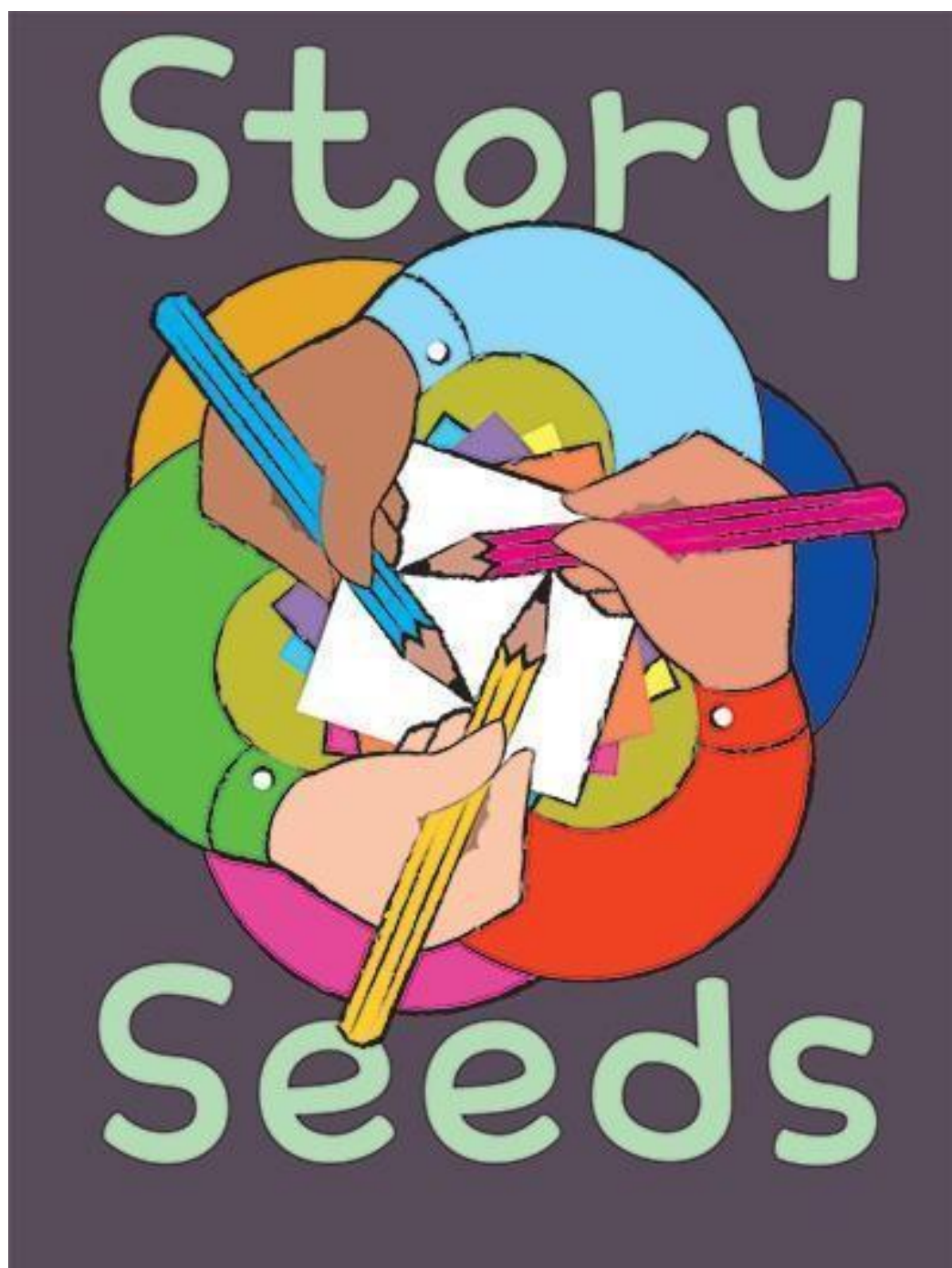




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Storytellers Across Borders

Evaluating CESDA: A Transnational Erasmus+ Project on
Inclusion, Creativity and Child Voice

July 2025

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Executive Summary: Storytellers Across Borders

Purple monsters in the Navilgio and Athy. A lost astronaut wandering through Tallaght, while two girls from Barona-Sant’Ambrogio neighbourhood go on a mission to the Moon. These are some of the imaginative adventures co-created by over 500 children across 24 classrooms in Ireland and Italy as part of CESDA: *Creative Education for Primary Schools in Disadvantaged Areas*, a transnational Erasmus+ project that placed inclusion, creativity, and child voice at its heart.

Creativity as Connection

Developed by Fighting Words (Ireland) and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole (Italy), the project brought together two inclusive creative writing pedagogies – *Story Seeds* and *No One Excluded* – to support children from marginalised communities in reimagining their own worlds through story.

Over 11 months, CESDA delivered:

- 24 inclusive creative writing workshops in Irish and Italian schools
- Six original stories co-authored by participating children in English and Italian
- A dual language illustrated anthology, with copies given to all participating children
- Cross-border exchanges, public showcases, and a podcast series
- *A Good Practice Guide* for inclusive creative facilitation
- Structured transnational skill-sharing and professional learning for educators

Children’s own environments, from takeaways and trams to parks, rivers, and rooftops, became magical settings for cross-border adventures. Workshops placed children’s experiences and identities at the centre, fostering confidence, belonging, and expression. Through shared storytelling and creative exchange, CESDA sparked intercultural curiosity and connection.

Evaluation Findings

Independent evaluation found that CESDA:

- Boosted creative confidence and engagement, particularly among children often underrepresented or harder to reach
- Enabled full participation of children with diverse languages, abilities, and learning needs
- Deepened teachers’ capacity to deliver inclusive, student-led learning
- Strengthened partner organisations’ approaches through structured, cross-cultural skill-sharing and reflection

CESDA aligns with the DCU Inclusive Arts Education Key Principles, Ireland's Creative Youth Plan (2023–2027), Erasmus+ inclusion priorities, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It shows how creative practice can support wellbeing, communication, cultural rights, and inclusive participation in primary education.

A Model for Inclusive Creative Learning

CESDA offers a replicable model of creative education that is inclusive, collaborative, and rooted in local context. It provides valuable insights for educators, cultural organisations, and funders seeking to:

- Tackle learning disadvantage through joyful, participatory learning
- Develop cross-cultural understanding in the classroom/learning settings
- Embed inclusive creative practice in education systems

By doing so, CESDA demonstrates the value of sustained investment in inclusive education, one that builds confidence, connection, and creativity. These stories remind us that creativity connects, inspires, and transforms, especially when every voice is included.

CESDA shows us that every child has a story to tell, and that story deserves to be seen, heard, and valued.

This report would not have been possible without the valuable insights provided by teachers participating in the programme through surveys and interviews. Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole thank them for their time.

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Introduction: Local Stories, Shared Imagination

*A purple monster in Athy. A mummy on the loose. An astronaut crash-lands in Tallaght, while two brothers flee the Gardaí and reinvent themselves in Milan. Milanese girls land on the Moon (made of cheese). Talking cats chase tuna across Europe.*¹

These stories, rich in imagination, humour, friendship, and transformation, were co-authored during the 2024-2025 school year by over 500 children in Ireland and Italy through *CESDA: Creative Education for Primary Schools in Disadvantaged Areas*, an Erasmus+ transnational creative writing initiative.

While each story is unique, common threads emerge: border-crossing adventures, curiosity about the unfamiliar, and the magical potential of the everyday.

Children turned their streets and neighbourhoods into places of possibility and playgrounds for intergalactic adventure and cultural exchange. Finglas spice bags were prepared by aliens and Milanese playgrounds became launchpads to the moon.

