

CASE STUDY: AN EXAMPLE OF QUICK WINS AND INVOLVEMENT

Multi-stakeholder involvement in reception education for quick wins

School type: Reception education

Country: Belgium

SIREE partner organisation: House of Learning

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The respective school for reception education has about 100 pupils from different age ranges (12-19) and nationalities, divided into six classes, depending on their level of literacy and how long they have been in the reception school. Usually, a pupil stays within this school for about a year, before moving on to mainstream education. The school wanted to participate in the SIREE project, but was aware it needed support from an objective person or organisation who could keep plans on track and bring good practices and new ideas from other schools.

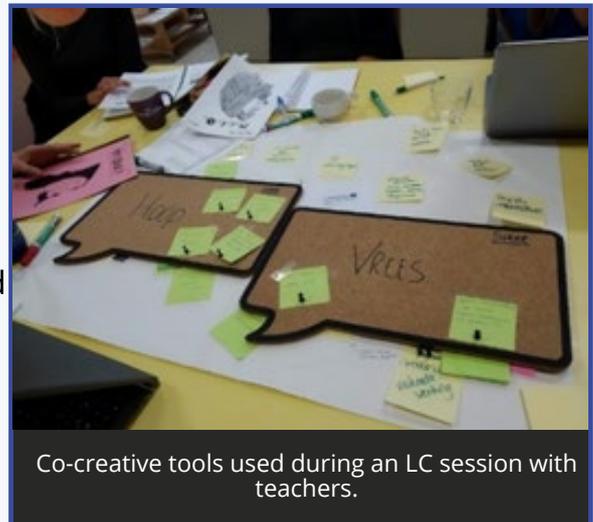
INSTALLING THE FIRST LEARNING COMMUNITY (LC)

We held a meeting with one of the teachers of the pupils to explain the project and make practical decisions, like which classes of students could participate. They decided to organise the Learning Communities (LCs) during school hours, so we could always work with the same group. They chose to organise the LCs during Dutch classes, and when the teacher of the pupils told colleagues about the SIREE project they were equally excited.

The first meeting was restricted to teachers only, so we could get to know each other. We decided the initial meeting with the pupils would be with none or just one or two teachers, so they could get used to us and get acquainted with the project. We could build some trust and both parties would feel more at ease to speak their opinions in like-minded groups, without any differences in "power".

On the agenda:

- More information about the project
- Some theme examples from other LCs
- Some critical success factors, such as a clear contact person within the school who comes to each LC, involvement of the school, bottom-up approach where pupils have an actual voice
- Hope and fear exercise: What do you hope we can reach with this project and what do you fear? This is an important exercise to keep focus along the way
- Creating a support base for the project within the staff: What kind of themes would you like to work on during the project lifetime?



In the first sessions with the teachers, we identified different challenges and divided them into themes:

- Professional network of the school
- Parental involvement
- Network of the pupils
- Pathways and flow options for transition
- Psychological issues

PROGRESS OF THE FOLLOWING SESSIONS

For the second and third meeting, we used the same methods but with different classes and with the pupils themselves. Two teachers were present to support with class management. The selected theme was **“What does integration mean to you?”** and everyone got to work with newspapers, magazines, scissors, and glue, resulting in twenty collages. This was a very approachable method to get to know the pupils, as we were able to talk with each of the groups, and it was interesting to see how everyone had a different view on integration.

While we were guiding the little groups, we could listen to their “informal” talks among each other. Not only were the words and photos they selected about “What is integration?” important to detect themes, but also their conversations among each other. In what they said, we could also detect some obstacles that pupils did not formulate explicitly, such as their lack of a Dutch-speaking social network. In the fourth LC session, we focused again on the teachers to give them feedback from the first LCs with the pupils and to work on the network from the school – something they prioritised themselves. We printed all the themes the pupils indicated, to see how we could connect the ideas from the teacher with the themes of the pupils. At this point, we detected a lot of similarities. The idea to install a quiet room, and implement some of the themes in that room was raised.

The theme for the next LC with the pupils was set. During this meeting, it was clear we had to work on both long and short-term goals/actions. Short-term goals could result in “quick wins” so that it was clear for teachers and pupils what the project could do for them. This turned out to be an important motivational factor. In the fifth and sixth LC, we worked on the action of the silent room with the pupils. The premise was “If we could implement such a room, what would it look like in an ideal situation?”. The principal of the school had given us the attic as a possibility to make a quiet room.

