Potential for Life

Participatory Action Research
Final Report
November 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The Potential for Life (P4L) pilot project integrates a participatory action research component to support systematic observation. Project partners used this framework to examine the extent to which the project has achieved its initial aims, to reflect on what had worked well and on how the programme might be strengthened, and to plan for the next phases of project development.

Text Box 1: Potential for Life Action Research Results

The results of the action research conducted for the P4L pilot show that it is a promising approach to supporting students to better understand their motivations for learning and to improve their learning strategies.

A number of themes emerged during the observation stage:

- The most significant impacts emerging from the interviews were related to increases in students' confidence and self-knowledge, and the quality of peer relationships
- The "Peer Effect" developed as participants learned to trust each other
- Participants were more conscious of their preferred learning strategies and were better able to organise themselves
- Student participants did *not* develop strong skills to advocate for their learning needs with teachers and parents.

These outcomes were consistent across sites as the P4L pilot was adapted to a variety of contexts and time frames.

The P4L participants commented on ways in which P4L could be strengthened by creating a broader repertoire to meet a range of needs. In addition, it would be important to develop a set of principles to guide users and ensure fidelity to the project as it is adapted to a range of contexts. Students may also be invited to contribute to further refinements of the curriculum to ensure it is clear and accessible.

Project partners noted that to have a more significant impact, broader changes in school curriculum would be needed. There may be a role for advocacy, as well.

The following sections of this report set out:

- The action research methodology
- The project aims and theory of change
- Implementation experiences in the three pilot sites
- What worked well, what might be improved

- Reflection
- Next steps for P4L

THE PROJECT AIMS AND THEORY OF CHANGE

P4L aims to help young learners reflect on their learning: what motivates and engages them the most and their preferred learning strategies. This approach is relevant for all students; it is potentially particularly important for those who are disengaged from or bored with school.

The project design was informed by:

- Research on the importance of student engagement and peer support to preventing early school leaving (ESL)
- Research on the effectiveness of peer training and mentorship in supporting student self-confidence and engagement
- The Learning for Well-being Framework (L4WB) which highlights the importance of each learner understanding his or her unique potential

Although students identified as "at-risk" of early school leaving (ESL) were not specifically targeted by the P4L programme, the research on preventing ESL is nevertheless relevant to all students who are disengaged and lacking motivation for learning. Indeed, research has found a strong correlation between student intrinsic motivation and boredom in different learning situations[1]. The research on preventing ESL recommends, among other interventions, the organisation of activities that improve self-confidence and the capacity to address challenges in school. "Buddy" and mentoring systems (with a peer, a teacher or a community member) create social support for learners. Peer mentoring is potentially an important part of this social support system.

The research on preventing ESL also highlights the importance of addressing individual learners' specific needs and interests. The L4WB framework focus on "the centrality of purpose and meaning" in helping learners to understand their own (and others') strengths and learning preferences is squarely focused on this aspect. This approach also aligns with research that identifies the importance of student intrinsic motivation for engagement, persistence toward learning goals and improved outcomes[2].

These three strands – preventing ESL, peer training and mentorship, and L4WB -- are woven together in a non-formal learning programme that supports students to reflect on their learning and on what motivates them most. The programme is is based on an active pedagogy; through various activities, games and exercises, students consider their own

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[1] See, for example: Daschmann, E.C., Goetz, T. and Stupinsky, R.H. (2011), "Testing the predictors of boredom at school: Development and validation of the precursors to boredom scales", British Journal of Education Psychology, Vol. 81, pp. 421 – 440. (The article brings together English- and German-language research.)

[2] See, for example, Froiland, J.M. and Worrell, F.C. (2016). "Intrinsic Motivation, Learning Goals, Engagement, and Achievement in a Diverse High School", Pscycghology in Schools, Vol. 53, No. 3., pp. 321 – 336.

preferred strategies for learning. These activities are also intended to support individual and group work and reflection and to build cohesion among the participants.

The theory of change highlighted at the beginning of the P4L pilot was that learners participating in the programme would:
- Identify their intrinsic motivation for learning (other than grades or teacher or parent pressure)
- increase their self- confidence and self-knowledge
- develop stronger peer relationships and thus, social support
- develop greater awareness of their preferred learning strategies, and appreciate that each individual has a unique approach to learning
- communicate their learning needs to teachers and parents.

The action research was designed to test this theory of change, and to identify the most effective approaches, as well as areas for improvement.

THE ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

Reason and Bradbury, 2008[3]

Action research is systematic, cyclical, solutions oriented, and participatory.

Stringer, 2010[4]

The initial project proposal provided for an action research component to support learning on the project impact and identify areas for improvement of the pilot. At the beginning of the P4L pilot (May 2016), the project partners discussed the action research methodology and how to use it in the context of this project. The overall framework four-stage model of the action research cycle was introduced. These stages are:

- **Stage 1: Plan** – participants define the problem and how to address it.
- **Stage 2: Act** – implement the plan.
- **Stage 3: Observe** – pay attention and document changes
- **Stage 4: Reflect** – analyse impact, revise plans for another cycle

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3 Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2008). The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice, 2nd Edition. SAGE Publishing.

4 Stringer, E.T. (2010). Action Research, 4th Edition. SAGE Publishing.

In reality there is considerable overlap across these stages.

