

Building Learning Communities for Peace

Action Research Reports from Croatia, Greece, Sweden and the UK



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1. Introduction

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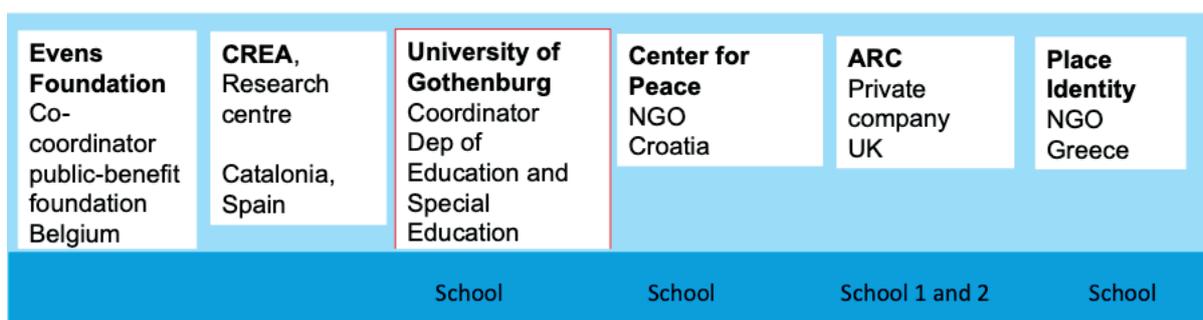
This report gathers the processes and results of the action research projects that took place within the framework of Learning Communities for Peace, a European project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union as a Strategic Partnership Project (2016-1-SE01-KA201-022164) and the Evens Foundation. The project was launched in November 2016, with the first partners' meeting in Sweden, and lasted until 31 August 2019.

The six project partners (Belgium, Sweden, Croatia, Greece, UK and Spain) that formed a consortium to run the project offered a combination of unique expertise in peace education and community-building strategies, and in research, higher education and practice. Additional funding was asked for three subcontractors (an evaluator, a graphic designer and a web-developer). Four project partners (Sweden, Croatia, Greece and the UK), the so-called operational partners, searched for a pilot school to cooperate with. As the UK found two schools, a total of five primary schools were linked to the project.

Overview of the different organisations

- Six project partners
- Three subcontractors
- Five pilot schools (1 in Greece, 1 in Croatia, 2 in the United Kingdom and 1 in Sweden)
- Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) – representing the EU Commission (Swedish National Agency)
- Local project support by the University of Gothenburg as project coordinator (project administrative officer, international centre support)

Consortium



Subcontractors



The Evens Foundation, a European public-benefit foundation operating since 1996, has offices in Antwerp (Belgium), Paris and Warsaw. For many years, it has initiated and supported projects within the field of peace education and conflict management. It has strong competences in organizing events, writing applications and building networks. Besides being one of the project partners, it had a special role as co-funder of the work in the pilot schools, the participation of the pilot schools in the training in Zadar and the work conducted by the subcontractors.

CREA – Community of Research on Excellence for All, is a multidisciplinary research group that was established in 1991, at the University of Barcelona. They regard themselves as being part of an international scientific community. They aim at working with communities, drawing on scientific excellence. In a changing society, they take a clear stance on overcoming inequalities, drawing on the contributions from research, and ensure that the scientific and human competence that are available are accessible to all.

The University of Gothenburg is a state-funded university. At the Department of Education and Special Education, several members of staff have expertise in conflict management at school. They are knowledgeable about prevailing conflict management/transformation theories, have experience and competence in managing and transforming conflicts that occur in daily life at school, and in working in international contexts.

The Center for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights – Osijek (Croatia) is an NGO founded in 1992. It promotes sustainable peace and strengthening non-violence culture in a war-affected region. It has extensive experience of working with post-conflict or post-war education in schools and the surrounding community.

ARC Resolutions Ltd (UK) is a company that supports people and organizations to work with societal and work-place-related conflicts. It offers municipalities, employers and organizations in the education sector mediation, conflict coaching and strengthening approaches.

Place Identity GR is a small NGO, founded in Athens in 2013, which designs and implements innovative social and political projects in neighbourhoods, cities and at regional and national level, with a focus on citizenship and participation. Several employees have expertise in using digital tools and designing a web-based educational toolbox.

1.1. Aims

The Learning Communities for Peace project aimed to address the rise of incidents of conflict in school settings as a consequence of changing European realities. In addition, it sought to shift the trend away from thinking in terms of universal, pan-European solutions and acknowledge the uniqueness of each and every school context.

The project was conceived as a European project situated in four sites of tension involving different partners working alongside each other in different realities but sharing the same overall goal of improving relationships and bolstering togetherness within school communities, taking a bottom-up approach. The essence of the project lies in the assumption of each setting's uniqueness and in the belief that shared ownership is crucial. This implies that there are no ready-made strategies, tools and methods that can be implemented to achieve the overall project goal. It also means that the overall goal is redefined locally to correspond to the lived reality in each setting.

The project focused on helping the participating schools to build their own unique peace-building strategies and become hubs for peace within their communities. The operational work steered by five primary schools in Croatia, Greece, Sweden and the UK in close collaboration with the partners, forms the core of the project. This phase of operational work, which lasted a school year on average, was monitored by researchers from the University of Cambridge. In each case, a specific context analysis and community consultation process was carried out, with the aim of creating context-specific projects. This process was based on an ongoing and responsive Action Research methodology allowing for successive cycles of reflection, planning, action, and observations to be undertaken by the pilot schools.

After this experience, the project partners worked together to write the present action research report on the operational work conducted with the schools, and developed an online toolkit and a workshop (online and offline) to share the project experience with policymakers and other schools that have an interest in becoming a Learning Community for Peace. In addition, the impact evaluation report was finalised.

The principles we identified as the core of the project were:

- Local settings are unique
- School communities need to develop their own unique peace-building and conflict transformation strategies.
- The process should be co-designed with the school and its community in order to share ownership.
- Use of action research as a reflective and participatory approach in which the process is more important than the results.
- Establishing egalitarian and inclusive dialogue.

In line with the conceptualisation of the Learning Communities for Peace project, we noticed that the research took place at several levels.

First, the project consortium wanted **to examine their assumptions and understand whether and under which circumstances this way of working is feasible, realistic and efficient.**

Secondly, each operational partner working with a school or several schools was constantly examining their own actions (project partner actions) to understand **how they could best support the school(s) to operate as a Learning Community for Peace (LCP).**

Thirdly, **each of the schools involved** in the project defined the main challenge their school faces when it comes to bolstering togetherness in the (wider) school community, subsequently formulating the **aim and actions (pilot school actions) of their own research**.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the process, our experiences of the process and the results of the different school projects in the LCP project.

Background & motivation

Although it is widely accepted that schools should be open and inclusive to the wider school community so as to prevent violence and improve living together, in reality they are often hesitant to engage fully with the community. First, schools and teachers do not consider it their priority as they already face a lot of pressure from different sides (government, inspection, parents etc.). Community projects like LCP are considered a luxury - mostly because they are understood as an add-on project.

Secondly, in light of the current context in Europe – the influx of refugees, threats associated with terrorism and radicalisation, structural inequality, dysfunctional integration policies, divisions in post-war societies – traditional approaches to peace education and conflict transformation seem to fall short of proposing adequate strategies for confronting rising tensions and fear of difference in schools and their surrounding communities. Peace education and conflict management programmes to date have worked on the assumption of largely peaceful (though sometimes unjust) European societies, without taking into account lived experiences of armed conflict, increased religious and cultural diversity, fear of terror, and forced migration. At the same time, many of these strategies and tools are developed and proposed by actors external to the school. This adds up to a lack of ownership or even feelings of frustration at school level.

Thirdly, there is often a lack of reflection and concrete support for schools to take up an active role as a hub for peace in their communities at the policy level. It is not considered the first task of a school.

All this can lead to a double renunciation: families and the wider community do not get involved, considering the conditions of dialogue as ‘token participation’, while schools, unable to establish productive dialogue with the community, withdraw from and even ‘resist’ the community. The result is a further erosion of trust, mutuality, exchange and participation. The impact on schools and the community is keenly felt.

We believe that the current socio-political environment calls for different responses. The school remains one of the few places in a society where people of different backgrounds come together and can learn to live together. However, it seems particularly important that schools develop their own strategies and narratives to deal with complexity (structural inequality, cultural differences, unequal distribution of power, need for extra resources, etc) and embrace controversy whilst fostering mutual respect within both the school and the wider community.

With this project, we wanted to experiment with and examine an alternative, bottom-up approach to foster inclusion and social cohesion, adapted to different European realities, building on the wisdom present in the (wider) school community. In doing so, we wanted to examine our assumptions, understand whether and under which circumstances this way of working is feasible, realistic and efficient, how it relates to the teaching/learning processes and what is transferable.

In short, can, and if yes, how can schools and the communities surrounding them engage in the kind of sustained dialogue, integration and peacebuilding that is so urgently needed?

In this report, we have tried to grasp what happened at the three different levels (project consortium, project partners' actions and pilot school actions) and how this reshaped our initial assumptions. The first part of the report, written from a European perspective, explains the project and its overall principles. The following chapters outline the different processes that took place in the partner organisations and the pilot schools. The conclusion then re-examines the initial project assumptions and proposes a framework of conditions that form a necessary component of the LCP approach.

1.2. Literature overview

In this section, we examine a number of studies that focus on *collective experiences of school life*, and that analyse the importance of involving the community in the school with the aim of preventing conflicts and ensuring cohesive and positive school climates.

While most studies on conflict prevention and school climate focus on principals' leadership and teacher relationships (Blasé & Kirby, 2008), community participation has been studied to a lesser extent. Without explicitly focusing on the role of the community, several scholars highlight the collective nature of the school climate, as it relates to internal and external factors that shape individual, but especially collective experiences of school life (Anderson, 1982; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). A positive and safe school climate has been linked to strong collaborative communities, and the connection between community participation and conflict prevention has been examined from both a social and academic perspective (Oliver, Soler, & Flecha, 2009; Oliver, 2014; Puigvert, 2014).

A second aspect endorsed by research evidence is the fact of having *free school choices*. In many countries, caretakers have a certain amount of freedom to choose the best school for their children (e.g. Bellfield & Levin, 2015). Consequently, families can live, work and go to schools in different geographic areas. How does that influence the sense of belonging to a particular community? What is the nature of the relationships between families with children in a school when they do not live together in the same neighbourhood (extended community?) According to the research, the sense of belonging to a community is a primary element in explaining why groups of individuals come together and participate in their community (including school participation) to create a better environment (a better neighbourhood, with more services for the residents, etc). People external to that geographic area or neighbourhood may get engaged when there is a strong social movement open to everyone. However, the research also notes situations in which there is a lack of 'community or group belonging'. In those cases, creating a participative movement may be more difficult. 'Free school choices' may lead to both types of situations, depending on whether the members of a particular community or group are moving together, or not. Research also suggests the need to find or establish common goals, shared by all members of the group, in order to create a sense of 'community belonging', which is positively associated to effective involvement.

A third aspect highlighted by the literature is *diversity*. Schools are not isolated places. Societal tensions and difficulties can 'enter' the school at any time. How to deal constructively with such situations? Is reaching out to the wider community a good strategy? According to the literature, diversity is usually associated with high performance and better results in the field of education (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013). In some cases, diversity is considered a factor of complexity that creates difficulties for teachers. It is common for teachers to complain that they are not ready or prepared to manage high-diversity classrooms or schools. However, research suggests that the problem in such cases is either lack of resources, or lack of professional training to familiarise teachers with resources or practices validated by research as effective in dealing with diversity. The literature also points out that diversity injects different views, referents and ways to do things, which is enriching in many different ways.

A fourth aspect is the *challenges that schools face* in our current societies. When it comes to the inclusion and integration process, they heavily depend on the support of parents and community agents. We are living in a globalised world. There are big movements of population (migration and refugees) for economic, political and other reasons (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For schools, this poses challenges: how do you integrate newcomers in the school; deal with different curriculum standards; work with families from different cultural communities; build a sense of school community and belonging; integrate children who may have been affected or even traumatized by war, and deal with conflict and possible violence in all their different forms?

Payne & Kaba (2001) show that, to establish meaningful partnerships between school staff and communities, it helps to set common goals that lead to changes needed in the school. In the last decades, school engagement, belonging and acceptance have become areas of growing attention, especially in relation to the most vulnerable students (Chiu, Pong, Mori & Chow, 2012). In this regard, Hargreaves et al. have emphasized the need to turn schools into better communities of caring and support (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996).

The importance of family in education has traditionally been a topic of much interest in educational research. However, only recently have studies on school participation adopted a broader approach that includes community involvement. Studies have highlighted the fact that, when schools count on different community members to increase and diversify interactions, students' development is improved (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Rogoff, Goodman Turkanis & Bartlett, 2001). A need to broaden the notion of educational participation has been identified since the 1960s in the American context, putting the focus on grassroot initiatives to build parent and community leadership, with the objective of improving low-performing schools in disadvantaged areas (Mediratta, Fruchter & Lewis, 2002). However, different scholars have pointed out the limitations of some community organizing experiences. As an example, community organizers and other professionals sometimes assume excessively central roles in their interventions, establishing relations based on clientelism with the community and setting exogenous agendas (Anyon, 2005; Warren, 2005).

The fifth aspect refers to *cumulative knowledge*. Besides being supportive (or not) of efforts made by the school, community stakeholders also offer added knowledge. Schools must provide access to the best knowledge resources available. That means implementing an inclusive curriculum, drawing on high-standard criteria (i.e. using standards that are universal accepted, contributions drawing on research, etc).

Taking into account this theoretical foundation, the Learning Community for Peace (LCP) approach is adapted from Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). It involves a learning community made up of different stakeholders (in the case of a school: pupils, staff, parents, community actors) taking a dialogic and participatory approach to bring about positive change in ways that are of value to the stakeholders.

Taking a bottom-up approach, we assumed that the LCP approach would enable stakeholders to develop their own unique strategy for peacebuilding using the (theoretical) LCP concept and the binary 'together and apart' principle to start a process of reflection. As mentioned earlier, more traditional peace education programmes usually rely on introducing isolated educational tools or implementing external programmes. The LCP model engages stakeholders in a learning community to create their own action plan from a range of options and ideas introduced by their own school community and the partners. The participating school communities are also supposed to lead and steer the implementation and evaluation of this plan. Ideally, the groups in each school are diverse in ways that reflect the wider community (as a condition of participation). This means that the process of engagement becomes as important as the concrete outcomes of the action plan to reach the overall project goal: improving relationships and bolstering togetherness within the (wider) school communities.

1.3. Methodology and action plan

As a first step, a **Joint Staff Training** (training-for-trainers) was organized for the project partners to discuss the LCP application, detail the LCP approach together, get to know each other, and introduce and train each other in the participants' respective methods and approaches. Some of the partners knew each other to some extent from other projects, but most of the members of the organizations were completely new to each other. For this start-up week, each project partner sent three people, giving a total of 18 people. Nearly all stayed in the same apartment hotel, which meant that the work of getting to know each other continued in the evenings. It was an intensive week that became very important for the project. During this week, we educated each other and got to know each other's skills and organisations. Each organization and person was given time in the schedule where they lectured or led a workshop based on how their own competence could be useful during the LCP project. The solid and broad knowledge available in the room during the week with regard to co-creative processes, peace-work, conflict management and school development was striking, as was the knowledge and experience that several organisations had of participating in and running EU projects.

This week both broadened the partners' perspectives and strengthened their capacities to promote the concept of learning communities for peace and support schools in creating such environments. We built trust a feeling of community in the consortium. In brief, the joint staff training has been crucial for the success of the project.

The second phase consisted of **Identifying Primary Schools** motivated to join the project as pilot schools, with a view to improve their school climate as well as to explore the role a school can play in improving 'living together' in the wider school community.

Then, the four operational partners each carried out a **Context Analysis** in close consultation with the pilot schools. Key questions in the initial stage of the project in each school included:

- How are people currently experiencing and responding to violence in schools and communities, and promoting social cohesion, peacebuilding and reconciliation?
- What are the areas in need of development?
- What are the cultural sensitivities and practical constraints on developing initiatives such as LCP amongst different stakeholders in schools and their associated communities?

This initial research also contributed to identifying key (community) actors/people for involvement in the next stage of the project. The context analyses (which can be found in the operational partners' reports, and vary in length and content) have been used to inform the steps to be taken to prepare implementation of one or more actions.

This phase concluded with the preparation and launch of the implementation phase in the following school year. Delegates of the five pilot schools attended a two-day European training, *European Learning Communities for Peace Lab*. We considered the organisation of this training involving school representatives to be crucial for the project's success. First, it allowed the partners to introduce the (theoretical) LCP approach and get direct feedback from the main stakeholders. It also offered the schools a platform to introduce and share successful strategies and actions they already implement, as well as questions/issues they are facing with the other pilot schools, thus creating a European Community of Practice. During the workshop, the schools were also introduced to Action Research, and, with activities to discuss challenges the schools were facing, the process of identifying an area of improvement to focus on had already started. An additional aim of the European training for the pilot schools was for them to meet each other.

After being introduced to the LCP approach during the workshop, the school representatives worked with the respective operational partners to **Develop an Action Plan** for their school after returning home from the workshop. The LCP project had intended to use the results of the baseline data collection carried out by the University of Cambridge evaluators to support the first phase of the action research projects.

All operational partners worked through the following phases of an action research project:

1. Reflection: identifying challenges/areas for change/improvement
2. Action plan
3. Implementation of actions
4. Observation and data collection
5. Interpretation of the data and reflection on a new action research cycle

At several of the operational sites, it was the project partners who collected feedback in relations to the actions. The delegates from the pilot schools contributed with feedback data. In Croatia, the teachers reported on the implemented actions. All operational partners created shared ownership and used egalitarian dialogue in their interaction with the pilot schools. Through the **Action Research** carried out in the different sites, the project schools and the operational partners explored different ways for the school to take up this role. In this phase the operational partners **assisted the pilot schools** in their transformation to an LCP.

Each online and offline **European partner meeting** functioned as a platform for sharing, reflection and learning along the way.

The LCP project was designed in such a way that each operational project partner could carry out this school development project and adapt it to the specific context of their pilot school. The focus of our project was on testing and exploring the LCP process in different contexts rather than comparing processes. We felt that the project partners would benefit from an exchange of unique experiences and expertise in order to better understand which conditions need to be fulfilled so as to build a successful LCP, acknowledging the ability of schools and teachers to create the change that is so urgently needed. We felt that using a participatory approach (i.e. action research) – being practitioner-centred in a specific context – to define the focus, to plan and implement the actions and to monitor the process, was completely in line with the main LCP principles described above (bottom-up approach involving the school community to co-design, co-construct and co-determine in developing unique peacebuilding strategies).

In addition, we believed the transnational scope would allow the partner organisations to take different contexts into consideration when drawing conclusions (arrival, Greece; post-conflict, Croatia; settling, Sweden & UK).

Based on the learnings of the project, we hoped to be able to develop and propose a set of transferable principles and processes and an inspirational toolkit to help schools to establish and sustain an LCP.

We also believed that carrying out this project transnationally would facilitate the sharing of practices, offer the schools a broader and culturally sensitive set of tools, strategies and practices to test and implement throughout the process, and strengthening the capacities of the partner organisations to promote the concept and practice of Learning Communities for Peace.

As it turned out, the first dimension of the transnational scope of the project – the possibility of testing it in different contexts, using an action research perspective – proved to be the most important one. It helped us to understand what ‘unique’ really means, how this complicates the process, and what remain as the essential characteristics of the LCP approach.

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3. Action Research in the UK

Tim Archer & Dave Warren

3.1. Research context

This report focuses on the UK context and the two schools that volunteered to be part of the LCP project.

Unlike in other contexts in the LCP project, two schools were selected in the UK, as their applications were evenly matched, as well as to protect the project if one school withdrew. Selecting two schools also provided a way to compare the unique approaches of two different schools within a similar context. Both schools approached the project differently and their initial research and action plan had different focuses. However, over successive cycles of action research, both schools came to focus on similar parent-targeted social media interventions. This might show a commonality of needs in the UK context, but also demonstrate the reality of these types of project within the UK schooling system, where the demands on teachers to meet standardized targets overrides other ‘non-essential’ aspirations. These reflections will be discussed in further detail in this report.

3.1.1. School Contexts in England

Primary education in the UK (5-11 years) is overseen by the government, with the Department for Education having responsibility for an increasingly fragmented landscape of educational provision. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have slightly different arrangements managed by their devolved governments.

Local authorities in England have a responsibility for public education and state-funded schools. In terms of choice, parents can elect to have their children educated by “regular attendance at school or otherwise”, which has led to a wide variety of provision.

State-funded schools (93% of students) are financed by local authorities and include:

- Academies – following their inception in 1997, start-up funding for academies came from private sources (private businesses, universities, charities, etc). Continuing funding comes from central government and academies remain free from local authority control. Newer academy ‘converter’ schools are existing schools that opt for academy status.
- Community Schools – the local authority employs staff and owns the land, while the school controls admissions.
- Free Schools are set up by a variety of people and organizations where there is a local need. They are free to attend and are non-selective.
- Foundation Schools are schools where the governing body or charity own infrastructure, employ staff and control admissions.
- Voluntary Aided Schools – faith and non-denominational schools have capital spending funded by a charitable foundation, which employs staff and sets admission criteria. The state funds day-to-day expenditure.

- Voluntary Controlled Schools – almost all faith schools, where the land and buildings are owned by a charitable foundation, but staff are employed by the local authority, which also controls admissions.

Independent schools (7% students) are fee-paying schools that are free from local authority control and funding, although they must follow a national curriculum and their teachers must have recognized teaching qualifications.

Elective Home Education gives parents the option to teach their children at home, without compliance to the national curriculum or with parents (or their nominees) having to attain teaching qualifications.

The two schools that took part in the UK LCP project were:

Pilot school 1: St Johns Church School, Riseholme, Peterborough PE2 5SP, a community school that became an academy converter during the LCP project.

Pilot school 2: Ravensthorpe Primary School, Brigstock Ct, Peterborough PE3 7NB, a voluntary aided faith school.

Both schools are situated in the same major metropolitan city (Peterborough) located in the east of England. The city is an industrial hub and has had a long history of migrant populations. Since the 1950s, Peterborough has seen an influx of migrant and refugee populations, placed within its catchment area (mainly between 2001 and 2011). The UK partner focused the selection of schools in Peterborough for a number of reasons, including: ARC staff had previous experience of working in the city, Peterborough is close to ARC and Cambridge University locations, local government is simplified to a single tier (a unitary authority), and Cambridge University has a teacher training outreach programme in Peterborough schools.

