Policy recommendations to facilitate the transfer and adoption of the IN-EDU engagement programme as a tool for social inclusion and to build Media and Information Literacy.

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Preface

The IN-EDU Engagement Programme aims to develop and reinforce media literacy and critical thinking competences in upper secondary school teachers, students and parents from diverse backgrounds in order to empower them at community level. The Programme is the result of the scaling up of good practices, implemented at local level in different European countries. The following recommendations are based on lessons learned throughout the implementation and suggest ways in which the activities could be repeated, improved or developed further.

The IN-EDU Engagement Programme

The IN-EDU Engagement Programme comprises two components, as described below:

- Training for teachers, aimed at equipping them with the necessary knowledge, competences and tools required for supporting their pupils – and thus indirectly their families and local community – in growing as competent media users and aware citizens;

- Civic Hackathon, involving mixed groups of students, with the objective of planning and designing community campaigns/actions for raising awareness or improving critical thinking and media literacy. Depending on the countries' specificities, the hackathon might be dedicated to a given topic with implications for Media Literacy (social inclusion, non-discrimination, hate speech, fake news, etc.).

These two components derived by good practices that have proven to be effective at local and grass-roots level when planning and regularly implementing training activities to develop Media Literacy and Critical Thinking capacities for young people also by empowering and supporting teachers and parents in their educational role. Specifically:

Positive Messengers training, financed as part of the Project Coalition of Positive Messengers to Counter Online Hate Speech, co-funded by the RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND CITIZENSHIP PROGRAMME of the European Commission https://www.positivemessengers.net/en/.

Annual Hackathon promoted by Sofia Municipality, in support of Sofia's innovation strategy, it is an annual competition for students in secondary school on using the Internet for solving various learning problems http://sofia-da.eu/en/news/906-bg10xeu-hackathon.html.

Competitions run since 2012 in a Secondary School, in which students are paired with younger teammates from elementary school to work on concrete tasks using the Internet, reinforcing digital and problem-solving skills
http://sofia-da.eu/en/competitions/big-to-me/387-big-to-me.html.

Throughout the implementation of the IN-EDU project activities, partners have progressively enlarged the scope of the Programme from Media Literacy and Critical thinking to the broader concept of Media and Information Literacy. Indeed, the IN-EDU programme is also very focused on Media and Information Literacy education. The programme developed a Media and Information Literacy teacher training manual 'Fresh AIR: Analyse, Interpret, React'[1] by Divina Frau-Meigs, Irma Velez and Pascale Garreau. This manual is aimed for use by teachers of students age 15-19 and is a series of 10 lesson plans covering a range of MIL topics and building on work already done in this area by UNESCO and the Global Alliance for Partnership on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL).

Policy Recommendations

This section of the document provides recommendations for transferring the IN-EDU Engagement Programme and its practices addressed directly to the different categories of stakeholders and beneficiaries targeted by the programme itself. Recommendations are the result of grass-root level experimentations in different EU countries, namely Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia, and are meant to be a source of evidences on how the different key stakeholders can be activated and cooperate for the promotion of Media and Information Literacy and the improvement of related competences.