This playful reimagining of the ordinary reflects CESDA's core values: inclusion, creativity, child voice, and intercultural exchange. It also echoes the wider vision of the European Union, one of solidarity, collaboration, and learning across borders.

Creative Collaboration Across Borders

CESDA was co-developed by Fighting Words (Ireland) and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole (Italy), creative writing organisations rooted in children's rights and inclusive practice. The project brought together *Story Seeds*, a place-based methodology developed by Fighting Words, and *No One Excluded*, La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole's adaptive framework for inclusive practice.

This collaborative model invited children from marginalised communities to explore their worlds through storytelling, reimagining home, celebrating difference, and building confidence through shared creativity.

Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation examines how CESDA met its two core aims: supporting expression and confidence among marginalised children and building educator capacity for inclusive creative learning. Drawing on children's stories, illustrations, podcast performances, teacher reflections, and project resources, including the *Good Practice Guide*, developed as a resource for educators, the evaluation explores

¹ This is a summary of the six stories co-authored by children participating in the CESDA programme. The full stories are available in the dual language publication [*Story Seeds. A collection of shared stories from Irish and Italian children / Semi di Storie, Una raccolta di storie condivise de bambine e bambini irlandesi e italiani.*](#)

how creative writing can act as a vehicle for participation, inclusion, and intercultural connection. It looks at what happens when children are given the freedom to imagine and the space to share those imaginations across borders.

Collaborative Storytelling: A Transnational Dialogue Begins

“[T]his project will allow students in Ireland and Italy to learn about where each other lives, how they think and the common values we share as European citizens, striving for a more inclusive and democratic society.”²

CESDA is a transnational Erasmus+ initiative designed to address educational disadvantage through creative writing. Co-developed by Fighting Words (Ireland) and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole (Italy), the project aimed to build confidence, literacy, and inclusion among primary school children in marginalised communities. Over 11 months (September 2024-July 2025), CESDA brought together:

- Skill-sharing between creative facilitators
- Storytelling workshops in 24 classrooms
- Co-creation of a dual-language anthology, bilingual podcast series, and *Good Practice Guide*

Known locally as *Story Seeds: From Ireland to Italy (and back again!)/Semi di Storie*, the programme demonstrates how creative writing, and intercultural exchange can promote belonging. It builds on the shared values and expertise of two organisations committed to supporting children from underrepresented backgrounds through inclusive, rights-based practice.

Both Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole are members of the European [Writing Our World \(WOW\)](#) network and [The International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers](#) with over 48 members worldwide. Together, they share the conviction that “young people need places where they can write and be heard, where they can have their voices... published and amplified.”³

Fighting Words: The Write to Right (Ireland)

“...[C]reativity, collaboration and delightful devilment ... is present each day in the Fighting Words centres across the island of Ireland.”⁴

Founded in 2009, [Fighting Words](#) offers free creative writing programmes to children and young

² CESDA Erasmus+ Application, 2024.

³ [About — The International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers](#)

⁴ Author and playwright Robyn Gill, quoted in the [2023 introduction](#) to the [annual Fighting Words](#) creative writing supplement published in The Irish Times. Written by author and playwright Robyn Gill, the piece introduced a collection of stories, poems and essays by children and young people from across Ireland and, in recent years, from countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia.

people across Ireland. The organisation prioritises inclusion, working extensively with DEIS schools⁵ and tailoring programmes for young refugees, children with additional needs, and other marginalised groups.

Independent evaluations show the approach enhances not just literacy and communication, but also motivation, wellbeing, and self-esteem.⁶ All sessions are designed to promote writing as a joyful, empowering act of self-expression. As one teenage participant put it: “You get there and write whatever you want on the page, just have fun with it.”⁷

La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole: No One Excluded (Italy)

“The children have complete freedom...they are always at the centre and always feel welcome” (Primary School Teacher, Italy).⁸

Founded in Milan in 2009, [La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole](#) (LGFDP) is a creative writing organisation working primarily with children aged 6–14 from economically disadvantaged or recently arrived migrant families. Its free programmes span school workshops, museum sessions, after-school clubs, and interdisciplinary labs involving prose, comics, music, and poetry.

At the heart of LGFDP is its *No One Excluded* method. This flexible framework adapts each workshop to the specific linguistic, sensory, or emotional needs of every participant. Visual prompts, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools, calm corners, and multilingual facilitation are common. This inclusive practice supports an atmosphere where children in public housing, foster care, or with disabilities feel, in one teacher’s words, “welcomed... in La Grande Fabbrica workshops, they’ve never been judged.”

Together, the two organisations brought their complementary approaches into dialogue, showing how cross-border stories can spark connection, creativity, and inclusion in every direction.

⁵ DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. It's an Irish government initiative aimed at addressing educational disadvantage and promoting equality within the school system. DEIS schools receive additional resources and supports to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds. All schools that participated in the CESDA programme in Ireland have DEIS status.

⁶ Links to research into the Fighting Words model are [available on the organisation’s website](#).

⁷ This student is quoted in the [evaluation of the Fighting Words Story Seeds programme](#) carried out in 2023 (p. 14).

⁸ The teacher provided feedback as part of this CESDA evaluation, and the quote at the end of this section is from the same piece of feedback.

Creating Together: Methodologies for Inclusive Practice

“CESDA grew out of an interest in learning from one another ... and a shared desire to explore how creative writing can be a powerful tool for equity, inclusion, and connection.”⁹

Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole have been exchanging ideas since 2009, united by a shared commitment to inclusive creative practice.¹⁰ CESDA builds on this long-standing relationship, bringing together the *Story Seeds* methodology developed by Fighting Words and the *No One Excluded* approach pioneered by La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole to pilot a transnational model of creative education rooted in equality, participation, and child voice.

At the heart of both approaches is the belief that every child’s perspective matters. The *Story Seeds* methodology places children’s local environments – streets, shops, parks, schools – at the centre of storytelling. This grounds creativity in the familiar, helping children recognise their own neighbourhoods as rich with imaginative potential. Sharing these stories across borders allowed children to view their everyday worlds through new eyes.

No One Excluded complements this with an adaptive framework that responds to each child’s linguistic, sensory, or emotional needs, ensuring full participation regardless of background or ability.

Together, these two approaches formed the basis for CESDA’s transnational collaboration. By blending place-based storytelling with personalised inclusion strategies, the partners created an educational space where children could explore identity, build confidence, and connect across borders. CESDA offered not only a model of arts education, but an example of inclusive, imaginative learning in action.

Transnational Dialogue in Action: Co-creating Aims and Delivery

“... CESDA’s rationale is grounded in the belief that creative education can be a powerful leveller for children in disadvantaged areas ... and that a transnational partnership will multiply the benefits.”¹¹

Drawing on shared principles and complementary expertise, the partners co-developed two central aims:

⁹ Introduction to *Story Seeds. A collection of shared stories from Irish and Italian children / Semi di Storie, Una raccolta di storie condivise de bambine e bambini irlandesi e italiani*. The introduction was co-written by Nóra Nic Con Uitaigh (Fighting Words) and Maraikel Gualandris (La Grande Fabbrica Delle Parole).

¹⁰ The two organisations also previously collaborated on [Neighbourhood, City, World](#) and [Words of Love](#).

¹¹ CESDA Erasmus+ Application, 2024.

1. To support expression and confidence among marginalised children, improving literacy and well-being through inclusive creative writing.
2. To strengthen the capacity of teachers, educators, and partner organisations through transnational skill-sharing and resource development

These aims informed the design of CESDA's three interlinked phases:

Phase 1: Best Practice Exchange: A focused skill-share between partner organisations to share methods, reflect on challenges and strengthen inclusive facilitation strategies.

Phase 2: Collaborative Workshops: Co-designed sessions for 24 classrooms in Ireland and Italy, where children created stories featuring shared characters and settings. The stories were later published and recorded in dual-language formats.