Figure 1: The Action Research Cycle
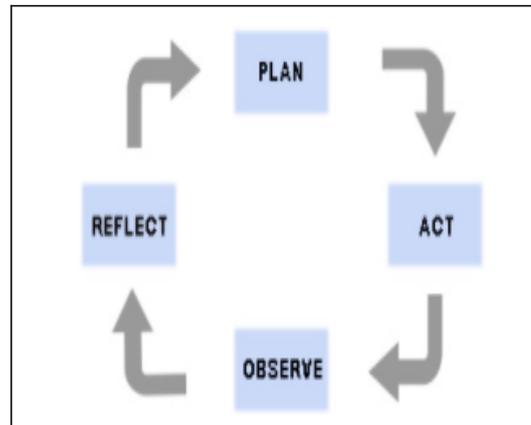
From Warwick Learning and Development Centre[5]

The partners have followed this action research cycle:

- Project partners launched the "plan" stage for the P4L intervention in the May and August 2016 partner meetings, where they set out the P4L curriculum and defined questions to be answered through the action research.
- During the "act" stage (September 2016 – September 2017), partners recruited and trained peer trainers, and following the cascade training model, then supported peer trainers (16 years to mid-20s) to train the younger student participants (12 to 14 years old). During this stage, partners and peer trainers adapted the P4L programme to their local context.
- During the "observe" stage (May – September 2017), partners kept track of what was working well and where adjustments to the P4L programme were needed. Feedback from peer trainers and student participants was an important part of this stage.
- During the "reflect" stage (October – December 2017) the project partners have considered the extent to which the P4L has fulfilled the "theory of change", and where further adjustments to the programme design may be needed.

Each of these stages is explored in more detail in the remainder of this report.

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5 https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/ldc/resource/evaluation/tools/action
(accessed 19 Nov 2017)

STAGE 1: PLAN

While the project proposal for P4L had set out the broad outlines of the pilot, project partners began design of the curriculum and specific activities in May and August 2016. The project was conceived as a journey with 12 stages. Activities were designed to support goals for each stage of this journey. Text Box 2 summarises the stages of this journey.

Text Box 2: Potential for Life (P4L) Curriculum

The P4L curriculum is set out as a 12-stage programme, with each session identified as a stage in the learning journey

1. Beginning
2. Learning is….
3. Unique potential and inner resources
4. Four perspectives
5. Finding your ground
6. Dimensions of learning
7. Differences and commonalities
8. Communication
9. Learning together
10. Learning within my environment
11. Planning learning
12. Moving on

As set out in the programme manual, the aim of the 12 activity sessions "…is to cultivate the love for learning and place the school experience in a larger picture by helping students:

- Cultivate their sense of purpose
- Recognise their motivation and strengths
- Explore optimal ways of learning
- Develop strategies for organising learning individually (metacognition) in collaboration with their peers"

The action research methodology was introduced at the May project partner meeting and further developed at the August meeting as the curriculum was being developed. At this point, the project partners discussed their understanding of the "theory of change" underlying the P4L approach – that is, how and why the activities of the P4L curriculum would support students to build their self-confidence and to engage with their learning.

Partners hypothesised that as a result of participation in P4L peer trainers and student participants would be better able to:

- appreciate that each individual has a unique approach to learning
- improve their self-confidence regarding their learning
- identify their intrinsic motivation for learning – that is motivations other than grades or teacher or parent pressure (which might be considered as extrinsic motivation).
- identify their preferred learning strategies
- articulate their own learning preferences and be able to ask for support from their teachers, parents and peers

It was agreed that given the relatively short intervention it would not be realistic to expect that P4L would have an impact on students' marks, absenteeism or on prevention of ESL. A more sophisticated research methodology would be needed to establish a causal link between P4L and these outcomes. The relatively small sample size of the groups and different conditions for implementation also posed challenges. Quantitative data for the programme are thus limited to the numbers of participants reached and their persistence in the P4L pilot.

However, partners agreed that it would be important to measure whether students had deepened their understanding of their motivations for learning, of their own and their peers' preferred learning strategies through the P4L process, and their ability to communicate their learning preferences and needs with parents and teachers. These more difficult to measure aspects might be captured in a short questionnaire to be implemented at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the P4L project. Learners would also be asked to keep a journal throughout the 12-step journey of the P4L programme. They would be asked to share those journals with the project leaders (replacing their name with a symbol only they could identify in order to preserve their anonymity), who would be able to assess whether learners had developed a more sophisticated understanding of their motivations and preferred learning strategies during the time of their participation in the project.

It was also agreed that it would be important to gather evidence on the extent to which learners developed their understanding of their motivation to learn, as well as their preferred learning strategies.

The questionnaire:

The questionnaire asked learners to use a Likert scale regarding their enjoyment of learning, how confident about their ways of learning, and the extent to which they felt it was possible to change their learning environment.

Other open questions invited students to think about successful learning episodes, and what supported their success, to notice differences in how they

and their peers learn, and how they communicate learning needs to teachers, peers and parents.

Questions on the programme design were also included (e.g., whether the activities were engaging, adequate, clear and relevant).

The journal:

Learners were provided with a journal with questions and suggested activities for the related sessions to support reflection. Learners were invited to draw or write about ideas or impressions they felt were important to remember after each session.

Focus group interviews:

Plans were made for the action research coordinator to visit each site for individual and focus group interviews to learn more about the impact of the P4L programme, what had worked well, and what might need to be adjusted. The Partners, peer trainers, student participants, and where relevant, teachers and school leaders were invited to participate in these interviews. These interviews helped to "triangulate" information to enhance the credibility of information gathered for the action research process.

To ensure accessibility, the learners' materials, which were initially developed in English, were translated into Romanian, French and Luxemburgish. In addition, the curriculum and action research methods were revised to reflect feedback from the partners following the August 2016 meeting. The evaluation meeting held in October 2017 also served as an opportunity for project partners to further reflect on the project design and implementation, and how these may be adjusted in the context of future project development.

STAGE 2: ACT: THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The P4L pilot was implemented across the three project partner sites in Spring and Summer 2017. Each of the project partners adapted the programme for their context and for the learners participating in the pilot, for example, adapting sessions and activities to the participants' needs and to fit the programme format (e.g., duration, content, etc.) most suitable for their circumstances. These three very different pilot sites provide a kind of "natural experiment" on adaptability of the programme for a range of circumstances.

