Intercultural Education; Migrant Students*

1. Introduction

Everyone should have the right to quality and inclusive learning opportunities and to contribute to education throughout their life (Council of the European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2021). This is crucial, particularly, for migrant students, who often acquire lower levels of academic achievement and are more frequently among those leaving school early (Eurydice, 2019,

p. 38–40), which influences their life chances and places them at an increased risk of discrimination, social isolation, and poverty (Pott et al., 2022). Facilitating migrants' access to and inclusion in educational systems is, therefore, one of the most significant societal challenges to reduce the discrepancy in life chances between migrant and non-migrant students. In this regard, increasing the migrant students' language proficiency and their feeling of belonging, on the one hand, and teachers' and educators' ability to address their needs holistically on the other have been identified as key factors in supporting their academic achievement (Eurydice, 2019). This links well with the objective set by the Council of the European Union (2018, p. 1) towards strengthening "Europe's resilience in a time of rapid and profound change" through "supporting people across Europe in gaining the skills and competences needed for personal fulfillment, health, employability and social inclusion". Towards this goal it has identified the importance of the promotion of eight "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning" (European Commission 2019): These include personal, social and learning-to-learn competences; STEM; language; cultural; citizenship; literacy; entrepreneurship; and digital competences.

Effective measures for addressing and overcoming challenges linked to learning and social relations faced by members of vulnerable groups are peer learning concepts (Manzoni & Rolfe, 2019). Indeed, they have been proven to enhance the acceptance of differences, to foster a greater sense of belonging, and to promote the development of more inclusive learning communities (Baloche & Brody, 2017). Peer learning approaches have become increasingly popular in recent decades, as they foster learning motivation and, in addition to developing subject related competences, promote socio-emotional skills, friendship, and therefore well-being (Jordan & Le Métais, 1997; Muumbate et al., 2020; Carvalho & Santos, 2021). Peer learning approaches could, thus, be effective in transmitting the key competences highlighted above and strengthening interpersonal relationships in different educational settings and modes of learning and, hence, addressing the societal challenge of differences in life chances between migrant and non-migrant youth. This is what the Horizon 2020 innovation project KIDS4ALLL (Key Inclusive Development Strategies for Lifelong Learning) aims to explore. In order to foster the social inclusion of migrant students, the international consortium is developing a multilingual e-learning platform[1] through which teachers and educators may increase

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1   The foreseen launch is March 2024: https://learn.kids4alll.eu/. For a more detailed description of the platform and its pedagogical framework, see: Conti & Szabó (2024).

their ability to offer quality education to all their students and, at the same time, young people may develop, in tight collaboration with a buddy, their competences in the eight key areas, strengthening their relationship to their class and community. Indeed, despite abundant research on the benefits of peer learning, research on the specific form of peer learning called the buddy-system has actually remained limited, also including its application in formal, informal, and non-formal educational settings and specifically through the use of e-learning. The project seeks to fill this gap.

This chapter presents the results of an extensive literature review and an empirical study conducted in the first year of the project surrounding the buddy-system and integrates this with a description of the concept, developed in the framework of the KIDS4ALLL project, aiming towards the dissemination of buddy-culture through digital media. The research adopted a sequential approach. In the first part (sections 2–4), this chapter investigates the characteristics of buddy-systems, their suitability for various educational settings (formal, non-formal, or informal education), modes of learning (digital or traditional), and for facilitating the inclusion of migrant students. This part starts with a description of the methodology used and ends with recommendations for the development of buddy systems in diverse educational settings. In the last part of the chapter (section 5), we describe the strategies developed in the framework of the Horizon 2020 innovation project KIDS4ALLL, aiming to promote inclusion by disseminating the buddy-culture through its e-learning platform.

2.   Methodology

The search strategy for the systematic literature review included peer-reviewed literature retrieved from Sage and Proquest based on the keywords buddy, buddy system and peer buddy. Only peer-reviewed literature in the area of education and social sciences, published in English and with the main focus of the paper being on the buddy approach, were considered for inclusion. The initial search, which took place in March 2022, yielded forty-nine papers with publication dates as outlined in Table 1. Following screening, ten papers were excluded as they did not meet any of the criteria of peer-review, did not relate to a buddy system applied in an educational or social scientific context, or the paper did not actually focus on the buddy system. Thus, thirty-nine papers were considered in the systematic literature review. The analyzed

buddy-programmes were mainly situated in the USA (n=27), Australia (n=3), and Canada (n=2), while three papers reported on initiatives based in Italy, the United Kingdom, and Indonesia, and four papers analyzed buddy initiatives in general without any specific geographic location.