The two schools comprised diverse student populations, with both having approximately 50% of students described as having 'English as an additional language (EAL). For example, one of the Peterborough schools had 23 languages in addition to English (March 2017). Both schools also stated that their catchment area covered single-parent families, children with special educational needs, and children requiring free school meals (about 18%). Both schools described how the school population has changed in recent years, with many students coming from non-EU countries, including ones experiencing recent instability such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

3.2. Action research process

3.2.1. Reflect

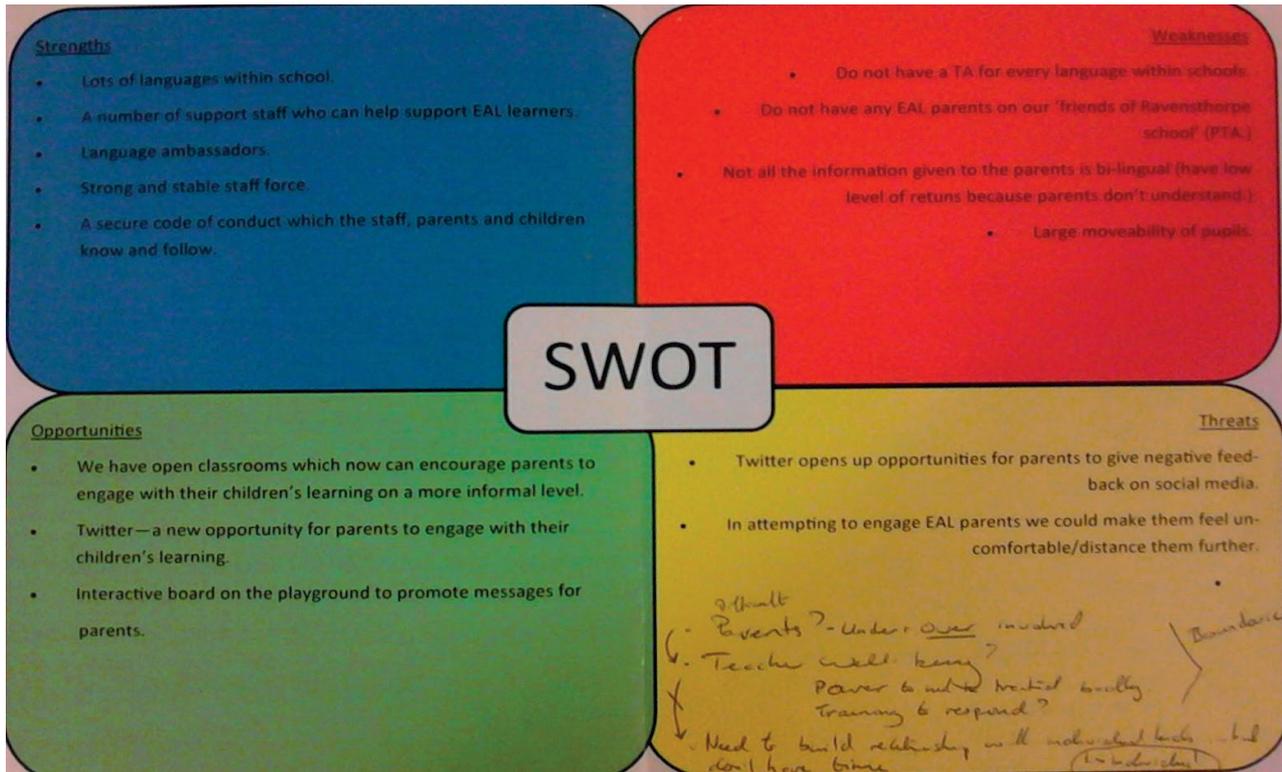
After the European Learning Communities for Peace Lab, the initial school delegate training (Croatia, April 2018), the school staff returned to their respective communities. Initially, both schools showed hesitation and confusion about how to proceed. Upon further discussion and reflection with the project facilitator, each site conducted a baseline analysis of needs and relationships in their area in the process of identifying the challenges the school wanted to work with or areas for change. Each site also produced a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to build a picture of where they could start. In terms of participation, 10 staff and 10 students from St Johns School contributed to their SWOT analysis, and 20 staff and 12 students contributed from Ravensthorpe School.

SWOT – Pilot school 1

<p>Strengths</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a need for children to be taught how to cope and deal with conflict. Evidence shown in reception's videos. 2. Enthusiastic staff who all are on-side and determined to deliver the same method. 3. Children enjoyed a Big Question Collective Worship about conflict and decided we need conflict, but need to deal with it in the correct ways. 4. We have brilliant outdoor facilities where sandpit talk can take place. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The children are very young and therefore we need to ensure Visual Voices are accessible yet informative. 2. The children's young age and varied abilities can affect the quality of responses and findings as some children are not yet able to verbally express how they feel. 3. Is the definition of conflict the same for everyone or are there different viewpoints? 4. Are all adults spreading the same message? Consistency – Lunch time?
<p>Opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Starting with the youngest year in the school means that as time goes on the whole school ethos will be affected and ways in which to deal with conflict will have already been taught. 2. Using the Parents Top Tips allows parents to share successes and learn from one another. 3. We have a wide range of skills (Tim's peer mediation knowledge & Fran forest school). 	<p>Threats</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parent questionnaire may not be accurate due to different understandings on conflict and whether or not the parents wanted to share. 2. Time within Reception's curriculum. 3. Some of our children receive mixed messages between home and school.

SWOT – Pilot school 2





Strengths

- Lots of languages within school
- A number of support staff who can help support EAL learners
- Language ambassadors
- Small and stable staff force
- A secure code of conduct which the staff, parents and children know and follow

Weaknesses

- Do not have a TA for every language within schools
- Do not have any EAL parents on our 'friends of school' (PTA)
- Not all the information given to the parents is bi-lingual (have low level of returns because parents do not understand)

Opportunities

- We have open classrooms which now can encourage parents to engage with their children's learning on a more informal level.
- Twitter – a new opportunity for parents to engage with their children's learning
- Interactive board on the playground to promote messages for parents

Threats

- Twitter opens up opportunities for parents to give negative feedback on social media
- In attempting to engage EAL parents we could make them feel uncomfortable/ distance them further
- Over-involved parents
- Teacher workload and well-being
- Time (lack of time to build relationships)

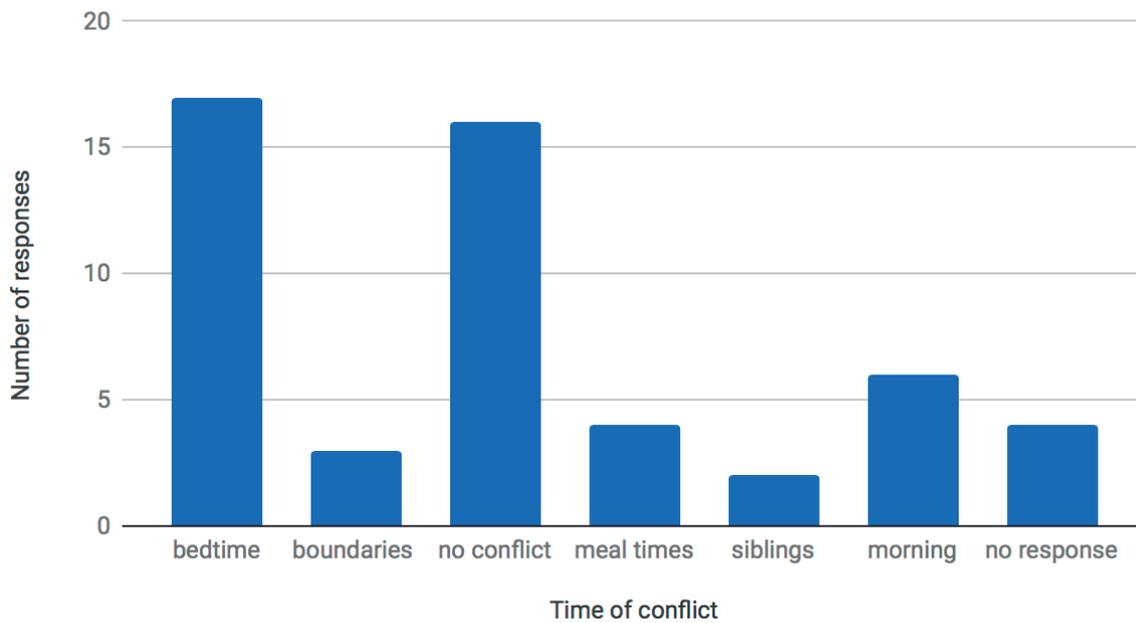
The pilot schools' preliminary conclusions from the initial analysis

School 1 concluded from their initial analysis: "We have decided to start our project with our youngest children in the school (reception). We want to teach our children, as soon as they start our school, how to manage conflict and how to use talk to guide them through this process. We believe that, if we use 'sandpit talk' and provide our youngest children with ways in which to solve conflicts, they will then carry these methods through them throughout their school life. If we continue to teach each new reception class, eventually the whole school would have been trained and we hope conflict will be easier for all students."

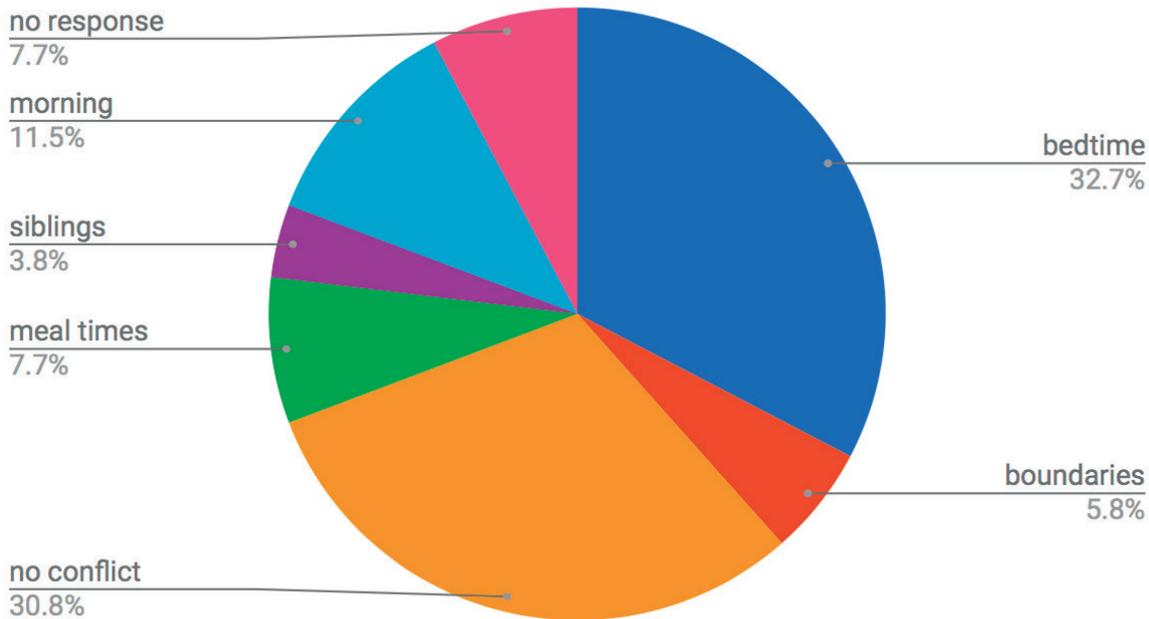
There was also an aspiration to connect and build relationships with the parents of the reception years (and beyond) by greeting them as they dropped their children off at school. It was hoped that this initial engagement may lead to further interest by the parents in school life and to possible events later where parents could come into school to observe their children's classes, or even possible events outside of school (cultural events and BBQs). As an additional activity to reach out to these parents, a home survey/visit was conducted to enquire into where conflict occurs in the home. It was hoped that this would both provide useful information about the challenges the parents were experiencing, and also act as a way to engage and build relationships with the families. The findings are presented below.

Home survey

When is their conflict in your home?



When is there conflict within your home?



School 2 concluded their initial analysis with two main preliminary conclusions:

1. Reaching out to newcomer parents. This could be done through personal interactions with parents at the beginning and end of school and via social media. It was hoped that by engaging with the parents they could feel more part of the school culture. School 2 envisaged that parent events, coffee and reading time could be undertaken. The school also saw their social media platforms as a further valuable avenue to engage parents. They felt this might act as a way to build bridges between what the children do in class and communicating it with parents on the boards outside the school and via Twitter to talk with their children about at home.

2. Seeking to set boundaries with over-involved parents who took up too much time and energy that may result in deficits of attention for the youth themselves. The assumption here was that many of the teachers are overwhelmed and this may affect their abilities to interact with the children in as constructive way as possible. To change this, they felt they could try to involve some of the over-involved parents in other aspects (such as playground monitoring) as this would hopefully both redirect their attention towards supporting the teachers in challenging areas and provide them with experiences of the realities teachers have to deal with (and might therefore build empathy from them).

3.2.2. Implementation of actions, observations and process reflections (Planning and Acting)

The following section discusses the implementation of different actions, feedback, reflections, and decisions each school took from their initial preliminary conclusions (discussed above). As noted, each school took a different approach to this process, but each responded to the challenges and feedback from staff, parents and students. Furthermore, the approach of both schools to collecting data and accumulating evidence varied. Both schools sought to interact with parents and sent out particular surveys. The core team tried a number of approaches and, by trial and error, encouraged feedback from parents – whether through parents returning surveys or messages, or participating in competitions, or through reflections and observations by the teachers themselves on any changes they noticed in the school environment. This organic process taken by the schools is outlined below.

Pilot school 1

The school decided to focus on the youngest children and to teach them how to manage conflict (Action 1). It initially asked the project partner to support them with research evidence for successful communication models for young children. The core team's aspiration was to teach these young children constructive ways of dealing with disagreement through using respectful communication. They decided to use the 'Sandpit talk' model as one of their teachers was familiar with it. As a second action, they decided to greet parents as they dropped their children off in the morning, and instigated a suggestion box to receive feedback from the parents.

Following the initial implementation of sandpit talk, School 1 began to feel that the children were too young to be able to be taught communication that would defuse conflict. Instead, teaching basic emotional literacy using cards was selected to encourage their understanding of emotions and how those might relate to disagreement. School 1 used the forest school they had in the school as a means to introduce many of these emotional literacy skills. It was felt that the outdoors activities provided conducive space for the children as they enjoyed using it. The school wishes to use this forest school more in the future.

School 1 also initially wished to train peer mediators in this same age group, but also concluded that it might be more effective to teach the younger children basic emotional literacy so that when they were older they could learn peer mediation more easily. The school felt that if, all the reception age group had received this training, over the years it would create a culture within the school where emotional awareness was embedded. This would also allow for peer mediation to be more successful as all the children would be familiar with the emotional language being used. School 1 therefore postponed the peer mediators training, but intended to still undertake this with older children in the future.

As the project evolved, the School 1 staff became aware (through the action research process) that their initial focus on the reception age missed the pertinent issues still arising among the older children. This new area of work highlighted a priority at break times (identification of a new challenge) when children often got into disagreements, and this would spill over and affect the classes. Often this affected the teaching, while teachers had to de-escalate the conflicts, taking time away from the intended lesson plan. Initially, School 1 decided to focus on the children who often instigated the issues at break time. They decided to redirect their role, giving them instead a role of break-time monitor or 'play-pal'. The idea behind this was that usually these were rather influential children who were able to influence the others into anti-social behaviour. By giving them a constructive role that consisted of making sure others got along and shared activities, they hoped they would feel empowered and influence the others in more positive ways. While this seemed to assist with many of the disagreements, over time the school began to further reflect that support for the midday supervisors (staff that supervise the children during their midday break time) might be needed. The project partner was asked to provide a workshop for supervisors, which included a communications skills workshop, encouraging supervisors to be role models for children. It was hoped that this would promote the desired culture of positive communication, to be embedded through *all* levels of the school.

During staff meetings, the supervisors discussed how they felt the issues were not simply about their communication, but how their role was perceived by some teachers in the school. They felt that the children perceived that they were less powerful than teachers, and thus could behave as they wished. During feedback to the school delegates, it was realized that perhaps this was an unacknowledged issue, which could be vital for the school's mission in a culture of cohesion. Further consultations were undertaken between the school and the midday supervisors towards seeking to create a line of communication and trust-building with the administration of the school. It was further hoped that the training in conflict communication would be useful for the supervisors (decided by both parties), but that it might also be useful to run combined training with both teachers and super-

visors so that they could also interact, working further towards a culture of collaborators as opposed to one marked with suspicion and blame of each other. This activity is still aspired to by the school, even after the initial EU project concluded.

Other activities that School 1 undertook for the children included an assembly question where they were asked to reflect on a topic and discuss it as a group. These topics included themes on peace and 'getting along', to build their vocabulary and awareness.

School 1 also reflected that, while working within the school was the most productive area of focus, many of the issues in school revolved around the home life of the children. It was decided that limited success would be achieved for the children in school due to these issues that were difficult (if not impossible) to affect. While the school had partnerships with local agencies and support, they felt this was an area to which they could only refer children and parents, rather than being able to tackle it directly. These conclusions led to a desire to connect and work with parents in more direct ways, but these engagements proved difficult to develop for School 1. Activities such as the suggestion box were rarely used for anything other than complaints. A termly class newsletter was more successful, with some of the parents showing interest in what had occurred in the school during the term. School 1 also experimented with social media postings about school life to the parents. This had limited success; there was interest in the school website, which was regularly updated with information, but lack of interest in the social media. School 1 also tried Monday coffee mornings and end-of-term invitations for parents into the classes, again with mixed success.

The school also planned other activities that either had limited success or did not happen. This included parent trainings (e.g. sleep solutions), more open days, and nurture groups for children whose home life was classed as being unstable. Reflecting on this, School 1 felt that these activities had less success due to a mix of lack of parent interest or time (as many were working long hours) and teachers lacking the time to run the activities.

Pilot School 2 – areas for change and implemented actions

Challenge for Change – parent engagement

School 2's preliminary assessment led them to a focus on parent engagement and involvement as this had been particularly challenging. The school delegates predominantly wished to find ways of engaging Lithuanian parents who they felt were isolated and did not interact with any other parent group, often not coming to school at all. However, over time, this focus became a more general focus on parent interaction. To focus on parent engagement, School 2 instigated three interlinked types of actions:

1. Events and activities designed to invite parent involvement
2. Social media use
3. Increased personal interactions with parents by the teachers at the beginning and end of school

1. Events and activities designed to invite parent involvement

Events that were tried by School 2 included Carols in the courtyard, a Christmas and summer fair, open classrooms where parents could observe a class, school competitions, book mornings where parents could read with the children, a morning café, and parent evenings. All of these provided ways of engaging with the parents, but also acted as ways to gather information and feedback on who attended and those who did not. This then allowed for further outreach for those missing to gain further insight.

School 2 found mixed success with these activities. Some, such as the Christmas fair, were perceived as a great success, while others, such as the summer fair, were perceived as having a low turnout. Generally, the school felt there was increased involvement and interest from the parents due to these outreach activities. However, on reaching out to the parents about what prevented them from attending, it was realized that perhaps the school's assumptions around parents involvement had been inaccurate. While the school initially felt parents were not getting involved due to either a lack of interest or cultural barriers, after getting to know some parents through the activities, the school came to a realization that many parents were simply overworked, tired and busy, and therefore would come only when they could (this included the Lithuanian parents), and also that many parents either did not know of the event or had forgotten about it. This realization led to a focus on increased social media presence, with translation software and personal reminders (discussed below).

2. Social media use

School 2 came to suspect that parents lack of involvement was due to not knowing or understanding about events. Social media was therefore used – Twitter and SMS (for parents who agreed). The school also used the two electronic boards outside of the school to relay information about events taking place as well as events that had happened so that parents felt more informed about school life. In their research, the school delegates had noticed that school letters received the least parent feedback, and sought to find out why this was the case. They concluded this was due to either the children forgetting to pass on the school letter or that the language ability of the parents prevented them from understanding. The delegates had noticed that parents often relied on their children to translate in face-to-face interaction, but that this translation might not be happening with school letters.

To focus on this issue, the school sent out SMS messages as well as letters as these could then be translated with software into the language the parents understood. The school also started reminding the children more frequently about events to pass on to their parents, and posted notices on the doors and electronic board as well. The school delegates even spoke directly to some parents after school, asking their child (or another child who could speak their native language) to translate.

The school felt that the use of media had a positive effect on the engagement of the parents, assisting involvement and interest, but noted that too much media use can cause confusion and frustration with some parents. Some media were not as successful as others; for example, a school competition was run where children were encouraged to talk with their parents about a particular topic they covered in school. Notices were put out so that parents also knew about it and in turn they were asked to give feedback to the school via their chosen media platform. This would also provide information to the school about which platforms were used by whom as well as building an interactive activity through the whole school. However, the competition was poorly attended. On reflection and through research, it was again concluded that this was due to parents attending as they could (e.g. when they had the time to do so), as opposed to a lack of interest in the school.

3. Finally, as noted above, the two school delegates began welcoming and speaking to the parents more regularly, both before and after school. They both reflected that this small gesture was one of the most significant actions in encouraging parent involvement and interest, as parents began to know the teachers and saw them as approachable. The delegates felt that this interaction led to trust being built, and to the parents explaining something they had been unable to speak about previously — that they were rather overwhelmed, but attended events when they were able to.

Youth focus activities

As discussed above, School 2 also instigated youth-centred programmes that included competitions and events. It also mentioned the success of a tool called The Talking Tin, which encourages students to engage in different ways in class and assists with language difficulties. School 2 also ran assembly dialogues about different cultures and held a cultural dress and food day where each child brought in a dish from home to share and talk about. These all required some involvement from the parents and were seen as a success, building awareness and understanding about the diversity in the school community.

The school also created youth ambassadors for some of the children from diverse backgrounds who had been at the school for some time. Their role was to support newcomer children to settle into the school, especially as they could speak the native language of the child. They were also sometimes called upon to translate to the newcomer parents information about school events and supports in the area. This was empowering for the children, who would get special recognition for their role.

A programme the school is now looking at is a programme on transitions as they feel that many of the issues they perceive in school may be in part due to difficulties in handling transitions. At the end of the project year, the school delegates reflected that they were now beginning to perceive some conflict emerging in the school, focused around particular points; this could be due to multiple factors, which had changed in the school environment over the year, but were now being noticed due to the project's focus on cyclical reflection. These conflicts could arise on transition from one class to another (especially reception to year 2), or from primary to secondary. The delegates mentioned that, given the often turbulent background of many of the students, it may be no surprise they have difficulties in handling change. This may be even further heightened due to the residual trauma that they felt many of their students had.

Over-involved parents

The delegates mentioned how, even though they had initially highlighted this as a potential area of focus, it was decided to focus instead on the other aspects as a priority. The reason for this was that, first, they began to learn better techniques for dealing with or ignoring the over-involved parents, or began to pass their complaints up the chain of command rather than feeling they had to handle it all themselves. However, they noted some frustration that there was no structure in place that supported staff when parents were abusive to teachers and they wished this could be a focus as well. They also mentioned that at times giving parents more responsibilities had sometimes made things worse. They did not wish to focus on this area as it would possibly only entice more energy away from the principal focuses of parent and youth involvement.