Ofensiva Tinerilor, Arad, Romania

P4L was first implemented in Arad in late Winter and early Spring 2017. The project was piloted in a lower secondary school with lower SES level students. It was implemented

during Romania's "informal learning" week, when children participate in special activities, and do not have any formal classes. This was an ideal opportunity to reach a large number of students and to have a dedicated period of time with them.

The peer trainers were recruited at the Elena Ghiba Birta High School of Arad, where a first presentation of the project focusing on the aims of P4L was made to 10 teachers. These teachers helped to identify potential peer trainers from the school. These students, who were 17 and 18 years of age, went through the P4L activities as preparation, and a few weeks later, trained younger students at Josif Moldivan gymnasium (between 10 and 14 years of age, with groups arranged so that students from the same class participated in the P4L training together).

As the peer trainers graduated from high school in May, the process of finding students interested in peer training would need to begin anew. However, Ofensiva Tinerilor is optimistic about sustainability and duplication of the project following the pilot phase.

The full training programme was implemented over the course of Romania's Informal Learning week in early May. Teachers were present to support the peer trainers for most of the sessions.

Organisation	Partners-trainers	Peer Trainers	Pupils	Teachers	Parents	TOTAL
Ofensiva Tinerilor	2	8	110	8 + 2 school principals	0	130

A first focus group was held with peer trainers in March 2017, and a second set of focus groups with the peer trainers, selected student participants (based on their availability), and teachers were held in May 2017.

4motion, Esch-sur-Alzette, Esch commune, Luxembourg

Partners at 4motion piloted P4L in two different settings: a vocational-technical school in Esch-sur-Alzette -- Lycée Belval - with students in their 3rd year, . Peer trainers in Esch-sur-Alzette were members of the 4motion staff (in their mid 20s and early 30s). The P4L programme was also implemented in the context of the Esch commune summer activities programme. Peer trainers for this programme were upper secondary students, and came from different schools in the area. A cascade model of training was used for all peer trainers (from 4motion and for the upper secondary students): all peer trainers first participated in the P4L activities themselves. These trainers were then prepared to act as peer trainers for others.

The pilot at Lycée Belval was carried over four days in May 2017 with a class of mostly boys studying auto mechanics. The P4L activities were implemented in short time periods to fit the student class schedules (e.g., during 30-minute sessions rather than in concentrated

course). There was a heat wave during this pilot week, so some of the activities were done outside, which the students said they appreciated.

Organisation	Partners-trainers	Peer Trainers	Pupils	Teachers	Parents	TOTAL
4motion	5	7	38	5 + 2 school administrators	2	59

Focus groups were held in September 2017, and included a session student participants at Lycée-Beval and for the peer trainers participating in the Esch summer programme.

AMO Reliance, Visé, Belgium

Partners at AMO Reliance implemented the P4L pilot as a week-long residential retreat (a first week in the spring with peer trainers, and a second week in the summer with younger participants). During the 'train the trainer' week and the implementation week with younger learners, the participants lived together, ate together, learned and played together for the five days of the programme.

The peer trainers are currently university students or have recently graduated from university, and work with or are completing internships with AMO Reliance. Several have completed studies in psychology, juvenile justice and related subjects.

The youth participants were between 14 and 18 years of age. They have been involved with other activities of AMO Reliance. They do not attend the same schools.

Organisation	Partners-trainers	Peer Trainers	Pupils	Teachers	Parents	TOTAL
AMO	2	5	27	0	0	34

Partners at AMO Reliance supplemented the P4L programme with materials from the Anti-Defamation League A WORLD Of DIFFERENCE® Institute's Peer Training programme which they had used successfully in previous peer training programmes. The added activities focused on creating intimacy within the group, defined group rules and deepened understanding of social diversity of the participant. This new dimension complemented the P4L focus on "inner diversity" of each learner.

All partners noted that they made significant adaptations to the programme throughout the process of implementation.

Focus groups were held with the programme leaders, peer trainers and student participants in September 2017.

STAGE 3: OBSERVE: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

In Stage 3, the action research coordinator from EIESP visited each of the project partner sites to interview the partners themselves, the peer trainers and the student participants. In Arad, the school leader and several teachers also gave feedback in focus group interviews. One teacher in Esch-sur-Alzette whose class had participated in P4L shared his observations as well.

A number of themes emerged in the interviews that were conducted as part of the observation stage. Participants reported:
- increases in self-confidence and self-knowledge, and stronger relationships with peers;
- stronger peer relationships as groups established trust;
- greater awareness of the learning process and improved ability to organize their studies;
- no impact on skills for self-advocacy related to their learning needs in their interactions with teachers.

Increases in students' confidence and self-knowledge, the quality of peer relationships

In focus group interviews, peer trainers and student participants were asked what they had learned from participating in P4L. Their replies showed that they had taken on the key messages of P4L. For example, lower secondary school students in Arad replied that through P4L they had learned:

- to cooperate
- to help each other
- to understand about different types of learning
- that they can learn from each other
- that it easier to learn through play
- that it is easy to learn.

These learners further explained that they had learned that everyone is different but you can still be friends. They were able to learn more about what their classmates do and don't like. These students also had learned about the concepts of non-formal and informal learning – that is, that learning happens everywhere. One learner commented that as a result of the P4L activities, he was more interested in learning and the learning process, "… because learning is for us".

Student participants in Visé, who ranged in age from 14 to 18 years of age, had similar responses. One student said that the climate created through the P4L programme had helped with her confidence, and that now she is less stressed when speaking in public. A couple of the student participants agreed that P4L had helped them to be less timid. The

sophrology sessions focused on body anchoring were popular with these students, who said they had learned about the importance of relaxation for learning.

