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# STUDY VISIT AMSTERDAM REPORT

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10-12 April 2019

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## Attendance list

### *Participants from our partner organisations*

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Country</b>
1	Laura Destefanis	School teacher (via Terre Mondo)	Italy
2	Emanuela Di Dio	School teacher (via Terre Mondo)	Italy
3	Kristi Kandima	School teacher (via Praxis)	Estonia
4	Ellen-Rose Kambel	Rutu Foundation	Netherlands
5	Laurinde Koster	Rutu Foundation	Netherlands
6	Liis Pariis	School teacher (via Praxis)	Estonia
7	Tomislav Tudjman	Risbo	Netherlands
8	Afke Weltevrede	Risbo	Netherlands

## Background AVIOR

Schools across Europe are seeing an increasing number of children who are either born in another country or whose parents are immigrants and who do not speak the school language at home. This presents a challenge as schools are expected to deliver quality education for all children, regardless of their ethnic background or linguistic abilities. Especially with the recent arrival of thousands of refugee children, the situation has become acute. This project seeks to respond to this challenge with a Strategic Partnership of seven organizations from six different European countries who will work together to make bilingual literacy and numeracy materials available to schools and to share best practices among teacher trainers and school leaders on how to create inclusive multilingual classrooms.

AVIOR employs a three-pronged approach: 1) Bilingual resources: rather than creating new materials, AVIOR translates and adapts existing bilingual materials of high quality which are offered in both the host language and the mother tongue of migrant children; (2) Teacher competence: teachers, parents and teacher trainers share best practices on multilingual and mother tongue education through study visits to schools and teacher training institutes in European countries; (3) Teacher/parent collaborative networks: parents and teachers are actively engaged in local case studies involving the newly translated bilingual resources in order to provide deeper insight into the barriers and opportunities of migrant parental involvement. This has the added benefit of creating informal local networks of parents, communities and schools, ensuring the continuity of the project's objectives.

## Background Study Visits

The project includes study visits to teacher training institutes and schools in order to observe how bilingual and mother tongue materials are used. The partner organisations will each participate in two Study Visits which will be held in partner countries, with experience in using multilingual teaching material. These are Greece, Estonia, Italy and Germany was originally planned, however, due to unforeseen problems with our German partner, who was unable to organise it, it was decided to organize the study visit in the Netherlands. Each visit is attended by a representative either from Risbo and/or from the Rutu Foundation to ensure continuity. Eight people participate in each study visit (including the hosts).

The idea behind the study visit is that although the use of bilingual or mother tongue materials may not be part of the official policy of the country, good practices can be found at schools or teacher training institutes. By observing these practices first-hand, teachers, trainers and parents obtain ideas and get inspired to develop good practices themselves, thus creating a multiplier effect.

Each study visit includes a **workshop by (local) experts** to explain the country's educational context and the practice in question.

Based on this introduction and before travel, participants formulate questions that they reflect on at the end of the visit.

Each study visit results in a **short 5-minute video**. These videos will be uploaded to all the partner's websites, along with a report of the visit. The goal is to show teachers, school leaders, teacher training institutes and parents across Europe what the use of bilingual and mother tongue education material actually looks like, how teachers are integrating language and content learning and how migrant children, teachers and parents respond to the practice.

The fourth study visit in 2019 was in Amsterdam, the Netherlands and was organized by the Rutu Foundation and Risbo. The video can be viewed [here](#).

## Amsterdam

Amsterdam is the capital and the largest city of the Netherlands. Amsterdam is well known for its canals and biking culture. The official language of the Netherlands is Dutch. Yet, with some 185 nationalities and an estimated 300 spoken languages, Amsterdam is a truly multilingual, multicultural city.



The main aim of the study visit was to provide deeper insight into how schools do (or do not) deal with the multilingual reality they meet every day in the classrooms.

Visits to two schools (one primary school who participated in the AVIOR case study and one school for newly arrived migrant children), talks with parents, teachers, teacher trainers, school principals and with the director of a Polish language school were the main ingredients of two and a half days of learning and exchanging.