3.2.3. Conclusions and Implications (Observe)

3.2.3.1. Participation and Engagement

The two schools had different initial approaches to the LCP project and the action research process. They chose different actions and focuses for the identified challenges. For example, one school sought to engage with a broad community, outside the school perimeter, in completing their actions. The other school seemed to adopt more of an intra-school focus, analyzing their observations of the school as a starting point, but never really moving beyond it. Both approaches had their advantages and limitations.

While it may have been preferable and more in line with the original project methods to engage the communities in consultations, the school taking this approach encountered initial feelings of

paralysis concerning how to start. Once they did begin consulting, this feeling became one of frustration due to the lack of feedback or interest coming from the communities they engaged with. This frustration led to further confusion and anxiety, raising concerns about the 'correct' way to deliver the project. Questions of 'Who do we speak to?', 'How can we due to language difficulties?', and 'In what forum (how do we get people together?)?' were all encountered by this school. This confusion was followed by a following question, 'Where do we draw the line and stop our outreach?' These frustrations might raise questions about the practical assumptions around these approaches and the comfort practitioners have with them. When the school did commence with parent and community consultation, they found that many either did not reply or did not provide any information to help. The school then found it difficult to interpret the information and make decisions on where the primary focus should be.

After reflection, the teachers proposed three particular limitations relating to the participation and engagement of parents.

- i) Language barriers, leading to a practical issue of communication, but also to a potential loss of 'face' and therefore hesitation by parents and unwillingness to engage at all.
- ii) Time and work constraints. It was thought that the poor initial turnout for events could be further connected to language (they did not get the messages about upcoming events) or could be due to lack of time (e.g. too busy working). The teachers had observed (through discussions with some parents that did engage) that many parents were working long hours or multiple jobs. As discussed above, this led to the conclusion that many parents simply attended what they could, as opposed to them being uninterested.
- iii) A third possible conclusion was that some parents might feel that getting involved in school was not their role, or alternatively that the school should just be focused on grades and not connecting with the home.

All this raises the question of how to engage with parents in ways that circumvent these possible issues. However, over time the school did manage to have increased success with parent engagement. This was put down to the successful use of social media and in particular directly talking with parents about the letters that had gone out about an event. A major lesson here was that multiple ways to connect were often required.

The other school, which did more intra-school reflection and decision-making, decided to work at first on the reception area rather than on engaging the community, as they had concluded that the former was a primary need. This decision was based on a general feeling that it was easier to support and make changes to the children earlier rather than trying to intervene and change later once they had become embedded in the school. The advantage of this approach was that it allowed the school to quickly commence and create staff buy-in. However, once they did commence, they began to notice that unforeseen issues arose. First, they began to notice that it was still difficult to engage the parents who often dropped their children off at school and left (or sent their children with other parents). They also began to notice that working with the youngest children (four years old) was limited by their abilities in language and other capabilities. Finally, while observing the beginning of the project, the school also began to notice that another area was perhaps more of an issue and was affecting these youngest children; it reflected that working only on the young children while not focusing on the break-time and playground issues meant that their other work might be undone by how it affected the rest of the school. This included the children misbehaving, staff stress levels, and staff needing to focus on managing behaviours rather than teaching lessons.

Due to this, the school began to realize that they needed a major focus on the break-time, as they felt this was key to the flow of the school for the rest of the day. Further reflection brought them to a realization of conflict simmering between the midday supervisors/lunchtime staff and the teaching staff. They realized that this was an essential focus as many of the other issues sprang from this time, and

the abilities of staff to be on the 'same hymn sheet'. The question arises: if the school had followed the full Learning Communities, would these issues have been highlighted from the start, saving time for it to emerge organically? However, it may also be possible that it was a better approach for this school to focus and work on particular areas until highlighting other areas in the system that are causing difficulties.

3.2.3.2. Reflection and Responsivity

It appears that both schools ended up taking more of a trial and error approach as they responded to issues that they had become aware of. Regardless of these individual approaches to the project, the organic nature of both schools' approaches allowed them to constantly reflect and improvise on what they were observing. This was a consistent factor for both schools: the importance of having a reflexive and responsive process cycle embedded in the school culture. The implication of this might be that process is more important than what schools 'do'. For example, both schools reflected, planned and observed continuously and therefore responded to the challenges they encountered. It might be suggested that this process was more valuable than carrying out a particular activity, and will support the schools on an ongoing basis as their unique situations constantly change. At the end of the project both schools reflected on how the approach had changed the way they looked at the school issues. They stated that they had become more observant and that parents now felt that the schools were more 'caring'. A school delegate added that they felt the school had been changed by the project; in particular, how the staff interacted with parents. In conclusion, a school's approach to migration, refugees and building community cohesion is best applied through the process the school takes to observe, reflect and respond to their situations on an ongoing basis, rather than through a one-off consultation followed by a rigid and inflexible programme of intervention.

3.2.3.3. Capabilities

Connected to the reflections above, both schools discussed the challenges in carrying out these projects due to the realities of the schooling system in the UK. Both sets of delegates mentioned how teachers, including themselves, were pulled in many different directions and felt immense pressure to meet particular mandatory standards around grades and levels. This meant that, even though the delegates had a strong desire to implement larger interventions, they simply did not have the time, resources or energy to do so.

This was especially pertinent, for example, when UK school's regulatory practices, such as visits from OFSTED, arose and took priority over programming deemed 'non-essential', such as the LCP. This perhaps attests to how priorities outside of the school can over-ride and affect implementation of projects inside schools, particularly in the UK context.

Therefore, the interventions tended to be smaller and more targeted. The schools reflected that this approach was potentially more effective and appropriate given the school environment for two reasons:

1. Parents were also overwhelmed and reacted negatively if they felt they had to do too many extra activities.
2. Other teachers felt overwhelmed and, even though they wished to support the project, perceived it as one of a number of 'add-on' programmes that distracted from their mandatory obligations.

Both schools discussed how they felt that such projects could therefore run a risk of backfiring if they were seen as one extra annoyance for the teachers or parents. Both schools found that these smaller interventions were therefore more effective in the long term as they both negated these feelings and were seen as within the capabilities of both parents and teachers, meaning they were more likely to be taken up and be sustained.

3.3. Implications and final thoughts

The above reflections may lead to certain implications for replicating such programmes, although each context is different and may necessitate a different approach.

Each school approached this project differently, but both carried the intention of affecting their school and community environment in positive and constructive ways. Questions regarding what is aspired to versus the reality may arise when these projects are undertaken, especially around capacity. Both schools encountered initial confusion and frustration over the project. This might challenge our own assumptions as project leaders about the utility of these approaches. Neither of the schools reached out to the community stakeholders or sought to connect with other community agencies. While this might seem a narrow perspective for schools to take, it may suggest that being a truly participatory or elicitive school is difficult to achieve, given the current teaching responsibilities and the externally mandated objectives schools must achieve. Both schools predominantly researched within the school, even pre-empting the activities before analysis, rather than extending the research out to the communities. However, it might need to be considered that this is the paramount (or only) way schools can attempt such programmes with the resources and capacities they have. Our initial idealized expectations and assumptions might therefore need to become questioned in relation to the realities while undertaking the project.

Similarly, a further question on data collection may also need to be considered. Both schools attempted some form of survey or interviewing methods during the programme, but found very limited response and success. Both schools therefore relied mostly on their own observations and reflections. Again, this might not seem in total keeping with the Learning Communities for Peace approach, but should itself be reflected upon before and during the programme as a possible reality.

While certain aspects of the project might not have met the initial externally expected criteria of a Learning Community for Peace, it could be argued that these were learning communities in practical action. The organic nature of both schools suggests that, in schools with good intention but limited time and resources, this is what can occur. In this light, this project provided a realistic micro-testing of this approach and shows what can happen when undertaking similar projects in similar environments. Allowing each site to be organic in its approach seemed key to their learning and development throughout the project, and may be an important consideration for other projects. The schools' most insightful learning often came when things did not go as planned.

Both schools felt the programme was useful for their school and had led to some significant changes. A major element that both schools reported was the benefit of having time to reflect on and analyze what was occurring on an ongoing basis. This reflection provided a lens for the delegates to be responsive to situations being observed, and act in ways to redirect or create change. This was seen as very useful for the teachers and even transformative for some who felt they were different as teachers because of it. An important element reflected upon by the school delegates was the requirement of ongoing support from the school's senior leaders, to help these concepts to become more sustainable. Without this support, both schools felt they would falter in the face of mandatory priorities.

Finally, one other aspect seen as useful was the connection and collaboration between the teachers from the different sites. While this was again low at times due to the time available to share from each school, the UK schools discussed how they wished this international collaboration could continue as it was very useful to be able to see what other schools were doing and share with other colleagues about challenges and solutions.



St Johns Church School



Ravensthorpe Primary School

4. Action Research in Sweden

Ilse Hakvoort, Ann-Katrin Swärd & Kajsa Svensson

The University of Gothenburg has been the partner organisation (project partner) responsible for implementing the LCP action research project in Sweden. In particular, staff from the Department of Education and Special Education, Faculty of Education, are involved. The University of Gothenburg is the second largest university in Sweden, is a public university and is state-funded. Advocating the importance and value of international collaborations, staff members get support when they become a partner in an Erasmus+ strategic partnership project.

The Department of Education and Special Education has staff with excellence in conflict resolution in schools. They are responsible for lecturing, workshops and seminars for pre-service and in-service teacher training. In addition, they conduct research in this field. Some of them are also knowledgeable about intercultural questions, norm-critical approaches, peace education, bullying and special education. Furthermore, the department has a well-established research group with a long tradition of conducting action research and being involved in school development projects.

4.1. Research context

In this section, the Swedish research context and its educational system are described in general, and the context in which the collaborating pilot school is located is described in particular. The content is based on the context analyses conducted during the first months of our collaboration with the Swedish pilot school, complemented by information collected during the action research period and general information about the educational system in Sweden.

4.1.1. General information about the Swedish educational system

Sweden offers free education (preschool class, primary, secondary and tertiary) for its citizens. The Ministry of Education has established two governmental agencies, the National Agency of Education and the School Inspectorate, which are responsible for ensuring that education is available to every child, that the quality of the education provided is equivalent across the country and that proper conditions for children's development and learning are in place.

Swedish schools follow a national goal-steered system but have a high degree of local responsibility. The Swedish Parliament and Government draw up the overall national goals for the Education Act as well as for the curricula and syllabi for preschool, preschool class, primary school, lower and higher secondary education, and the leisure-time centre. Thus, it is the government that decides on rules, values, goals, overall learning outcomes, course plans and curriculum.

The municipalities are responsible for running the schools, decide on how government grants are divided among the schools in their municipality, and are the employer of school staff. In their work, they need to follow national governing documents. In the municipality where the Swedish pilot school is located, the Child and Youth Office is responsible for implementing educational policies. The head of administration at this office is directly employed by politicians of the municipality (who are always democratically chosen). Under this head of administration several officers operate. The school principal reports to the officer for primary school education at the Child and Youth Office.

Every Swedish school can be seen as an autonomous unit and every municipality is responsible for monitoring that schools follow the governing documents, and providing the economic resources they need. The School Inspectorate, one of the governmental agencies, conducts randomized controls by visiting, observing and interviewing staff as well as controlling the written documentation of teachers and the principal concerning students' performance and other matters related to teachers' work and responsibility.

It sometimes seems that schools are under strict control but, in reality, that is not the case. Every school is more or less an autonomous unit and can therefore make many pedagogical and didactic decisions itself. Every teacher can also decide if they wish to be involved in different research or projects such as LCP. Nobody can force them to be involved. When the university wishes to collaborate with schools, we only need to contact the principal and teachers at a school. They can say no or yes. If no, we can look for another school that is interested in collaborating with actors outside the school. Inside the school, teachers always collaborate within working teams. With regard to the LCP project, the first school we asked said no to our request to be involved as they already were involved in another project. The second school we asked was interested in working with us in this international European project.

Schools in Sweden have to work systematically on maintaining a high and comparable quality. This quality work, defined in the Education Act, must focus on meeting the national goals for education. Governmental agencies such as the National Agency for Education and the School Inspectorate provide general advice for systematic quality work. The results of this work are followed up, analyzed, and assessed in relation to what scientific studies and proven experience highlight as important. It is also important to consider current research when planning and prioritizing development initiatives.

Everyone's participation is fundamental to this quality work. The management of the school, the staff, the students and the custodians need to contribute with views, voices and documentation that make the quality of the school visible. Ultimately, it is about offering all students an equivalent high-quality education regardless of the place of residence, gender and social or economic background. Equal education does not mean that it should be uniform or that all students should receive the same amount of resources. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with school law and curricula, is the basis for quality work in relation to the participation of students and their influence.

Students must be given the opportunity to participate in the quality work of the school. The degree and kind of participation depends on age and level of development of the student. The preschool manager and the principal are responsible for ensuring that the custodians are also given the opportunity to participate in the quality work. Furthermore, each preschool and school unit must annually set up plans concerning discrimination, harassment and degrading treatment that describe how the work should be carried out, in order for the national goals of promoting equal treatment and prevention of harassment and degrading treatment to be achieved.

The Education Act obliges Swedish schools to establish a plan to counteract degrading treatment. Up to January 1 2017, the Discrimination Act obliged schools to write a yearly plan for preventing and counteracting any form of discrimination and harassment (often referred to as an 'equal treatment plan'). However, on 1 January 2017, the provisions of the Discrimination Act were amended, and the formal requirement for an equal treatment plan was replaced by the requirement that schools document all the work they do in relation to harassment and discrimination, which need to cover all seven grounds of discrimination (and not only five as previously). This legislative change concerns harassment and discrimination (regulated by the Discrimination Act), and not degrading treatment (regulated by the Education Act).

Schools still need to write a yearly plan to counteract degrading treatment. The pilot school we worked with has such a plan in which it outlines the situation regarding the well-being of its students. It is the principal who is responsible for ensuring that a plan is written, implemented and annually evaluated. Every year, concrete goals are formulated on the basis of a survey that gathers information about the current situation for the students in school (for example, on whether they feel safe and secure). Furthermore, identification of rules, norms and organisational aspects that could marginalize some and not others should be included in this survey. The demand for a yearly survey is linked to the idea that school improvement needs to have an evidence-based and/or scientific foundation. The School Inspectorate has developed criteria to assess, during inspecting of a school, if it is following the law.

In this school-year plan (2018/2019), our pilot school stated that all staff at school and the leisure-time centre must create an environment where everyone should feel safe and respected. The overall goal is that no-one should be subjected to any form of degrading treatment. It is stated that the staff will work with the students on the importance of three key wordings: Consideration, Responsibility and Community. In the first weeks of the school year, all teachers will work with the students on the routines and rules that need to be learned and followed. At the leisure-time centre, the students give their views about how to work with the indoors and outdoors environment through the recreation councils. Every year in grade two and five, the students are asked to answer a questionnaire. The formulated plan is presented and discussed with the school parents association and posted on the school website. As the evaluation of the concrete goals and aims of last year's plan concern the school year 2017/2018, during which the project team worked with the school on the LCP project, the findings of the evaluation are presented below (referred to as 'data').

4.1.2. Conflict resolution

In the relevant articles of the Education and the Discrimination Act, it is stated that “degrading treatment, harassment and discrimination are forbidden” and “schools have to promote human rights and equal values, and prevent violent situations happening”. Neither Act, however, uses the term conflict, and teachers and other school staff do not get support in ways they can manage, resolve or transform the conflicts they encounter every day in the school.

Fortunately, we have seen increased attention given to conflict resolution in the Swedish teacher training programmes since 2005. While the Swedish government decides on goals, directives and distribution of resources for the teacher training programmes, the Swedish Higher Education Authority (one of the governmental agencies) is responsible for the quality of teacher education and the descriptions of the teacher education degrees. With the reforms of the teacher education programmes in 2011, *Social relations, conflict resolution and educational leadership* was included as one of eight educational core areas of priority in the official teacher education degree descriptions. Consequently, all higher-education institutions (HEIs) that provide teacher education were from now on required to offer courses/modules to address this theme. Even though length, content and quality in conflict resolution education differs across the various HEIs, it has been seen as a step forward in providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to manage the conflicts that occur in their classrooms (from minor distractions and disturbances to escalated conflict situations). This means that it is possible that some of the newly employed teachers at the pilot school have had some education in conflict resolution; while those who followed the earlier programmes might not (if they did not choose to take a free-choice course in this subject).

4.2. Where the practice took place

The Swedish pilot school is located in a community with about 41,000 inhabitants – 27,000 in the central city and 14,000 in the surrounding villages. This community is located within commuting distance of the second largest city in Sweden, Gothenburg. The community is responsible for all the schools in this area.

The selected pilot school is a public primary school for students aged six (preschool class) to 12 (Grade 6) (Sweden also has private schools). Class numbers vary between 17 and 27. The school has approximately 339 students, 20 teachers, 10 teachers for the leisure-time centre, 10 assistants for students in need of extra support, one administrator, one caretaker, one vice-principal and one principal. While the school principal is chosen by the community board responsible for education, the principal herself is responsible for interviewing staff for the school before asking the community to employ them. We discussed the LCP project with the principal during April-October 2017; the vice-principal (already one of the delegates in the LCP pilot school team) then became principal in November 2017. The school has access to a health team employed by the central community organization – consisting of a special needs educator, social worker, school nurse and psychologist. The cleaning staff and staff responsible for hot meals (served during lunch-time in Swedish schools) are employed by organizations contracted to provide these services.

Around 70% of the 339 students have parents with Swedish roots, and 30% have one or two parents born in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, Albania, the Netherlands and England. While 25% of the students are girls, 75% are boys. Regarding economic background, the student families vary greatly, from socially and economically disadvantaged to higher socio-economic standards. (It's interesting to note that most of the families with low social-economic standards live on one side of a street and most with high socio-economic standards on the other side.) Most of the students live within walking distance of the school.

In most Swedish schools, school starts at around 08:00 and finishes between 13:00 and 15:00 (the younger children, aged 6-9, finish most days at 13:00; the older ones, aged 10-12, between 14:00 and 15:00). Students are welcome to attend the leisure-time centre before school, from 06:00, and after school until 18:30. Both school, before-school and after-school activities use the same buildings and property (the principal is responsible for both staff categories – leisure-time-centre teachers are often 'extra resources' during school hours).

The school has a relatively active parent association even though it does not represent all the parents.

The schoolyard is big and complex since it is spread out around the school. It is not easy for one teacher to control what's going on among the students when they are on the other side of the school building.

4.3. Working climate and action research support

Project team at the Department of Education and Special Education, University of Gothenburg

All three members of the University of Gothenburg team had heard about action research and some had read about it but none had carried out an action research project by themselves. Two members of the team are researchers and have conducted various studies with other qualitative research approaches. The team consisted of staff with 30-35 years of experience in doing research. In addition, it included a staff member with 30 years' experience of working in and with primary schools, as well

as staff competent in working with conflict resolution in practice. At the department, we have access to a research group that is specialised in action research and school development.

The project team consisted of:

- Kajsa Svensson: university teacher, drama pedagogue/teacher educator with competences in intercultural questions, conflict resolution
- Ilse Hakvoort: associate professor, researcher/teacher educator with competence in conflict resolution, fundamental values, degrading treatment
- Ann-Katrin Swärd: assistant professor, researcher/teacher educator with competence in special education, degrading treatment

We also worked several times with an external expert, Bernard LeRoux, with competences in dialogue about complex questions, conflict resolution, transformative mediation and deep democracy.

4.3.1. The Swedish pilot school

The pilot school was totally new for the team of the University of Gothenburg, which meant that we needed to get to know them. In March and April 2016 we held two introduction meetings with the then principal. The aim of the introduction meetings was twofold. First, to find out if the principal and the school were interested in participating, and secondly, to start with a context analysis. The principal informed the staff of the school about her interest in participating in the LCP project, and the benefits she could see for the school, and asked the staff for their support. Furthermore, as four delegates of the school would join the workshop in Zadar, Croatia, the staff was asked to hand in a motivation letter if they wished to represent the school, participate in the workshop and become members of the group delegates of the school. Nine motivation letters were handed in from which the principal choose three. The fourth person was the vice-principal as she is part of the school leading team.

While writing a context analysis, we reflected on possible and interesting community members, for example:

- The lower secondary school in the neighbourhood where most of the students go after finishing this school
- Municipality: the head of administration at the Child and Youth Office
- Municipality: the officer responsible for primary school education
- Health team
- Parent association
- Social workers at the Social Service Office, called in when students and their families are having problems
- Child and youth psychiatrists
- Leisure-time activities organizations (e.g. handball, soccer)
- Churches
- Community workers involved with issues such as drugs, alcohol

4.3.2. Leading the action research process

To update the knowledge of the project partners concerning action research, short introductions on action research and participatory research designs were given during the Joint Staff Training week in Antwerp (Jan/Feb 2017). In addition, the participants of this training week, three from each project partner, exchanged ideas about the knowledge and competences they possessed on action research and related research methodologies.

To inform the pilot schools about the LCP project, action research process and impact evaluation and to stimulate them to start their process, four delegates of the five pilot schools attended a two-day workshop in Zadar (Croatia) in April 2017, the European Learning Communities for Peace Lab. Project partners each sent one trainer to prepare the workshop during the days before the school delegates arrived. These trainers, among other things, were introduced to the process of action research during a workshop led by Klara Bilic Mestric, an action researcher from the University of Zagreb, Croatia. The trainers were also in charge of leading the workshop and shared their newly received knowledge about action research with the delegates of the schools.

The process of implementing and leading the action research process in the Swedish pilot school was discussed between the project partner and the four delegates of the school. All four delegates felt short in their knowledge and skills, as well as not familiar enough with the procedure of leading an action research process. They tended to see the process as owned by the project partner. It was decided that two members of the project partner would lead the action research process. In early autumn 2017, they had access to online lectures by Karin Rönnerman, professor in education at the department (both in Swedish and in English). Additionally, they read several texts from Karin Rönnerman, Anette Olin, Åsa Hirsch and other experts in action research in order to learn and develop their understanding of the Nordic action research approach applied at the University of Gothenburg. They also participated in a one-day international conference about action research (August 2017) with Stephen Kemmis as one of the presenters, followed by a seminar series on action research at the university. During the rest of autumn 2017, they participated in a series of seminars specially designed for the department staff to learn about doing action research. In other words, the project partner became educated in action research through the educational activities offered by the department. They were thus prepared for studying their own practices; that is, the action research process they were responsible for guiding (the project partner action research activities). Not being a member of staff at the pilot school meant that they could only indirectly study the school practice. According to action research principles, participants study their own practice, and thus the staff of the pilot school were the ones who could influence and study the daily practice of the school. It was decided that the project partner should lead the process by guiding the delegates of the school in conducting action research activities with their colleagues. The project partner was given the responsibility to collect information/data about how these pilot school actions went. Interesting to mention is that, at the end of the collaboration between the project partner and pilot school, it was observed that the principal had collected information about some of the actions (which will be described below).

Along with their own action research education, the project partner made plans to guide the school through the following phases: Reflect on (with a. Identify challenges/areas for change, b. Prioritise the identified areas for change, and c. Why do the participants perceive this as problematic? In need of change?), Action plan (identifying possible actions), Act (implementation of the actions), Observe and collect data to evaluate the actions, and Reflect again (with analyses of the data and conclusions, preparing for a new action research cycle).