Peer trainers in who implemented the programme in the Esch commune summer activities programme had similar replies. They highlighted the importance of reflection. One learner reported that "I am becoming more confident. I start by reflecting first, and then I can do things." Another observed that "Potential for Life didn't change my learning style, but it helped me to get more specific and organised."

In each of these sites, the quality of peer relationships increased. As one of the upper secondary school peer trainers in Luxembourg commented "…helping others, and learning that your peers learn differently is also very important. The exercises can help know which class members will be better at explaining [a new concept] in your learning style."

The "Peer Effect" developed as participants learned to trust each other

Students participating in P4L in Arad and at the Lycée Beval in Esch-sur-Alzette were classmates and already knew each other fairly well. However, P4L had deepened their relationships. As student participants in Arad commented, "we've known each other for a long time. But we know each other better now, and we help each other study."

Peer trainers at the Esch commune summer activities week, however, found that they were sometimes acting as mentors for their classmates from school. The 4motion coordinator working with these youth observed that it was sometimes difficult for these peer trainers to balance their role as a peer trainer and their role as classmate.

Peer trainers and student participants at the Visé residential retreat hadn't all known each other prior to the P4L training. Activities such as expressing expectations and fears, sharing what each learner needs to feel good within the group helped to build trust among the participants. Listening exercises, opportunities to share their hopes and fears about what the week, the introduction of "anchor" works that participants could use if they were feeling ill at ease were also important. The team energisers reinforced this group spirit and feeling of mutual support.

The Visé participants had clearly developed strong group cohesion. During the focus group interviews, younger learners from the first group stayed on when peer trainers arrived for the second focus group interview – staying on for more than four hours in order to continue talking about their experience and to also enjoy the company of others they had not seen since the July retreat.

The residential retreat model certainly contributed to cohesion among student participants, but even in the lighter programmes implemented in Esch-sur-Alzette and Esch commune summer activities programme, the student participants shared that they had learned to respect differences among their peers – and also to appreciate their own unique learning needs. Participants at both these sites highlighted how important it was to understand that

their peers had different perceptions and ways of learning, and that this helped them realise it was important to refrain from judging others.

Participants were more conscious of their learning preferences and were better able to organise themselves

Peer trainers and student participants gave several examples of how they had started to reflect more on their learning. As one of the most enthusiastic participants at the Esch-sur-Alzette pilot site commented, "I've been in several different schools, but I've never learned anything like this."

Several participants had reflected on how they best like to learn. For example, several participants indicated that they preferred the "manual" exercises. One learner said that she learned that she is an "emotional" learner and that she needs to be in a good mood to study. If something is bothering her, she found that it is important to confront any problems before she sits down to study. Another participant commented that she found that learning environment was very important to her. "I like to have a window with a beautiful view", this learner commented. Another declared that she makes decisions when she is walking, while her classmate said that he makes decisions when he is lying down.

Other participants said that they were reflecting more on their learning and how they do things, and found that as a result of this they could be more effective. One learner observed that she had a tendency to just jump in to new things. By talking, she could figure things out. Now, she commented, she had started by reflecting first, and then doing things. This had helped to build her confidence. Another participant said that he now knows how to find motivation in everything he does.

Some participants said that when they don't understand something, they are more likely to ask that it be explained or shown in a different way. For instance, one participant gave the example of learning to drive. "A friend [in the driver's seat] was explaining", he says, "but I realised I would learn better if I could get in the driver's seat and then follow her instructions."

A couple of other students said that they would structure and plan differently their own approach to learning. For example, one of the older peer trainers said that she is now more likely to study regularly, and not just before an exam or before a project is due, and that she now remembers more. Another commented that the best way to learn was to explain it someone else.

Student participants did not develop strong skills for self-advocacy

The peer trainers and student participants were asked whether they found it easier to express their learning needs with teachers and parents. Students said that they were more likely to share what they had learned through P4L with their parents (although only a

minority of students said they had). They were also able to express their learning preferences with their peers (and this happened quite naturally as students participated in the P4L activities.)

One of the P4L activities, "Dear Teacher", invites students to prepare a collective letter to their teachers telling them what would help them to learn better. For example, learners in Arad said that they would like their teachers to be more calm and patient and to put less pressure on them. They also said they would like their teachers to be more open, and let them work in groups.

Across the pilot sties, the participants said that the Dear Teacher activity had helped to clarify their thinking on how they prefer to learn in the classroom setting. However, none of these students interviewed were willing to take the next step to actually communicating this to their teachers. As one student commented, it "wouldn't be wise to do this". (

On the other side of this equation, a teacher in Esch-sur-Alzette who was asked if any of the students participating in P4L programme had shared what their reflections on their preferred learning approaches with him, he said they had not. This teacher observed that European students are less likely to be as assertive as young people in the United States, where he had spent time working. A 4motion peer trainer in Luxembourg confirmed that there is a strong cultural element to students' willingness (or lack thereof) to speak up about what they want from teachers.

At the same time, these results point to the need to consider broader advocacy programmes for changes in classroom teaching, learning and assessment approaches that accommodate diverse learning preferences and motivations; advocacy related to promoting student agency is also important.

Feedback on selected P4L activities

Peer trainers and student participants gave feedback on some of the P4L activities. The student participants required some prompting to remember exercises – particularly those for whom several months had passed between the P4L programme and the site visits (e.g. in Visé and Esch-sur-Alzette). It's also important to point out that peer trainers adapted activities for the learners they were working with, the time available, and other factors, so they were not uniformly implemented across sites. (The most extreme example described was in Arad, where peer trainers found that the P4L activities were too advanced for the youngest learners (this was the case for a group of 5th-year students at the school), so little of the actual P4L curriculum was covered.)