Table 1: Profile of Papers in the Systematic Literature Review

Year of Publication	Number of Papers in Initial Search	Number of Papers Following Exclusion
Prior to 1990	1	1
1990–1999	8	8
2000–2009	18	14
2010–2019	17	13
2020 onwards	4	2
n.d.	1	1
Total	49	39

In the same period, initiatives focusing on migrant inclusion and self-reportedly drawing on buddy-schemes were identified in eight countries. Their project managers, educators, and project participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to understand the characteristics of the specific buddy approach, challenges experienced regarding its implementation, and the factors relating to success. The analysis in this chapter is restricted to the data collected in Germany, which reflects the results obtained in the other countries. This focus allows for more detailed insights and analysis of commonalities and differences in the analyzed buddy approaches. Six organizations were identified, as indicated in Table 2, and were then invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews.

The interviews were conducted with, in total, 16 persons: eight were people involved in the project management (at least one per project), three of them working also directly with the project participants; two were educators engaged in one of the projects; six were participants taking part in two of the researched actions. All participants were between the ages of fourteen and twenty-three years of age at the time of the interview (May-August 2021), and four of the participants had a migratory background, meaning they had

migrated themselves. Overall, eight individual interviews (project managers (4), participants (4)) and four team interviews were conducted (project manager teams (2), educator teams (1), buddy teams (1)). Due to COVID-19 eight of the interviews were conducted online and three in person. On average, the interviews lasted for forty-eight minutes (the longest interview was sixty-nine minutes, the shortest lasted eighteen minutes).

All interviews were conducted in German by two researchers. One of the interviewers (female, circa 40 years old, migratory background – Europe) was responsible for introducing the KIDS4ALLL project and its goals and contextualizing the interviews. The other researcher (female, circa 30 years old, German) conducted the semi-structured interviews based on the interview guideline. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed following the simple transcription system (Dresing & Pehl, 2011). These transcripts and the notes taken during the interviews formed the basis for the analysis of the interviews, using inductive category formation and summarizing content analysis (Mayring, 2010).

Table 2: Interviewed Peer Buddy Initiatives in Germany

Initiative	Profile
Programme A	Initiated by a private foundation that works nationwide with schools training children and young adults as buddies, in a social integration and special needs framework.
Programme B	Initiated by a private foundation that works nationwide training children and young adults to support their peers. It focuses specifically on transitional periods, e.g. from kindergarten to school, or from primary to secondary school.
Programme C	Part of and funded by a university's sports framework, refugee students are invited and supported by their peers to take part in sports classes and to create social connections in that environment.
Programme D	Initiated and funded by one specific city, young refugees and people with a migratory background are paired with other young people (mostly without a migratory background) to receive support with school work.

Initiative	Profile
Programme E	Initiated in twenty seven primary and secondary schools of a large city and funded by the city in cooperation with a private agency, the project involves children and students offering their help in typical everyday challenges concerning school life.
Programme F	Funded by different public institutions and organized by a local association offering different classes and leisure time activities, young refugees are invited and trained to form buddy-teams for networking and mutual support.

3.   Results

In this section we summarize the results, comparing the literature review with the in-depth interviews conducted in Germany. They are organized in relation to seven dimensions: the educational settings; the socio-demographic profile of participants; the types of interventions; the definition of the buddy approach; the composition of the buddy teams; the key requirements for successful buddy-systems; and the modes of learning.

Educational Settings

The analysis of the papers in the systematic literature review revealed a prevalence of initiatives based on the buddy approach particularly in primary education (n=21). They were witnessed less often in pre-primary (n=13) and secondary education (n=13). It has to be borne in mind that buddy systems often involve more than one educational setting with buddies in the same initiative often being of different ages and, hence, enrolled at different levels of education. Buddy systems least often were organized in higher education settings (n=1) or with the engagement of community partners (n=1). Nearly all papers (n=38) reported on buddy systems initiated in formal educational settings, while one paper focused on a buddy approach in a non-formal setting.