Phase 3: Good Practice Guide: A practical toolkit for teachers and creative facilitators, based on insights from the workshops and skill-share sessions, offering adaptable techniques for inclusive storytelling with marginalised groups.

Together, these phases reflect CESDA's commitment to co-creation, reflection, and long-term impact, ensuring the project's learnings extend beyond the initial programme and into broader educational practice.

Evaluating Across Borders

This evaluation, conducted under CESDA's Erasmus+ award (KA210-SCH Small-Scale Partnerships in School Education), explores the project's value, impact, and quality. It focuses on how inclusive creative writing supported children from marginalised communities across Ireland and Italy, and how CESDA contributed to building capacity for inclusive practice among educators across two countries. It also aims to support future research, funding, and policy development in inclusive arts education.

Following the Story: Evaluation Approach

The evaluation was designed to follow CESDA across its full 11-month duration. This continuous, embedded approach allowed for meaningful observation of how the project evolved over time and how key outcomes emerged through creative practice.

Multiple sources of qualitative evidence were used to develop a rounded understanding of CESDA's impact:

- Children’s creative outputs, including six bilingual stories and a podcast series developed collaboratively, capturing voice, creativity, and place
- Feedback from 12 teachers and 11 project staff in Ireland and Italy, gathered through interviews, surveys, and reflective notes
- Project materials such as skill share reflections, planning documents, and the *Good Practice Guide*

Children’s stories and performances were not just outputs; they served as evidence of CESDA’s core values: celebrating identity, supporting self-expression, and creating inclusive space for imaginative participation. The *Good Practice Guide*, co-developed by the project partners and an experienced educator, was also used to assess how inclusive methods were documented, shared, and sustained across organisations.

This approach ensured that every strand of the project, from classroom interactions to facilitator reflections, was considered through the lens of CESDA’s central aims: inclusion, voice, creativity, and cross-border collaboration. The embedded, longitudinal approach enabled insight into how outcomes evolved through the duration of the project, rather than relying on one-off reflections.

Shared Stories, Inclusive Impact

Feedback from 12 teachers¹² and 11 project facilitators¹³ in both Ireland and Italy offers insight into children’s engagement, confidence, and learning. These reflections were analysed thematically and considered alongside project outputs to assess the project against its core objectives:

- To what extent did marginalised children gain confidence, express themselves, and feel included through creative writing?
- How far did teachers and organisations adopt or strengthen inclusive creative practices?

Each activity and output was assessed against these aims to understand their contribution to CESDA’s impact. For example, the collaborative storytelling workshops were examined for how they enabled full participation across diverse linguistic, cultural, and learning needs. The cross-border skill-sharing sessions and *Good Practice Guide* were assessed for their role in strengthening capacity and fostering professional growth.

¹² Six Ireland based and six Italy based. The qualitative feedback was provided via a mix of surveys and interviews.

¹³ Three staff members were interviewed and eight provided reflections captured after the four skill share sessions that took place between Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole.

This objective-focused approach ensured that all elements of the project, from story content to facilitator reflections, were linked back to CESDA's overarching goals of voice, inclusion, and collaboration.

Framework Alignment: Inclusion, Participation and Child Rights

The evaluation was guided by a set of aligned educational frameworks that reflect the specific policy contexts of the partner organisations as well as wider EU and international priorities. While several of the frameworks originate in the Irish context, their core principles, such as inclusion, personalisation, participation, and cultural diversity, closely align with broader European and international commitments to inclusive education and cultural participation. These shared values are reflected in both partners' ethos and practice and resonate clearly with the Italian context.

In particular, the DCU Key Principles resonate with the aims of the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024), which foregrounds equity, cultural rights, and community-rooted learning.

These are complemented by Erasmus+ priorities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which anchor the evaluation in a broader rights-based and intercultural perspective. Taken together, these frameworks ensure that the evaluation remains both locally grounded and internationally relevant, reinforcing CESDA's value as a scalable model of inclusive creative education.

Relevant Policy and Practice Frameworks

- **Inclusive Systems and Inclusive Arts Education Key Principles: A Strategic Framework for the Arts and Social Inclusion in Education Sector.** Developed by the Educational Disadvantage Centre at Dublin City University (McCabe & Downes, 2025)¹⁴ and referred to hereafter as *DCU Key Principles*, this framework highlights equity of access, flexibility, personalisation, cultural diversity, and participation. CESDA's activities were assessed against these principles, for example: Were workshops accessible (equity)? Were they adapted to learners' needs (personalisation)? Did they reflect diverse languages and cultures (diversity)?

¹⁴ [DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre's Inclusive Systems and Inclusive Arts Education Key Principles: A Strategic Framework for the Arts and Social Inclusion in the Education Sector](#). The framework builds on the key principles for inclusive systems developed in the Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017 [report published by the EU Commission](#) (p.18) to add a further layer for Arts Education and Social Inclusion. Throughout this report, this framework is referred to as "DCU Key Principles." The Framework is available in [Appendix 1](#).

- **Ireland’s Creative Youth Plan (2023–2027)**, which prioritises access to creative opportunities for underrepresented groups. CESDA directly supports this vision through cross-border collaboration, inclusive teaching methods, and the promotion of key child competencies such as creativity, communication and collaboration.
- **Erasmus+ Priorities** on social inclusion and learning equity, which underpin CESDA’s design and funding. The project provides an EU-funded model of inclusive arts education, demonstrating the value of Erasmus+ investment in tackling educational disadvantage through creativity.
- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**. CESDA reflects the spirit of Articles 12, 13, 29, and 31, which uphold children’s rights to express themselves, develop their identity, and participate fully in cultural and artistic life.

Together, these frameworks ensured that the evaluation remained both contextually grounded and internationally relevant, reinforcing CESDA’s value not only as a local initiative, but as a scalable, policy-aligned model of inclusive creative education.

Limitations

This evaluation was designed to surface rich insights and inform future practice. While small in scale and rooted in qualitative methods, it was carefully structured to foreground learning, voice, and reflection. There was no control group or formal pre/post measurement. However, triangulated evidence from multiple sources, including children’s work, teacher insights, and project documentation, offers a credible, nuanced account of CESDA’s early-stage impact.

The next section outlines CESDA’s key activities and outputs, and how they reflect the aims and values described above.

Becoming Storytellers Together: Activities and Outputs¹⁵

“Through creative writing, the children were able to experience the joy of inventing a story, of sharing emotions, working in groups, and also valuing listening and mutual respect” (Primary School Teacher, Italy).

Between September 2024 and July 2025, CESDA brought together more than 500 children from 24 classrooms – 12 in Ireland and 12 in Italy – to co-author six original stories. Through 24 inclusive creative writing workshops, the programme engaged 42 teachers, 13 staff from partner organisations, and a team of volunteers across both countries. These were not just creative

¹⁵ CESDA activities and outputs are summarised in a table in [Appendix 2](#).

exercises; each activity was designed to reflect CESDA's core aims and demonstrate inclusive arts education and EU values in action. As two children from Italy shared, "We're almost done with the story of the purple monster and we liked it very much and we had so much fun. And we worked together so much," a reflection of both the creativity and collaboration that defined the workshops.

This section outlines CESDA's activities and outputs, showing how practice aligned with purpose and policy. References to key frameworks, including the DCU Inclusive Arts in Education Key Principles, the Creative Youth Plan, Erasmus+ priorities, and the UNCRC, are woven throughout.

Designing Together: Welcoming Every Child

"The children have always been placed at the centre... they've always felt welcomed and like protagonists of the activity" (Primary School Teacher, Italy).