## Agenda Study Visit

The fourth study visit went to Amsterdam in the Netherlands and was arranged by Risbo B.V. and Rutu Foundation. The agenda was:

Wednesday 10 April 2019	
Arrival of participants	
19.30 – 21.30	<b>Optional:</b> SIRIUS Roundtable on 'the Art of Multilingual Teaching' (organized by Rutu Foundation and Risbo) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goethe Institut: Herengracht 470, Amsterdam</li> </ul>
Thursday 11 April 2019	
08.00 - 09.00	Breakfast
09.00 – 11.00	AVIOR Welcome Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fashion Hotel</li> </ul>
11.30 – 13.00	Meeting with Bozena Kopczynska from the Polish Lokomotywa Weekend School in Amsterdam <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixtree: Broedplaats LELY, Amsterdam</li> </ul>
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch
15.00 - 17.00	Meeting with Fadie Hanna and Inti Soeterik about Culturally Responsive Teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam</li> </ul>
17.00 – 19.00	Free time
19.00	Dinner
Friday 12 April 2019	
09.30	Leave hotel
10.00 – 12.00	School Visit 1: AVIOR Materials; meeting with teachers and parents who participated in the AVIOR case study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>St Janschool, Amsterdam</li> </ul>
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch at the school with multilingual parents
13.00 – 14.00	Travel time
14.15 – 15.15	School Visit 2: Talk with the principal, teachers and parents of a school for newly arrived migrant children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AmstelWijs School, Amstelveen</li> </ul>
16.00	Free time



# Summary Study Visit

## Sirius National Roundtable: The Art of Multilingual Teaching

On the evening before the actual programme started, our guests from Italy and Estonia had the option to attend a Sirius National Roundtable organised by AVIOR partners Risbo and Rutu Foundation. The Roundtable is part of a series of events which brings educators, policy makers and parents together under the name of 'Multilingual Amsterdam' to discuss how education for multilingual children with a migrant background can be improved.

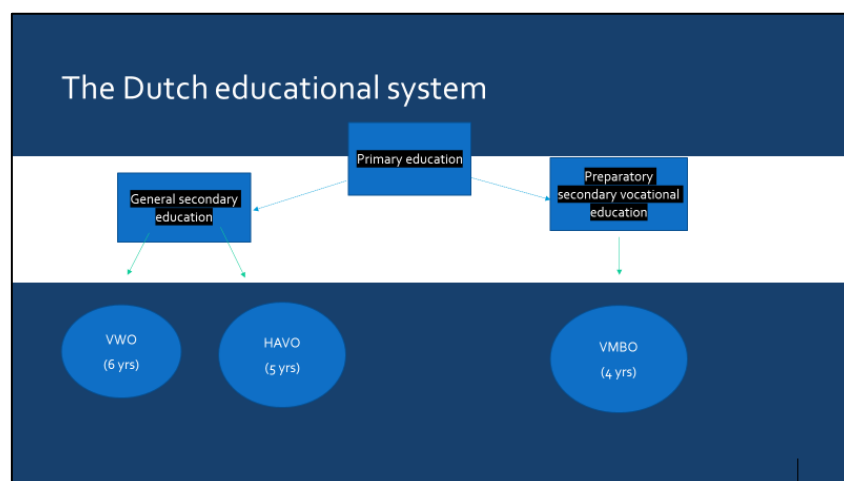
For this Roundtable, the focus was on good teaching practices. Teachers and researchers from the Netherlands and Germany provided many examples to show that the languages that children bring to school, are 'not an enemy, but a tool' for learning.

## Day 1: Multilingualism and Diversity in the Dutch Educational System

After a round of introductions the Dutch AVIOR team gave some background about AVIOR, the programme for the next two days and an overview of the Dutch education system.