The initiatives selected in Germany involved programmes implemented in formal settings (Programmes C and E) and non-formal settings (Programmes D and F), and as a collaboration between formal and non-formal settings (Programmes A and B). Given the focus of the Horizon 2020 project KIDS4ALLL, which aims at supporting the inclusion of migrant youth of compulsory

school age, the research on buddy systems carried out in the same project, which forms the basis for the qualitative data reviewed in this chapter, focused mainly on this target group. Hence, programmes investigated targeted mainly children of primary and secondary school age with the exception of Programme C, which represented a buddy initiative in higher education, and Programme F which also involved older young adults.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Participants

Buddy approaches investigated in the systematic literature review targeted most often students with learning difficulties (literacy programmes – n=10; academic skills programmes – n=9); students with disabilities or other conditions influencing learning (n=11) or students experiencing challenges with social inclusion (new entrant programmes – n=5; social inclusion programmes – n=8; social skills programmes – n=5). No buddy programmes targeted specifically the inclusion of migrant students. However, many papers were not sufficiently explicit regarding the profile of participants in these programmes, which makes an evaluation difficult, since participants in social inclusion programmes may have included migrant students. Indeed, two programmes, one of which was a social integration programme, indicated that it involved non-native speakers.

In contrast, all projects included in the interviews conducted in Germany with managers, educators, and participants of initiatives built around the buddy approach focused on the inclusion of migrant youth. This is due to the focus of KIDS4ALLL, though this suggests also that both formal and non-formal educational settings are suitable for buddy initiatives aimed at the inclusion of migrant youth, though community engagement appears to play a stronger role in non-formal educational settings than in the buddy approaches investigated in the systematic literature review. At the same time, non-formal settings may also provide the structural and financial support required to sustain projects which retain social inclusion as their main objective.

Types of Interventions

Overall, the reviewed articles presented buddy approaches that can be differentiated into three intervention types as indicated in Table 3, namely skills programmes, social inclusion programmes, and special needs programmes. While skills programmes focus on providing specific support to individuals

with both literacy or academic skills needs as well as social skills needs, social inclusion programmes are aimed at providing orientation, integration, or remedial programmes focused on including the participating individuals in a specific setting. Finally, special needs programmes are specifically designed to foster the inclusion of individuals with disabilities or other conditions, such as autism. All interventions based on the buddy approach tend to be driven by a perceived 'limitation' or 'deficit', such as literacy challenges or a lack of interaction of individuals with special needs with their peers. In response, the buddy initiative serves as remedial or preventive action. Moreover, buddy-programmes tend to be initiated and sustained by individuals forming part of the formal education setting in which they are implemented rather than by the target population addressed by them.

Table 3: Intervention Types of Programmes Based on the Buddy Approach

Skills Programmes	Social Inclusion Programmes	Special Needs Programmes
Literacy Programmes ("book buddies") (n=10)	Orientation Programmes (new entrants) (n=5)	Students with Disabilities or other Conditions (n=11)
Academic Skills Programmes (n=9)	Remedial and Integration Programmes ("buddy bench", anti-bullying programmes, intergenerational exchange) (n=8)	
Social Skills Programmes (n=5)		

Definition of the Buddy Approach

The buddy initiatives selected in Germany aimed at the inclusion of migrant youth and, therefore, were predominantly focused on social inclusion (Programmes A, C and F). Although programmes B and E also consider social inclusion as a central aim, they focus on the difficulties that students may have at school, e.g. in the transition phases, aiming through the buddy-system to indirectly support their performance. Only one of the programmes was focused primarily on skills development, as it aimed at improving the performance of

project participants in school (Programme D). It appears, therefore, that the buddy-system is perceived as an important instrument against social exclusion, though not frequently connected to the development of skills. The research also shows that these initiatives were structured differently depending on the overall goal of the programme, primarily if the learning intention referred to skills attainment or was focused on the social inclusion of migrant youth.

The systematic literature review identified the lack of a clear differentiation between the buddy approach and the peer-learning concept. Nevertheless, from the literature review key characteristics associated with the buddy approach included: *solidarity*, *empathy*, and *curiosity* as specific character traits and triggers for the participants to engage in the buddy initiative. It also revealed a *focus on mutual interest* and *mutual learning*. However, learning appeared subservient to collaboration, with initiatives focused on skills development, such as literacy or other academic skills programmes, stressing the learning element more strongly. That being said, elements of learning forming part of the buddy-initiative were designed in a dialogic manner[2], i.e. they stressed not only the importance of mutual learning, but the enrichment which grounds on the differences of the buddies involved in the initiative.