The final version of the document integrates the feedback collected on the IN-EDU Engagement Programme and related Recommendations by external experts during the Final International Conference of the project "SOCIAL HACKTIVISM ACROSS EUROPE - Media and Information Literacy Education for responsible and active citizenship" organised in Perugia and online on the 22nd June 2021. In particular, contributions have been collected by:
Debora Barletta, No Hate Speech Movement Italia
Laura Bononcini, Public Policy Director for Facebook Southern Europe
Divina Frau-Meigs, Savoir Devenir
Alton Grizzle, Programme Specialist in Communication and Information, UNESCO, Section for Media and Information Literacy and Media Development
Giuseppe Iacono, Italian Minister of Innovation and Digitization - Department for Digital Transformation
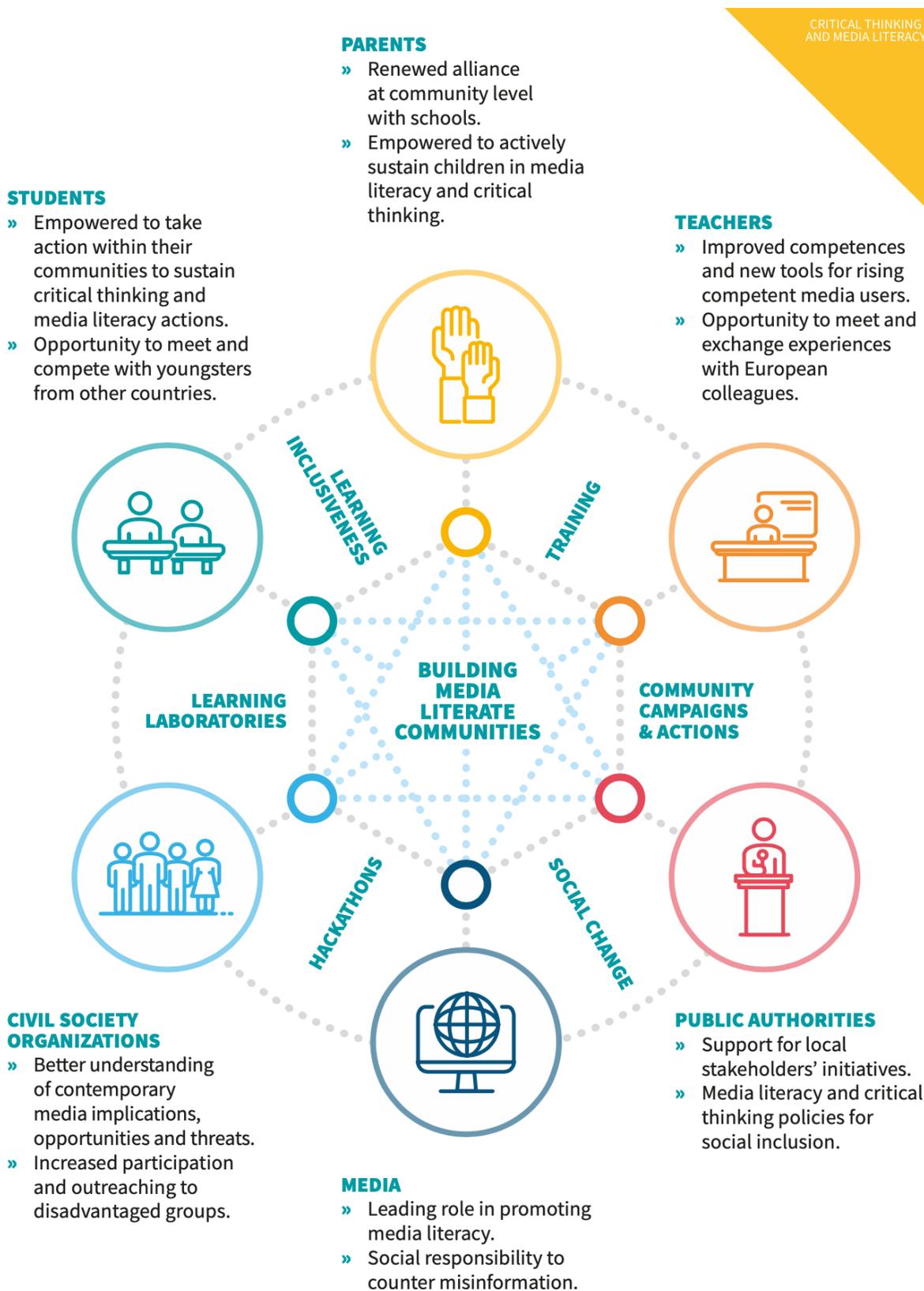**Arja Krauchenberg**, President of the Lifelong Learning Platform
Luigi Melpignano, Headmaster IISS di Molfetta (BA) and member of the Ministerial Scientific Committee on Citizenship Education
Sonja Merljak Zdovc, Editor of Slovenia's online newspaper for children ČASORIS
Enrico Tombesi, Fondazione Golinelli.