In the following section we will mostly reflect on the process of the members of the project partner, even though we are aware that they conducted activities with the school and collected information from them. At the end we will reflect on the process involving the actors in the school.

4.4. Action research process

4.4.1. Reflect

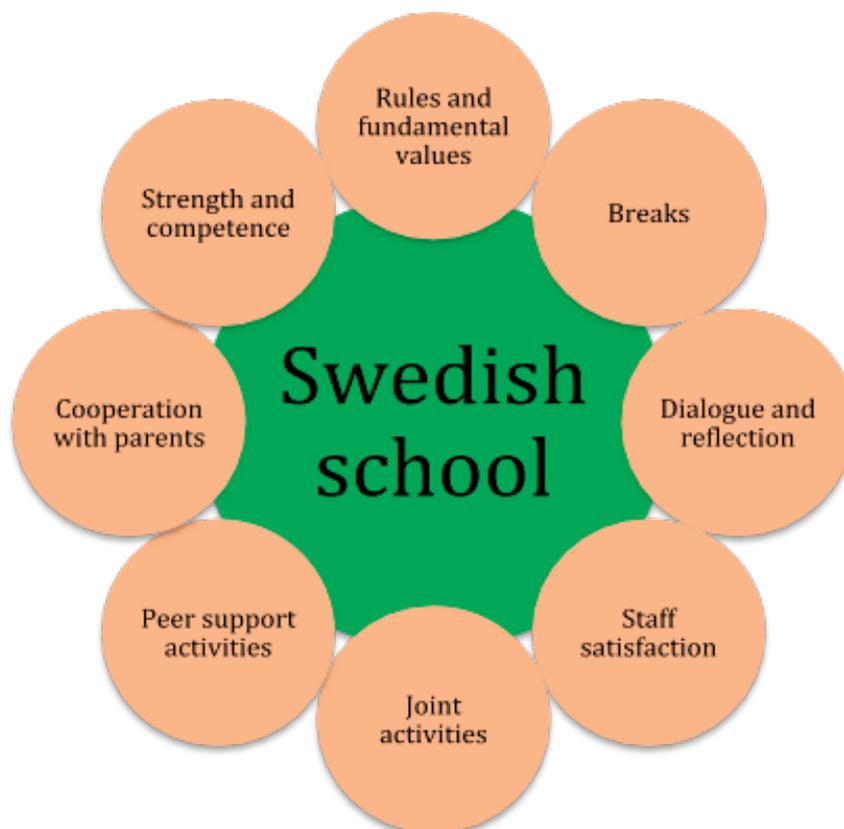
Mapping is an important tool and often used to identify areas for change. The pilot school was assigned the task of identifying areas, issues or challenges that were not working, were problematic or

were regarded as in need of improvement and change. Assigning this task to the school was based on a central action research assumption that the educator her or himself has knowledge about and experience of their own practice and thus is the most suitable person to find out what is in need of change or improvement. The four delegates of the Swedish pilot school started this identification process during the training in Zadar (April 2017) and continued when back home (spring and autumn 2017). The project partner organized a follow-up Zadar meeting with the delegates of the school aiming at discussing their ideas and possible steps to take (14 June 2017). The delegates said they had found out and decided what the school needed to work with. Their 'knowing' challenged the principles of action research and the idea of co-constructing/co-designing, which builds on democratic forms of learning together, hearing all voices within (and maybe outside) the school that need to be heard, and also participatory dialogue. During the meeting the project partner asked several questions regarding participation and co-determination, co-constructing and co-designing, and persisted with involving the rest of the staff of the school.

Reflect on part one: Identifying challenges/areas for change

The delegates of the school said a staff meeting was organized to inform the staff during two-day staff meeting at a conference centre before the start of the next academic year, August 2017 (with staff from the pilot school only, and not with members of the project partner as this could disturb the bringing-together process). Activities and ideas from the workshop in Zadar were shared, and during these two days the staff would have time to discuss the challenges/areas of improvement. Eight challenges were identified by the staff of the school.

The eight areas of improvement



The identified challenges (summarized from staff meeting)

<p>1. Challenges or areas for improvement</p>	<p>What challenges can you identify to work with in relation to building a 'Learning Community for Peace'?</p> <p>Identify areas of improvements or areas to focus on</p>	<p>1. Rules and fundamental values</p> <p>A need exists for a more coherent understanding of fundamental values and unity in the approaches staff use to apply rules.</p> <p>2. Breaks</p> <p>A need for less conflict between students, better structure and planned activities.</p> <p>3. Dialogue and reflection</p> <p>Reflect and understand together when critical incidents occur between staff, and even between students.</p> <p>4. Staff satisfaction</p> <p>To have fun and get to know each other (also the new staff) better.</p> <p>5. Joint activities</p> <p>Create a community between students and an 'us' feeling.</p> <p>6. Peer support activities</p> <p>Need for a safe and secure environment between students.</p> <p>7. Society/community and parents</p> <p>Need for better cooperation with parents.</p> <p>8. Strength and competence</p> <p>To be acknowledged, developing fields of expertise and being able to make use of each other's expertise.</p>
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Reflect on part 2: Prioritise the challenges/areas for improvement

For continuation and follow-up of the process, meetings were organized between the project partner and the delegates of the pilot school. On 11 October 2017, there was a catch-up meeting for the delegates to report back from the two-day staff meeting in August, collect the identified challenges and discuss plans for the autumn. During this meeting it was decided that Kajsa Svensson, from the project partner, would organize and lead a workshop for all school staff to prioritize the eight challenges (25 October 2016).

Participatory open democratic ranking process workshop for all school staff (led by Kajsa Svensson)

Aim: This workshop aimed at: a) enlarging an understanding of the interest of all colleagues, b) underlining the importance of all voices, and c) finding out where most of the staff members would like to start.

Central question: What are the challenges/areas of improvement that are most important for the school to start working with at the moment?

Note: It was not decided beforehand how many areas would be prioritized.

Description of the activity: Every staff member got two post-it notes, on each of which they wrote their first name. Each working team used another colour, that is F-3 (teachers working in preparation class up to grade 3), 4-6 (teachers for grades 4-6) and teachers working with the leisure-time-centre. An important aspect was that the process was not anonymous. One member of the staff asked why? Maybe they were more used to anonymity. As this was a very important step in mapping and understanding choices and finding out both majority and minority interests, non-anonymity was essential. All the eight areas identified by the staff (during the two-day conference in August) were presented, briefly explained, and written on big sheets of paper which were posted on the wall (thus, eight sheets on the wall).

Example of sheet posted on wall (left Breaks, right Society and Parents)



The staff could put their two post-it notes on the same or different sheets. The instruction was: put your name on the sheet for the area you think is the most important at this moment to work with. To have two post-it notes meant they did not need to consider 'should I put my name on this one or that sheet?'. No-one really knew beforehand what the result could be.

The following two challenges were ranked one and two:

1. **Rules and fundamental values**
2. **Breaks**

After the participatory open democratic ranking process, Kajsa led and guided conversations with small group exchanges between staff (World Café format). The small group exchanges aimed at initiating conversations around why these areas were of high importance.

Reflect on part three: Why are the different areas of improvement important?

Time to deepen understanding...

Two activities were organized by the project partner to deepen the understanding of the staff from the pilot school as well as of the members of the project partner as to why these two areas needed to improve.

1. Guided conversations with small group exchanges between staff (an adopted variation of a World Café)
2. Tutorial sessions with each staff group, F-3, 4-6 and leisure time/recreation staff

Information collected from the three sessions led by a member of the project partner and attended by the principal

Three tutorial sessions were conducted:

- 1) Session with the F-3 teachers (F= preschool class) and principal (9 January 2018)
- 2) Session with the teachers responsible for leisure-time centre, and principal (10 January 2018)
- 3) Session with 4-6 teachers and principal (10 January 2018)

In the meetings with the three teachers' teams, different voices came up. The leisure-time-centre teachers said they regularly felt excluded from the discussions when their competences were not as accounted for or used as they wished. They also said that they earlier had been responsible for indoors break activities, which worked very well. They suggested ways in which the time schedule for the breaks could be changed.

The teacher team for teachers in grades F-3 talked mostly about conflicts between students. Some of the students brought conflicts emerging in their families and/or during break-time into the classroom. That affected the teaching, as it could take a lot of time to solve the conflict before the lesson could start. The project partner noted that, from the discussions, it seemed to be clear that both students and teachers did not really know how to manage the many conflicts.

The teacher team for teachers in grade 4-6 discussed how knowledge concerning rules varied among the staff. Newly employed teachers were not aware of some special old rules. The team also highlighted problems with grade six and their wish to stay indoors instead of being forced to go out during their breaks. The teachers had different opinions about this and also about the meaning of 'all students are all teachers' responsibility'. The discussion was mostly about lack of supporting each other. They agreed about some changes that were needed.

Reflection after the tutorial sessions

Several of the teachers and leisure-time-centre teachers mentioned afterwards that they had not felt fully prepared for the tutorial sessions. The information had been posted on the electronic BlackBoard for staff to read. For example, one of the teachers said they had prepared an agenda for their meeting, not being aware of the fact that members from the project partner were coming. Miscommunication? The project partner had decided not to send out materials for reading in advance, mainly out of concern not to demand too much of the teachers. Maybe this was a wrong decision, and sending materials for reading could have helped to prepare for the tutorial sessions. Another participant noted that “we were mainly talking about problems” and “it nearly sounded that we only have problems in this school and that is not the case”. These comments raised the question: Is it difficult or is there resistance to talking about what is not working well? What happens if we do so?

Information from school staff collected during the workshop and supervision

<p>2. Values</p>	<p>Why is this important for me, my colleagues, students and their parents? How can it improve our work and the work of the school?</p>	<p>It is important to work with rules and fundamental values because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We live in an individual-centred society. ● The school has a large turnover of staff and they do not know the rules and haven't been involved in the discussions about them. ● It is important to have consensus concerning rules. ● They can lead to recurring conflicts and misunderstanding. ● The students have other rules at home, and have not learned which rules are needed to manage themselves in society. ● It is important to ensure clarity about the rules during the whole day (6-18.30). ● We believe that the students know the rules but do not follow them. ● Disrespectful language occurs. ● Home and school differ in their values. ● At present conflicts indicated that it does not work. ● We want to improve the climate for students (between teachers/staff and students). ● The school has lost its focus in its work with fundamental values. At present, most focus is put on knowledge outcomes.
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		<p>It is important to work with breaks because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They are an important part of the daily life of students in school. ● There are many conflicts during the breaks. ● When students do something that is not allowed, there are no clear consequences.. ● It would be good to systematize adult supervision during the breaks. ● There are too few adults outside during the breaks (staff shortage). There is so much happening that we need to notice. ● We have older students that are bored or sad, and anxious and insecure children. ● Anxiety during breaks causes anxiety in the classroom and during after-school activities. Conflicts that are not managed during the break continue during the whole day. ● The schoolyard is very big and is split up by the different school buildings which makes it difficult to guard the students as they spread out. ● The children need to be seen. ● Sometimes the school needs to take over the responsibility of the parents. ● The school lacks activities; students do not know what to do; many children do not manage free play; they need to find out what they can do by themselves. ● There are several power battles during the breaks. ● Nearly every break, fights or violence take place. ● Students find it hard to be outside without adults.
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Information from the impact evaluation

In the LCP project application, it was planned that the results from the 'baseline' impact evaluation data collection could serve as an input for selecting areas of improvement for the pilot school. We were able to plan the activities for the data collection with both staff and students for November and December 2017. The impact evaluation consisted of two activities: a short survey for students and staff, and a visual voice activity for students and staff. The school asked for guidance on the process of data collection with the staff (survey and Visual Voices with staff) and written instruction for the school delegates for the collection of the data from the children (survey and Visual Voices with children in their respective classes). These were provided.

The evaluator from the University of Cambridge was, however, not able to visit the school to interview staff and listen to the visual voice presentations from the children before January 2018. The visit of the evaluator was regarded as a very positive experience, especially by the students. They en-

joyed speaking English with the evaluator, recognized him during his breaks and lunch meal (many waved). After returning home, the evaluator processed the data and wrote a report. This was long after the school had decided on the areas they wanted to work with.

An extra activity

Two Croatian teachers and one person from the Osijek Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights visited the school (1 December 2017). This visit was much appreciated by the teachers, students and principal.

An intensive LCP week 15-18 January 2018

1. An evening organized by the project partner, with all school staff and Bernard LeRoux (15 January 2018). The aim of the meeting was to hear each other's voices, come together as a group, get some extra input on thinking about rules, values and conflicts, and be ready to make decisions on which actions to implement.
2. 16-19 January: Evaluator visits the school with the aim of participating in the visual voice sessions with the children and collecting data through interviews with staff from the school and the project team.

4.4.2. Action plan

Based on the information and ideas collected from all staff during autumn 2017 and the intensive LCP week in January 2018, there were follow-up meetings attended by the project partner and the delegates of the pilot school (6 February and 9 May 2018). The meetings focused on discussing and elaborating possible actions, and reflecting on the possibilities of implementing certain actions. In this process, only the project partner and the school delegates were involved. The members of the project partner summarized the discussions in research questions and aims, as follows.

Research questions and aims

3. Re-search question	What can we do with the challenge we face with regard to the breaks?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We can plan organized and joint activities. 2. We can review our supervision system. 3. We can buy new outdoors materials. 4. We can examine the causes of the problems during the breaks.
4. Aim	What do we want to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create community among the staff ● Reduce the number of bored students and increase the number who enjoy themselves and think it is fun to be outdoors ● Reduce the number of conflicts during the breaks and those conflicts that are carried into the classroom after the break ● Gain more insight into what works and doesn't work in our organization and our work

4.4.3. Actions

During the spring term, several actions were identified and developed that could change and improve the school practice.

Note: We noticed that the school often indicated that there was not enough time and they could not give priority to the project. But when we talked to them, reflected and got feedback, we found that they do a lot that is not always reported.

Action 1: Outdoor break schedule for staff

The pilot school was united in agreeing on the important principle that at least one staff member (preferable more) would be outside during student break-time. The outdoor break schedule was not working well. The first action after all the meetings and discussions was to look over the schedule for the adults to supervise outdoor activities during the breaks, which was done by the principal. A first discovery was that the notion that some staff were not scheduling themselves for outdoor breaks was incorrect. Every one signed up for the agreed number of 'outdoor supervision' sessions. However, the table used had far too many gaps, given the number of staff working at the school. The principal realized that it would be important to inform her staff during a staff meeting that each and every one fulfilled their supervision tasks and that a totally different schedule was needed. A new schedule had to be developed with fewer gaps, to be implemented for the new academic year 2018/2019. All teachers should be involved and responsible for the students' indoor and outdoor breaks.

Action 2 Reactivating indoor break activities for the older students

It was also discussed that it would be feasible during spring 2018 to reactivate indoor breaks for the older students. This was something that the school had been doing but the arrangement just disappeared. One of the teachers for the leisure-time centre was asked to lead this indoor-break activity for the students of grade five and six twice a week. The principal provided some responses about this action, including: "*Indoor break activities for the older students were organized two days a week. When the pedagogue was ill on one of the occasions, the students came to tell me that the activity could not be cancelled like that and asked the principal if she could be there instead.*" We interpreted this as an expression of importance from the students.

Action 3 Addressing activities for students during the breaks

- a. Changing break-time schedules to allow joint activities
 - b. More and different materials for the schoolyard
 - c. Indoor organized breaks for grade 5 and 6
 - d. Parents cleaning and painting the schoolyard
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- a) For the start of the new academic year 2018/2019, ideas were developed to change the morning break-time schedule for all students. Until then, classes had been scheduled to go outside one after the other. That is, first one or two classes during 20 min, followed by the next classes during 20 min and so on. This meant that for three periods of 20 minutes for the morning breaks, adults needed to be scheduled to be outside in turn. The school considered if it was possible to change the series of morning breaks to one break for all. Consequently, fewer staff had to be scheduled to be outdoors during the morning breaks, joint activities could be organised by an adult or a group of students, and older and younger students were able to play together. During the lunch breaks, students are outdoors in smaller groups. One group eating; another group outdoors.

- b) In addition, new outdoor playing material was bought and spread out in different places around the schoolyard so that the students had more choices of what to play with.
- c) The parent organisation took the responsibility of freshening up the schoolyard by painting games on the floors (e.g. Kingcourts) and checking the materials.
- d) Indoor activities for the students in grade five and six on certain weekdays continued.

Action 4 Evening staff meeting with all staff and principal where three fundamental value words were discussed

The value words ‘Consideration, Responsibility and Community’ were discussed during an evening staff meeting (pilot school activity). These three words are now displayed all over the school.

Action 5 Reducing the number of students in the corridors before school starts

Instead of children walking into the school building when arriving at school, they (and their parents) are welcomed by the staff and sometimes the principal in the schoolyard. The bell for ‘going in’ rings five minutes before school starts, thus not allowing students to hang around in corridors, etc.

Possible and planned actions

6. Actions	What can we do to fulfil our goals?	
	6.1 Will we read something?	
	6.2 What actions are planned with colleagues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Two-day conference at a conference hotel with all staff (to identify challenges the school is facing and discuss fundamental values) (reflection & dialogue) ● Open, democratic, ranking workshop with Kajsa Svensson (reflection & dialogue) ● Tutorial sessions with the three staff groups (F-3/4-5/leisure-time centre staff) (deepening) and principal (reflection & dialogue) ● Evening with Bernard LeRoux (reflection & dialogue) ● Principal examined the schedule for staff supervisors during break-time and found out that, even though every staff member was doing their duty and was outdoors as required, the schedule had too many gaps. ● Evening staff meeting with all staff and principal where three fundamental value words discussed.

		<p>Actions for the schoolyear 2018/2019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement a new schedule for break supervision. ● Schedule joint breaks for all classes during the morning (instead of one after the other). ● Develop activities for all students during the breaks, led by staff or older students. ● Staff and sometimes the principal should be out in the schoolyard before school hours to welcome the children in. ● The school bell should be rung five minutes before school starts so that do not hang around, e.g. in corridors. ● Evaluate the new break-time system (October 2018). <p>The team with delegates from the school are three teachers and the principal who the project partner met every 4-6 weeks for dialogue and follow-up.</p> <p>The four delegates from the pilot school were in Zadar for inspiration and to get to know the delegates from the other schools in this project. Already in Zadar, they were asked to reflect on the project's research problem in relation to their own school context.</p> <p>School visit of two teachers and one representative of the NGO in Croatia. One teacher and the principal participated in the UK school visits and the Conflict Matters conference in London.</p> <p>Common activities: Visual voice and surveys for the impact evaluations. Collecting information about the situation at present and time for reflection.</p>
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	<p>6.3 What actions are planned with students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indoor breaks for grades 5 and 6 (11-12-13 year-olds) with a teacher ● Buying new outdoor materials for playing ● Participating in the visual voice (impact evaluation) – students were able to listen to each other and their explanations of the pictures ● Reorganization of the breaks: all students should have the same 20 minutes' break during the morning (more children to play with and easier for the adult supervision system). ● The common break-time during the morning creates possibilities for joint organized and guided activities. ● Buying a GaGapit (see picture)
	<p>6.4 What actions are planned with parents?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents association: helping out with repainting the schoolyard <p>Discussed plans for the school year 2018/19</p> <p>Different start of the new school year; inviting parents for a parents meeting together with their children (we know that this has not been done)</p> <p>Aiming to: show what the school is good at, to make a parent meeting interesting and stimulating and create more space for contacts</p>
	<p>6.5 What actions are planned with the local community?</p>	



GaGapit

4.4.4. Observing and collecting data

During the school year, the project partner collected information from activities conducted in order to reflect and to plan actions. The activities as well as the written material from the activities supported the process of reflection and dialogue of those involved (project partner, delegates from school and all staff). Some of the activities were partner action research activities, others were pilot school action research activities.

Action research activities initiated by the project partner – we collected:

- Notes from follow-up meeting between the project partner and delegates of the pilot school
- Notes from the project partner meetings
- Process and outcome of the participatory open democratic ranking process workshop
- Outcomes in the form of large sheets from the small group discussions (World Café)
- Summaries from the tutorial sessions
- Baseline data from the impact evaluation

Data collected by the project partner to understand what actions had been implemented and how they worked – we collected:

- Harvesting from the feedback session (December 2018) between project partner, and principal and teacher (both delegates) from the school
- Final data from the impact evaluation

- Feedback during the dissemination seminar at the school where the project was summarized and results from the impact evaluation presented – during the discussion, staff responded to the presented results and expressed their own experiences of change

Action research activities initiated by the pilot school – we collected:

- Reports from the two-day conference involving school staff
- Evaluation of the new break-system
- Evaluation and update of last year's plan to counteract degrading treatment (found in the formal documents of the school)

Project partner

Harvest from the feedback session with principal and teacher

On 5 December 2018, Kajsa Svensson, Ann-Katrin Swärd and Ilse Hakvoort (the project partner) met with two delegates from the school, the principal and a teacher. Two teachers, who had represented the school the previous year, left the school to move on in their teaching careers. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: (1) preparing for the dissemination activities for spring 2019 and (2) a spontaneous feedback session on the accomplishments of the pilot school.

During this feedback session, we used the whiteboard to write down what the headmaster and the teacher were telling us.

Notes from whiteboard (collected statements and reflections from the two delegates)

- § More tranquillity in the corridors
- § Since November a calmer start of the day (oral comment: We decided that we ring the bell 07:55 in the morning 5 minutes before the lessons. The children are not allowed to go into the school before. The principal and other teachers were often on the schoolyard to welcome the children.)
- § Fewer conflicts between children despite the many children outside
- § Staff are able to show the children more area to play and things to play with
- § Younger children less afraid of the older children
- § Increased togetherness between students and staff
- § Organising the morning break-time for all students at the same time provides a space for planned/ organised activities for children to join in
- § Grade 5 and 6 continued with their inside break-time a few times a week.
- § Parents have mentioned that they heard it was calmer during the breaks at school
- § The student council has reported that not all children have access to the swings, too few of them
- § Classroom teachers, guess all of them, work with the three value words/fundamental values
- § GaGa pit [a rink for playing GaGa, a variant of dodgeball] – a schedule is needed for the many children that want to play there – maybe we buy one more
- § More sense of community between the staff
- § Increase of exchange between working groups
- § Organised for spring 2019– a theme week on community
- § Cleaning evening for all staff to help: afterwards the tables were nicely set with a pizza buffet for everyone that helped
- § In the parent association there are several inspiring parents

- § There are more balls, 'Kingcourts', other ball games to play with
- § The staff still miss common planning and reflection time
- § The staff have evaluated their experience of the change of the break schedule

Summary from our harvesting

The feedback session showed that several of the actions planned to be implemented at the start of school year 2018/2019 (and thus after the project partner had finalized their intervention) were actually implemented – such as morning break-time for all students at the same time, purchasing new materials for the school yard, a new schedule for the teachers being outside during the breaks, and continuation of classroom activities with the children with regard to fundamental values as well as of indoor break-time activities for the older students.