This corresponds with findings from the interviews conducted in Germany with buddy initiatives focused on the inclusion of migrant youth. These buddy systems, like the buddy approaches included in the systematic literature review, were based on the principle of a symmetrical relationship between the buddies characterized by openness, respect, and curiosity towards the other and their uniqueness, but also solidarity. The specific differences between the members of the buddy team, such as difference in age, level of education or specific skills, such as language proficiency, did not in general negatively affect the perceived symmetry of the relationship, but served as a spark to trigger curiosity between the partners. The experience of being a buddy has been described also by the interviewees as enriching for *all* participants.

Composition of the Buddy Teams

The buddy schemes analyzed in the systematic literature review involved both buddy partners of the same age as well as different aged partners (younger and

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2   The understanding of the dialogic approach, as used here, is informed by the interdisciplinary study on the definition of dialogue conducted by Conti (2012).

older buddy). The vast majority of buddy systems included pairings of students with students. However, in a few instances pairings of students with teachers or with members of the community, as well as teachers with teachers were reported. Buddy initiatives were generally based on pairings of one to one. However, instances were also reported of pairings of one to many, e.g. a student with a disability or other condition and their peers in the class. Pairings of one to many appeared suitable in inclusive initiatives taking place in larger settings. This seems to allow for flexibility and continuity of the initiative in the case that one of the buddies were to become (temporarily) unavailable. The buddy initiatives analyzed in the selected literature also included pairings of many to many. These were common in teacher-led initiatives with pairings of whole classes of different levels of education and generally complementary to one-to-one pairings of student-student and teacher-teacher as part of the same initiative. In those instances, the whole class pairing took place in specific stages of the project that involved the induction phase at the beginning of the project, or the reflection phase at the end of the project.

These findings are in line with the findings from the interviews, which also identified pairings of the same age as well as of different ages (older buddy with younger buddy). The different programmes run different pairing-formats: pairings one to one (Programmes C and D), one to two (Programme B), and many to many (Programmes A and E). At the same time, the interviews also revealed that the buddy approach does not always need to have a fixed pairing format in terms of number, nor a specific orientation to specific profiles, nor in relation to the objective of the buddyship. The buddy-approach can be just lived as a *culture* permeating a certain group: The members of the group absorb the dialogic attitude on which the buddy-system is rooted and express it in terms of the enrichment of eye-level relationships. Buddy-teams emerge in this context spontaneously, on the basis of the needs and interests of the group members who become buddies for a certain project, often helping one another to reach a certain goal (Programme F).

Key Requirements for Successful Buddy-Systems

The literature review has led to the identification of some core factors which have a positive impact on buddy-systems. Some of these are related to the facilitator of the initiative, some to the condition under which the buddy-system takes place. Among the first factors is the *clear commitment of the initiators* of the intervention and their ability to manage the process, including the delicate task

of elaborating the profiles of the participants in order to match them correctly and to organize trainings and offer support mechanisms. Particularly important seems to be the *initial training*, in which the participants are introduced to the buddy approach and develop basic skills, although the pedagogic and material support given to the buddies throughout the process is also relevant, e.g. in the form of counselling and through the provision of learning materials. A specific challenge highlighted in the literature is the insufficient preparation of the students in relation to the display of their agency and their ability to take on the role of experts, switching from the role of learner to that of mentor. This implies the need to convey concepts with their own words and codes to their peers and, most importantly, to enrich the learning contents with their own knowledge, which actually represents the real added value, as it originates from their own individual experience in their lifeworld. In relation to the conditions under which the buddies collaborate, particular importance is given to the *place* where the buddies meet, which must be available, easily accessible, and adequate to the tasks and objectives. Moreover the literature highlights the relevance of a clear outline of *the duration of the intervention* (e.g. one scholastic year) as well as the specification of the *frequency of the meetings*.