[1]https://in-eduproject.eu/library.html

Below it is provided a visualization of such stakeholders and beneficiaries, which has been used by project partners in their respective countries to invite and engage them to participate.

PARENTS
» Renewed alliance at community level with schools.
» Empowered to actively sustain children in media literacy and critical thinking.

STUDENTS
» Empowered to take action within their communities to sustain critical thinking and media literacy actions.
» Opportunity to meet and compete with youngsters from other countries.

TEACHERS
» Improved competences and new tools for rising competent media users.
» Opportunity to meet and exchange experiences with European colleagues.

LEARNING INCLUSIVENESS

TRAINING

LEARNING LABORATORIES

BUILDING MEDIA LITERATE COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY CAMPAIGNS & ACTIONS

HACKATHONS

SOCIAL CHANGE

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
» Better understanding of contemporary media implications, opportunities and threats.
» Increased participation and outreaching to disadvantaged groups.

MEDIA
» Leading role in promoting media literacy.
» Social responsibility to counter misinformation.

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES
» Support for local stakeholders' initiatives.
» Media literacy and critical thinking policies for social inclusion.

Students & Young people

How to engage students and young girls and boys around topic of critical thinking, citizenship and MIL?

- Think outside the box when designing the learning activities, preferably adopting a non-formal approach.

- Underline and strengthen the links between their daily activities in the community, online and offline, and the role they are and will be able to play as citizens in society.

- Involve all the target groups throughout process, starting from the planning phase, in the communication, implementation and evaluation both of the Civic Hackathons and awareness raising campaigns – it is something that is always said by policy makers and experts and we managed to do it (e.g. involvement of students in the design of the communication activities and in the production of promotional videos, communication coverage of the event by students of a lower secondary school who could not register as team for the Civic Hackathons, etc.).

- Co-design and co-create the activities with the direct involvement of students, also by assigning them an active and leadership role as for example being Jury members of the Civic Hackathons with the same responsibility and role of the experts.

- Organising activities online is not always the best method but it does have advantages, such as providing the opportunity to involve students directly in many aspects of the activities, e.g. in co-creating / co-evaluating the viability of online resources and tools to learning purposes.

- Refer to flexible ways of activating youngsters through multiple actions and tools, including a dialogue across generations and peer learning methodologies.

- Trust students and youngsters, in particular their capacity to innovate messages, learning processes and working methods.

- Value innovative learning environments and methods, such as the Civic Hackathons and the related campaigns. These can be used by schools, with appropriate assessment criteria or integrated within other extra-curricular activities.

- Include a moment of self-reflection to assess the skills acquired during the Hackathons and Student Camp, and provide certificates of participation, detailing the expected learning outcomes.

- Imagine and plan Civic Hackathons and Student Camps as systematically integrated into the school curriculum, also by promoting formal ways of recognition of the practices and its inclusion in school programs (e.g. PCTO Italy).

Promote Civic Hackathons as part of a wider projects, both in terms of duration (e.g. throughout the whole school year) and scope (e.g. as systematic component of the citizenship education curriculum) so to set the conditions for students to continuously overcome their limits and learn.

How to include students from groups at risk of social exclusion?

Contact and involve schools outside the capital/big cities, which usually serve students and families from rural areas and remote regions. As far as possible, use their facilities to host teachers' training and seminars to let their students and teachers feel "where things happen". Geographical distance from the main centres of sociality has been reported to partners as a factor increasing the risk of exclusion in particular in the case of Umbria in Italy which has slow means of transportation/ connection within the region. The efficacy of the blended structure of the hackathons – online and offline – is able to reduce such distances and increase the participation of teaching staff and youngsters in extra-curricular activities such as the ones proposed by IN-EDU.