From the outset, CESDA was grounded in a shared commitment to inclusion. During transnational skill-sharing sessions, facilitators exchanged methods rooted in the DCU Key Principles, leading to a joint approach that was flexible, place-based, and child-led.

Workshops were tailored to the specific needs of each classroom. Facilitators used pre-programme surveys and planning conversations to understand learning styles, classroom dynamics, and individual interests. One Irish teacher explained that their school is DEIS-designated, increasingly diverse, and faces significant literacy challenges, particularly in senior classes. An Italian teacher described how a newly arrived child with limited vocabulary "was able to experience every part of the event fully, just like the others." Another Irish teacher added: "I felt like with the way the workshop was set up, anyone could have accessed it... they were all able to access it, which was great."

This inclusive design reflects the DCU Key Principles and Framework for Inclusive Arts Education, particularly personalisation (B2), flexibility (B2), and equity of access (B1). It also aligns with Erasmus+ and Creative Youth priorities, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms every child's right to access culture and participate in creative life. As one group of children in Ireland reflected, "There were a lot of languages in the class – Irish, French, Arabic, Polish, Latvian, Swahili," capturing the diversity of voices welcomed into the storytelling process and highlighting how the workshops created space for everyone to contribute, regardless of background or first language.

Connecting Through Story: Place, Culture and Curiosity

“They were able to put their place on the map and they were able to connect [it] with another place. That’s really powerful” (CESDA Team Member).

Children in Ireland and Italy co-created stories that crossed borders, languages, and time zones. Their characters embarked on surreal, exciting journeys, from hot air balloons to Mars-bound rockets, between Milan and Dublin.

In line with the *Story Seeds* approach, children rooted their stories in the familiar. They wove in local landmarks, from Libreria Cortecchia and Via di Rudinì in Milan, to the North Clondalkin Library and Galway Bay in Ireland. Everyday places were reimagined as sites of magic and possibility. One Italian child remarked, “It was very nice to write and use my imagination ... the story was more scary than beautiful, it was very fun,” capturing the freedom children had to explore a range of genres and emotions in their storytelling.

[Story maps](#)¹⁶ visually tracked these locations, from Piazza Axum to the M50 motorway, helping children link their own neighbourhoods with unfamiliar ones across Europe. These became shared reference points in a growing collective geography: the Duomo di Milano, where Derek, Sammy and Melvis are attacked by a flock of seagulls; the River Slaney, where a winning lottery ticket is swept away. One teacher described children using Google Maps to explore their partner schools’ cities, blending literacy with geography and curiosity: “They could see the places, and suddenly they were in the story.”

Children swapped story chapters and sometimes met live on Zoom to discuss their work. These exchanges were not incidental but central to CESDA’s design, reflecting its goal of fostering curiosity, empathy, and intercultural awareness through co-creation. During these sessions, they asked each other questions about daily life, food, language, and school. One Irish child described Italian as “sounding like music, or rap,” capturing the playful spirit of cross-cultural discovery. A teacher in Milan reflected, “These are children who rarely leave their neighbourhood ... so collaborating with a place like Dublin, which feels very far from them, that was really important and truly surprising.”

Stories were translated into both Italian and English, and facilitators supported multilingual dialogue through shared drafts and live interactions. Some children learned basic greetings and adapted dialogue to suit both languages, deepening their appreciation of how language shapes identity and imagination. Children in Ireland said they liked listening to Italian “because it is helpful if you want to

¹⁶ Created using [Google My Maps](#).

learn a new language.” For children from marginalised communities, it offered not only representation but meaningful connection with peers across Europe.

The interplay of location, child voice, and imagination reflects the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024), which identifies cultural discovery and diversity as central to inclusive arts learning.¹⁷ The Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) similarly highlights collaboration, curiosity and imagination as core competencies, all developed through this playful, participatory approach.¹⁸

This emphasis on place also reflects the “spatial turn” in inclusive arts education (DCU Key Principle B7), a shift that recognises both physical and relational spaces as key to equitable learning. CESDA transformed classrooms, libraries, and school halls into creative zones, and invited children to see their own neighbourhoods as story-worthy. In doing so, it advanced the Erasmus+ commitment to intercultural dialogue and upheld the UNCRC’s vision of every child’s right to cultural participation, voice, and belonging.

Amplifying All Voices: Celebrating Creative Confidence

“They saw their names in print and their stories being read aloud - that’s when it hit home how much their voices matter” (Primary School Teacher, Ireland).

Across Ireland and Italy, CESDA made children’s creativity visible, not only in workshops but in the published, performed, and celebrated stories they co-created. Each of the six collaborative tales was compiled into a dual-language, illustrated anthology. With a print run of 750 copies, every participating child received their published work, a meaningful recognition of their creative voice. The anthology is also freely accessible [online](#),¹⁹ allowing schools, creative practitioners, and young readers across Europe to explore the stories.

For many children, the act of publication made their achievements feel real and celebrated. One Italian teacher explained, “It was important for the children to see that what they had created had value. It built confidence and showed them that their ideas mattered.” One child in Ireland described the excitement of anticipation: “It was fun, knowing that one day our story would become something we could read.”

In addition to the printed anthology, children narrated their stories in both Italian and English for a bilingual podcast series, also available online.²⁰ These audio recordings, along with a celebratory

¹⁷ [UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education](#) (2024).

¹⁸ Government of Ireland. [Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027](#), (p. 11-12).

¹⁹ On both the [Fighting Words](#) and [La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole](#) websites.

²⁰ [Story Seeds/Semi di Storie](#)

online launch featuring guest speakers such as Irish author Naoise Dolan, created inclusive, multilingual spaces for public recognition.

This act of publication, central to Fighting Words' participatory model, affirms the value of children's creative voices by recognising their work as worthy of public sharing. Research such as *Fostering Creativity Through the Participatory Arts* (White, 2021),²¹ highlights how recognition through public sharing supports wellbeing, confidence, and growth. Inspired by this approach, experienced teacher and creative educator Mary Lowry reflected on the impact of adopting similar practices within her own school: "Our students know their work is valued and appreciated."²²

This commitment to recognition and voice aligns with the UNCRC Article 13 (freedom of expression), the Creative Youth Plan's focus on communication and collaboration, and the DCU Key Principles (B6) around inclusion, visibility, and sustainability in creative education.

Building Capacity: Sharing What Works

"I learned a lot, not only about their way of working, but also about how we can reflect together on our own [way of working]" (CESDA Project Team Member).

In addition to the children's creative outputs, CESDA generated a strong legacy of professional learning and resource development. A key output was the *Good Practice Guide*, co-developed by staff from both La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole and Fighting Words, alongside an educator with expertise in inclusive arts education.²³ This collaborative process ensured that the guide reflected the diverse strengths, approaches, and insights of both partner organisations. The guide distils CESDA's methods into practical resources, inclusion checklists, story map templates, and adaptable techniques, designed to support educators and facilitators working with marginalised groups.

The guide was intentionally designed to be practical and accessible, with clear, user-friendly language and illustrated examples. Checklists, story maps, and adaptable exercises are included throughout to support easy application. These features ensure the resource can be used flexibly by educators and facilitators across diverse settings, regardless of experience level or context.

These resources were also showcased through a co-hosted webinar for teachers and educators. All tools and publications, including recordings from the webinars, will remain available on the CESDA partners' websites, supporting continued access and future use. The *Good Practice Guide* will also be

²¹ White, I. (2021) [*Fostering Creativity Through the Participatory Arts*](#).

²² Lowry, M. (2019) '[Students are journalists and poets and storytellers and performers](#),' *Irish Times*, 7 May.

²³ The *Good Practice Guide* was written by Mary Lowry, a former teacher, a specialist in creative education and facilitation, who has worked with [Oide](#) in teacher support for Arts in Junior Cycle among other roles.

presented as part of a cross-border project involving schools from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, extending CESDA's impact into new educational and regional contexts.