The principal and the teacher were astonished when they looked at all the notes on the whiteboard, and realized how much they had achieved in the school. They were clearly overwhelmed. This made us conclude that there is little time during school hours to step back and reflect. This was clearly the role of the project partner.

Pilot school

Pilot school evaluation on changes to the morning break-time schedule

The change in the morning break-time schedule was implemented at the start of the school year 2018/2019 and evaluated by the staff in October 2018. The staff evaluation was led by the principal (own initiative to collect data/information) who shared the outcome with the project partner. Seventeen positive and 10 critical responses were given. On the positive side, it was said that there were noticeably more staff/adults outdoors, spread out over the different corners of the school-yard, children were not always allowed to do as they liked because collective activities could be organized, older and younger children mixed and thus there were many more choices about whom to play with and less conflict, even though there were more children outdoors. The critical voices said that there were more queues for equipment, the younger children did not always dare to join certain activities such as football, more conflicts could be observed because there were more students in the school-yard, and in particular the grade one children would not benefit. All the voices in the evaluation suggested that the morning break could be improved even more. As an extra voice, the principal said: "Parents of a student who used to attend our school requested if their child could start again as they heard that the atmosphere in particular during the breaks had improved so much."

Evaluation of last year's plan (public information on the internet)

The school evaluated last year's plan with students through interviews and surveys around their three keywords, as well as formal and informal conversations with the students and conversation in the staff group. Observation was another method to collect data about how the plan worked. The evaluation focused on joint activities. It was noted that the wearing of a yellow vest by staff outdoors had increased safety outdoors. Working with the keywords led the students to reflect more on themselves. Most children know the keywords but some students said they could feel insecure in certain places, especially when older students were in the corridor. Another issue that was obvious in the evaluation was that teachers need to continue working with the keywords. To gain more knowledge and skills in dealing with students with special needs, the staff will be educated in competence about children with neuropsychiatric conditions. In addition, more adults are needed during the breaks and

to cover the different spots in the schoolyard. In the evaluation part of the plan, it is noted that the school bought new toys and a GaGa pit to provide more structured activities.

This way of working reminds us about action research. There is a starting point and knowledge of what needs to be developed. After that, it is time to plan and implement the steps. Once the efforts have been completed, you need to follow up the results again. The different parts link with each other and each requires an analysis. This systematic process means seeing the whole, and that each part is dependent on the whole and affects the other parts.

4.5. Conclusion

Looking back on our collaboration with the pilot school

The collaboration between the project partner and pilot school can be divided into different periods: a pre-period, intensive period and post-period.

During the pre-period (February-June 2017), the project partner and delegates of the school worked together to prepare the more intensive collaboration period. Preparations consisted of a first 'getting to know each other', the beginning of a context analysis, exchange of information, the LCP lab for the delegates of all five schools, and a meeting to discuss how to start the work at the school with all school staff after the summer holidays.

During one school year (end of August 2017-June 2018), the project partner and pilot school worked intensively on different activities related to the action research cycle. The first six months were focused predominantly on identifying the issues the school wanted to work with and improve. The university team was used to work with reflection, slowing down processes so as to allow better understanding, and including all voices possible; the pilot school was used to work with actions and moving forwards, sometimes on the bases of decisions by a smaller group of people.

Two very different cultures, a school culture and an academic culture, with different paces and ways of working, met and sometimes clashed. In these collisions, the question of co-designing was apparent more than ever. Who decided on the pace? Who should be involved? Was there a middle way? While the voice of the project partner was louder in relation to time for reflection and involving all staff at school, the voice of the pilot school was listened to with regard to defining community. The school preferred to focus on the actors in the school first before reaching out to others beyond the school. The way forward seemed to be when all were ready to take a next step.

After six months, both project partner and pilot school were ready for the implementation of some actions. The frustration of the school about the slowness of the process was noticeable. They longed for actions and experiencing improvements, and wanted to drop the phase of discussing issues that were not going so well. From January to June, a few actions could be implemented but not many, as there were other important, non-LCP-project issues that asked for the attention of the school. Several suggested actions needed larger re-organisation and had to wait for the new school year to start. When the project partner ended their direct involvement (June 2018), an action plan was developed and the school had started with their actions.

The post-period of our collaboration ran from September 2018 to April 2019. During this period the school worked independently on the implementation of more actions; the evaluators from the University of Cambridge collected their final data for the impact evaluation; the project partner collected information about the process through a feedback session, and several dissemination activities were prepared and put into practice. Looking back, this post-period turned out to be a very essential period of the project. It was during this period that changes and improvements were discovered. We

all moved from wondering ‘what the LCP project in the end brought and what it taught us’ to experiencing real changes and finding out how much we had learned – from co-designing a project and egalitarian dialogues to learning how to do action research; from deepening our understanding of the culture of the school to the time it takes to implement change.

The importance of the post-period

During the post-period, the school was able to independently implement suggested actions as formulated in the action plan. Experienced and presumed improvements by the staff of the pilot school were confirmed by the results of the impact evaluation. The staff had noticed, for example, a decrease in the number of escalated conflicts outdoors and in the corridors, and the results of the impact evaluation confirmed this assumption by pointing to an improvement in the school climate and an increase in the number of students and adults who said they felt more listened to.

While the pilot school, in September-October 2018, was sceptical about what it had accomplished, in April 2019 they came with another picture to the dissemination seminar in Gothenburg. Positive changes in the school had become noticeable, and the post-period as well as the preparations for the dissemination activities had given the school time to reflect on the process. After their presentation, the principal and the teacher both mentioned how much fun it was to talk about their experiences and that only now had they come to understand all the achievements of the school.

“When you come to school, it is then that we understand what we have been doing” – one of the delegates

A parent of a former student (who had changed school) contacted the school saying they would like their child to return to the school as they had heard how much it had improved (reported by one of the delegates).

5. Action Research in Croatia

Nikolina Svalina & Klara Bilic Mestric

5.1. Research context

The Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights, Osijek has been the partner organisation in Croatia in the implementation of this project and action research. The centre is a civil society association founded in 1992 as a non-violent response to the violence of war raging in Croatia. Since its nascent phase, it has been working, amongst other, with teachers and teaching professionals, and has participated in numerous national and international projects dealing with peace education. There are many books, manuals and teaching materials that testify to the centre's continuous contribution in this field. In short, the work of the centre, from the beginning, has been focused on:

(...) human rights, equality, peace, pluralism and civil society. Two of its major projects are: The Promotion of Democracy and Civil Society, and Education for Peace Building and Psycho-social Development of Individuals and the Community in Eastern Slavonia and Danube Area – Creative Workshops. The former focuses on preparing citizens for monitoring elections and non-partisan campaigns and on assisting civil activists in the development of non-governmental sector and cross-border co-operation. The latter project was initiated in 1992 with the aim of assisting displaced teachers and children, including returnees, to overcome their traumatic experiences of war through workshops and seminars in which they learned the techniques of trauma management and self-empowerment. A long-term objective was to promote a culture of peace and non-violence as a prerequisite for a stable society. The programme is a combination of educational and interventionist approaches. The educational component is realised in terms of the acquisition of new values and skills in workshops.

The Centre for Peace joined this project because it agreed with its overall assumptions: each school, and its setting, is unique, and thus each school or each stakeholder has to develop its own strategies for addressing challenges to peace. The centre also supported the idea that the intervention should be done through action research: action research is action-oriented, but reflective as well; it is participatory and grassroots-based. It discloses power relations, gives power to the individual and fosters collaboration and joint actions.

Since this research addresses the realities of different learning communities, what follows is a brief review of the primary education system in Croatia.

5.1.1. Education in Croatia

Primary schools are mostly founded by the units of local self-government and the towns. In private primary schools, alternative primary education is available according to special pedagogical principles (Waldorf, Montessori). Eight-year primary education in the Republic of Croatia is compulsory and free for all children from the age of six to 15. Education of children with developmental difficulties is conducted in 21 special institutions. Education of the representatives of national minorities is car-

ried out in 24 primary schools, where the programme is conducted in the language and writing of the minority, while 61 primary schools have classes with a programme conducted in the language and writing of the national minority.

Primary schooling is divided into two levels: grade 1 to grade four, with one teacher per class focusing on all subjects, and from the fifth grade onwards with specialised teachers for each subject.

Public education in Croatia is subsidised by the Ministry of Science and Education, which also controls the operation of the school system and introduces regulations to implement legislative acts. The school is run by a school board, composed of representatives of school employees, parents and the superintendent (local/regional self-government unit). The board decides on and controls the implementation of annual curricula in each school. The head teacher's role is managerial and administrative. Schools also have parent and pupil councils with an advisory role.

Critiques point out that the Croatian government spends only 4.8% of its GDP on education (European average 4.7%). Thus, teachers are underpaid and schools lack money even for their most basic needs.

5.1.2. Socio-political context of the project implementation

In the public arena, the project implementation period was marked by harsh and to a large extent political (rather than expert) public debate about the long-awaited curricular reform, currently in its experimental phase. Both pupils and teachers are burdened with an outdated curriculum in which the focus is placed on rote-learning, i.e. reproduction of facts from textbooks rather than on acquiring key competences. As in many other European countries, the reported cases of peer violence are on the rise each year, as stated by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia in February 2018.

Other than being an important part of the migrant route to Schengen countries, Croatia, apart from its capital, Zagreb, does not face serious challenges with regard to successful societal and educational integration of refugees and migrants, but this is largely due to a low number of refugees and migrants wanting to stay in Croatia. However, Croatia has still a long way to go when it comes to resolving the legacy of the war, as the community still has not undergone a thorough social reconstruction, and, most of all, in building its civil society which was virtually non-existent just several decades ago.

After the war, huge amounts of international money were poured into most of the former Yugoslav states, under the label of 'democratization'. Part of that money went to civil society organisations to work, among others, with educators. And this is how peace education or education for nonviolence was introduced to Croatian schools. Unlike in some other post-socialist European countries that did not have armed conflict, there is virtually no teacher or educator in Croatia who has not been trained in nonviolence. Having said that, the civil society organisations in Croatia still face a huge level of distrust from both the population at large and from formal institutions, schools included. For a long time, they were being paid by foreign governments, which resulted in distrust. This makes it hard for a civil society organisation in Croatia to engage in serious and continuous work with schools. To attend a training, a seminar – that is fine, but to engage in an in-depth process of discussing relationships, school structure and power relations in a school and in a school community, that seemed virtually impossible.

5.1.3. How and why we decided to implement LCP in Ivan Goran Kovačić primary school in Vrbovsko

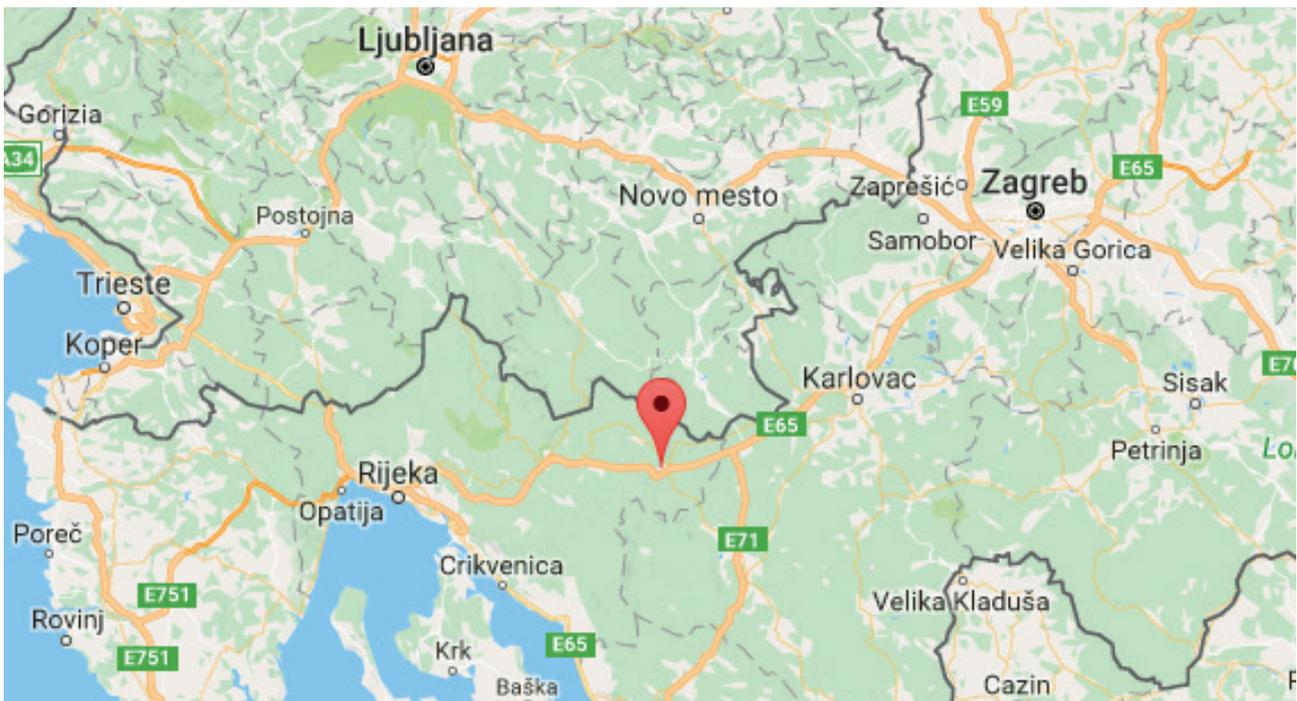
The Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights – Osijek established in 2009 an award for the promotion of peace-making, nonviolence and human rights in honour of one of its founders, peace

activist and humanist Krunoslav Sukić. In 2015, the centre also introduced the *Certificate of Appreciation – Peacemaking School*, awarded to primary and secondary schools which promote education for nonviolent conflict management and active citizenship and solidary participation on the improvement of life of their school and local community. The laureate of this certificate in 2016 was the Ivan Goran Kovačić Primary School in Vrbovsko.

Given the short intervention time (only one school year) to implement such a structural process, we decided not to pilot the process in more challenging areas of Croatia, such as eastern Croatia, where the centre is also situated. We opted for a school that experiences interethnic challenges related to the recent war and, unlike eastern Croatia, has kept its minority population numbers almost at the same level as before the war, which is quite a rarity in Croatia. Also, Vrbovsko is one of the rare ‘peace pockets’ in Croatia: an area inhabited by both Serbs and Croats in which war didn’t take place, because its population decided not to fight each other (although some of them participated in armed conflicts in other parts of Croatia).

5.1.4. Geographic and demographic data

Vrbovsko is situated in the far east of Gorski Kotar in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County. With its 280 square kilometres area, the Vrbovsko municipality covers 60 villages and has 5,076 inhabitants. In the north, it borders with Slovenia. The geographical position of Vrbovsko, halfway between Zagreb and Rijeka, is of extreme importance for the local economy.



Location of Vrbovsko in Croatia

According to the last census (2011), there are 5,076 people living in Vrbovsko, of whom 60.15% are Croats, 35.22% Serbs and 4.63% ‘other’; 57.01% of the population are Catholics, 35.34% Orthodox and 7.65% ‘other’. The mother tongue of 95.49% of the population is Croatian.

The gender structure of the population of the town of Vrbovsko is the same as in other Croatian regions (prevailing female population). Demographic features include a low birth rate, high mortality, a natural decline in population and a negative migration balance.

The most important industry is the wood industry. Abundant forests have resulted in many sawmills. The economic crisis and the recession affecting Croatia particularly affected this area, especially small and medium-sized businesses. Negative economic factors have risen to the fore through a devastated economy. This has largely contributed to the depopulation of the area, especially by young people.

5.1.5. About the school

Ivan Goran Kovačić Primary School consists of one central primary school located in Vrbovsko and seven branch schools under its auspices – in Severin na Kupi, Moravice, Senjsko, Jablan, Gomirje, Lukovdol, Veliki Jadrič. The schools in Vrbovsko, Severin na Kupi, Moravice enrol pupils from first to eighth grade, while the other schools only have pupils from first to fourth grade. The central school in Vrbovsko and the branch schools have a total of 36 classrooms (1,871m²), two sports halls (1,417m²) and four sports courts (2,864m²).

The school starts at 07:30 or 8:00 and ends at 12:35. In two branch schools, after-school care is organised for pupils who travel by public transportation to school and back.

The school engages 65 employees. Apart from 43 teachers, it employs also a headmaster, a pedagogue, a SEN educationalist, two librarians, school secretary, accountant, cooks, janitors, and cleaning and maintenance personnel.

Teacher turnover rates are low. Teachers usually spend most of their work time in one school. Most have a fixed-term contract and are full-time employees. However, many work in 2-3 different schools (main and branch schools).

All classrooms are equipped with basic teaching materials and equipment, which are being acquired and renewed in accordance with financial circumstances. The school has outdated IT equipment, and is applying for donations through different projects. Currently, the school owns 43 computers.

The school has three libraries: one in the central school and two in two branch schools. In total, they have 7,611 books and other library material. School libraries organise and run various projects, such as 'We all read in our family' – developing reading skills and love of reading in a family circle, 'Gorani – with a book in their hand' – developing reading competences and development of social skills, Biblioclub, Treasure Bag, My First Book, Reading Knows No Frontiers, visiting book fairs, etc.

The school offers a wide array of before and after school activities aimed at fostering pupils' talents and interests in various areas. It has a drama group, theatre group, literary and journalism group, art group, photography group, creative group, ecology group, heritage group, school choir, brass band, firefighters, Red Cross group, etc. The school's sports club gathers children around different sports, such as football, handball, volleyball and chess.

A total of 45% of pupils and teachers are of Serbian nationality and 55% are Croats. Apart from providing education in the Serbian language and script, the school runs different interethnic and interreligious projects aimed at fostering tolerance in the learning community (such as the project 'Cyrillic and Latin Alphabet – Unity in Variety', in which pupils learn how to write in the Cyrillic alphabet, irrespective of their nationality; optional classes of three catechisms – Catholic, Orthodox and Baptist, which have resulted in visits to each other's place of worship, emphasizing the value and significance of a mutual sacred heritage).

The school mediation centre was founded nine years ago and all teachers, pupils and their parents, as well as mediator-trainers, have completed the specialist programme for practising mediation. The school also runs programmes for nonviolent conflict resolution as well as prevention of violence in youth relationships for 7th and 8th grade pupils.

5.1.6. People relevant to the research

The research was conducted in close planning and cooperation with project partners: University of Gothenburg (SE), Evens Foundation (BE), ARC (UK), Place Identity Gr (EL) and University of Barcelona (ES). The group met regularly both in person as well as online to design the research, set the principles and aims, and reflect and consult throughout the research implementation. It was a group of critical friends.

Teachers and other school staff, pupils, parents from the Ivan Goran Kovačić school in Vrbovsko and members of their learning community were at the heart of the research. They participated in training events, seminars and workshops, an action research planning session, a reflection session and two evaluation sessions. We exchanged numerous emails and had phone conversations and Skype talks. We learned from them tremendously.

Dr Klara Bilić Meštrić of the University of Zagreb trained trainers and project partners how to plan and deliver action research. She also conducted training and reflection sessions with the teachers from the school in Vrbovsko. She is our critical friend and also a critical friend of the teachers from Vrbovsko, who are writing their own action researches about the project.

Dr Sara Clarke-Habibi of the University of Cambridge conducted an external evaluation of the process and made two evaluation visits to Vrbovsko. Discussions with her and reflections on the project enriched our understanding.

Dr Valerija Barada of the University of Zadar provided valuable inputs about the literature in the field of sociology, relating to the culture of peace in multi-ethnic communities.

5.2. Action research process

In order to plan, act, monitor and reflect on the process, qualitative data were collected; namely, correspondence with critical friends, workshop/training materials and evaluations, images, notes from reflection sessions, audio recording from focus groups and reflection session, teachers' action research accounts, reports and the results of participatory observation.

The focus of this research was on establishing a process that would:

1. introduce the school to the concept of the Learning Communities for Peace and understanding of its main principles and values
2. introduce the school to action research as a method of reflective action and leading them through their own action research
3. test to what extent an outsider to a learning community for peace, in this case, a civil society organisation, can cooperate with a school to bring about this process

It is these three aims that we will describe and analyse in the rest of this report. The steps taken in the realisation of these goals were manifold and expanded over a period of two years.

Key steps taken to achieve goals

First encounter with the school	Osijek, December 2016
Joint staff training of project partners	Antwerp, February 2017
Setting a framework of the school's LCP	Osijek, April 2017
European learning communities for peace LAB – joint teacher training	Zadar, April 2017
Conducting the whole-school analysis of needs and challenges	Vrbovsko, May/June 2017
Workshop about action research, designing an action research plan	Vrbovsko, July 2017
Implementation of the action research plan	Vrbovsko, September 2017-September 2018
A 5-day initial impact evaluation visit of University of Cambridge researcher	Vrbovsko, November 2017
Reflection and further planning by partners at the project partner meeting	Athens, March 2018
Second impact evaluation visit of University of Cambridge researcher	Vrbovsko, October 2018
Reflection on action research process; workshop on how to write an action research account	Vrbovsko, October 2018

In the report that follows, we will focus on the actions that are Vrbovsko-specific and not covered by other documents of the LCP project, i.e. first encounter with the school, setting a framework, analysis of needs and challenges, workshop on action research and the action research plan as well as its implementation (as related to our goals), and reflection on action research process.

5.2.1. Introducing the school to the LCP concept

The process extended over a two-year time span. It started in December 2016, when the school was first approached to participate in this experimental project. The first encounter took place at our annual ceremony of the Krunoslav Sukić Award for the Promotion of Peace-Making, Nonviolence and Human Rights, at which the school from Vrbovsko was awarded with a Peacemaking School Recognition. Head teacher Anton Burić and pedagogue Tanja Jakovac expressed an initial interest in participating in the project.

At our project's joint staff training (Antwerp, February 2017), the project partners discussed how to engage with schools and the main content and strategies of our action research. This training set milestones for our future work with the school in Croatia.

A great opportunity to present the project and its basic features was the school's five-day study visit to Osijek, in April 2017. The group of 25 people who attended a one-day introductory workshop to LCP was composed of both adults (teachers, parents, school administration) and pupils (11-14 year-olds) in equal numbers; this was already a big advantage that coincided with the main principles of LCP – a bottom-up approach and equal participation of all stakeholders of a learning community. The challenge for us as facilitators was to prepare process and materials that would be understandable and suitable for both adults and children.



Children from Ivan Goran Kovačić primary school at 7 March 2017 workshop

The facilitators did not start with presenting the project or with defining the key terms; they rather let the group, divided into smaller mixed groups, define what a ‘learning community’ and ‘peace’ meant for them, and then to come to a conclusion about what ‘a learning community for peace’ meant for this particular school. *They came to this definition: A school community consists of a number of people and to build peace in a learning community means to ‘build more quality relationships among stakeholders of a learning community’* (group discussion, 7 March 2017).