Engage in the teachers' training support teaching staff, usually working with students with Special Educational Needs. This might facilitate the involvement of students at risk of social exclusion, since they usually have a closer relationship with their reference teachers.

If relevant and available, partner with educational authorities responsible for social inclusion as it is the case in Italy where ITET Aldo Capitini is the regional referent school for social inclusion responsible for supporting the other schools in be better equipped to contrast the risks of social exclusion and educational poverty.

Underline the role of hacktivism as change maker for excellence and promote the idea of hacktivism for all as everybody can be a change maker and change is a common effort rather than the result of super human beings.

Plan Civic Hackathons and International student camps, functional to the development and reinforcement of non-formal and transversal competences, having in mind the diverse and individual learning needs.

Teachers & Educators

How to empower teachers and educators for supporting MIL, critical thinking and citizenship?

◗ Refer to flexible ways of activating youngsters through multiple actions and tools, including a dialogue across generations and peer learning methodologies (e.g. Cliccando positivo project).

◗ Build teachers' confidence with the digital tools and media, including for instance social networks that are often not used or banned from classrooms not just for pedagogical choices but also to avoid possible lack of competences (usually young people are perceived as much more capable of using such tools even though during trainings it often emerges that their use is limited in terms of possibilities provided by the platforms/tools and not fully aware).

◗ While promoting MIL as a transversal element to be integrated into the school curriculum, allow and facilitate teachers in treating it, at least for the time being, as a separate topic. At an initial stage it can be easier and lower barriers towards the complexity of the topic.

◗ Re-shape teachers' role in the classroom and in the school institution as Agents of Change, by acquiring and reinforcing their abilities to act as students' tutor and learning process facilitator, rather than exclusively being focused on "traditional" ways of designing and organising teaching and learning (Civic Hackathons have proven to be an effective environment where teachers experimented their role of tutors, by supporting students in designing and creating their own learning environment and expected product at the end of the competition).

◗ Train teachers and invest in their Continuous Professional Development in order to broaden their competence development, especially in building meaningful learning experiences in different environments (both off and online) appropriate to learners' needs for today's and the future global society (Media and Information Literacy can be either a new specific subject itself or a transversal approach adopted for the different school subjects).

◗ Promote and value teachers' flexibility and adaptability to different and innovative learning methods, also in a disruptive way as the Online Civic Hackathons have demonstrated, having in mind the benefit and safety of all learners, especially when accessing digital resources, sharing online contents, participating in social media.

◗ Apply a blended learning model combining in person and online activities, as appropriate to the age and context of the learners and intended learning outcomes (e.g. more than one approach to the learning process, school site and distance learning environments, or different learning tools that can be digital and non-digital).

🔑 Encourage reflection and experiment with transversally assessing MIL, using different tools and methods.

🔑 Give certificates showing the skills acquired or reinforced by teachers/mentors in supporting students/pupils during the design and implementation of communication campaign activities as those completed during the civic hackathons. This can serve as a reference for teachers/mentors and an award for their additional work among busy regular activities at school.

🔑 Do not oversimplify the complexity of Media and Information Literacy giving an illusion to teachers and students, but rather give account of such complexity (e.g. risks and opportunities) in the trainings and non-formal activities for an effective empowerment of the participants both in terms of employability in the digital word and citizenship.

How to take advantage of teachers' professionalism and commitment?

🔑 Build alliances among teachers of different school subjects through Media and Information Literacy as either a new specific subject itself or a transversal approach adopted for the different school subjects (Civic Hackathons or similar "edutainment" approaches are effective also for improving cooperation and reliable relationships among teachers and other educational staff).