CESDA served as a rich professional development opportunity for both partner organisations. Over four cross-national skill-share sessions, facilitators deepened their understanding of inclusive practice. The sessions enabled not only the exchange of concrete tools but also critical reflection. "We were still learning and deepening our understanding of how shared storymaking across groups of young people can be delivered effectively," said one CESDA team member.

The collaboration was reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Staff at both La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole and Fighting Words gained valuable insights from one another's methods, fostering a shared sense of professional growth. Irish team members highlighted LGFDP's thoughtful approach to personalisation: "They gather an awful lot of information on their participants... so they tailor the experience accordingly." At the same time, LGFDP staff appreciated how Fighting Words scaled its approach to support older groups, including teenagers and adult learners. One team member reflected, "I also felt a growing sense of connection, not just among the kids, but between us at La Grande Fabbrica and our colleagues at Fighting Words." This spirit of mutual learning and respect underpinned the partnership throughout.

This dialogue enabled each partner to refine their own practices while learning from the other's. The reflective, relational nature of the partnership mirrors the child-led approach used in the classroom: open-ended, iterative, and focused on growth.

Teachers, too, described meaningful professional learning. Many reported increased confidence in using inclusive, student-led methods. One teacher in Ireland said the project encouraged them to "step away from focusing on errors" and embrace creativity as a space where "mistakes are part of the process and growth."

This collective capacity-building supports Erasmus+ goals around strengthening organisational capacity, and aligns with DCU Key Principle B6, which emphasises community engagement and sustainability in creative education. Insights from this process are now informing future programming, and the *Good Practice Guide* stands as a practical tool to extend this impact across sectors.

Beyond the Workshop: Dissemination and Integration

CESDA's reach extended well beyond the classroom. To support visibility and legacy, the project's outputs were shared in multiple formats: print, audio, digital, and live events.²⁴ The bilingual anthology and podcast are freely accessible online, and an Irish Times supplement²⁵ included information about and stories written as part of the project. The *Good Practice Guide* and key learnings were also disseminated via webinars, European platforms, and professional networks. This included a presentation at the Writing Our World Conference in July 2025, where experiences, insights and learnings were shared with an audience of educators and facilitators from creative writing organisations across Europe.

This emphasis on public sharing and integration reflects the goals of Erasmus+ and the Creative Youth Plan, both of which promote sustainable innovation, inclusive participation in cultural life and the sharing of effective practice.

The project's values and inclusive practices are now integrated into ongoing programming at both partner organisations. The partnership model itself, grounded in mutual learning, trust, and experimentation, offers a template for future cross-border arts education initiatives. The project's values and inclusive practices are now integrated into ongoing programming at both partner organisations. The partnership model itself, grounded in mutual learning, trust, and experimentation, offers a template for future cross-border arts education initiatives. As one CESDA team member noted, "Having these reflective spaces is really important for developing quality practice and sowing seeds for possible future collaborations."

By investing in capacity, reflection, and dissemination, CESDA demonstrates how small-scale projects can generate long-term impact across sectors, geographies, and generations.

Beyond the Page: Building Confidence, Connection, and Creative Capacity

Writing is always a journey. It's never to arrive. It's always to keep going and keep thinking in new ways (Irish writer Naoise Dolan, addressing participating children at the online anthology launch event).²⁶

CESDA's impact extends far beyond the printed page. While the published stories and performances stand as visible achievements, the deeper outcomes lie in how the project nurtured creative

²⁴ A summary of dissemination is available in [Appendix 3](#).

²⁵ Irish Times, 14 May 2025. [Stories that travel from Ireland to Italy \(and back again!\). Arts and social inclusion project funded by Erasmus+ is a literary relay between Irish and Italian creative writing students.](#)

²⁶ Irish writer Naoise Dolan launched the published anthology at an online event on 5 June 2025. Participating children from Ireland and Italy attended and interacted with one another at this celebratory event.

confidence, connection, and long-term capacity, for children, educators, and organisations alike. Drawing on interviews, reflections, and children's voices, this section explores how CESDA's inclusive approach supported transformation at every level.

Confidence and Voice: Seeing Themselves as Storytellers

"They saw their names in a book, and it made them feel like someone thinks what I have to say matters" (Primary School Teacher, Ireland).

Across both countries, children gained confidence by being trusted as creators. Teachers described how pupils who were previously hesitant began to take risks, share ideas, and embrace their identities as writers. "They really, really loved it... It gave them confidence. Now they're saying: we're the storytellers of the class," one Irish teacher noted.

This shift was enabled by a strongly child-led approach. "The adults were needed very little," another teacher observed. "It was so child-led." Italian teachers echoed this, highlighting how the workshops celebrated voice over perfection. "It encouraged them to make mistakes," one teacher explained. "Not to fear them, but to see them as part of the creative process."

These changes were not only temporary sparks; they marked a change in how children saw themselves. The process validated their ideas, celebrated their stories, and gave them space to be heard. As one Italian teacher reflected, "What they had created had enough value to be sent from one country to the other."

This focus on voice, inclusion, and creative risk aligns with the DCU Inclusive Arts in Education Principles (particularly B1 and B2), the Creative Youth Plan's emphasis on wellbeing and engagement, and Article 13 of the UNCRC, affirming every child's right to freedom of expression.

Inclusion in Practice: Welcoming Every Child

"I felt like with the way the workshop was set up, anyone could have accessed it ... they were able to access it, which was great" (Primary School Teacher, Ireland).

From design to delivery, CESDA created space for every child to take part. Teachers across both countries described how the inclusive structure, grounded in flexible facilitation, personalisation, and creative freedom, supported meaningful participation from a wide range of learners.

A teacher in Italy explained how a newly arrived migrant student with limited vocabulary was able to "experience every part of the event fully," thanks to the scaffolding built into the approach. One Irish teacher reflected that is "wasn't about grammar or being the best at writing. It was about thinking differently, finding a new way in," underscoring the project's emphasis on creativity over correctness.

Children engaged through writing, drawing, discussion, and performance, choosing the mode that suited them best. The freedom to contribute in multiple ways, at their own pace, helped ensure that those with additional needs or lower confidence could fully participate. "... thanks to the support of the facilitators, us teachers, and above all their classmates, even the shyest and most introverted children began to participate more," (Italian Primary Teacher), highlighting how the workshops encouraged children to support one another.

This approach reflects the DCU Key Principles B1 and B2, focusing on equity of access and responsiveness, and aligns with the Erasmus+ priority on social inclusion. It also enacts Articles 12 and 31 of the UNCRC, affirming every child's right to be heard and to engage in cultural life on their own terms. "Here there are no mistakes; you can transform them into something else... It's a great method for inclusion" (Primary School Teacher, Italy).

A Spark That Lasts: Joy, Creativity and Ongoing Impact

"It has shown them that they can be writers" (Primary School Teacher, Ireland).

CESDA's impact didn't end when the workshops finished. Teachers described how children kept writing, drawing, and referencing their stories in the weeks that followed. Some created new chapters at home, others drafted newspaper articles or reimagined their characters' next adventures.

In Ireland, one teacher noted that a student who had been reluctant to participate ended the day "non-stop talking about how fun it was." In Italy, teachers described how engaged the children were with children continuing to talk about and show interest in the stories and characters they had created. These responses show how the project left a lasting emotional and creative imprint.

The workshops also shifted how children saw themselves. A teacher in Ireland explained: "It's inspired them to write for an audience," helping children recognise their own creative voices and see writing as something they could own, and continue. In Italy the children "felt that they were building something important and they would get very involved in the story. Some of them, even those who usually find it hard to concentrate, were really involved and wanted to continue" (Primary Teacher, Italy).