In general, student participants had very different reactions to the different activities (pointing to learners' inner diversity). However, this feedback may be helpful in thinking about how to adjust activities to appeal to more participants.

The compass/wheel

With the compass exercise, participants were asked to decide what perspective was most important for them in their learning.

The directions of the compass are:
- North (overview, or big picture)
- South (action)
- East (inspiration)
- West (relationships)

Across the sites, many of the younger participants found themselves in the "action" (southern) quadrant. The peer trainers, who were older, frequently commented that they found it difficult to place themselves in any one quadrant. This feedback was perhaps most pronounced in Visé, where peer mentors were university age. One of the younger learners in Esch-sur-Alzette commented that the activity was too vague, and accompanied by too much theory and discussion.

Iceberg of diversity

This activity, which is taken from the "A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE®" training programme, was done as a complement to the Compass exercise in Visé. This exercise is designed to help participants explore visible and invisible identities, and to develop better personal connections. Participants at the Visé pilot reported that they enjoyed this activity and that it had an important impact on their thinking.

Portraits

In this activity, which was also from the "A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE®" programme, the participant draws the person in front of them. Participants appreciated the opportunity to use artistic skills. One participant commented that he appreciated exercises that give an idea of how you are perceived by others.

Quick lesson

In this activity, participants shared with peers something they like doing in just two minutes. This was highlighted as a particularly fun activity by some.

Dear Teacher

Participants said they liked the Dear Teacher exercise because it gave an opportunity to reflect on learning. However, as one participant at the Josif Moldivan gymnasium in Arad commented, it's frustrating not to follow through with this by sharing results and having a real conversation with teachers.

Animal qualities

Participants in Visé described how they were invited to think of an animal they like or which inspires them. They then mimed the animal for other participants, and shared the reason why they chose this animal and what qualities they associated with it. This activity was generally appreciated, but as one participant said, you had to "act like it wasn't crazy".

Lemon Land

Participants in Esch commune and in Visé described how they were invited to imagine/create a world together (in Esch commune, Lemon Land was reimagined as Apple Land). One participant commented that the idea that anything was possible made this activity particularly appealing. It was an opportunity to say what you want to be and to identify what qualities are important. This activity was combined with the compass so that participants took the viewpoint they had identified in the compass as they created this world. The "action" or "manual" group found it was particularly easy to create an imaginary world.

Energisers

Energisers were alternated with reflective exercises. Participants reported that this helped the sessions pass quickly, and also help to reinforce the team aspect of P4L. The participants at the residential retreat, where the programme was much more intensive, said that as a result of this approach, they weren't tired at the end of the day the way they are after school.

Journals

Several of the participants commented that they found it difficult to write in the journal (which was optional). Often the text and questions were too abstract. Some more explanation about why the questions were being asked might be helpful. On the other hand, other participants found the journal was helpful for making the activities more concrete.

Student participants' general comments

Across the sites, most of the student participants appreciated the activities and the opportunity to be able to choose what and how they worked together. When asked whether he would like to have more of this approach in school, however, a participant in the focus group at Esch-sur-Alzette said that it was more important for them to learn to listen to the teachers and follow instructions, as this prepared them better for their future working lives where the boss would also be giving orders.

A consistent comment from student participants across all the sties was that explanations before activities and the follow-up were often too long and too theoretical.

Peer Trainer Observations

Peer trainers participated in a cascade model of training. In other words, they participated in the activities of the P4L programme themselves before leading the activities with younger students. The peer trainers were accompanied by the project partners. In the case of Arad, teachers were present for most of the activities (leaving the classroom, for example, during the Dear Teacher activities to enable the student participants to express themselves more freely).

Across sites, more than one peer trainer said their motivation to participate was "why not?". One participant in Luxembourg said he hopes one day to become a teacher and thought P4L might be good preparation for that, but this was not a common motivation.

The Luxembourg "train the trainer" sessions included discussions on "life quality", asking three questions: What things in the world cause you to suffer? How are you in a group? How do you need to learn? These questions also have both reflective and motivational aspects, which might be important for peer trainers who had a rather vague motivation when they started.

A common comment of peer trainers across sites was that it was difficult at the beginning to understand what P4L was about. The initial explanations seemed very general and theoretical. However, with time, things became clearer. One of the upper secondary school peer trainers in Luxembourg commented that a few more concrete examples would have helped to make the aims of the different activities clearer. Another suggested that it would be important to clarify and deepen some exercises. Across the sites, the peer trainers expressed the view that a broader repertoire of activities to choose from would also be helpful.

The peer trainers agreed that it was important to experience the P4L activities themselves, although in Arad, one observed that it would be useful to have the peer trainers to analyse what they were doing and why, how they felt during the activity, and whether they found the activity helpful. The young peer trainers in Luxembourg who were in the same preparatory sessions had very different reactions about their training. For example, one said she would have liked more time to prepare the lesson that was to be filmed, while others said they felt better when they could be more spontaneous .

The age of the peer trainers and their own confidence levels in their academic abilities seems to have made a difference on how they themselves experienced the programme. For example, some of the older peer trainers (university-level students in Visé) said that they had started to reflect more on their own learning strategies and had made some changes to how they study. They commented that these were minor changes to their study habits, rather than any kind of major shift. In another example, several of the upper secondary school students in Arad said that while they understood that peer learning could be useful for some students, they themselves preferred to study independently. It should be noted

that these peer trainers had all been successful with their learning strategies, and so were probably less inclined to try new learning strategies.

A member of the 4motion staff who had participated in the peer training observed that the P4L activities were a refreshing change from what she had experienced as an upper secondary student in Luxembourg and as a university student. Even as a student in the academic track for high achievers, she noted, she had felt alienated and bored. It was difficult to see the relevance of what they were learning, as her teachers were not likely to discuss how what they were learning might apply to students' future careers and lives.