🔑 Engage teachers and make them feel valued not only as knowledge recipients but also as a source of inspiration for students, for their capacity to critically reflect, to add a different point of view, to systematise students' learning outcomes. This implies also the systematic introduction of self-reflection practices among teachers themselves and among them and students, as the Feedback sessions after the Civic Hackathons and the related Awareness Raising Campaigns have shown.

🔑 Enhance the role of teachers as facilitators in the learning processes, so as to strengthen their competences and to make teaching professions more attractive; this, also by reinforcing the pedagogical value of innovative approaches which bring an added value to the expected learning outcomes defined by the education Policies at National level.

🔑 Involve teachers in the design of the learning experience behind the Civic Hackathons or International Student Camp, setting the framework of the experience and checking the prerequisites. This is important when proposing creative and self-learning activities to students as a guarantee to the achievement of the expected learning outcomes [edu-Hackathon].

🔑 Promote the value dimension of Media and Information Literacy, which embraces among others
inclusion, freedom of expression, care for privacy, diversity.

Parents & families

The situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic has complicated the implementation of the project activities more directly targeting parents and families. Whereas with students and teachers it was possible to adapt and transfer the majority of activities online, this was not so easy in the case of parents and families for a variety of reasons – including over exposition to online meetings, lack of digital tools or competences, etc. As a result, activities were cancelled as it was impossible to organise them in-person.

How to facilitate the engagement and cooperation of parents and families?

 Enhance forms of mutual learning between students and their families, providing suggestions to students on how to report and transfer the acquired knowledge at home. For instance, selecting adults as target of possible communication campaigns and conducting a preliminary test or need analysis with the families).

Organise public events in which parents and families are invited to participate, both in the case of educational non-formal initiatives (e.g. the Civic Hackathons) and in occasions planned in order to have the work and commitment of students to MIL (e.g. implementation of awareness-raising campaigns) recognised and enhanced within the whole community (e.g. final events, conferences, etc.).

 Provide non formal learning activities on MIL also at the workplaces, by involving companies and other employers, since the topic of online hate speech, disinformation and fake news, etc. is affecting the society as a whole. Employers should be more active in promoting learning initiatives and informal meetings with their employees also in light of their Corporate Social Responsibility and UN Global Compact on SDGs (see National Recommendation in Italy, from the Experts' Group of the Ministry of Innovation and Digitalisation). Trained and empowered teachers could become facilitators for such activities.

Public authorities (PAs) and scholastic / educational authorities

What role for PAs and educational authorities in promoting MIL, critical thinking and active citizenship?

 Invest in ad hoc training of competent PAs for making sure that MIL is well understood and promoted, in its complexity.

 Ask for their promotion of activism at grassroots level and for providing resources for activities (funds, time with experts, governance framework, etc.). To facilitate the inclusion of students from diverse groups, also at risk of social exclusion, authorities can decide to dedicate part of the structural funds or the NextGenerationEU for investments in modern equipment and high-quality connectivity.

▶ Campaign to create space for change at community level through the cooperation of all the actors involved, rather than imposing change, as only way to achieve a change that is good for everybody.

▶ Involve PAs as institutional partners in the promotion of non-formal learning activities aimed at raising MIL competences in schools (both for students and teachers) as a way to reach out to a wider and more diversified group of schools but also ensuring them a wider visibility within local communities and various stakeholders. By doing so, PAs can contribute to make the practices more inclusive and become agent of innovation in terms of involvement of young people at risk of social exclusion at local level as envisaged by policies at European level (e.g. Council of Europe).

▶ Partner with institutions that implement and recognise teachers' training according to the national school system (e.g. assigning credits for continuous professional development or for career progression) so to make the training opportunities more appealing and enlarge the capacity of the training offer to reach out to the expected beneficiaries and target groups.

▶ Ask local PAs to adopt the winning campaigns or projects in order to realise them in full partnership and also favour their dissemination.

▶ Advocate for recognition and definition of non-formal learning in the different countries, as it has proven its importance and relevance in stimulating cooperation among the various target groups (teachers, students, parents and families, media, etc.).