### Brief facts about the Netherlands:

- ▶ Population: 17 million people
- ▶ 220,378 immigrants from over 190+ countries (CBS, 2017)
- ▶ National Language: Dutch and one official minority language Frisian in Friesland
- ▶ Second and third generation immigrants mostly from Suriname, Dutch Antilles, Turkey, and Morocco.
- ▶ Refugees come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and many other countries
- ▶ European migrants: from Germany, Poland, etc.





### Primary Education in the Netherlands:

- ▶ Is obligatory, starts when pupils are 4 years old and lasts 8 years.
- ▶ Is provided by schools for primary education (*basisonderwijs*) or special education (*speciaal onderwijs*).
- ▶ At the end of the last year, pupils (11-12 years old) are placed in different tracks for secondary education: a vocational education track (VMBO, 4 years) and general secondary education (HAVO, 5 years and VWO, 6 years) with only VWO leading to the university.
- ▶ Which track a student follows depends on: a recommendation from the school, a national standardized test known as *Citotoets* and students' own preference.
- ▶ There is considerable controversy over the selection methods. Statistics from the Education Inspectorate (2018) show that students with a migrant background are disproportionately attending vocational school (VMBO) while the 'highest' academic track (VWO) is disproportionately attended by white native Dutch students. The same inequality is seen between students with high and low educated parents.

### Multilingualism in Dutch education:

- ▶ Newly arrived migrant children older than 6 years, must attend special Dutch classes for at least 1-2 years where the main focus is on learning Dutch. After this they will be placed in regular classes, where no special support is offered.
- ▶ Children who were born in the Netherlands and are emerging bilingual speakers, do not receive any language support in school.
- ▶ The official policy is to encourage monolingual Dutch education. Only the Frisian (language spoken in the Frisian province) is officially recognized.
- ▶ Lately, multilingual education is becoming more fashionable with increasing number of schools offering bilingual education, but only in high status languages (e.g. English/Dutch). Migrant and regional minority languages are not encouraged and sometimes prohibited to be spoken in schools.
- ▶ We know from extensive research in the U.S. that when bilingual students receive no support in their home language, it takes on average at least 7-10 years (or much longer) to be able to perform at the same level of monolingual kids who speak the school language.<sup>2</sup> In the Dutch education system, secondary school tracking takes place at the age of 11-12 years. This means that bilingual students are tested in Dutch at a time when they have not yet reached their full capacity in the Dutch language, which may partly explain their disproportionate absence in the higher education tracks.
- ▶ Encouragingly: in 2017 the Primary Education Council and the Ministry of Education published a report recommending the use of mother tongues for newly arrived migrant students in primary schools.

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<sup>2</sup> Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W.P. (2017). [Validating the power of bilingual schooling](#): Thirty-two years of large-scale, longitudinal research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37, 1-15.

## Polish Center for Education and Culture in Amsterdam

At the Mixtree café, a short walk from the hotel, we meet with Bozena Kopczynska, the director of a Polish weekend school.<sup>3</sup> Her main message was that weekend language schools are very important for the identity of multilingual children with a migrant background who find themselves in a different country. Some of the children may get confused if they are seen as Polish and their family speaks Polish, but they themselves are not fluent in the language. The school was started by parents in 2011 with 12 children. Today they have 80 children and a waiting list, teaching children from the age of 5 to 17 years. They do not only learn the Polish language, but also Polish culture, history, geography and the 1000 year relationship with the Netherlands. As Polish are the 5<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group in the Netherlands, and considering the considerable amount of trade between the two countries, one of the wishes is that the Polish language becomes an elective language course in high school. Another important relationship that could be developed is with regular primary or secondary schools, so Dutch teachers can learn more about their students with a Polish background, they could exchange Polish books and other learning materials.



Figure 1: Bozena Kopczynska, director of a Polish language and culture school in Amsterdam (left) and Afke Weltevrede (Risbo).