Presentation from workshop with mixed group from Vrbovsko, 7 April 2017

Afterwards, the group broke up into smaller groups to list the strengths and challenges of the school in their actions to build quality relationships in their learning community. After the presentations, the strengths and challenges were thoroughly discussed. The adults and children had different perspectives and opinions about these issues, and the discussion showed that there were many misunderstandings. For example, one teacher said: *“Parents rarely come to parent-teacher meetings or to individual consultations, and when they come, they are mostly passive. They lack interest in what is going on in the school and they show little interest in their child’s progress.”* The reaction of pupils to these words was quite strong. They explained that their parents were very busy; sometimes they had two jobs in order to make ends meet; they had to take care of their younger children or work on the farm. In addition, the pupils said that, because of the scattered nature of the dwellings in the mountain area surrounding the school, parents found it hard to travel to school.

Furthermore, one teacher, also a parent, explained that parents still needed to learn how to engage with a school, because they (especially the older generation) tended to be respectful and quiet in communicating with the school staff. This conversation itself was a big learning point for all involved. It demonstrates how important it is to discuss challenges in mixed groups and from different perspectives. This part of the workshop ended with the conclusion about the main strengths and challenges.

The next task was to list all activities and cooperation projects that the school implements and are related to improving relationships in the community, whether in the school or in cooperation with other schools, local or regional government, civil society organizations, religious organisations, etc. Since the school has, apart from the school in Vrbovsko, seven branch schools, the group was now divided into smaller groups according to the location of their school. The lists that they developed were quite extensive, which indicated how proactive the school already was, and its great communication with community stakeholders.

Only after this exercise were participants introduced to the project itself, its European dimension and milestones. Facilitators explained that, based on the elicited definitions of their learning community for peace, defined challenges and strengths as well as key stakeholders in their community, they were going to define an action plan to be implemented in one school year in order to create better relations within their learning community. They were given guiding principles to lead and participate in the process: a whole-school and bottom-up approach, which should be participatory, inclusive, reflective and process-oriented.

The introduction to the process also included a European LCP LAB – joint teacher training, in April 2017 in Zadar. Four representatives from each European school participating in the project, this time only teachers and administrative staff, took part in a two-day training. Facilitators of the training were representatives of partner organisations. One of the greatest challenges we faced in preparing the workshop was in clarifying the role of two different research studies in the project: action research and impact evaluation. During the process in Zadar, the teachers from different European schools got to know each other and the range of different school realities, which was one of the most important benefits of this event, as well as gaining a European perspective on the idea and the process. This is also where teachers were introduced for the first time to Visual Voices, an evaluation tool used by the University of Cambridge to evaluate the impact of the conducted process.

Excerpt from participants' evaluation of the LCP LAB (prepared by Dave Warren)

6. What did you like most about the training, what worked well?

Candidate Identifiers	Response
a.	To get to know new people.
b.	i) Meeting other schools and learning from each other, ii) the action research.
c.	Many teachers from other countries and establishing relationships across Europe.
d.	Collaborative and thoughtful training, polite and respectful atmosphere, more time needed to write our own ideas, 3 days with 'brain-breaks' would have been a more comfortable timeline.
e.	Meeting other teams and learning about our similarities and challenges.

f.	Amazing opportunity to meet teachers & experts from all over the world; great and clear info; really motivating; open to questioning and adapting.
g.	Information about the project; making contact with other schools; thinking about the project (challenges) in our school community.
h.	I learn more about school systems in other countries and issues and problems they have. I heard some good ideas that I can use at my school. Communication with others very well.
i.	Although at the beginning it was challenging, I found interacting with others interesting and helpful. I kind of 'overcame myself'.
j.	I liked the strange and familiar exercise. Because of our diversities, we all look through different eyes on the world around us. I also liked the Visual Voices examples. I gathered very useful information from other schools and we worked well as teams regardless of the different countries that we came from.
k.	It was very well thought out and encouraging. We had real opportunities to work with others from different cultures.
l.	First I like getting to know each other. The most about the training is learning community for peace. I also liked the example from Spain and I think everything worked well, especially exchange of knowledge.
m.	Collaborating with other groups.
n.	I like the differences, that you both listen, exercise, discuss and reflect. The hardest part is when someone speaks too fast and it would be nice to have some slides on paper, so you can write some notes on them during listening.
o.	Good to work together and share.

Although the school had already defined its key challenges and strengths in building an LCP at the workshop in Osijek in March 2017, it took 'the-whole-school-approach principle' seriously: it developed a questionnaire with questions about the school's challenges relating to building better relations and distributed it to all school staff, children and parents throughout May and June 2017. This process was not new to the school. In fact, similar surveys were conducted at the end of each school year in order to plan their next year's curriculum, teachers' professional development and school investments.

5.2.2. Introducing the school to action research and leading it through the research

Based on the collected data and key challenges from all examinees, a smaller group, composed of 10 teachers, including the head teacher and pedagogue, met in Vrbovsko on 5 and 6 July 2017 to develop an action research plan. The workshop was run by Dr Klara Bilić Meštrić of the University of Zagreb, who also conducted a preparation of trainers in the area of action research before the Zadar LCP LAB.

The process of preparing teachers for the action plan was partly organic, being based on their actual needs and some of the actions that had already been started in school. But it also involved an element of a top-down approach, as we came with our own values in this project and ideas on which direction it should go, particularly those concerning the project goals, bearing in mind the very context in which the school is placed (a mixed community and a nonviolent history in what was otherwise a war-torn country). After a five-hour session, the school staff came with a draft action plan, on which

we worked together in the weeks that followed in order to produce the final version. An abbreviated version of the final action plan is shown below.

Outline of final action plan

<p>1. Challenges</p>	<p><i>What are the challenges of building better relationships in and around school?</i></p>	<p>1st challenge: Internal and external school space is not of satisfactory quality.</p> <p>The outdoor space of the school is underused for the needs of the school and the community (outdoor classroom, lack of leisure facilities). Insufficient school equipment to achieve high-quality teaching.</p> <p>2nd challenge: Insufficient information flow between pupils, teachers and parents.</p>
<p>2. Starting values</p>	<p><i>Why is building better relationships in and out of school important to us?</i></p> <p><i>What does it mean to my pupils? Parents? Colleagues?</i></p> <p><i>How can I improve our work through building better relationships?</i></p>	<p>1. By jointly building and using the indoor and outdoor spaces of the school, we will create better interrelationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What matters to us is the school equipment – it leads to maximum use of our teaching potential. ● We need to be more motivated in order to motivate pupils better. ● Building trust between teachers, pupils and parents that contributes to better communication. ● Transparent communication of participants in the educational process.
<p>3. Research questions</p>	<p><i>What can we do with the challenges we are facing? How can we contribute to address the challenge?</i></p>	<p>1. How use the outdoor spaces of the school for teaching purposes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How use outdoor space for the needs of children and citizens? ● How use outdoor space for cultural and public events? ● How improve the internal equipment of the school to improve the quality of teaching? ● How raise funds for landscaping? ● How better connect with branch schools and involve them in school activities? ● How balance interests? ● How motivate branch school teachers to become more involved in school projects? ● How can we build better mutual trust between pupils and teachers? ● How can we build better mutual trust between teachers and parents? ● How can we get parents to come to school parent-teacher meetings? ● How can we get parents involved in school projects?

<p>4. Aims of the research</p>	<p><i>What do we want to achieve?</i></p>	<p>1st overall objective: Improve the material and spatial conditions of the school in collaboration with parents and the local community.</p> <p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equip IT offices and schools (Ministry of Education equipment of the school?) ● Use and tidy up the school's outdoor space and environment to enhance the quality of teaching and connect the school with its context (the local community). <p>2nd overall objective: Enable better communication between pupils, teachers and parents.</p> <p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduce e-class registers to all schools ● Facilitate communication between stakeholders through social networks ● Conduct training in communication skills with teachers <p>Organise team meetings of teachers for the purposes of team-building</p>
<p>5. Research criteria</p>	<p><i>How do we know if we have achieved the goals? Which criteria needed to be met?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analysis of the quality and quantity of the joint activities ● Satisfaction levels of the branch-school pupils and teachers ● Frequency of activities in the school surroundings ● Number of activities, cooperation and number of participants ● More frequent cooperation with parents ● New learning and cooperation spaces ● Better flow of information ● Satisfaction with the relationships of all participants in the educational process ● Better cooperation with the local community

6. Activities	<p>6.1. What activities are we going to implement in order to achieve our goals?</p> <p>6.2. What will we read? (topic-related professional and scientific literature)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organising working groups 2. Acquiring the funds to conduct activities 3. Creating a plan to observe activities and reflection 4. Keeping a research journal <p>1st challenge – Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acquisition of IT equipment ● Cabinet refurbishing ● Construction and renovation of outdoor classroom in a school garden in Vrbovsko ● Designing an educational trail at Severin a Kupa Primary School from the school to Frankopan Castle ● Designing an educational trail of medical plants in school garden ● Labelling wild plants in school garden <p>2nd challenge – Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gain approval from Parents and Teachers Council and School Board to launch the school Facebook page ● Designing and administering school Facebook page ● Choosing and using social networks to establish better communication between parents ● Introduction of e-class registers to all schools ● Examining the need to conduct communication skills training ● Conducting communication skills training ● Performing joint team-building activities 	<p>Ministry of Science and Education; LCP, The Park of Good Intentions; History Lane; Educational Path</p> <p>Barbara Turk Čop</p> <p>Vesna Trope</p> <p>Anton Burić</p> <p>Tihana Ljubojević – history teacher and Vojin Božović – Local council Severin na Kupa</p>
	<p>6.2. What activities do we plan with colleagues, critical friends? Who are they?</p> <p>6.3. What activities do we plan with our pupils?</p> <p>6.4. What activities do we plan with parents?</p> <p>6.5. What activities do we plan with the local community?</p>		
			<p>Nusreta Murtić</p> <p>Alenka Javor</p> <p>Jasmina Krakar</p> <p>Viktorija Samša</p> <p>All teachers</p> <p>Tanja Jakovac</p> <p>All teachers</p>

	<p>Additional activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involve branch schools in joint activities ● Increase the number of joint activities ● Transfer some activities to branch schools (school councils, celebrations) ● Literary meetings, celebrations, sport competition, joint research, A school bag full of culture project ● Ask parents for help with transfer when taking pupils to joint gatherings ● Involve parents, professionals in specific fields in educational programmes ● Continue with existing activities with Ministry of Interior, fire brigade, city library and religious associations, get involved in activities with Red Cross ● Contact local private entrepreneurs to donate materials for outdoor classrooms ● Contact parents to help with the construction of these classrooms, with pupils ● Create new workshops for the new school year ● Ask parents to participate in school celebrations and competitions ● Deliver a presentation for parents about what we do in school, at parents' meetings, school open doors ● Themes across curriculum ● Take part in cultural events in city as part of City Day, Pumpkin Festival, St Martin's Day... ● Organise performances and concerts ● Find critical friends: mutual, defectologist, City Library, KUD Frankopan, TZ Vrbovsko ● Provide books in the gazebo ● Read relevant scientific and professional topic-related literature 	

7. Data	What are the data in our research? How will we collect them?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research journals, photographs, themes across the curriculum, critical friends' comments, study for the gazebo 2. Reflection on the satisfaction levels regarding inclusion 3. Surveys, journal articles, photographs, recordings 4. Collecting data following the timeline
8. Ethical dimension	Does everyone want to participate? What if someone does not agree to participation? Do I have parents' consent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Presentations of the action plan at the teacher council assembly, pupils council, parent-teacher meeting ● Collect parents' and pupils' consent

The process of facilitating the implementation of the action research took place during the school year 2017/2018 (some actions did not stop with that school year). During this period we contacted the school regularly either face to face, through Skype meetings or in email correspondence.

During the workshop at which the school staff created the first version of the action research plan, some common challenges in conducting action research were highlighted. We did our best to prepare teachers for the uncertainties of action research. However, some were still puzzled over questions that regularly create problems in school action research; they were unsure if they were doing it well, if the research part went well, if they had collected data properly, etc (personal communication with teachers, mail correspondence, Skype meetings).

Despite the feelings of insecurity, given that this was the first time that school teachers, the pedagogue and the head teacher had conducted action research, their approach was truly participatory and bottom-up, and the work on the goals was done collaboratively, in constant dialogue with both the school community and the local community. They worked meticulously on achieving their goals. Below is a summary of some of the actions taken between 2017 and 2019 (some are still ongoing).

Actions taken, 2017-2019

The school has created a Facebook page in order to facilitate communication among schools and also with the local community.
Viber groups with parents were created that facilitated easier and more transparent communication between parents and home teachers.
An e- Class register was introduced in some of the schools in 2017/2018 and in almost all branch schools in 2018/2019 (except for branch school Moravice).
Teachers and pupils participated in several programmes aimed at developing communication skills.
Teachers participated in numerous events together, with the aim of team-building (going to theatre plays together, numerous festivities, etc).
Branch schools were actively involved in numerous cultural, educational and sport activities.
Several important events took place in branch schools and not only in the main school.
Local professionals delivered lectures to teachers and pupils on several subjects of importance for the local area.
Parents and pupils participated in numerous activities aimed at improving conditions in and around schools (decoration, gardening, refurbishing, wall painting, etc).
A gazebo (outdoor classroom) was built.
The historical trail in Severin na Kupu was built.
The school was equipped with new computers, printers, etc.
...

The number of actions taken by the school was immense. This presented a challenge to us as to how to keep track of all the activities and (if needed critically) analyse the progress the research was making. Due to our positions (of a facilitator and someone used to conducting smaller-scale action research studies with individuals who work on their own professional challenges and resulting goals), the scope of work and the need to systematically follow all the steps taken seemed to be overwhelming. Despite having intense communication with the school and following their work on their Facebook pages, in their research diaries, etc, there was a feeling that it would be hard to systematically observe all the work that had been done and reflect on all the actions that had been taken - for both of us, the project partner and facilitator of the LCP process and the school itself. In short, due to the number of activities that the school envisioned for this period and the pace they took, it was hard, if not impossible to have enough time to reflect on all the actions that were planned and implemented. The school was obviously making progress, as the impact evaluation, Visual Voices and their own reports clearly show, but the time for a systematic reflection in such a short (project-framed) period was scarce.

It is for this reason that we decided to reflect on the whole process at a workshop on 27 October 2018 where the teachers were also taught how to write an action research report. Before the technical part of the workshop, dedicated to report writing, the group of around 20 teachers was divided into two smaller groups to reflect on the whole process and the actions taken in relation to the predefined goals – the overarching goal for the LCP action research project to promote “the process of building better relations among all participants in the educational process, and more and better connections with the local community”, and then the two sub-goals (divided between the two groups): (1) to fa-

facilitate better communication between teachers and students, and (2) to improve the material and spatial conditions of the school in collaboration with parents and the local community.

In the reflection, the tone was generally positive as most of the goals had been achieved and the activities listed testified to the hard work that took place during the period in which the action research was conducted. Communication was facilitated through various communication channels; branch schools were involved in all the activities and in many cases they hosted various celebrations and other events; numerous events gathered parents and teachers and pupils, which led to better relationships. However, teachers did highlight challenges that remained and that went beyond the scope of the project. The whole area is particularly suffering from depopulation as many families are emigrating. Consequently, some of the branch schools will have to be closed down due to lack of pupils. The branch school Lukovdol has only one pupil, and the branch school Senjsko has already been closed down. Although much of the new IT equipment was provided through various projects and in collaboration with the local community (local entrepreneurs and politicians), the central school in Vrbovsko benefited from energy renovation during the same period, which then created an even bigger gap between the centre and periphery (central and branch schools) in infrastructural terms. Some of the parents from other areas drive their children to Vrbovsko for these reasons.

Finally, the reflection also looked at our role as facilitators in the whole process and the overall analysis on the action research process.

5.2.3. How far can an outsider to LCP cooperate with a school to build better relations?

The last reflective dimension was dedicated to the whole process of action research. In this part of our report, we will also reflect on our role as an outsider to an LCP and facilitator of an action research process.

When asked about the transformative dimension of the action research and to what extent it had taken place, the pedagogue, Tanja Jakovac, stated that the process of personal transformation had not been so extensive, as they had already been working on the goals that the LCP advocated. However, she did highlight that the systematic approach and constant observation and reflection that the research required was something new and had yielded positive results:

... it has inspired us for even more engagement because it was something systematic, organised, and we have had feedback – a kind of external evaluation, which I don't see in the teaching process ... We give ourselves credit as if we are working on ourselves. We normally do this because we see that our students are more successful, but it is only natural what we do and it was great that someone from the outside comes to say that what we do makes sense. This year, we all wanted something, and the other ones were involved, who did not take part until now, although a small number still remained aside, which doesn't mean they are bad teachers. It has connected us, so far each school has worked for itself (...), but now our attitudes and our thinking spread, now we see that everything that we do is a part of all of us – I see this as something valuable. – School pedagogue, 27 October 2018, Vrbovsko

Her comments also marked the role of facilitators as external observers whose approval was welcomed and appreciated. She also makes the important point about the unity that persisted or came about as a result of this joint endeavour (“now we see that everything that we do is a part of all of us”).

However, teachers mentioned the scope of work as something they had also found challenging. A statement saying that even “just three actions, but on which we will work together, make sense” and that they all needed a break now, confirmed our personal attitudes that the measures taken were to some extent burdening and hard to observe and reflect upon in a detailed and thorough way.

A couple of teachers highlighted the focus on challenges that the LCP approach advocated through action research. As one of the teachers observed:

I became aware of what the problems were. We are all doing great work and that's all been great for years, but to focus on challenges – this I found great! (chemistry teacher, 27 October 2018, Vrbovsko)

A challenge to connect people and enable better communication and relationships was something that several teachers brought up:

It is useful because the implementation of a project alone is demanding in terms of interpersonal relationships, many different things and ideas that took place, and experiences, difficulties and obstacles, material and human, high expectations ... But this experience would be useful to everyone ... the challenge of connecting people... getting material equipment is less of a challenge than connecting people and having to work together (religious classes teacher, 27 October 2018, Vrbovsko)

Though not explicitly mentioned, it was in these (and similar comments) that we felt that the role of NGO as an outsider in this community did make sense. With its clear and systematic approach, which required constant planning, action, observation and reflection and the focus on challenges that existed in society, our role did not seem redundant or unnecessary for the purposes of the LCP.

However, some challenges remained that we, as an outsider NGO organisation, felt had not been addressed in the research conducted. These challenges concerned inter-ethnic conflict which is rather palpable in other parts of Croatia with a higher mix of ethnic groups (Serbs and Croats), but did not seem to have an impact on the community and schools we worked with in LCP. On certain occasions, when we tried to ask questions about inter-ethnic relations, these questions were most frequently approached as something irrelevant and not pertinent to the local context. However, in other instances, some isolated voices indicated the opposite (e.g. a religion classes teacher during the reflective workshop, 27 October 2018).

It is in this context that we became aware that, in work with the LCP, we need to strike a balance between issues that matter to us – an NGO that has been actively involved in peacebuilding relations related to inter-ethnic conflict, especially bearing in mind that the Centre for Peace is situated in the war-torn zone where questions related to inter-ethnic conflict are of utmost importance – and the school and specificities of the local area, which managed to avoid the conflict and participate in an extremely co-creative and constructive environment.

Another, albeit related, issue that seemed relevant and worth addressing in future projects and research, concerned a more general question of the role of an NGO that is not from the same area as the community itself. Despite our intensive involvement and constant dialogue with school teachers, pedagogues and headmaster, we felt that we missed the fine nuances of the everyday reality in which relationship-building took place. Furthermore, our own preoccupations (mentioned above) were also something that were hard to observe from the position of an outsider. It is for this same reason (of us not being a local organization) that the observation part and reflection could not be as systematic and as extensive as we would have liked. Although the position of the Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights – Osijek is legitimized for a number of reasons (coming from a war-torn area, working on peacebuilding for decades, recognising the school's work and intensive dialogue with the school community), its external position may entail various challenges. Other NGOs that will work in this (or a similar) context might be dealing with issues related to projectisation of peace-building and 'armchair peacebuilding'. We therefore recommend that constant dialogue and direct involvement in community activities be integrated in such (research) projects.

5.3. Planning a new cycle of research

After the final reflective workshop, a general conclusion was that the action research yielded extremely positive results. All the envisioned activities were successfully completed or, if still in progress, were proceeding as planned. In the final reflection, teachers expressed their satisfaction with the way branch schools had been involved and with the parents' participation in school activities. Both internal and external school spaces had been much improved and this has led to more creative classes and networking on the whole. The general feeling was that the local community took part to an unprecedented extent. For the new cycle of research, as the teachers themselves concluded, the challenge of how to connect the school with the local community remained. But this cycle was a great beginning and set a new direction for the school.

As most of the action research participants stated, this was indeed just the beginning. In spite of the scope of the activities and the work that had been done, teachers felt that it had taken time to become acquainted with the action research methodology and that the whole idea of reflective practice is something that needs to be learned and developed. This school is used to working on projects and similar activities, but the basic idea of action research – that the initiative comes from bottom-up, involving all participants (teachers, school admin staff, pupils, parents) in active engagement in the whole process, that the plan can and should be readjusted after careful observation and reflection – was something new, and is something that the school plans to maintain, particularly concerning the challenge of building relationships in school. The following excerpt is from their action research report:

Recommendations for further research will be related to working on the challenge to bring together participants in the education process.

1. We will investigate how and to what extent teachers are satisfied with the cooperation of support and technical and administrative staff and vice versa. If we start from the fact that the social system of the school is made up of students, teachers and supportive technical and administrative staff, then the school culture depends on their mutual relations and cooperation. Research will also be based on their characteristics such as the role that they play in the educational process, the position, and the relationships among them.
2. We will investigate how satisfied students are with the communication between themselves and the teachers and other staff in school.
3. We will also explore the educational status of our students with the aim of improving the quality of teaching.
4. We will complete the Frankopan Teaching Trail in collaboration with the local community.

Finally, we can conclude that this kind of research is improving the quality of each school. The school should not be a place of bureaucratic pursuits in which we constantly refer to rules, laws, averages, arithmetic means, etc. The school should be a community of all participants in the educational process, a learning community.

The local community and school should be collaborative, stimulating and creative to teach young people that it is important to be together and that the community needs them. A local community like a school should be a learning community. (excerpt from school action research report, April 2019)

Finally, despite the stress and time constraints for the reflection part, it is important to highlight that the Vrbovsko school has successfully achieved the goals from the action research. It identified and recognized all the members of its learning community for peace; it engaged the schoolchildren, their parents and the local community, including politicians and entrepreneurs. As shown in this report,

they put enormous effort into the various activities, which resulted in the creation of community. The gazebo they built together clearly demonstrates ‘togetherness’ and testifies to the success in building the community.

The activities have enabled a flow of information between teachers to an extent unprecedented in previous projects. Some teachers from branch schools voiced a sense of being cut off from school activities. However, during the LCP project, the community implemented concrete measures to address this challenge and this led to fruitful cooperation with the branch schools during all project stages.