This sustained creative momentum supports Objective 6 of the Creative Youth Plan, which positions creative participation as a pathway to wellbeing and resilience. It also aligns with DCU Principle B6, which emphasises continuity and community engagement as key markers of inclusive arts education.

Whether it was walking past the local river in Athy and saying, "That's where our story happened," or in Milan "always asking to go back to the story and continue it," children carried their stories with

them, evidence that CESDA didn't just build writing skills, but sparked something deeper: a belief in the value of their ideas. "It was very nice to express my imagination, it was a beautiful experience" (Child Participant).

Shared Stories, Shared Worlds: Connecting Across Borders

"It created that connection that might not have existed otherwise" (CESDA Project Team Member).

One of CESDA's most powerful outcomes was the intercultural exchange between Irish and Italian students. Through Zoom calls and shared story drafts, children swapped ideas about local life, food, and characters, from Centra chicken rolls to the Duomo's seagulls. These lighthearted exchanges often sparked deeper connections and genuine curiosity.

A teacher in Milan remarked, "It was amazing for them to see their own lives reflected and to learn about children in a different country." Language itself became a source of fascination: one facilitator recalled Italian children assuming the Irish were speaking another language when they heard strong Dublin accents.

These interactions helped children place their lives in a wider European context. They learned to see themselves not just as students in their own classrooms, but as storytellers in a shared world. As one Irish teacher observed, "They were part of something ... it wasn't just our school doing this. We're in this with another country." This sense of cross-border connection expanded their horizons and made the act of storytelling feel meaningful beyond the walls of the classroom.

This outcome strongly aligns with DCU Key Principle B4 and the Erasmus+ focus on intercultural dialogue. It also reflects the "spatial turn" in inclusive arts education (B7), where classrooms become relational hubs that connect local realities with broader European narratives. CESDA made space for these connections to emerge naturally, through laughter, stories, and playful connections, laying the groundwork for lasting empathy and mutual understanding.

Place, Imagination and Belonging

"They weren't trying to invent a new world out of thin air, they were writing about places they already knew. That helped hugely" (Primary Teacher, Ireland).

Children set their stories in streets, rivers, and neighbourhoods they recognised, from Pancaffè and the Navigli canal in Milan to Finglas and the River Slaney in Ireland. Grounding stories in familiar places helped children connect emotionally with their writing and view their surroundings as story-worthy.

One Italian teacher explained how her students became “attached to the story’s characters” because they could “dive into the heart of the story” and imagine it unfolding just outside their window. Children shared hyperlocal details with pride, from Tigros supermarkets to Centra chicken rolls, embedding the stories in a real, shared world.

This outcome aligns with DCU Principle B4 (cultural relevance) and the UNESCO Framework’s emphasis on place-based learning.²⁷ By starting from the local and lived, CESDA helped children build pride in their communities and imagination grounded in belonging.

Learning Together: Building Capacity Through Creative Exchange

“It was great to feel we are not alone in our work and to be inspired by the depth of practice and commitment from the other team. There were clear differences in our approaches that made the exchange really valuable” (CESDA Project Team Member).

The outcomes of CESDA extended beyond children’s creative growth. Teachers, facilitators, and partners also described renewed confidence, practical learning, and strengthened professional networks.

Some educators began the project unsure how to facilitate creative writing but gained confidence through hands-on experience. “Every workshop you take part in, you pick up some skills,” said one teacher. “If I go away with one new idea, then it was worth it.” Others noted how CESDA’s inclusive model gave students with additional needs opportunities to thrive, reinforcing the value of adaptable, student-led practice. Seeing students with additional needs thrive “just reassures you that it is a good approach,” noted one Irish teacher.

Several teachers have already begun integrating CESDA techniques into their regular teaching, including group brainstorming and the “heads down, thumbs up” voting method. One noted, “It becomes more fluid the more you use it,” highlighting how the methods grow more natural with practice. Another reflected on a key learning from CESDA: “If students are engaged, everything else follows,” a reminder of the power of participation to drive learning.

For the project teams, the partnership between Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole was a key driver of growth. Through four cross-national skill-share sessions, teams shared tools, adjusted workshops in real time, and deepened their understanding of inclusive practice. As one team member put it, “There’s something special about collaborating with people who share your

²⁷ [UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education](#) (2024) states that culture and arts education should be “integrated in teaching and learning by engaging with cultural institutions and spaces, living heritage bearers, local community mediators, and other cultural professionals” to “expand place-based education that grounds a stronger connection between learners of all ages and backgrounds, their communities and environments”

values and your approach. It creates a kind of trust and mutual understanding that goes beyond the work itself.”

As part of this collaborative process, an external educator with expertise in inclusive arts education participated in the cross-national skill-share sessions and engaged closely with both organisations. Her role included drawing out the unique approaches, challenges, and innovations of each partner through in-depth conversations and observation. These insights helped shape the co-created *Good Practice Guide*, ensuring it was grounded in real-world experience and responsive to the diverse needs of practitioners.

The co-created *Good Practice Guide* is one legacy of this learning, offering adaptable resources that, as one teacher noted, they would “use every day.” This supports Objective 3 of the Creative Youth Plan (strengthening educator capacity) and aligns with DCU Key Principle B6 around sustainability and community engagement in creative education.

CESDA’s impact wasn’t limited to the children, it strengthened the confidence, capacity, and creativity of the adults who support them, laying foundations for continued learning across borders and classrooms. One teacher in Milan summed it up simply: “Taking part in this project was truly a unique opportunity, I believe, and we were all very happy, both students and teachers.”

From Stories to Action: Key Recommendations for Future Practice

CESDA shows how inclusive, creative collaboration across borders can support children’s self-expression and deepen educational engagement. The following recommendations aim to sustain, expand, and embed this model across schools, systems, and future programmes.

1. Prioritise depth over breadth.

Sustained relationships are essential, particularly when working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Programmes should prioritise continuity over one off engagements, allowing trust, creativity, and confidence to grow over time. This aligns with DCU Key Principles (B2), which emphasise personalised and long-term learning.

2. Value the voices behind the stories.

Children should feel that their ideas, and their presence, matter. Create regular, meaningful opportunities where children feel heard, respected, and recognised. As one Irish teacher put it, children knew “this organisation and these people care about me and what I have to say.” This sense of being valued fosters trust and reflects the DCU Key Principles on relational, inclusive environments.

3. Deepen School-to-School Collaboration

Live online exchanges were highlights of CESDA. These real-time moments brought the cross-border element to life for children and made their partnerships tangible. Future programmes should expand these opportunities and embed more structured, reciprocal links between participating schools.

Peer-to-peer exchange, through joint story creation, live sharing, or collaborative feedback, can deepen intercultural understanding, foster empathy, and help children feel part of a wider creative community. While cross-border collaboration is powerful, local or regional partnerships can also support connection, perspective-taking, and shared learning.

This recommendation aligns with the DCU Key Principles on relational and collaborative learning (B7), the Creative Youth Plan's emphasis on connectivity, and Erasmus+ priorities around transnational partnership, intercultural dialogue, and shared European values.

4. Embed Co-Creation From the Start.

While CESDA strongly modelled child-led storytelling within workshops, future programmes can go further by involving children earlier in the design of themes, formats, and outputs. Co-creating elements such as story topics, podcast structure, or even workshop formats from the outset can enhance ownership, participation, and alignment with children's interests. This deepens inclusion and supports national and international frameworks such as the DCU Inclusive Arts in Education (A1, A2, B2),²⁸ the Lundy Model of Participation,²⁹ and UNCRC Article 12, which enshrines every child's right to be heard in matters affecting them.

5. Diversify Creative Pathways.

Offer children a range of storytelling formats, writing, illustration, audio, and performance, to reflect diverse strengths and needs. This supports DCU Key Principles B1 and B2, which prioritise flexibility and access, and aligns with UNCRC Article 13 on freedom of expression through varied media.