Some of the young students at the Josif Moldivan gymnasium in Arad said that they saw the peer trainers, who were kind and patient with them, as role models. The younger student participants saw that these slightly older peer trainers were able to combine their studies with activities and friends.

The peer trainers commented that they found explaining activities to be stressful – although project partners observed that the peer trainers were often better at given explanations than they were. After having delivered the programme the first time, peer trainers commented that they were now more confident in their training abilities.

The timing of the programme also had an impact. For many of the peer trainers in Arad and in Luxembourg, it was difficult to participate in this extra activity after school There were too many tests in the springtime, and it was difficult to fit this in.

Teacher Observations

Arad is the only site where teachers were present for the P4L training. The peer trainers ran the sessions, but teachers were there in case needed (although they left the classroom for the Dear Teacher exercise). In a focus group session, these teachers said they found the activities intriguing and they were very glad to welcome the peer trainers to the school during the informal learning week. These teachers recognized that the student needs are real, and that for many of these students, their parents are not very engaged. The peer mentorship can be very valuable.

Teachers at the Josif Moldivan gymnasium in Arad said they were intrigued by the P4L activities, but for many, they were not sure how they could use these activities in their own classes. Teachers face pressure to get through a crowded curriculum. There are few training opportunities and salaries are low, so there are few incentives to adapt new approaches. In addition, any new activities that are introduced on a formal basis also must be approved by the director at a county level.

Partner Observations

Each of the project partners made significant adjustments to the core P4L curriculum in order to fit the context in which they were working. Considerations included the time available, age of the participants, observations on what had worked well with the student participants on any given day and how to adapt for the particular group, and so on. Partners suggested that it would be important to have a much broader repertoire of activities available. Indeed, the types of "on the fly" adjustments partners made to curriculum require a level of experience that peer trainers themselves do not have.

Partners in Arad worked with student participants from 5th to 9th year (about 10 to 14 years of age). They observed that younger learners were not ready for many of the conceptual activities. The 12-13 and 14-15 year-old students were much more engaged in the activities. While the younger students were not able to respond to an open question on what they perceived the aims of P4L to be, they were able to respond to more targeted questions. These students had formed a stronger bond through the opportunities to interact and to reflect on their own learning and motivations. The older students interviewed were better able to articulate the aims of P4L, although the experience did not appear to have had as strong an impact on their group cohesion.

Partners in Visé emphasised the importance of trust building among the participants. The residential programme allowed the peer trainers and the student participants to build a stronger bond, but some groundwork to build trust at the beginning of the week was essential. They also noted that the "A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE®" training programme on anti-discrimination had added an important element. Indeed, there were strong parallels with the focus on inner diversity emphasized in P4L and the focus on cultural, social, economic and other kinds of diversity emphasized in the "A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE®" training programme.

Partners in Luxembourg abbreviated the P4L programme to work with the school schedules. The peer trainers and student participants were interviewed some months after the P4L pilot, so prompts were needed to remind them of specific activities. Nevertheless, they were able to recall activities and to talk about the impact on the way they think about their learning to a surprising degree.

A note on gathering evidence to support the Action Research

The ongoing observations of project partners and interviews with all the key players provided rich evidence on how P4L had shaped perceptions about motivations and preferred learning strategies, as well as what had worked well and what had worked less well in the pilot project.

It should be noted that the short LIKERT-style questionnaires and learners' journals proved to be a less effective means to gather evidence of the programme impact. In part this was because learners chose not to share journals. Some learners also commented that the journal questions were too abstract and they were not sure how to answer them. This also

aligns with their comments on other aspects of the programme being overly theoretical, and points to a need to modify these aspects. Indeed, while some portion of the student-participants at the Josif Moldivan gymnasium in Arad provided shared their reflections through the journals, the journals did not really provide significant insight on shifts in how they understood their own motivations and learning processes.

STAGE 4: REFLECT

The P4L partners came together in October 2017 to review their experiences with the P4L pilot and to consider the implications of their experiences during the prior stages for next steps. In addition, during the site visits, partners, peer trainers and student participants engaged in brainstorming about how to deepen the P4L and its impact.

Key issues explored included:

- Whether the theory of change underlying P4L was borne out
- The timing and intensity of the programme
- Sustainability of the programme
- Target age for student participants
- Elements missing from the P4L curriculum
- The need for a system-wide change to make a real difference.

The P4L theory of change

As noted above, early in the process of planning and curriculum design, the project partners hypothesised that as a result of participation in P4L peer trainers and students would be better able to:

- improve their self-confidence regarding their learning
- appreciate that each individual has a unique approach to learning
- identify their intrinsic motivation for learning – that is motivations other than grades or teacher or parent pressure (which might be considered as extrinsic motivation).
- identify their preferred learning strategies
- articulate their own learning preferences and be able to ask for support from their teachers, parents and peers

Based on feedback from the site visit interviews, P4L was indeed successful in meeting the majority of these aims. The most powerful impacts appeared to be in relation to development of self-confidence and the strengthening of peer relationships. Recognition of inner diversity – their own and their peers' unique approach to – was integral to this. As one student remarked, understanding that people see and understand things differently allowed them to feel freer to ask for peer support; learning from different viewpoints helped deepen their understanding.

At all sites, the peer trainers and student participants said they had been able to reflect on their learning and were able to identify their preferred learning strategies. The student participants also expressed that they had become more self-confident about their learning. Reflections on intrinsic motivations for learning were embedded in activities that supported self-knowledge – for example, the compass, the exercise on animal qualities, the quick lesson during which learners "taught" about a favourite activity, and the journal.