▶ Looking at MIL as a lifelong learning process, advocate for MIL becoming a transversal concept also in the school curriculum.

▶ Support PAs as employers in planning and implementing non-formal learning activities on MIL also among their staff, since the topic of online hate speech, disinformation and fake news, etc. is affecting the society as a whole.

▶ Advocate for financial awards for students' ideas, which has proven to be a great incentive for them to test their skills and knowledge, to learn how to deal with budgets and to implement real project in real situations.

▶ Engage competent authorities in the definition of the framework and conditions when organising a Hackathon, to strengthen its educational value.

▶ Advocate for non-formal practices as the Civic Hackathons and the International student camp to be up-scaled at system level with the support of PAs.

Civil Society Organizations

*How to involve CSOs and improve cooperation in the promotion of critical thinking, citizenship and MIL?*

🔑 Build or reinforce networks among activists against hate speech (e.g. lie detectors, positive messengers, etc.) by contacting and regularly exchange information with organizations and stakeholders that operate at local, national and European level.

🔑 Include representatives and CSOs from as many sectors and areas of activities as possible, each of them bringing in the perspective of the social cause they support or promote – and underline how critical thinking and MIL can serve the purpose of their action (e.g. as planned and done in the International Student Camp). This it can facilitate new forms of cooperation among organizations usually not working together and strengthen the capacity to impact on MIL and citizenship competences of the students.

🔑 Select relevant visible and recognizable persons at local or national level to be explicitly invited as role models during the non-formal learning activities proposed both to teachers and students. Their involvement is also functional to further transfer and disseminate the training and learning practices. In the case of the IN-EDU Engagement Plan implemented in Italy the followings, among others, have contributed to the activities: e.g. Isabella Borrelli, an intersectional hacktivist; Lorenzo Bartolucci, a young boy with a personal story of being bullied; or Odiare non è uno sport, a national project to fight hate speech in sport.

🔑 Ask local CSOs to adopt the winning campaigns or projects in order to realise them in full partnership and also favour their dissemination.

🔑 Foster their international cooperation for developing an ever richer set of practices for promoting MIL education at all levels.

🔑 Empower CSOs to organize ad hoc training addressed to PAs for making sure that MIL is well understood and promoted, which in turn could facilitate the public support to initiatives such as the Civic Hackathons and the International Student Camp.

Media

How to engage with media and cooperate with journalists?

🔑 Identify and contact local and national media in the design, implementation and assessment of the non-formal learning activities – e.g. providing resources and inspirational contents, participating as Jury members in the Hackathons, etc. Media could also promote the ideas behind the events (of social inclusion, Media Literacy and Critical Thinking), explaining the importance of such events and promoting a more effective form of dialogue/ engagement.

- Propose to the National Association of Journalists to include in their training credits, some specific for learning how to combat hate speech, how to use fair language, how to verify the sources of information.

- Ask to be involved in media and journalism festivals for presenting the results of teachers and students training on MIL, as in the case of the awareness-raising campaigns produced by the winning teams of the Hackathons.

- Agree on possible cooperation of the students with local media and journalists as award for those participating in specific non-formal activities.

- Invest on Media literacy competences of Media, underlining the impact their action can have on readers or listeners (e.g. reaction to the way information is published) despite the time and economic pressure they are subject to.
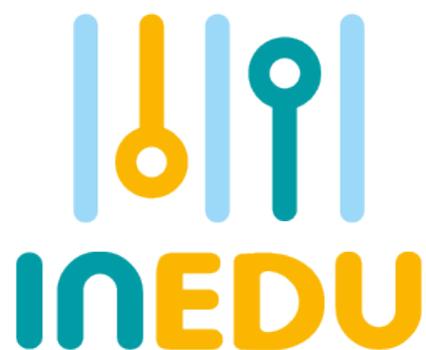
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