## University of Amsterdam Teacher Training Programme: Critical Multiculturalism

In the afternoon, we meet with Fadie Hanna and Inti Soeterik, teachers at the University of Amsterdam teacher training course ("universitaire Pabo or UPvA"). There are six University teacher training courses in the Netherlands. The difference with the regular teacher training course (called 'Pabo') is that at university, students engage in research and receive two bachelor degrees after 4 years: a Bachelor in Education (the regular teaching certificate that allows them to teach at the primary school level) and a Bachelor in Science (pedagogy). Fadie and Inti try to give their 40-50 students who come from mostly Dutch white backgrounds and are overwhelmingly female, a critical perspective on mainstream

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lokomotywa.nl/>

academic literature and popular sources of knowledge. They develop a deeper understanding of the structural inequalities in Dutch society that are organized around race, gender, class, sexual orientation and other hierarchies as well as all the intersections between these categories. Education is an important way these hierarchies are reproduced so it is critical for new teachers to be aware of these dynamics, their causes and how to resist them. One example that was discussed is that even though the Netherlands was one of the slave trading countries and much wealth was generated from the Dutch colonies in Africa, Asia and South-America, this part of Dutch history is not taught in schools in much detail.



Figure 2: Some of the literature used for the course.

We were shown one of the exercises they do with their students, to teach them about equity and equality. We all had to throw a crumbled up piece of paper in a waste basket. Some of us were seated right next to the basket, others were further away or could not even see the basket.

One of their activities is managing a Community of Practice with schools and research around Diversity ("Werkplaats Diversiteit"). They receive questions from schools and together they try to come up with answers and approaches. An upcoming topic is multilingualism, which is why they were interested in the AVIOR project.

The day was concluded with a wonderful Ethiopian dinner.

## Day 2: School Visits

### Visit to the St Janschool, Amsterdam

The St Janschool is situated in a bustling, ethnically mixed neighbourhood school in the Amsterdam-West district, providing primary education. The school is culturally and linguistically very diverse with pupils speaking 37 languages. The St Janschool is one of the two schools in the Netherlands who participated in the AVIOR project and has experimented with the multilingual



school materials. Parents from Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds were involved in the project.

Our visit started with a meeting with a parent and a parent liaison worker who had both worked on the materials. The meeting was held at a preschool (BSO Chassé<sup>4</sup>) close to the St. Janschool.

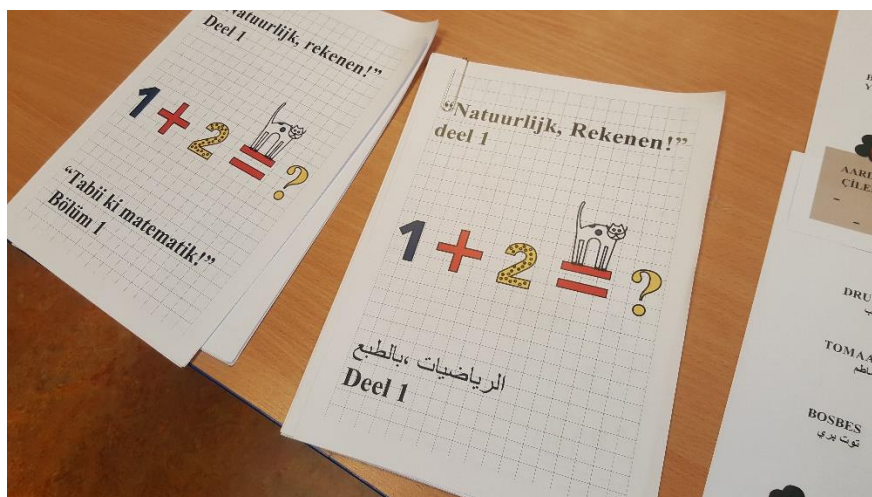


Figure 3. Bilingual mathematics material in Dutch/Turkish and Dutch/Arabic.