P4L had less impact in regard to students being able to articulate their preferred learning strategies with teachers. As noted above, students believe it would not be in their best interests to tell teachers that they would prefer a different approach to their learning. One teacher pointed out that this may be cultural; students in Europe do not assert their own views. But this may also be seen as a lack of support for individual student agency in schools. Some further observations on this aspect are included in the next section.

Timing and intensity of the programme

Due to timing of the overall P4L project grant, as well as the constraints of the academic year (with time for additional activities opening up only late in the school year), the P4L programme was implemented only in Spring 2016 (early April in Arad, late May in Luxembourg), or in the case of the Visé residential pilot, over the summer. Partners noted that there were some real disadvantages to this as student participants did not have many opportunities to apply P4L concepts to their learning at this stage (this is also one of the difficulties of measuring P4L impact on student marks).

The intensity of the programme is also important to consider. As has been noted, across the pilot sites there was a great deal of variation, with half-hour sessions over the course of four days in Esch-sur-Alzette, half-day sessions during informal learning week in Arad, and a five-day residential programme in Visé. Even for those students participating in the lightest of these programmes, P4L supported learners to reflect on their learning. While the programme did support mutual understanding among these learners, the programme did not have the same impact on the cohesion of these classmates as the Visé.

The intensity of the programme may also have an impact on types of activities highlighted. The student participants in the Visé pilot commented on how important it was to feel secure with their peers, particularly when reflecting on very personal issues (which of course is part of understanding one's unique potential). The project partners chose to highlight a number of trust building exercise and this helped to create a climate where it was safe for learners to express themselves. A disadvantage of the residential programme was that these learners do not go to the same school, and are not able to share insights on learning with classmates.

Indeed, the timing and intensity of the programme may also have an impact on whether students are able to retain what they learned with P4L. In all focus groups, students needed prompts to remember specific activities. The Visé participants were able to recall activities in

more vivid detail, once prompted. The peer trainers, who had experienced the programme twice (as part of the cascade approach), were more likely to say that they had started to change their learning strategies based on their reflections in P4L. This may point to the importance of reinforcing the activities over time, rather than only in a short-term seminar format.

Target age for student participants

Student participants in the programme ranged in age from about 10 years old (one class in Arad) to 16 years old. The peer trainers ranged in age from about 16 (students who were in their 11th and 12th years in upper secondary school) to their early 20s (university students who are connected with AMO Reliance in Visé). Based on feedback from the participants, the youngest learners were not ready to get the full benefit of the programme, which incorporates many conceptual elements. Many of the older peer trainers commented that while they had integrated some new learning strategies in their studies, the programme had not made a fundamental difference to their views on learning. This is not to say that the P4L curriculum could not be adjusted for these different age groups. The current activities, however, are well suited to 14 year olds.

Elements missing from the P4L curriculum

During site visits, the peer trainers, student participants and project partners were invited to brainstorm on how P4L could be strengthened. Two general strategies were suggested.

1.) The P4L curriculum could be expanded to include a focus on specific skills for learning to learn

While "learning to learn" is considered as an important competence at European level, this is not necessarily part of the curriculum in the countries where the P4L pilot was implemented. It was suggested that P4L could include some concrete exercises to help learners improve their study skills. For example, these may include skills to develop mind maps and connecting new concepts to previous knowledge. Organisational skills and time management might also be taught.

2.) More could be done to share P4L methods with teachers and to provide materials

One approach to integrating P4L earlier and more consistently throughout the school year might be to offer teachers a toolkit with ideas and activities to integrate activities during open periods. The partner organisations could provide support and assistance to teachers to ensure fidelity to the programme goals.

P4L might also target specific classes where it would complement the curriculum. For example, in Belgium (Fr.-speaking community), new ethics and values courses have recently

been introduced in secondary schools. These courses may provide the right opportunity to introduce activities focused on developing awareness of oneself and of others.

3.) Advocacy is needed for broader change

Non-formal learning can be an important approach to supporting social change. But deep changes in the formal school system are also needed. P4L project partners have expressed some interest in advocacy for more fundamental changes to teaching and learning in schools to support student well-being.

Advocacy may focus on how P4L can help meet broader goals. The P4L approach fills an important gap in early school leaving prevention programmes, few of which address students' intrinsic motivation or peer support. It can also support efforts to introduce transversal skills that have supported the European Key Competence Framework. These include: constructive management of feelings, decision-taking, initiative, risk assessment, problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity.

Long-term sustainability of the P4L programme

At the October 2017 evaluation meeting, project partners ndicated that they believe the P4L programme is sustainable and could be further expanded to include more activities and to reach more schools. Additional funding as well as an appropriate business model would be needed.

Beyond this, it will also be important to develop guidelines, or principles, to support new users of the P4L curriculum. As has already been apparent in the different approaches to implementing the P4L pilot, the programme is highly adaptable.

These principles, or guidelines should:

- Communicate the aims of the P4L programme and the underlying philosophy. It should be apparent how each of the activities included is related to these overarching elements.
- Highlight the importance of including initial activities to build trust among the participants, which are essential to getting the most of the P4L activities.
- Ensure that abstract concepts on learning need to be supported by concrete examples
- Ensure that the overall mix of activities in the programme includes both active and reflective learning, and balances team building with opportunities with self-examination
- Provide student participants with concrete strategies and tools to support their learning
- Engage student participants in design of new P4L activities. Student involvement is important not only to ensure that activities will resonate with the participants, but

also as a way to promote students' agency. Students will also have the opportunity to practice their skills for self-advocacy as they negotiate the types of activities they would find to be best adapted for their learning preferences.

- Set out criteria for selection of additional activities (in line with the programme aims and philosophy).