These factors were also mentioned in the interviews, in which the success and sustainability of the project has been linked to the commitment of the responsible persons, to the institutional support and recognition given to the programme and to the presence of structures ensuring long-term continuity. The prevalence of buddy systems in formal educational settings appears to confirm the importance of institutional settings and frameworks for the successful implementation of such initiatives. The interviewees also pointed out that while professionals are generally expected to have the necessary skills to implement the project and its aims, the participants need preparation before entering the programme. The selected initiatives undertake this through informal exchange (Programme D), while in a few cases an initial workshop summarizes the principal aspects (Programmes A, B, C and E). In all programmes the buddy-teams receive support in the form of counselling. In this way their well-being is ensured as well as the general positive development of the buddyship. Four out of the six programmes (Programmes A, B, E and F) also offer tailor-made training units throughout the process to allow the buddies to develop the hard and soft skills needed for accomplishing their buddyship. The data collected through qualitative research confirm that adequate conditions in relation to space and time are fundamental for good collaboration; indeed all programmes with one-to-one and one-to-two schemes make sure their par-

ticipants fix their collaboration in terms of frequency and duration at the beginning of their buddyship.

Modes of Learning

Nearly all of the programmes analyzed in the reviewed studies (n=38) implemented their buddy-system through traditional learning modes and face-to-face interaction. Only one initiative reported buddy interactions and peer-learning via digital media. The buddy-programmes examined in Germany were specifically designed to promote buddy-systems on-site. During the Covid-19 Pandemic most of these had to stop, except Programmes B and D which supported the continuation of the buddyship through digital media. Digital forms of the buddy-system, in which collaboration takes place online as well as in hybrid formats – i.e. in which the buddy-collaboration on-site is guided by an e-learning platform, as is the case in the KIDS4ALLL project – remain underexplored in the literature and underutilized in practice.

4.   Recommendations for the Development of Buddy-Systems

It is evident from the systematic literature review and the findings from the interviews that the buddy-approach can be expressed in various types of buddy-systems, which may be shaped according to one of the following three schemes: pairings of one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many. The buddy-system must be conceived on the basis of the objectives of the specific initiative, the context in which it is going to take place as well as the needs of the participants involved. Moreover, the outcomes of both our meta-analysis and empirical study show that a core characteristic of the buddy-approach is the balanced relationship of the buddies despite their different positions, e.g. with/without disability, with more/less language proficiency. The dialogic attitude which buddies are invited to assume allows them to understand this experience as an enrichment for all, beyond its character grounded in solidarity. Indeed everyone has strengths and weaknesses, therefore *all* buddies are encouraged to share their knowledge, perspectives, and skills and can, in this way, learn from each other while building a positive interpersonal relationship.

As participants have different degrees of dialogic competence, it is important to support them from the beginning with training, counselling, and ade-

quate materials as well as with practical issues which may arise. The intention is to stimulate collaboration and to help participants create a relationship in which they all feel free to express their opinion, to display their creativity, and to discuss their feelings in different situations, including those which are induced by conflict. In order to avoid frustration and ensure the participants' well-being, it might be useful to ask the buddies to start with the joint elaboration of their principles of collaboration, which may also include mediation strategies to be applied in the case that conflict arises. Setting a clear frame to the collaboration, also in terms of place, time, and joint objectives can favour the development of a buddyship whose members feel comfortable and motivated.

The data highlights that buddy-teams need the competent support of teachers and educators, who are however not necessarily specifically prepared for this task. As the buddy-approach questions their traditional role, it requires specific knowledge, skills and attitudes which transcend the pure commitment and might differ from the ones they have trained until then. Moreover the findings show that the commitment of the person in charge is not enough even in relation to the programme's sustainability, which is instead favored by its institutionalization.

5. Implementation of the Buddy Approach Within KIDS4ALLL

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the Horizon 2020 project KIDS4ALLL aims to foster social inclusion of migrant youth through addressing their needs holistically. In order to reach this goal, various strategies interweave in its design. Firstly, the concept combines the promotion of key competences with peer-learning, promoting simultaneously in this way cognitive, behavioural, and social development. Secondly, the project's output is not just dedicated to migrant students, but it is for *all* students and also for teachers and educators, all of them being citizens who together constitute their community and who shape the future jointly. Thirdly, KIDS4ALLL is based on a special form of peer-learning, that is the buddy-system, whose dialogic character puts into focus differences, while at the same time balances relationships. Fourthly, it also considers teachers' and educators' learning needs and invites them to satisfy these needs themselves, in exchange with a buddy. Fifthly, it acknowledges that learning does not just happen lifelong but also *lifewide;* the project's output is therefore designed to be useful also in non-formal and in-

formal educational settings. Finally, in order to reach its target-groups, the project exploits the advantages offered by digitality and its output is conceived to be multimedial, multilingual, and accessible in any location. Nevertheless in order to stick to its goal, the project keeps the focus on the local reality of the users and stimulates collaboration on-site.