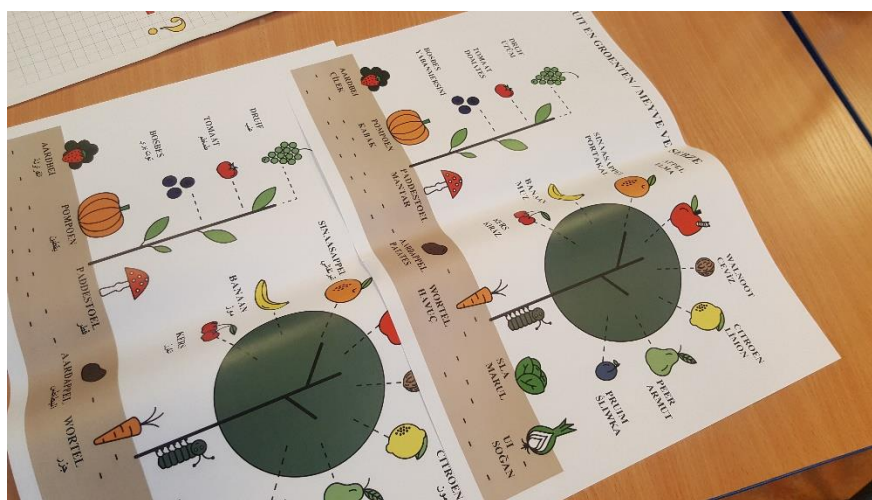


Figure 4. Posters with bilingual vocabulary in Dutch, Arabic and Turkish.

### Meeting with parents

One of the parents has a 7 year old daughter who attends the St Janschool. At home, she speaks a Berber language (one of the Moroccan local languages, which until fairly recently was not written) with her daughter. She was educated in Arabic and has been learning Dutch since coming to the Netherlands. Her daughter also attends Saturday school to learn

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.akros-amsterdam.nl/buitenschoolse-opvang-bso/chasse/>



Arabic. She emphasised that the bilingual material is a *great tool and opportunity for both children and parents* for several reasons:

- ▶ Use of mother tongue in education helps children see that their native language is not the problem. Instead, they learn to see it as a valuable tool which they learn how to use.
- ▶ Many migrant parents have difficulty with Dutch and do not have experience with the teaching methods used in the Netherlands. The Dutch/Arabic bilingual materials have helped her understand what her child is learning, which made it possible to explain exercises in Berber. She noted that the content was similar, but that the importance of language in subjects like mathematics can hinder understanding of the material itself.
- ▶ Because it is now possible for parents to get involved in the learning process (or they know at least what subjects and levels are being treated in class), the cooperation between teachers and parents has improved. Teachers and parents each have their own knowledge about the child and what their strong and weak points are. Through the material, they can combine their knowledge.
- ▶ She was able to use the three languages (Berber, Arabic and Dutch) in a way that her daughter would best understand a specific exercise, switching from one to the other depending on her daughter's level of understanding. This way, learning is completely adapted to the child by the parent and it does not involve extra work for the teacher.

The vice principal of the St Janschool, Dienneke Blikslager added that since the introduction of the material, she had seen this mother changing: she is really able to participate in her daughter's learning; she is more engaged with the school. According to Dienneke, cooperation and contact have improved among parents as well. Parents were very interested and even when they were physically not present, the transition between home languages and the school language went well.

### **Tour of the St. Janschool, Amsterdam**

At the St Janschool our group was given a tour by two Italian and English speaking bilingual pupils. The children were clearly feeling proud that they could use their language skills for this purpose.

After the guided tour, Dieneke gave a presentation about the St Janschool<sup>5</sup> and the ASKO,<sup>6</sup> the school board to which the St Janschool belongs. The St. Janschool is organised around three central values “*bewust, betrokken en betrouwbaar*”, which translates to “aware, engaged and reliable”, and the school’s slogan: “*Je mag zijn wie je bent en worden wat je kunt*” (You may be who you are and become what you can).

In the vision of the school, the bond between parents and child is the most important.

Language plays an important role in the relationship between parents and child which is why the school is currently involved in a pilot project to become a Language Friendly School. While they were already welcoming all languages, now it will become part of their official policy. The Language Friendly School is an initiative of the Rutu Foundation and has two goals: to create language friendly learning environments for all children worldwide and to ensure that no child is prohibited or punished for using his or her mother tongue at school.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 5: Sounds of animals in different languages (multilingual art at the St. Janschool.