Multimodal participation strengthens inclusion and supports children with differing learning styles.

²⁸ The first section lists 10 Key Principles for Inclusive Systems in and Around Schools. A1 refers to a System Wide Focus and A2 Equality and Non-Discrimination. See [Appendix 1](#) for further information.

²⁹ Lundy, L. (2007). "Voice" is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927–942.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>

Developed by Professor Laura Lundy (2007), this rights-based model outlines four key elements, Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence, to ensure meaningful implementation of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The model is widely used in education and youth participation initiatives to guide child-centred decision-making and practice, including [Ireland's National Participation Framework](#).

6. Centre Creativity in School Life

Encourage schools to embed creative practices across the curriculum, not just as standalone workshops. CESDA showed how creative storytelling can support learning across multiple areas:

- **Language learning**, including Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), through children's engagement with Italian and English via dialogue, greetings, and bilingual audio narration
- **Wellbeing and self-expression**, by fostering confidence, ownership, and voice through storytelling
- **Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)**, through place-based writing that connected children with local and European contexts
- and **core literacy skills**, as children read, wrote, listened, and presented in meaningful ways.

Teachers in both countries highlighted how the approach complemented and deepened classroom learning. As one Italian teacher explained: "Creative writing within the school curriculum can have great educational value, both didactically and in terms of personal development... It stimulates imagination and creativity, and makes learning more fun and motivating, which is important for children."

Another reflected that the process encouraged critical thinking, decision-making, and communication skills: "It encourages personal expression and strengthens critical thinking... leading children to make narrative choices, develop logical consistency, and think about how to describe the places and characters they invent."

This holistic, child-led approach aligns with the Primary Curriculum Framework (2023)³⁰ in Ireland, which emphasises creativity, wellbeing, and learning through the arts, as well as the Creative Youth Plan Objective 6 and the DCU Inclusive Arts in Education Key Principles. In Italy, it supports the National Curriculum's focus on creative thinking, civic engagement, and *competenze trasversali* (transversal skills),³¹ and reinforces the European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018),³² which position creativity, cultural awareness, and expression as foundational to school education.

³⁰ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023) [Primary School Curriculum](#).

³¹ [Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo – Scuola dell'infanzia e primo ciclo di istruzione](#) (MiM, 2025): the July 7 2025 edition introduces a stronger focus on creative thinking, active citizenship, and transversal competences ("competenze trasversali") as fundamental goals of Italian primary education.

³² [Council of the European Union \(2018\). Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#) outlines eight essential competences, including cultural awareness, creativity, and multilingualism, as key to personal fulfilment, active citizenship, and employability.

Embedding inclusive creative practices like CESDA's storytelling model can help children connect learning to their lives, voices, and communities, supporting policy goals across national and European contexts.

These recommendations are not only about replicating CESDA, they are also about embedding inclusive creativity into how we educate, connect, and listen to children.

Conclusion: Cross-Border Friendship and Imagination

"We went on an Erasmus!" (CESDA Child Participant).

Spoken with pride and delight, this simple phrase captures the heart of CESDA. For many of the 500+ children involved, it was their first experience of international collaboration, powered not by travel, but by imagination, creativity, and connection through shared storytelling.

CESDA showed how inclusive, creative education can unlock confidence, curiosity, and belonging. In classrooms across Ireland and in the heart of Milan, children discovered that their own stories, rooted in local places and personal experiences, could spark cross-cultural friendships and travel far beyond the page.

From sausage rolls and legendary astronauts in Tallaght to kebabs and secret disguises in Milan, the six stories created through *Story Seeds: From Ireland to Italy (and Back Again!)/Semi di Storie* are joyful testaments to what children can achieve when trusted as creators. Like their authors, the characters collaborate, overcome obstacles, and build bridges across worlds

But CESDA was more than a storytelling project. It demonstrated how inclusive, child-led creativity can deliver on key policy priorities in education, inclusion, and youth participation. The project achieved measurable outcomes aligned with the DCU Inclusive Arts in Education Key Principles, the Creative Youth Plan, Erasmus+ priorities, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, from increased wellbeing and equity of access to enhanced teacher capacity and international exchange.

CESDA now stands as a replicable model for systemic impact and joyful learning. Its resources, from the *Good Practice Guide* to the podcast and anthology, offer practical tools for embedding inclusive creative practice across sectors and settings.

Continued investment in initiatives like CESDA is more than a cultural good; it is a strategic imperative. It enables schools to engage the most marginalised, equips educators with inclusive tools, and ensures children feel seen, heard, and valued. As one Italian teacher observed, their students "dream of being able to do anything... and they know that in order to do that, they need someone by their side who truly cares about them."

By valuing every child's voice, welcoming every perspective, and nurturing creativity as a shared endeavour, CESDA leaves us with a powerful reminder: Imagination knows no borders, and neither should opportunity. As one Italian teacher reflected, referring to the children participating in CESDA: "If we stop them now, they lose a bit of that magic. And I think that magic is exactly what should exist at their age."

Appendix 1: DCU Key Principles

DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre's Inclusive Systems and Inclusive Arts Education Key Principles: A Strategic Framework for the Arts and Social Inclusion in Education Sector.

Dr. Una McCabe and Professor Paul Downes 2025

Ten Key Principles for Inclusive Systems in and around Schools (Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017) report for the EU Commission p.18 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6e48090a-e204-11e6-ad7c-01aa75ed71a1>

A1. System wide focus Schools, agencies and families are distinct but connected systems, each having a set of relationships and mutual influences that impact the individual – both system blockages as barriers and system supports.

A2. Equality and non-discrimination Substantive equality requires a commitment to educational success for everyone irrespective of social background; to achieve this, different groups may need additional supports. Non-discrimination includes a right to equality of concern and respect in a supportive environment free of prejudice.

A3. Children's rights to expression of voices and participation, and other educational rights

Children have a right to be heard on issues directly affecting their own welfare, with due regard to their ages and maturity.

A4. Holistic approach A holistic approach recognises the social, emotional and physical needs, not simply the academic and cognitive needs, of both children/young people and their parents.

A5. Active participation of parents in school, including marginalised parents Parental input into school policy and practices, as well as their children's education, requires both a general strategic commitment and a distinctive focus on marginalised parents' involvement.

A6. Differentiation in prevention approaches Different levels of need require different strategies to meet them, including those students and families that are experiencing moderate risk and chronic need.

A7. Building on strengths Promoting strengths in effect challenges the negative deficit labelling of vulnerable groups, and seeks to promote growth (both for individuals' personal and educational development and for system level development) rather than simply prevent.

A8. Multidisciplinarity as a multifaceted response for students with complex needs A range of actively collaborating professionals is needed to address the complex, multifaceted needs of marginalised groups.

A9. Representation and participation of marginalised groups Marginalised groups include those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, those at risk of early school leaving, those experiencing bullying, mental health difficulties and/or special educational needs, and in addition, some groups of migrants and ethnic minorities. There must be a distinct focus on the processes and structures that ensure these groups' representation and participation.

A10. Lifelong learning Lifelong learning, from the cradle onwards, requires a distinct educational focus on active citizenship, personal and social fulfilment, intercultural dialogue across communities, and additionally on poverty, social inclusion, and employment. It embraces informal learning, as well as nonformal and formal education classes relying on active learning methodologies.

Seven Key Principles for Inclusive Arts Education

B1. Equity and Access

Inclusive arts education ensures equal access to arts learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, socio-economic background, gender, or ethnicity. EU policies emphasise eliminating barriers to participation, ensuring that all individuals have equitable access to the arts and can develop their full potential. This includes making arts education spatially, physically, socially, and economically accessible, ensuring that marginalised and vulnerable groups are fully included. A financial resource allocation process needs a prioritising focus on those most in need.