While the first five strategies refer to contents discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the last one has just been touched upon, as we have observed that the vast majority of the (meta-)analyzed initiatives takes place on-site, without involving any strategic use of digital means. Considering that the engagement with digital media has become ever more pervasive, a major gap between merely analog didactic offers of the buddy-approach and post-digital lifeworlds[3] seems to exist. KIDS4ALLL aims to contribute to the innovation of educational design through its hybrid concept, meaning thus the creation of an e-learning platform which stimulates buddy-interaction in place. This multimedia platform should make learning more accessible and appealing for learners of the postdigital society and at the same time disseminate widely the buddy-culture. This implies overcoming a core challenge: How to make this platform successful in different world regions? The project developed a twofold tactic in order to harmonize standardization with localization. On the one hand, the contents, the format, and the design are inspired by quasi-universal trends, so that once translated they should be easily usable and understandable by the speakers of 13 languages, among which there is Arabic, English, French and Spanish. On the other hand, the didactic concept according to which its content is structured and presented leaves space for localization, giving the buddy-teams themselves the task of involving in their exchange, knowledge which is meaningful to them. We will now show how this concept is to be realized by describing the KIDS4ALLL e-learning platform.

The KIDS4ALLL e-learning platform is organized in three areas, namely the *know.what* area, the *know.how* area and the *work.it* area. In the *know.what* area, children, adolescents, and young adults find content aimed at stimulating their buddy-collaboration. The content is presented in the form of thematic units which start with a warm-up, usually an interactive quiz, then offers the

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3   In this context, 'postdigital lifeworlds'draw upon Cramer's interpretation of the term "postdigital" (2014), signifying contemporary lifeworlds characterized by extensive digitalization. It denotes the pervasive integration of digital media into our daily lives, wherein digital tools and platforms have become commonplace for various aspects of everyday existence.

buddies specific input on the topic with a task to solve together. It afterwards proposes to them at least one creative task that leads participants to produce their own content, and ends with a reflection which they can also share online in form of a digital postcard. The content transmitted in this area focuses particularly on the acquisition of the eight key competences for lifelong learning, which are considered, as mentioned in the introduction, as crucial to addressing the societal challenge of differences in life chances between migrant and non-migrant youth. Moreover, in order to also provide teachers and educators with the competences they need to act and design their lessons and projects in a more inclusive way, there is a dedicated *know.what* area for them. The contents are structured in the same manner as for the youth: With a warm-up exercise, a specific input, practical transfer-tasks, and a reflection. Content-wise, however, the know.what area relates to collaborative learning, socio-emotional skills, global competence as well as dialogic and intercultural competence. For both target groups, the learning units in the know.what area have been designed towards the development of the learners in three domains: The cognitive domain, through transmission of knowledge; the behavioural, through the facilitation of skills training; and the emotional domain, through the promotion of specific attitudes.

The *know.how* area provides users with video-tutorials of two-three minutes each, that intend to stimulate buddy-collaboration and support this from the beginning to the end. Ten tutorials are dedicated to the students and outline how they can conceive, manage, and successfully realize with their buddy a joint project, the project being the production of educational content. The tutorials refer exclusively to a one-to-one buddy scheme, as it fosters maximum active participation of both buddies and favours the development of their personal relationship. In line with the recommendation developed out of the findings, the buddy teams are encouraged to talk from the beginning of their buddyship about their collaboration and set goals related to how they can effectively work together, based on their mutual expectations. These ten tutorials deal, therefore, with teamwork but also with design thinking, project management, pedagogic content elaboration, inclusion and diversity issues, as well as content presentation and recording. As educators and teachers play a central role in the promotion of self-determined, dialogic, and creative buddy-collaborations, ten tutorials have been produced specifically for them. These aim to help in the building of matching buddy-teams, to develop an adequate framework in which they can work, and finally to support their creative and collaborative processes. The tutorials are, therefore, on participatory project man-

agement, team-building, dialogic facilitation as well as on the transmitting of know-how useful to support their buddy-teams in the production of their content in the context of KIDS4ALLL, and beyond.