Finally, the project managed to engage all members of the community. School staff, students, parents, local community all contributed to the quality of the activities and the school curriculum. In this sense, the action research proved to be truly participatory. The initiative came from the grassroots level, and all members of the community took an active part in the research. The role of students, parents and local entrepreneurs was transformed; they were no longer mere passive ‘consumers’ of the school curriculum, or outside observers. During the LCP project, through constant and active dialogue, they profoundly shaped the intellectual and physical space of Ivan Goran Kovačić School, its branch schools and the surrounding area.

As for our role, the Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights – Osijek will continue its cooperation with the school. Some events have already taken place, following the process of action research. The LCP project and the action research were presented at the Peacebuilding School Forum event in August 2019 in Moravice, where Dr Sara Clarke-Habibi presented the whole concept and the relevant findings.

In order to finish the whole action research cycle, teachers, pedagogue, headteacher and other participants of the school action research have written their action research report. The Osijek Centre is now helping with the editing and revision of this document.

6. Action Research in Greece

Dionysis Giannibas, Mary Karatza & Stephania Xydia

6.1. Research context

6.1.1. Educational system

The Greek educational system is particularly complex and centralized (1), since educational policies as well as educational content are mainly the result of central and governmental decisions.

At the central level, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has the administrative responsibility for the education system in all areas, services and grades. It is the essential decision-maker when it comes to setting goals and regulating various issues such as defining the curriculum, appointing teaching staff and controlling funds and resources. The Institute for Educational Policy elaborates scientific and research issues on education, and suggests or issues an opinion on proposals that are determined by the political leadership. At the regional level, the Regional Education Directorates oversee the implementation of national education policy, while at the local level, the Primary and Secondary Education Directorates supervise all the schools in their area of responsibility. Meanwhile, the schools are responsible for their proper functioning through the Teachers Council and the Parents and Guardians Associations.

Educational policy ends up being strongly influenced by the personal beliefs of ministers, and the political, ideological and party directions of the respective government results in constant and spasmodic changes. In public debate in Greece, the lack of comprehensive and modernized strategic planning is often highlighted. Decentralization of the education system, school autonomy and democracy in the school community have been discussed by many governments, scientific conferences and workshops but more as theory or need, rather than being translated into practice or implementation.

Educational material and practices in Greece are characterized as knowledge-steered (passive acquisition of knowledge) while they often constrain new ideas that could be considered 'out of the box', such as practical learning and divergent thinking, cooperative teaching, or integration of specific skills or social challenges and opportunities. Teachers and students come across many barriers preventing initiative or deviation from circulars.

Recently, practices such as the 'flexible zone' have been integrated into the curriculum to encourage more student-steered and creative learning approaches based on needs and the potential of the students and school community.

At the same time, local authorities are mainly responsible for building infrastructure for schools, while educational equipment issues are often determined by central political mechanisms. Also, municipalities and other non-profit-non-governmental organizations have the opportunity to enrich their schooling experience by developing programs outside of school hours and by using the infrastructure and the people of the school who offer themselves on a voluntary basis. All initiatives and activities to be developed in this setting must be approved by the Ministry of Education and, as far as NGOs are concerned, the approval is examined by the Minister's office.

In the recent years of the country's economic recession and the influx of refugees, many large charity foundations and sponsors have supported integration and equality programmes in school communities, particularly in the central section of Athens.

However, such programmes have generally involved ‘top-down’ practices or public relations on behalf of the foundations. School communities are primarily passive recipients rather than active protagonists regarding the creation of a programme that responds to their needs, encouraging cooperation and resilience. At the same time, the programmes are usually limited to just a few schools, are discontinued when the funding period ends and usually lack sustainable or scaling-up opportunities, substantial evaluation procedures, dissemination of findings, best practices and other open data.

The LCP bottom-up approach, Research/Action Practice, Learning Community, combined with the know-how of Place Identity Clusters (PI) on participatory design methods applied to wider neighbourhoods, towns, and citizens on urban regeneration issues, as well as urban and constitutional planning, have created appropriate conditions for experimentation and learning. Place Identity Clusters, having as its established goal to develop regionally actions around urban centres and having secured independent funding, seeks cooperation in neighboring municipalities in Athens that have fewer opportunities for support, even though they face similar or even greater problems. It is also worth mentioning that in Greece, due to socio-economic conditions, corruption and resistance, especially cultivated in some party spaces, there is a kind of euro-scepticism or counter-reaction against European programmes or actions by non-governmental organizations.

With regard to the issue of refugee integration and equality of children in education, political and party confrontations have often arisen, especially targeting cities, neighbourhoods and schools. In these contexts, extreme right-wing actions establish polarized conditions and destroy every effort for harmonious coexistence and cooperation among and within the school community.

6.2.2. Collaboration with the primary schools

1st school

The first collaboration attempt for the project was with a school belonging to the municipality of Agioi Anargyroi-Kamatero. This municipality is located in north-west Athens, near an industrial and low-income area. The local authorities have been developing various programmes of solidarity and support for refugees in recent years. Meanwhile, a member of the organization PI in Greece is also a parent and an active member of the Parents and Guardians Association of the school, and has been ensuring direct connection, trust and commitment.

After an information meeting with the Teachers Committee, their assembly unanimously decided to integrate the school into the LCP programme. Two teachers, one of whom was the headmaster of the school, and two parents attended the LCP European Lab for Pilot Schools in Zadar and began planning an initial collaboration while waiting for the required approval of the project by the Ministry of Education. However, after the summer break, a new headmaster was appointed and the active attitude of support and cooperation transformed into inactive suspicion about EU programmes and the role of NGOs. It was not long before we were informed that the Teachers Association had decided to withdraw the participation of their school from the programme, justifying their decision by the absence of approval by the Ministry.

2nd school

The partner organization team therefore decided to find another school that would be willing to promptly embark on the project in the middle of the school year. This required that the new school would be willing to adjust its schedule and overcome any trust issues that occurred after obtaining information about the previous school collaboration. Given the circumstances, the partner organization team went on to contact three schools simultaneously in an attempt to assess which one would most likely commit to the project.

The new partners came from the 7th Primary School in the municipality of Ilion. The organization's personal encounters were once again helpful in order to establish a connection. However, two important factors influenced this school to collaborate: the practical benefits, i.e. the in-kind support provided by the Evens Foundation, and the reassurance that the school and the teachers involved would have absolute control over the whats and hows of their involvement in the project.

Moreover, according to the headmaster's comments, it was the relevance of the project that attracted the collaborators, as in recent years there had been attempts at approaching the topic, both in a broader context within society and the school communities in general, and in this school's particular way of being. More specifically, a Team for Preventing School Violence had already been formed; there had been incidents, albeit not deemed very serious, of aggressive behaviour among students as well as conflict between teachers and parents.

Alongside the relevance of the project's subject, the status of the project as reflected in its institutional framework and its participating partners influenced the school's decision to participate, including the fact that it was an Erasmus+ project and other partners were involved. Also, the attitude of the Parents and Guardians Association lent weight, even though some parents responded, in a particularly aggressive manner, to project practices such as the 'open agenda', which was a necessary condition to run a participatory and bottom-up process with the school community.

The above factors contributed to dealing successfully with some challenges involving the teaching staff. For example, some of the teachers objected to an NGO being involved in school affairs. It must also be noted that 50% of the teachers do not hold a permanent position in the school, which, as the headmaster pointed out, leads to detachment and lack of a sense of belonging, ownership and shared responsibility.

2nd school context

The school is located in Ilion, a north-western suburb of Athens with a population of 85,000. During the year of the deployment of the project's activities, the 7th Primary School of Ilion counted 277 students and 35 teachers. There were 6 grades, each grade had two classes, except for the third and fifth grades that had three. The school population included 15 students born in other countries and another 15 born in Greece but with foreign nationality. These 30 students, accounting for 10% of the overall school population, had the following nationalities: Albanian, Georgian, Syrian, Pakistani and Indian.

The school building, constructed in 1977, had particularly large corridors, 12 large classrooms, one large event hall, a chemistry room, a library, an artroom, a warehouse and a dining hall. The compulsory school programme lasts from 8am to 1.15pm and the optional full-time programme is from 7am to 8am and again from 1.15pm to 4pm.

6.2.3 People relevant to the research

A long-term action research project requires commitment, availability and stability, which was difficult for us due to workload, maternity reasons, and the occupational mobility of Greek organizational teams. The combination of Greek realities and the long-term processes of bureaucracy made necessary the rotation of people and responsibilities.

The LCP project coordination team consisted of:

- One scientific partner with a collaboration agreement, who specialized in the design and evaluation of educational programmes (two people in turn during the project)

- One member of the administrative staff of the organization specialized in community projects and participation methodologies (again, two persons in turn)
- One volunteer member of the organization, specialized in communication design and citizens engagement, and also an active member of the school's Parents and Guardians Association

The project team at the first school was enriched by two school teachers, one of whom was the school headmaster and the other a parent and member of the Parents and Guardians Association. The project team at the second school was enriched by two school teachers, one of whom was also the teacher leading the school's Team for Preventing School Violence, and the other the deputy headmaster of the school, while other teachers took advantage of the project's framework of peace-building, by adapting the school's cultural event.

During the project activities, various external experts with competences in rhetoric in education or life coaching and transformational thinking were also involved.



6.2 Data

The data were collected through various processes, some methodical, others organic:

- World Café harvesting: participants' notes, prioritization and categorization
- Notes from brainstorming, reflection or observation by coordination team
- Interviews with school teachers who worked closely with the programme activities
- Personal evaluation form
- Collective evaluation board
- Evaluation form before and after a workshop (recording the transposition dynamic)

Action 1: Meeting with school community 'doers'

After official procedures had been taken care of, the first meeting of the second school (Ilion) took place in an atmosphere of urgency. Given the lack of time and lack of prior framing and training of teachers from the LCP programme (Zadar) but having secured the strong support of the school's

headmaster, a meeting was coordinated at the school where the PI Project coordination team could discuss openly with active and interested teachers. The meeting took place in the school staff-room with the participation of three members of the PI and five members of the school (four teachers and the headmaster).

<p>Action 1: Meeting with school community ‘doers’</p>
<p>Aim</p> <p>Framing LCP & school reality Building common understanding Creating the framework</p>
<p>Harvest of the meeting</p> <p><i>Information was provided about the organization’s actions, the LCP programme objectives, and the philosophy behind a bottom-up and learning community. It was clarified that the school would not bear any financial burden for these actions and would receive support.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness workshops for parents regarding school bullying and methods of nonviolent communication had been initiated at the school in the past, but parents’ attendance had not been very high. • Students’ busy programme of extracurricular activities has an effect on other types of participation for them and their parents. • Within the school community, students get along better than parents in terms of harmonious coexistence and cooperation. • There is a possibility that the sixth grade will present a theatrical performance at the end of the school year, though many decisions have yet to be made. <p>Lack of equipment and resources have had a large impact on the school. For example, a new sound system that can serve a large room and a photocopy machine (to enable the circulation of material and schoolwork for the students) are needed. The principal also frankly informed us that financial support was a key incentive to take part in the LCP programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers were informed on how to implement participatory design methods and were offered sources and examples from previous workshops. <p><i>At this meeting we also defined the purpose and role of PI members:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PI members focus on facilitating and supporting, while teachers, along with students and parents, determine the agenda, time, place, and content. • Within this role, PI members provide support on methodologies, production, networking and addressing other practical or technical issues that the community may face. • PI members can support with design and informational applications for any activities that might emerge in order to enhance the activation and participation of the school community.

Action 2: Open school community workshop



Mapping challenges and co-creating suggestions

The PI team together with two teachers (the teacher leading the Team for Preventing School Violence, and the deputy headmaster) defined and decided on goals, time, space and duration of the first open action towards the school community.

The aim of the workshop was to help determine both conditions and suggestions from the school community members themselves, contributing to successful living together, and then attempting to incorporate the proposals into the next actions.

It was decided that the World Café method, regardless of whether participants are few or many, discussion rounds can be made, active and equal participation of all attendees is ensured, and instant mapping of the conversation topics is made possible. After discussing with the teachers, the main title of the invitation came to be: "Take part! Let's talk about harmonious coexistence and collaboration". The workshop revolved around two main questions and its outcomes, in the participants' own words, were as follows:

Action 2: Open school community workshop 'Take part! Let's talk' (World Café)	
Aim Mapping collectively needs & challenges Co-creating suggestions & solutions	
Harvest of the workshop	
Discussion cycle A: What are the challenges we face in our school community?	Discussion cycle B: What do we need in order to help our school community follow the path of participation, collaboration and living together in harmony?

<p>Need for better communication and collaboration</p> <p>“To have our children talk to us about what preoccupies them” “Need for communication (students <> parents <> teachers) day” “Rational communication and assessment of incidents – no overreactions” “Collaboration among parties making up the school community” “Respecting and enforcing rules”</p>	<p>Support to the school community by an expert (psychologist/social worker)</p> <p>“Teacher counselling on crisis management and group dynamics management” “Parenting school’ organized on a regular basis” “Institutional framework providing one psychologist for every five schools, so he/she can diagnose and support/help in resolving any emerging issues” “Permanent position of psychologist in every school unit” “Presence of a psychologist/social worker” “Cooperation of the school with a psychologist”</p>
<p>Troubling behaviour – Conflict</p> <p>“Parents with offensive behaviour, who influence their children” “Aggressive behaviour by students” “Need for parent counselling” “Dispute among students, among parents, between teachers and parents” “Insulting behaviour by teachers”</p>	<p>Communication / Cooperation between parents and teachers</p> <p>“Formal framework for communication between parents and teachers” “Regular (once every 3 months) afternoon meetings between teacher and parents of his/ her class for open discussion”</p>
<p>Challenges within student groups</p> <p>“Group-forming that may cause tension in the class” “Attention to children being marginalized” “Social isolation of a kid in the school” “Tension instead of collaboration”</p>	<p>Participation / Expression of the school community members</p> <p>“Participation of as many members of the school community as possible in activities like today’s” “Gathering of the children at school to discuss their ideas”</p>
<p>Quality of infrastructure – Safety and security</p> <p>“Safety for children, road safety, school facilities’ safety” “Need for better infrastructure” “Need for security – protection for students against external threats” “Cleaning – Catering for the needs of vulnerable children groups”</p>	<p>Lobbying for better infrastructure</p> <p>“Lobbying of municipal authorities for timely fulfilment of infrastructural needs” “Lobbying of responsible authorities (municipality etc) by the Teachers Council and the Parents Association on issues regarding infrastructure”</p>
<p>Lack of time and space for play</p> <p>“Lack of time and space for play”</p>	<p>Opportunities for play</p> <p>“Safety for play – Space for play / A school yard not made with concrete, and use of the yard in out-of-school hours for neighbourhood play” “Lack of free time – Changing school books that are highly demanding”</p>

Evaluation of the World Café workshop

The workshop lasted three hours. Three teachers and 25 parents, mostly women, took part.

- Most of the participants valued highly the opportunity to enter this kind of discussion and to be heard, as well as to expose their views, needs and ideas.
- It create an appetite for more participatory workshops.
- All attendees were asked if they wanted to continue afternoon meetings of this kind. All said yes.
- Oral feedback collected by the lab coordinators included:
 - “This (World Café) must be established!”
 - “When will we go again (World Café)!”
 - “A World Café should be done every week!”

Outside the meeting room, whoever wanted could answer two evaluation questions placed on a table:

1st question: How do you like the workshop?

19 persons evaluated it 9 ~ 10

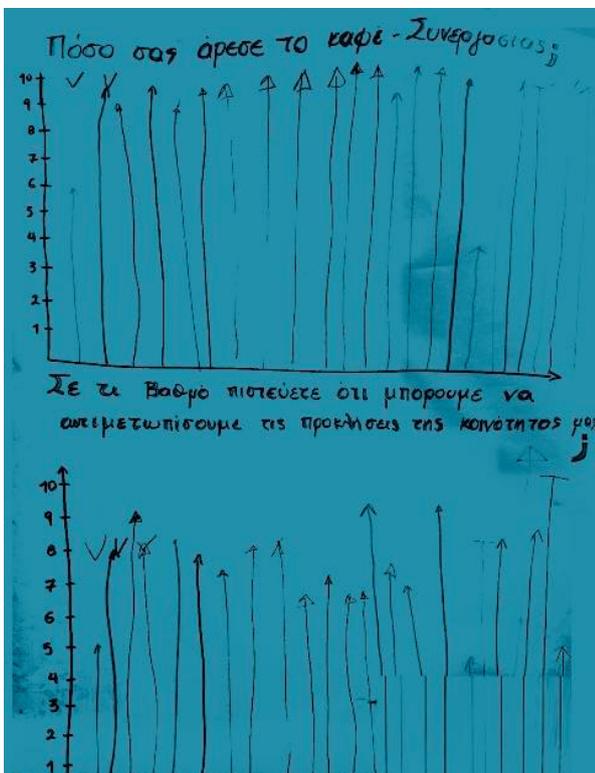
2 persons evaluated it 5 ~ 6

2nd question: To what extent do you believe we can face the challenges of our community?

2 persons evaluated it 10

3 persons evaluated it 5

16 persons evaluated it 6~8



School Activity A1: “Thinking creatively & communicating effectively”

School Activity A1: Workshop for teachers & parents

“Thinking creatively & communicating effectively” – May 2018

Aim: To focus on communication challenges and skills

Reflections on the workshop

- The participants gave some examples of challenges they face on how they communicate in their everyday life, with their children, at their work, and within the school community.
- The expert trainer coordinated the situation by using different methods that made it easier to overcome various kind of barriers.
- The participants realized the option of changing the dynamics and effectiveness of discussions and the ways of interacting.
- The participants engaged very actively and soon a playful mood prevailed.
- The analysis and deconstruction of the means of communication contributed to making everyone feel relaxed and comfortable.
- The workshop showed how everyone faces similar challenges and that the sharing was often enough to simplify the problems and reinforce communication and proximity.



Parents in circle

School Activity A2: **“Skills for making the most of our potential”**

School Activity A2: Workshop for teachers & parents

“Skills for making the most of our potential” – June 2018

Aim: To face our challenges collectively through new approaches

Reflections on the workshop

- The workshop for parents and teachers was facilitated by a psychologist/trainer in transformational coaching.
- The workshop used theories and practices to showcase a ‘transformative’ approach in managing one’s relationships, perceptions and goals.
- In just two hours, the flow of the lab gradually led to an unexpected result: everyone spoke openly and deeply about what concerned them in that moment and shared personal testimonies.
- The workshop was just an introduction session of this training programme. However, it managed to convey the awareness that a school community could be a space where people are able to discuss together, think together, and find solutions together in both personal and common challenges.
- This workshop strengthened the purpose of the project and dissipated the reserve that most of the participants showed at the beginning of the workshop.

Harvesting from optional participant evaluation

After the meeting, the participants were asked for feedback from the trainer about how they experienced the workshop. Here are some comments:

“A very radical but at the same time worthwhile approach to the problem I thought I had as a parent, and I do not have one. Thank you very much for this very enlightening experience”
– Journalist (aged 43)

“I saw the issues of purpose and purpose for the future, and with today’s workshop some points stopped being blind” – Planner

“I left a better man, parent, companion” – Employee (43)

“Quite interesting speech, leaving many positive elements. A short time for so many important issues that have been raised, it would be nice to have another meeting in the future continuing this conversation” – Freelancer

“I got a lot of things, I’ve benefited a lot, I’ll apply them right away” – Teacher (48)

School Activity A3: “New skills for the future”

School Activity A3: Workshop for pupils
“New skills for the future” – November 2018
Aim: Developing constructive discussions on issues that concern or inspire the pupils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workshop was attended by 27 children, mainly from fifth and sixth grade, who sat in a wide circle, while 10 parents observed the process. • A special coach trained in these methodologies explained the rules. • The coach and children listed the areas of their daily lives (friends, family, homework, reading, extracurricular activities, foreign languages, health, personal life, etc). • Each child completed a chart and discussed the areas of their everyday life, evaluating them as functional or dysfunctional. • The children selected the sector they mostly focused on, worked out the facts concerning it, and how they could transform their results in the future. • The charts remained private for each student. • The parents and children discovered a way to observe, reflect on and rethink the issues that concerned them. • This gradually led to a more responsible and creative stance towards matters that would seem at first to be barriers. • In many cases the children discovered that they had to communicate better, to show more understanding, or to resolve their problems themselves.

School Activity B1: Staging the Athenian Old Comedy *Peace* of Aristophanes

School Activity B1: Staging the Athenian Old Comedy <i>Peace</i> of Aristophanes
Aim: Creating a cultural event for the whole school community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers of the two sixth-grade classes collaborated to produce a theatrical performance. • The teachers offered roles to all children. • The performance was based on an Athenian Old Comedy, <i>Peace</i> by Aristophanes. • The students rehearsed every day for two months. • The teachers advised the students to organize some sessions at each other’s homes in a smaller group collaborating on specific parts of the performance. • Some parents contributed by helping to make the scenery and masks. • Other teachers provided technical solutions with lighting and sound, • The municipality contributed some professional costumes. • The performance took place twice towards the end of the school year, once during school hours for the students and staff and once during evening hours for the wider school community.

Harvest from teacher interviews

The teachers pointed out:

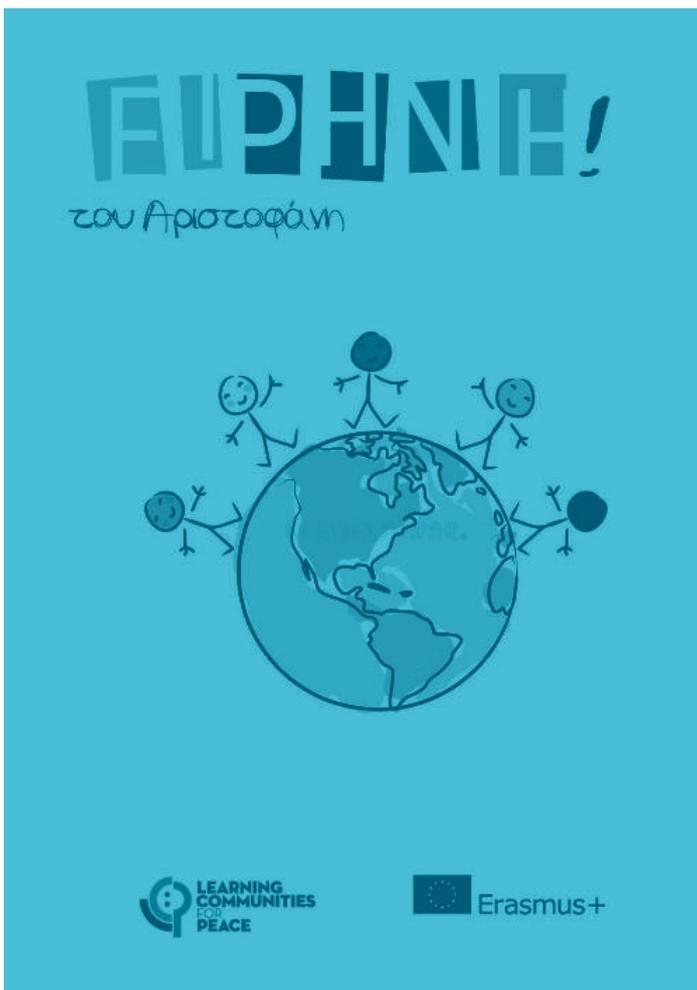
The overall preparation period was a strong experience for children and teachers as it brought everyone much closer to each other and even alleviated the competition between the two classes.