In addition, EPTO has a well-established training programme to deepen peer trainers' competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) over time. These include competences tofacilitate workshops, to give and respond to peer feedback,to deal with difficult situations and personalities, and so on. This aspect could be further developed in relation to the P4L programme.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS

1.) Introduce activities related to the "growth mindset"

Above, it was noted that student intrinsic motivation aligns with research identifying the importance of student intrinsic motivation for engagement, persistence toward learning goals and improved outcomes. This is also reflective of the "growth mindset", studied by Carol Dweck (2006)[6].   As described by Dweck, "growth mindset" is "…based ont eh belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and growth through application and experience…. [P]eople with this mindset believe that a person's true potential is unknown (and unknowable); that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil and training" (loc. 152 - 162, kindle edition).   Learning – or growth – is based on risk and effort.   Individuals with a growth mindset are able to develop their self-efficacy— that is, the belief in one's capacity to accomplish a task.

The growth mindset is distinguished from the (all too common) "fixed mindset" – which may be described as the belief that individuals "…have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character…." (loc 143, kindle edition) For individuals with a fixed mindset, risk and effort reveal inadequacies.

Education systems have traditionally done much to reinforce the "fixed mindset" through selection and sorting of individual students according to their academic performance. This approach co-exists with the increasing emphasis on the importance of supporting all learners to achieve to high levels.

Dweck and colleagues have developed an eight-session workshop to support adolescents to develop a growth mindset. Students learn about brain plasticity, are shown how to apply the concepts of growth mindset to their own studies, and helped with specific study skills.

6 Dweck, C. S. (2006). Mindset: The new psychology of success. New York. Random House.

They have also developed a computer programme, Brainology®, to support learners in developing a growth mindset (https://www.mindsetworks.com/programs/brainology-for-schools).

Other educators have also developed activities to support growth mindset have been developed and could be researched for their suitability for the P4L format. The majority of programmes are targeted to formal schooling, but some resources are also available for non-formal education (see this site, which is addressed to youth mentors working outside the formal education system: https://www.mindsetkit.org/growth-mindset-mentors).

2.) Introduce a focus on "habits of mind"

The term "habits of mind" emerged from research on nurturing "everyday creativity" (that is, the ability to generate new ideas, to solve problems, and so on – and distinguished from the idea that creativity is solely defined by innate talent, or genius).). The habits of mind (sometimes referred to as dispositions or character traits) that have been found important to supporting creativity include: inquisitiveness, discipline, persistence, discipline and imagination[7]. Guy Claxton, who contributed to the work on creativity and habits of mind, extends this list to include: the ability to collaborate, being resourceful, asking good questions, having a range of learning strategies (see https://www.buildinglearningpower.com/about; the programme has been developed for formal education, but aspects could be adapted for P4L's non-formal learning approach). These different habits of mind are well aligned with Dweck's work on growth mindset, as well as the aims set out for P4L.

As researchers have noted, the habits are not something that can be "taught", but rather they can be nurtured. Lucas, Spender and Claxton (2013) have developed a tool which learners can use to assess their own development (it sets out the five habits of mind, and for each of these, defines specific facets). The tool provides a way for learners to reflect on these different habits, or dispositions, and to think about their own maturation across these areas.

Figure 2: Assessing Creative "Habits of Mind"

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7 See Lucas , B., G. Claxton and Spencer, £. (2013) Progression in student creativity in school: First steps towards new forms of formative assessments. OECD Education
Working Paper No. 86 (Paris, OECD).

This tool (which is essentially a rubric in circular form) could easily be adapted to reflect other dispositions identified in the research as important for effective learning and leaner well-being. It should also be backed by firm understanding of the dispositions themselves (how they are defined, how learners mature and develop, what type of evidence they could use to identify their own personal development, and so on).

3.) Introduce student capacity for self- and peer-assessment

Self and peer assessment are important elements of learning. Students who are able to identify where they need to improve their learning will be more able to ask their teachers or parents to help them to close their learning gaps (of course, ideally, teachers are also supporting learner assessment). Competences for effective self- and peer-assessment need to be developed (they do not come automatically!). This may include capacity to give effective feedback (that is focused on the task at hand, references to criteria as to what counts as a good performance, feedback that is clear and specific and that includes suggestions for improvement). Learners may also need to develop skills to balance positive feedback with suggestions for improvement (e.g., two stars and a wish)[8]. Students in P4L who are in the same class may be able to apply these skills to their homework.

EPTO has developed self- and peer-assessment forms, as part of his competence framework and certification process[9]. These forms could be adapted specifically to P4L.

4.) Engage participants in co-construction of the P4L curriculum

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8 OECD (2005). Formative Assessment: Improving learning in secondary classrooms. Paris. OECD.

9 http://epto.org/content/training/certification

Student participants across the pilot sites noted that the P4L curriculum was often too abstract. Engaging students in co-construction would increase their agency and would also help support quality of the curriculum as a communication tool. It would also reinforce their development as independent learners.

There are a few models for effective co-construction:
- https://www.teachforamerica.org/teacherpop/how-engage-students-designing-and-implementing-lesson-plans
- http://learningaway.org.uk/resources/co-construction-design/two-approaches-to-co-construction/
- https://teacherhead.com/2012/08/27/towards-co-constructed-learning-how-to-get-it-started/
- https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/asset/168/download?...pdf
- http://voiceofstudents.eu/
- https://www.facebook.com/StudentVoicetheBRIDEtoLearning/

Co-construction of the programme would require some careful planning to ensure that the central aims of the P4L programme are maintained, and that activities are effectively aligned with them. It would also need to be appropriate for the age of learners involved. For example, younger learners expressed that they found some parts of the P4L programme to be too theoretical, preferring concrete activities. While design of programme activities inevitably involves conceptual work, learners may help to select activities. They may also help in the translation of abstract concepts to more concrete terms.