One of the initiatives of the St Janschool is an after-school programme where multilingual children reflect on their languages through art. Another is a language buddy programme where older children help younger children, for instance by doing math in their mother tongue.

We were invited for a lunch at the St. Janschool where we could talk informally with teachers, including some of the teachers who were part of the AVIOR pilot programme.

### Visit to the Amsteltaal School, Amstelveen

After lunch, we visited the Amsteltaal School in Amstelveen, a city adjacent to Amsterdam and a popular place to live for high educated temporary migrant workers. Amsteltaal is a specialised (language) school for newly arrived migrant children who do not yet speak Dutch.<sup>8</sup> We were welcomed by the school principal who explained that when children are newly arrived, they have two options: they can go to a language school part-time while attending a regular school; or they can attend a full-time newcomer’s school, like Amsteltaal. During the first year Amsteltaal focuses on improving the Dutch language and estimating the

<sup>5</sup> <https://www2.askoscholen.nl/scholen/sintjan/Paginas/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.askoscholen.nl/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://languagefriendlyschool.org/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.amstelwijjs.nl/Amsteltaal>

cognitive level of the child. These are prioritised over subjects such as biology and geography. Reading in home languages is very much encouraged, since it can match the child's cognitive level and therefore not letting (lack of) proficiency in Dutch impede the cognitive progress.

In the past, the schools with the most experience with non-Dutch speaking children were generally situated in lower economic areas. Today, there are a lot of newly arrived children of highly educated parents (partly caused by Brexit) and when they go to schools situated in more prosperous areas, the schools may not know how to cope with non-Dutch speaking children.



Figure 6: Multilingual Welcome poster at the door of the Amsteltaal School.

Today, visitors are welcomed with a poster in many different languages (see picture). But Amsteltaal did not always welcome other languages. "A few years ago," the principal remembered, "we genuinely believed that just speaking Dutch really was better." She said she was ashamed to say that a few years ago they would ask parents who were conversing among each other in their own language, to either switch to Dutch or continue the conversation outside. However, she also admitted that this happened less frequently when the language spoken was English. But they have completely changed their approach. Now Amsteltaal views languages differently and acknowledges that prohibiting or punishing use of mother tongues creates a poor language environment in which children learn to speak both languages sub-optimally.

After the introduction we separated into two groups to interviewed teachers and parents.



## Interview with teachers

We interviewed Hanna Kuijs who is a teacher at Amsteltaal and Frederike Groothoff, who is the language coordinator of a group of schools in Amstelveen.

Frederike who was previously a school teacher at a newcomer school and is currently pursuing her PhD, showed various examples of how teachers can use the home languages as a way for children to both feel at home at school and to help them learn.



Figure 7: Frederike Groothof (left) and Hanna Kuijs

Hanna explained how she changed her mind last year when she attended a lecture by Prof. Jim Cummins on Identity Texts. The remark by a child who said that she was always given colouring pages and that she 'was more than a colouring page' really touched her soul, she said, because that is what she had been doing herself. When children came into the school and did not speak any Dutch, she didn't know

what to do with them, so she just handed them a colouring page or gave them too simple exercises at kindergarten level. She realized this was not the right message to give to 7-10 years old. So she changed her focus to "participation": ensuring that all children participate in the class in whatever way they could. Among others she developed a lesson where all children write about their life before they came to the Netherlands, their journey here and then their life in Amstelveen. The children may choose to do this in their mother tongue, in Dutch or whichever language they like and then they translate it to Dutch. Sometimes parents or other members of the community help with the translation. The benefit of this approach is first that, all children participate and secondly, that they learn Dutch. How is it possible that they learn Dutch by writing in this mother tongue? Hanna explained that she reads their story to the class in the Dutch translation, the authors may not understand all the words, but because it's their own story, they know the story, they know what comes in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. They are fully engaged, trying to understand and in this way they pick up a lot of Dutch. Much more at any rate, than if they were colouring a page.