The impact of this experience on the students is illustrated by two examples. For one student, who had difficulty becoming part of a team and participating in activities that require exposure, the play was very tempting – s/he swung several times between “I want to play” and “I don’t want to play”. For another student who experiences long-term difficulties in connecting with his peers, and expresses his isolation with frustration and negativity, the play and its creation process did not have any negative effect on him.

During the premiere everyone could see the results of high commitment, exceptional teamwork, fun and passion.

The final product of the work was a success, as it was deemed of high quality, especially given the limited time available to prepare for such a demanding project.

The students, by going through the pains of putting on the show, would be able to grasp the message of the play in a more direct and substantial way.



The theatre performance poster

School Activity B.2: Painting for Peace using new technologies

During computer classes, the teacher asked the sixth-grade students to prepare an essay on peace. The students were free to use information from the internet (such as texts and photos), or to create their own digital paintings using the software they were being trained in during the lesson. They responded with eagerness and created a series of mixed-technique projects that were exhibited in the school’s multi-purpose room during the year’s closing events.



Students’ drawings

School Activity B.3: A Mural for Peace

The Teachers Association collaborated with the technical department of the Municipality of Ilion in the creation of creative murals on the main facade of the school.

6.3 Interpretation – what we’ve learned

Following the completion of the LCP project actions in the Greek context, we went through several rounds of discussion and critical evaluation of the action research process while gathering insights from the diverse individuals involved. Some factors worthy of analysis are documented in this section, in terms of challenges faced, outcomes and lessons learned. These factors arise from some basic conditions that created limitations and barriers during the action research process. We also make some general recommendations for further research.

First, **various external factors influence the internal life of the school community**. In Greece, one of the basic challenges result from a closed and centralized educational system. Heavy bureaucracy, political imbalance, instability of executives, the ideological opinions of rulers and directors,

make the process of approval or implementation extremely fluid and subjective. The teaching staff have to follow the directives of circulars without deviation or motivation for trying out alternative processes. These circumstances create a lack of trust or feeling of insecurity in front of potential complaints against staff, which further discourages experimentation or activities beyond the formal educational practices.

At the same, the heavy workload of all participants seems to be another fundamental barrier. The teaching staff have to contend with reduced salaries, insufficient staff and regular relocation from one school to another every year. The parents often face financial issues that prevent them from taking part in activities outside the formal educational programme and what does not directly concern their children's grades. The students are occupied with many extracurricular activities, usually provided by the private sector (evenings and weekends). That is mostly due to limited and outdated curricula within the public education system which leads families to invest their time in chasing after formal recognitions for their children (foreign language diplomas, IT certificates, etc), which are considered necessary for third-level education and employability. Time, energy and space do not come easy, which leads to lack of investment in meaningful relationships among the school community groups, fatigue, and reluctance to take on extracurricular responsibilities.

In these conditions, it is necessary to establish more open processes in order to overcome the limitations. Methods such as 'open calls' to various schools or an 'open network' of interested schools could ensure collaboration with early adopters among the school communities – pioneers, problem-solvers, and 'doers' in the school community who are inherently restless, positive or have a willing-to-try attitude. The LCP concept in Greece can empower and facilitate 'doers' so that they do not feel alone within a discouraging system, can act within the community as a catalyst of participation and action, enrich the school programme with new experiences and breakthroughs, and the necessary processes for community and peacebuilding.

Given these conditions, it is necessary to implement a collective and participatory project such as the LCP to ensure highly open and binding processes and a clear distinction between the role of doer and the role of facilitator. There could be an open call with well-defined specifications to all schools in an area to ensure responsiveness and collaboration with teachers or parents who are curious, active and 'committed to commitment'. In practice, such work needs to identify potential pioneers, early adopters and problem-solvers, and therefore the actors who wish to see a transformation of the school community. The LCP framework helps actors not to give up in their efforts against a discouraging system, to act within the community as a factor of participation and action, and enrich the school curriculum with new community-building experiences and peace-building practices. An external organization, team or consortium can also support the 'doers' by offering new knowledge, best practices or reference materials around community engagement and facilitation, peacebuilding, etc, as well as practical or in-kind support, networking with experts according to the school's needs.

If the role of the out-of-school organization cannot be clearly limited to the role of facilitator and if it seeks to play a leading role, the school communities ultimately gain the least.

At the same time, it is essential that there be a socio-political movement in Greece to advocate for a wider, open and participatory process for major reform of the Greek education system, that would allow children, teachers and parents to be part of it.

Secondly, in the Greek school community there seems to be a **severe lack of experience and basic skills in the area of participation and collaboration** and in actually practising them. Lack of time is the easiest excuse for non-participation, but we noticed that school community members have many negative experiences in parents' assemblies, school committees, etc, which did not provide creative or productive dialogue, which leads to frustration and a sense that it is pointless to

engage in public or common matters. Furthermore, there seemed to be a difficulty in understanding the open-ended framework of bottom-up co-creation processes. Parents and teachers demanded to know in advance what exactly was going to happen, from programme start to programme closure, sometimes interpreting a bottom-up approach as not serious, not feasible – and even suspicious! In this framework, not knowing how to co-design or make co-decisions, many were reluctant to take responsibility or action. The school director seemed convinced that the parents and teachers simply don't care, and this conviction appeared to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy, with a negative ripple-effect through the school community.

Meanwhile, in Greek school communities, there are often polarized conditions coordinated by 'active' members closely connected to political parties. They are trade unionists or local government-elected people who serve small-scale interests and create conflicts that interfere with discussions of practical problems or the essence of school life, which discourages many parents from getting involved in institutionalized or scheduled processes. Recently, at the time of the refugee crisis, schools became a field of political polarization, even of extremist views, while the meetings operated as a reaction and complaint mechanism instead of a space for action and problem-solving. In our case, we came across euroscepticism and parents' aggression towards the project because of its funding from the European Commission, but also resentment about the involvement of an NGO in a school community. Some parents and teachers object to any initiative that is not governmental, and believe that NGOs are 'private initiatives' with corrupt intentions.

In the light of all the above, it is necessary to strengthen the culture of participation and collaboration, and to make the 'common ground' more visible by changing the paradigm and creating new frameworks of actions that are liberated from political parties and their clientelist relationships.

New theories, methodologies and know-how are needed in applying creative participatory practices for community information, engagement, co-creation and problem-solving to the school reality. A kind of re-invention of the notions of democracy, community, participation and self-regulation is required – an 'out-of-the-(Greek educational) box' solution. International networks such as Art of Hosting (www.artofhosting.org) could support and empower an international LCP network.

During the LCP project, we also faced a 'critical literacy' problem. From the start of the project, we encountered difficulties in both the project team and the school community in terms of linguistic translation and cultural adaptation of the title, terminology and basic notions of LCP, and in terms of common understanding between social or academic silos. This meant it was necessary to create time and processes to introduce, study or understand new concepts.

The real need was somewhat indefinable but obviously a variety of answers can be found in theories such as those of Paulo Freire and the definition of critical data literacy. The intercultural dimension or communicative learning of Freire's theory can enrich LCP-type projects and actions. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking, "focusing on issues related to equality and social justice". The purpose of critical literacy is to engage all members of the school community in the production and negotiation of meanings that are relevant to them, proposed "as a pedagogical methodology oriented to understand reality so as to transform it" (*Contributions of Paulo Freire for a critical data literacy*).

6.4 Planning a new cycle of research

During the project, research was carried out in Greek literature and circulars, as well as in actions developed in Greece, converging on the philosophy and methodologies of the LCP project and elaborating its narrative, concepts and key words in the Greek language. In general, the research showed that in recent years many participatory, mutual learning projects have emerged in Greece,

but all of the projects need to be more practical and interactive within the school communities themselves, rather than theoretical. Also, the concept of democracy and participation is often confused with volunteering instead of being understood as active citizenship and taking part into the decision-making process. In other cases, 'Democracy & Education' programmes are implemented by visiting the Greek parliament and learning how it operates, though without incorporating the notions of active participation, democratic dialogue, integration, co-creation and collective decision-making.

In approaching the completion of the LCP programme, we realized that we were just at the beginning of the action research. Since we did not have previous experience in schools as an NGO, and had not run workshops with educators, parents and students, we evaluated the experience of LCP as an incredible start for the planning of further activities and projects. We realize even more now that, in Greek school communities, there is an immense need for programmes such as LCP, but at the same time the field, mechanisms, processes and mindsets are not yet ready for something like this. Even though the targets and range of events were limited, the challenges and behavioural patterns revealed offered us deep understanding of the challenges school communities are confronted with in Greece. From the discussions and sharing that took place, we have received calls from school principals inviting us to support them with participatory activities in Erasmus+ and related projects. We are, therefore, back to the designing process of new projects and collaborations in an attempt to succeed in the following priorities:

- Networking, discussion and brainstorming with actors of other relevant programmes or projects in Greece (e.g. *Open Schools*, *School Partnerships for Democracy in Education* by EUDEC -European Democratic Education Community) Greece, etc.
- Methodological planning of projects or actions in a way that is based on building an LCP community of practice in various schools, based on teacher initiative and commitment and allowing actions to merge with the didactic programme.
- Mapping experts, networks or platforms that could enrich or broaden school community members' skills (e.g. *Art of Hosting* -global network-, *Metamorfosis-ngo*), core team members' skills (e.g. the pedagogical team *Skasiarxeio*, platform *100 Mentors*, the initiative *Tipping Point in Education*, *The Network of Greek Libraries*, which coordinates actions in 200+ public libraries throughout Greece – which could help LCP with a scaling-up methodology).
- Facilitating development know-how and tools that support processes of information, engagement and participation by a 'whole-school-approach community', even if there are linguistic or cultural gaps.

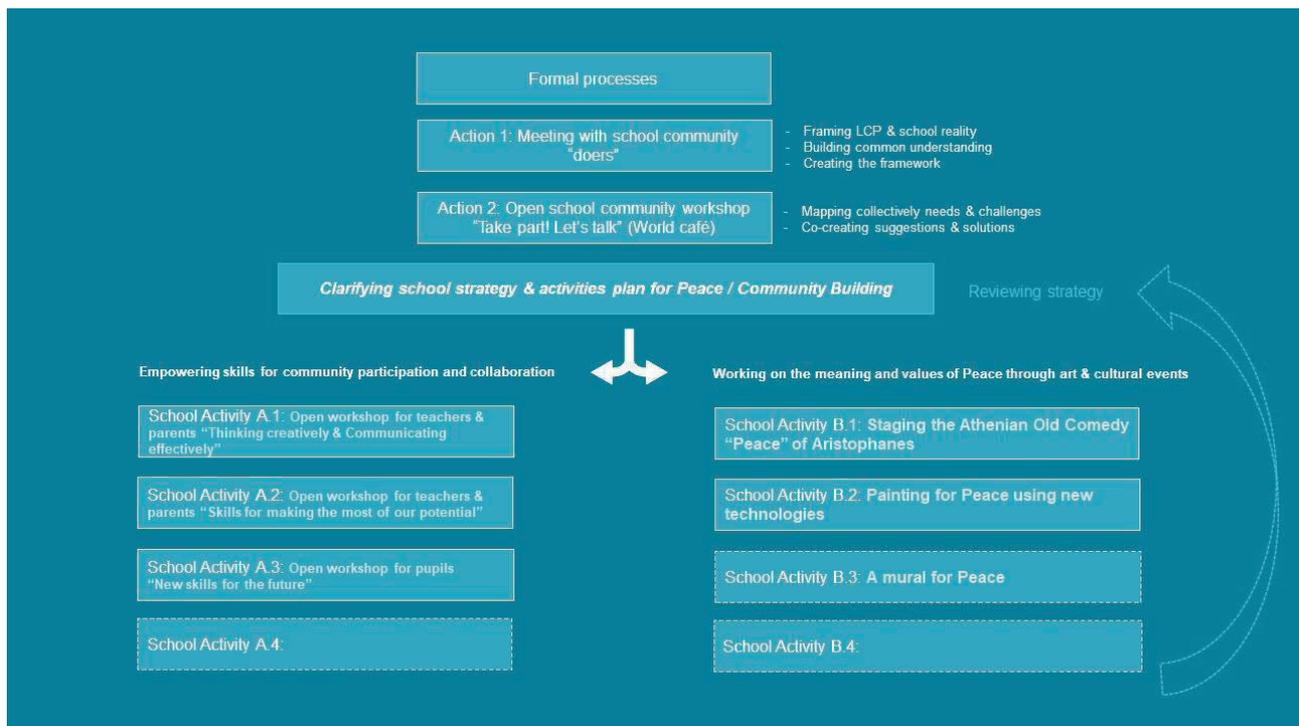


Meeting with other initiatives and programmes during LCP Multiplier Event

6.5 Conclusion

The challenges of living-together or peace-building processes in each school community may be various and complicated, but the proposals and actions that emerged, formally or more organically, give rise to a particular pattern. Following the principles of the project according to which ('++') we began with actions that were like white canvas (see Actions 1 & 2), where we identified where we were and where we wanted to go. From that point on, an activity strategy emerged that had two main axes:

- a) Participatory and collaborative activities and
- b) Artistic and cultural activities. Also, it became clear that peaceful coexistence needed to be approached both as a practice and as an ideals.



Main actions and activities

Analyzing the data of the first 'open school community' workshop (Action 2) and then the discussions that took place at the tables, we clarified some keywords, such as: Rhetoric in Education, Creative Thinking, Transformational Thinking, Participatory Leadership, Participatory Design and Decision-Making, Critical Literature, and Problem-solving. After a discussion with the teachers who attended the first workshop and members of the Parents Union, we decided to continue a series of open workshops on the topics of the Harvest Report. We began searching for networks with other organizations and experts to help us enrich the content and experiences of these meetings by approaching new theories and practices that challenge and experiment with teachers, parents and children. The school system should provide constant access to both formal and informal education, curriculum and extracurricular programmes. At the same time, the circle of the school community should not be confined to student-teacher-parent relations, but be constantly expanded within the boundaries of the neighbourhood, academics, the activist community, pioneers, and so on.

Changes occur when each member of the community can contribute to the self-determination of the school community, when each child has found a way to play a role in the school's performance, or when the members are practising values or practices that allow for balance, initiative and problem-solving.

The challenge of building peace, both within the school community and on the planet, should not be non-political or apolitical. The school community will find a way to resolve or mitigate conflicts by continually practising the most authentic forms of art and democracy.

7. Conclusion

Marjolein Delvou

The country reports showed that the action research was a journey that took the operational project partners and the pilot schools in different directions. At the same time, when looking back, we also noticed a lot of similarities. Below we will re-examine the initial project assumptions of the LCP project to verify whether they remain valid, and we will then propose a framework of conditions that forms a necessary component of the LCP approach. The essence of the project lies in the assumption of each setting's uniqueness and in the belief that shared ownership is crucial. This implies that there are no ready-made strategies, tools and methods that can be implemented to achieve the overall project goal. It also means that the overall goal is redefined locally to correspond to the lived reality in each setting.

Revisiting the initial project assumptions

Uniqueness, ownership & participation

It was clearly important to approach each pilot school as a unique setting. This meant, first, that the schools were taken seriously and, secondly, that they could work within the limits of their own capacities and resources. In several of the country reports, it is mentioned that the pilot schools also much appreciated the fact that they would be the ones steering the project. However, several schools (UK and Greece) had wanted to know beforehand what was going to happen and what they were supposed to do. The project, therefore, also engages with one of the recurring challenges that schools face: the imperative to produce specific results and deliverables. The shift to an open-ended process, with the school community leading the way, might well be one of the main reasons why the pilot schools evaluated the project positively, but it will take time to adopt this way of working.

Community

The project partners had imagined a reaching-out to community stakeholders outside of the school for the pilot schools to become a hub for peace within their respective communities. However, in the UK, Sweden and Greece, the schools chose to focus on the school community, and did not reach out to the wider community during the project period. While all the pilot schools seemed to understand the importance of reaching out to community actors beyond the school, that did not mean they were ready to do it. Sometimes this was related to frustrating experiences in the past, to overburdened teachers or to the fact that they identified other priorities. We found that enlarging the community step by step is also part of the process. For example in Sweden, the pilot school preferred to focus on actors within the school first before reaching out to external actors. But at the end of the period they were ready to take the next step.

Defining who is part of the community also depends on the issues a school wants to tackle, and this in turn depends on the stakeholders that you involve in defining the project from the outset. Here the role of the project partners was important, because they were questioning the school about this: not

forcing them to involve certain actors but at least opening up a conversation about who the different stakeholders were.

The project also increased the understanding between different stakeholders of the learning community. In the UK, by talking to different internal stakeholders, the facilitator found out that there were tensions between the teachers and the midday supervisors that the school delegates had no idea about. In Croatia, the discussion between students and teachers at the launch of the project, organized by the facilitators, demonstrated how important it is to discuss things in mixed groups and from different perspectives. In this case, teachers learned from the students that their parents did not lack interest in getting involved, but rather that they were very busy. Similarly, in the UK, interaction between teachers and parents led to many parents explaining that they were overworked, tired and busy, but would attend events when they could do so.

In short, 'community' turned out to be a much more layered and complicated concept than the project partners had in mind, but as a concept it remains powerful because of its positive resonance.

Towards a framework of conditions for a Learning Community for Peace

Action research principles

Carrying out proper action research proved to be a challenge for the pilot schools as well as for the operational partners. Only in Croatia did the pilot school manage to write their own action research report. The challenge here involved not only the more formal aspects of data collection and writing a report, but also the fact that the pilot schools were sometimes planning and implementing different actions at the same time, which made it difficult to observe and analyze everything that was going on.

At the same time, they all acknowledged that the systematic and cyclical approach of reflecting, planning, acting and observing helped to structure their work, while also strengthening relationships between the stakeholders involved. In Croatia, it was mentioned that it helped people to connect and work together, while in the UK the more observant attitude of the teachers involved led to the parents perceiving them as more 'caring'.

We therefore argue that it is not so much the result of action research that is of importance for a learning community for peace, but rather the process and the principles of action research: having a reflexive and responsive process cycle embedded in the school culture. But, as stated by the teachers in Croatia, this reflective practice is something to be learned and developed. Ideally, action research would be included in (initial) teacher training.

Time

This brings us to another crucial factor: time – not only time to implement the approach but more essentially to make time to observe and reflect upon actions taken and to understand where change has happened. In Sweden, the conversations that took place between the project partner and the school delegates after the collaboration period had ended were crucial to help them understand this. All the pilot schools agreed that having or taking time to reflect was a positive experience.

Unfortunately, we could only work with the schools for one year. In Croatia, for example, where the school undertook a lot of actions, this meant that there was little time for systematic reflection. But also in the other pilot schools, one year proved to be very short, not only because it took time to get acquainted with the action research methodology but also because it takes a lot of time to engage with different stakeholders to reflect, plan and implement the first actions. Sometimes a school only got to the action part at the end of the year.

The good news is that all of the pilot schools intend to continue the work and are planning new actions.

When it comes to implementing the approach, we think it is important to stress that LCP is not an add-on programme that lasts a certain amount of time. It should not be seen as something the teachers have to do on top of their normal duties. Rather, it is a new way of working that, while very intensive in the beginning, might open up more space and time for them once they have integrated it fully.

Resources and capacities

A very important lesson to be drawn by the project partners from the experimentation phase is that schools can only attempt such programmes with the resources and capacities they have. This is also one of the main principles of action research: the selected issue should be within the control of the person who is studying their own praxis.

Expecting too much from the start can cause frustration because things may not work out even though people have invested a lot of time and energy. When taking little steps, every little step forward can be considered a success. Smaller actions – within the capabilities of the stakeholders involved – are also more likely to be sustained. This meant that partners had to adjust their ambitions and expectations – for example, when it came to reaching out at once to the wider community, but also concerning the issues a school wished to tackle.

In Croatia, for example, the facilitators were surprised that the inter-ethnic conflict did not surface as an issue to address. It was considered neither relevant nor pertinent. But there were also isolated voices in the school saying the opposite. This may mean that the school and its teachers did not feel ready or able to address it.

In Sweden we saw that, although it was not apparent at first sight because they took little steps, the pilot school was surprised to find out how much they had actually achieved in the end. In one of the schools in the UK, the little gesture of welcoming and speaking to the parents more regularly made a big difference in getting parent involvement and interest. In Croatia, at the other end of the spectrum, teachers felt exhausted because they had been doing a lot. This may indicate that they went beyond their own limits in order to make the project a success.

Connected to the question of resources, we should not forget that there was also a small budget for the work in and with the schools. In Greece, the principal stated that this was one of the reasons to join the project. We should be aware that the availability of a budget is not necessarily a factor in the case of other schools that want to engage in an LCP process.

Language and definitions

It proved to be important for the pilot schools to adapt the terminology to make the LCP concept work in their own language and reality. Having said this, we would advocate that the definition and rewording of the phrase Learning Community for Peace should be the first step for a school engaging in this process. In Croatia, this proved to work very well as an introduction to the process, while also allowing a school to take ownership and defining their own ideas from the start.

Critical friend(s)

All the pilot schools greatly appreciated the role of the project partners as facilitators and external observers. This raises the question as to whether this is an essential condition for a school that wants

to operate as an LCP. We would not argue that a school necessarily needs to work with an external partner, but rather that the idea of engaging a critical friend is an important one to consider when embarking upon the LCP journey.

Motivation & initiative

In action research, motivation is key. Ideally, the object of research is of passionate interest to the researchers. In this project, we took the initiative and invited the schools to join, not the other way round. As mentioned in the Croatian report, the project partners were highly motivated to engage in an in-depth process of discussing relationships, school structure and power relations in a school and its wider community. We managed to communicate and share this motivation to a certain extent – in some schools more than in others – but ideally it should be the school that takes the initiative.

Epilogue: Learning Communities for Peace, a reality check

One of the central questions of the project is: Can schools and the communities surrounding them engage in the kind of sustained dialogue, integration and peacebuilding that is so urgently needed, and, if so, how can they do so? In revisiting this question, we have to admit that we were somewhat overambitious when conceptualizing the Learning Communities for Peace project.

Soon after the start of the project, during the Joint Staff Training, we realized that, to be true to the main principles of the project – uniqueness, ownership, participation – the project partners should not tell the schools who to work with. Nor should we define for them what it meant to be a Learning Community for Peace. Realizing this early on helped the operational partners to redefine and reinvent their role during the process. We noticed also that this made the relationships between the pilot schools and the operational partners more egalitarian. We were in this together: reflecting, planning, acting and observing. In the end, this process of searching turned out to be the major strength of the LCP approach.



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