In the *work.it* area buddy-teams can upload and publish – with permission and support of their teacher/educator – content related to one of the eight key competences which they have jointly created. This area of the platform is therefore a sort of participatory archive for educational content and extends the KIDS4ALLL peer-learning experience further, allowing buddy-teams to learn thanks to contents previously produced by other buddy-teams. The opportunity given to any and every buddy-team to share content on this platform has a further interesting implication: It makes the platform a lively place in which users can leave their traces and perceive the presence of others. As the material published in this area does not go through an automatic selection based on language, the users come into contact with multimedia content in several different languages. The *work.it* area is therefore a space in which users may experience their first conscious contact with other languages and indirectly with peers living in other regions. This connection, even if mediated, may strengthen a sense of belonging to the multilingual, transnational world community. By making buddy-culture 'go viral', the KIDS4ALLL e-learning platform promotes the development of stronger ties among young people, members of the same local community as well as positive connections among young citizens of the world.

6.   Conclusion

Universal access to and the enjoyment of high-quality, inclusive learning opportunities is a fundamental right. Research shows that this is not yet the reality and that young migrants are particularly prone to experiencing diminished academic performance and face an elevated risk of school dropout. This is linked with numerous factors, though a key role is played by language proficiency, social exclusion, as well as the insufficient ability of many teachers and educators to address their needs holistically. This chapter delved into the potential of the buddy-approach to foster social inclusion and outlined the strategies pursued by the Horizon 2020 innovation project KIDS4ALLL, which seeks to enhance the inclusion of migrant students by synergizing the buddy-approach with the development of key competences for students, as well as for teachers and educators.

In the framework of this project, funded by the European Commission, we have first conducted a systematic literature review on the buddy-approach and an empirical qualitative study on buddy-initiatives in Germany. Their findings, presented in this chapter, have provided a comprehensive insight into the current state of implementation of the buddy approach, shedding light on how it has been executed thus far. Based on the results derived from our (meta)analysis, we have formulated key recommendations for designing initiatives centred around this concept, which have been seamlessly integrated in the KIDS4ALLL output. In the following, we summarize the main findings and reflect on the strategies developed by KIDS4ALLL to make the buddy-culture 'go viral'.

While the buddy approach may lack a formal, explicit definition, it is commonly understood as a type of supportive and mutually beneficial connection among a select group of individuals marked by a dialogic attitude. In this approach, buddies engage in a balanced relationship that allows them to express their individuality and enhance their personal growth through meaningful interactions with one another. The buddy approach can manifest itself in various forms, including one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many configurations, often coordinated by an experienced individual responsible for the initiative. However, the buddy approach does not inherently require a pre-organized structure in which to thrive. In cases where a buddy culture prevails within a group, buddy teams can spontaneously emerge based on shared projects and mutual interests.

While the systematic literature review primarily identified the prevalence of buddy initiatives in formal educational settings, insights gleaned from interviews with German buddy initiatives focused on migrant youth inclusion reveal that both formal and non-formal educational settings can effectively accommodate such programmes. Facilitating students' sense of inclusion and belonging within the (school) community not only boosts their motivation but also transforms them into active participants in the learning process. However, the potential of buddy approaches to foster inclusion and skill development remains under-explored across various educational settings (formal, non-formal, or informal) and modes of learning (digital or traditional). This observation is supported by findings from both the systematic literature review and interviews conducted with representatives of buddy initiatives dedicated to migrant inclusion.

The primary focus of KIDS4ALLL is to bridge this existing gap by promoting peer-learning in buddy teams in and outside the formal educational settings. To achieve this, the project harnesses the digital realm, which has thus

far remained underutilized. An attractive and user-friendly platform is being developed to make learning *lifewide*, bringing individuals together and transforming strangers into buddies who learn from each other in their free time. In this manner, the project seeks to not only address the inclusion of migrant youth, but also to instill an active engagement of students in their own learning journey. By disseminating the buddy-culture online, KIDS4ALLL taps into the full potential of an increasingly diverse student population.

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