B2. Personalization and Flexibility

The design of arts education must be adaptive and responsive to the diverse needs of students. This principle highlights the importance of differentiated learning, curriculum flexibility and the elimination of winner/loser oppositions, enabling personalised learning paths that cater to individual talents, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds. The EU's Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning underlines the necessity of fostering inclusive learning environments that accommodate the varied needs of learners to encourage creativity and innovation.

B3. Collaboration and Participation

Inclusive arts education promotes active participation and collaboration between teachers, students, communities, and stakeholders. It encourages a co-creation approach, where learners, particularly those from marginalised or vulnerable groups, are involved in shaping their educational experience. This principle aligns with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the UNESCO Education 2030

Framework for Action, which call for inclusive systems that foster dialogue, engagement, and participation of all actors in education.

B4. Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity

The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education 2024 emphasises the promotion of cultural diversity as a cornerstone of inclusive arts education. It encourages the integration of various cultural expressions, traditions, and art forms from around the world, ensuring that students are exposed to a wide range of perspectives. This principle supports the idea that arts education should reflect and respect diverse cultural identities, fostering an inclusive environment where all students can see their cultures represented and valued.

B5. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Inclusive arts education encourages collaboration across disciplines, integrating the arts with other fields of study to promote holistic learning. The Unesco framework advocates for an interdisciplinary approach where the arts are combined with sciences, social studies, and other subjects to enhance creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. A particular focus here is on interdisciplinary curricular aspects involving the arts.

B6. Community Engagement

The UNESCO framework emphasises the importance of community engagement in arts education. It calls for arts programs that connect students with their communities, promoting social cohesion, empathy, and civic responsibility. Successful arts-based community development should aim for sustainability, creating projects that can flourish over time and adapt to the evolving needs of the community. This includes building capacity within the community and securing resources to ensure the continuity of arts programming.

B7. A Spatial Turn Focus on Physical and Relational Spaces for Equitable Inclusive Systems

This spatial turn in education is increasingly recognised for equitable inclusive systems. This focuses on design of suitable and accessible physical spaces to engage and empower marginalised groups. It further adds a strong focus on relational spaces including going beyond diametric spaces of winner/loser oppositions and exclusions.

Appendix 2: Project Activities and Outputs

The table below summarises the main CESDA activities and outputs, indicating their scope, outcomes, and alignment with relevant frameworks and objectives. Each activity and output in the table below is assessed for alignment with relevant educational and policy frameworks that underpin CESDA's approach:

- **DCU Inclusive Arts in Education Key Principles (B1–B7).**
- **Creative Youth Plan 2023–2027 (CYP O1–O7).**
- **Erasmus+ Priorities.**
- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).**

These references (e.g., B2, O6) signal which principles or objectives each activity supports, making it easier to understand CESDA's alignment with both national and international frameworks.

Activity	Detail/Scope	Output	Key Framework Alignment	Outcome	Completed
Best Practice Exchange	4 online skill-share sessions between staff at Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole. Focused on inclusive practice, facilitation tools, and planning.	Inclusive and adaptable workshop template; access checklist based on the <u>DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre's Inclusive Systems and Inclusive Arts Education Key Principles: A Strategic Framework for the Arts and Social Inclusion in Education Sector</u>	B1 Equity & Access; B2 Personalisation & Flexibility; B3 Collaboration & Partnership, B7 Spatial Turn. CYP: O2 Equity of Access. Erasmus + Priorities: Inclusion & Diversity.	Staff/volunteer capacity built; shared facilitation approach adopted for inclusive storytelling.	

Activity	Detail/Scope	Output	Key Framework Alignment	Outcome	Completed
Creative Writing Workshops	24 workshops, 12 Ireland, 12 Italy. Tailored delivery for DEIS schools (Ireland), and schools with a 100% ESCS index from Prove Invalsi (Italy), including classes with migrant learners, and children with additional needs.	6 collaboratively written, illustrated stories; story maps created; classroom-based creative engagement.	B2 Personalisation & Flexibility; B4 Cultural Diversity & Inclusivity; B7 Spatial Turn. CYP: O1 Creative Opportunities; O2 Equity of Access (Targeted Provision); O6 Enhanced Wellbeing. Erasmus+ Priorities: Inclusion & Diversity, Common EU Values. UNCRC: 12, 13, 31.	Children developed stories rooted in their local context, building confidence, expression, and intercultural curiosity.	
Storybook	Dual-language, illustrated print anthology featuring 6 co-authored stories. Copies to all participating children & schools.	750 print copies produced and distributed; digital version hosted online by Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole .	B6 Community Engagement. CYP: O6 Wellbeing. UNCRC: 12, 13, 31.	Tangible recognition of children's creativity; supported confidence, visibility, and classroom celebration.	
Podcast	6 dual language podcast episodes narrated by children, hosted on Spotify and linked from project websites.	Full bilingual podcast series hosted in Spotify and available online via Fighting Words and La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole .	B2 Personalisation & Flexibility, B4 Cultural Diversity & Inclusivity, B5 Interdisciplinary Collaboration. CYP: O1 Creative Opportunities, O2 Equity of Access. UNCRC: 12, 13, 31.	Celebrated children's voice and multilingual skills; extended accessibility and reach.	

Activity	Detail/Scope	Output	Key Framework Alignment	Outcome	Completed
Good Practice Guide	51-page illustrated digital guide co-developed with external educator. Shared at June webinar and freely available online.	Practical toolkit available online with ready to use templates presented directly to 40+ educators (so far) and shared widely via networks of both partner organisations.	B3 Collaboration & Participation; B6 Community Engagement. CYP: O4 Creativity in Curriculum/supporting curriculum frameworks. Erasmus+: Knowledge sharing and practitioner exchange.	Transferable model for schools and creative organisations; supports ongoing use of CESDA methodology.	
Evaluation	Independent, mixed-methods evaluation using stories, interviews, surveys, and facilitator reflections.	Final evaluation report aligned with key frameworks and project aims.	B6 Community Engagement. CYP: O7 Research & evidence. Erasmus+ Youth Knowledge-sharing and future policy alignment.	Documents early-stage impact; supports future strategy, sustainability, and replication.	
What's Next?	Two end-of-project planning meetings and co-created reference note for future collaboration.	Internal working paper outlining continued use of CESDA approaches and transnational learning.	B3 Collaboration & Partnership; B5 Interdisciplinary Collaboration; B6 Community Engagement. Erasmus+ Youth participation knowledge sharing/exchange.	Partners agreed to build on the CESDA model in future projects; continued use of inclusive methods.	

Appendix 3: Dissemination

This table provides a thematic summary. A detailed record, including platform analytics and web/social metrics (e.g. newsletter opens, social shares, online listenership), is available in the dissemination reporting tool.

Where possible, dissemination was conducted in both Irish and Italian, and in accessible formats (e.g. dual-language podcast, printable PDF storybook). This ensured alignment with CESDA's inclusion goals and extended the project's reach across education and cultural sectors.

Activity Type	Examples	Target Group(s)
Events	Online book launch Webinar for educators (Ireland and Italy),	Participating teachers, children, project partners Teachers, educators
Professional Presentations	Writing Our World Conference Cultural event flyer distribution in Italy Creative Connections Presentation	European Partners/Creative Educators Teachers, educators Teachers
Media Coverage	Feature in <i>The Irish Times</i> Education Supplement (delivered to all schools in Ireland)	General public, schools
Digital Dissemination	Project partner websites and social media; podcast shared via Spotify; newsletters and mailing lists, including story in Writing Our World newsletter	Broad public, education/culture networks
Targeted Communications	Including E-scéal (Irish Primary Principals Network newsletter), Oide Creativity	Education stakeholders, school leaders