To make this as approachable as possible, we foresaw different methods (which are also accessible for students with a low level of Dutch) on how the pupils could give their input. They could paint, work with clay, draw or play with Lego. We also planned on how to practically make the room a “quiet space” with a cleaning plan and how to involve other pupils in the school.



A word cloud of themes raised by students, displayed in various shades of pink and magenta. The words are arranged in a roughly rectangular shape, with some words appearing larger and more prominent than others. The themes include: GAMES, FOOD, COLLABORATE, BOXING, RELATIONSHIPS, CULTURE, FAMILY, DUTCH, HOBBY, TEAMWORK, HOME, FRIENDSHIP, RELIGION, LIVING TOGETHER, RECYCLE, HOUSE, and RESPECT.

Above: Word cloud of the themes that were raised by students.

For the seventh meeting with the teachers, we worked on the action of “expanding and reinforcing the (integration) network of the school”. We invited the integration officer of the municipality to make a stakeholder analysis, and made some specific plans which the members of the school could follow up. The eighth meeting was held with just teachers, as it was focused on a specific target the staff had formulated, namely on how to cope with psychological trauma in the classroom. During this session we were able to invite a professional who could give theoretical and practical input to teachers on how to handle psychological issues. The professional had developed a training session on how a teacher can expand the window of tolerance of pupils. This gives the teachers figurative “handles” or guidance to work on psychological issues during their classes.

The ninth meeting was focused on the theme of parental involvement, where participants of the LC were teachers and parents. To reach the target group of parents, we organised the LC during “parental contact”. We asked them different questions on their perception of the school and the environment and if they were interested in joining a parental group, which gives a voice to all parents in the school.

Unfortunately, this LC was organised just before the Covid-19 lockdown. We gathered some important information and contacts of parents who wanted to participate, but we could not carry out any actions. The school was closed until the end of May 2020. Teachers struggled to reach everybody for the daily tasks and messages, so the project of SIREE was not a priority at the time.

PARTICIPANTS IN THE SESSIONS

The group of teachers varied from meeting to meeting, but at least three teachers were stable participants. In the sessions with the pupils, the group was very stable as we were able to organise the meeting during school hours, with two classes. We kept people motivated because we were very focused on quick wins to gain their trust.

We also invited externals, such as the integration officer of the municipality, to ensure the formulated ideas were considered long-term. We could, for example, also have organised an integration network ourselves, but it is important the municipality can act on problems shared within this group, and to create a sustainable effect that lasts after the project’s lifetime as well.

ACTIONS

Action 1: Integration network

Teachers indicated the network of the school had to be enhanced and reinforced. A reinforcement of the network would also meet some desires pupils themselves indicated, like possibilities for free time activities and connection with Flemish-speaking people. In order to do this sustainably, we started an integration network in the school’s municipality. The SIREE project initiated the first meeting and we invited some important stakeholders, analysing together who should be a member of the network and in which role. The integration officer of the municipality took the lead and followed up on this network.

Action 2: OKrANT

A newspaper for parents, partners and pupils was developed in which readers can get an idea of what the reception class does. This newspaper will be published twice a year. Reactions on the first edition were very positive, among others from the parents. There was a lot of input from the pupils themselves. Students were given responsibility and were allowed to contribute a great deal. They felt more connected to the school by contributing to the newspaper.



Co-creative tools used during an LC session with teachers.

Action 3: Silent room

Creation of a silent room where pupils can get psychological support, or have the time and space to be at peace. Pupils gave their input on how such a room should look, and made a plan on how to realise it practically. They had a lot of great ideas, but sadly, some were not possible due to the financial means of the school. Due to the coronavirus lockdown, we could not evaluate if the space was used by pupils.

Action 4: Training session psychological issues (window of tolerance)

We organised a training session to support teachers in how they can offer psychological support to their pupils. By organising this training with an external partner, we could also expand the network of the school and give practical tips on where they could refer pupils if they couldn't help themselves. The session was well received by teachers. They found it interesting and inspirational, although they aspired to receive even more practical and especially more concrete tips.