The interview was videotaped and can be viewed [here](#) (in English with Dutch subtitles).

## Interview with parents

During the group interview with parents we spoke with three mothers whose children attended Amsteltaal. Two parents (A. and S.) were Turkish and the third mother (M) was from the Philippines and spoke English with her family. We asked about their experiences with schools in the Netherlands and with communication; to what extent parents engage in the education and the school; and discussed what the similarities and differences were between Italy and Estonia.

All three parents had different experiences with the Dutch school system. A. explained that their family who already lived in the Netherlands, knew about the Amsteltaal School and she had asked them to reserve a place for her child. M. did not know it was usual to register for school in advance and had no contacts in the Netherlands. She explored the possibilities of registering for an international school, but this turned out to be very expensive. Because learning Dutch was seen as helpful for integration, Amsteltaal was recommended by the local government. S. had already registered her child for a Dutch school, when she was called about the language school. In case enough pupils would register, they would be able to open a class for children from 4-6 years old. All three parents expressed their satisfaction with the school. They mostly appreciated the informative e-mails that were sent in both Dutch and English and the fact that speaking English was self-evident.

A. and M. followed the progress of their children (6 and 9 years old) but preferred not to intervene in the education. A did not want to give her son the idea that he was being followed too much, whereas M. felt that learning and homework should be reserved for school so that time at home would be primarily quality time. S. sometimes used books in Turkish with her daughter but emphasised that these were more like playing than like homework. She agreed that school work should remain at school.

All parents also agreed that contact between parents was very important. It helped them to discuss doubts about raising children and make them more secure in educating their own child as well as build their own social network. They regretted that there were not many opportunities for meeting/contacting parents provided by the school and also felt that expectations of contacting parents might be different in various cultures.

## Conclusions Study Visit

### Comparing schools in the Netherlands, Estonia and Italy

The teachers from Italy and Estonia worked at very different schools, which made for interesting reflections and exchanges. In Estonia, the teachers work at an international school with mostly children from expat families who may be there only for a few years or even a few months. As a result, they never have a real start of the school year, the whole year the groups are forming. A real challenge for the teachers.

In Italy, the teachers work at two different schools, both also with children from parents who come from all over the world, including as refugees. These are regular primary schools, but just like in the Estonian international school, children arrive during the whole year.

In the Estonian international school, the working language is English and a big difference between the Estonian school and the Italian and Dutch schools we visited, is that most parents speak English and are highly educated. The teachers could therefore communicate more easily with the parents. Communicating with parents some of whom cannot read or write and do not have a language in common with the teacher, is clearly a big challenge. The visit to the Dutch schools was an 'eye opener' for one of the Estonian teachers who was clearly up for the challenge and wanted to learn more.

### Changing the mindset

What is important is the mindset that learning does not have to take place in one particular language (such as Dutch or English). Children can learn in and through many different languages. The problem starts when a) parents are uncertain about which language to use with their children; b) teachers do not know how to communicate with parents and c) teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to use the multilingual talents of their students as a tool for learning.

### The school curriculum as a bridge between parents and schools

One of the conclusions that was drawn from our discussion about the AVIOR bilingual materials was that parents need a reason to work together: with the teachers and with each other. Developing the bilingual materials and using them provided this reason. At the St. Janschool the AVIOR materials led to the creation of a new community, with parents interacting more with each other and with the school.

### Boosting parents' confidence

As an additional benefit, the cooperation between parents and teachers involving home languages (with parents assuming the role of translators, providing additional support at home or at school) can make parents feel more confident: they know their languages, they are the experts now.

### **Facilitating parent-child interaction in the mother tongue by (pre)school**

Because very young children are not doing homework yet, parents can discover what their children are capable of by playing or reading to them in their own language. (Pre) schools could facilitate opportunities for parents to come to school for a while and play or work with the children.

### **Illiterate parents**

There can be differences between parents who received more formal education in their country of origin and are familiar with the information and skills taught at school, and those who received only a few years of education. The bilingual materials help non-formally educated parents participate and learn as well, making them more confident.