Frequently Asked Question - FAQs
Troubleshooting Guide

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Doubts grow with knowledge

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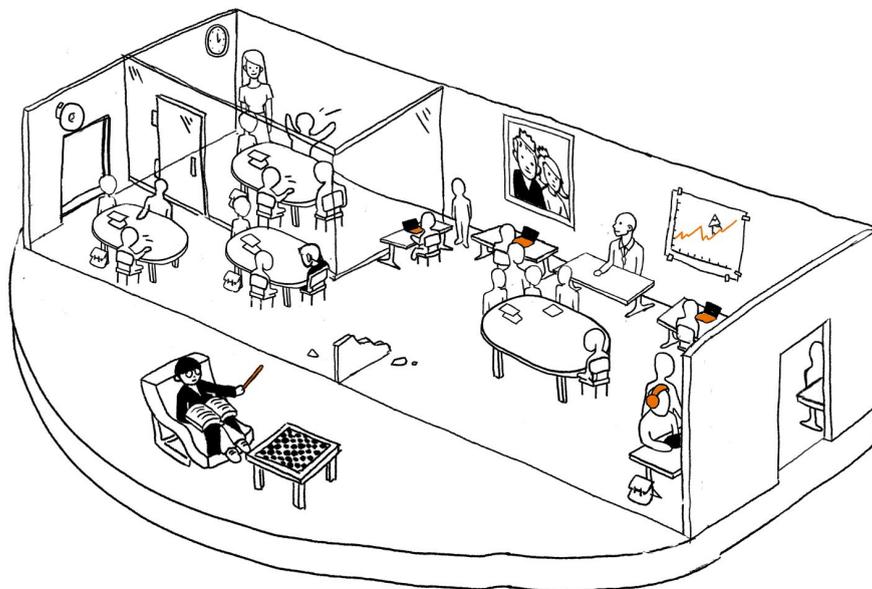
Have you already started to implement the School Transformation Lab method in your class and/or your school? Have you started just now to discover and study the method? Are you already in an advanced phase of the transformation process?

The truth is that doubts may arise anytime. That is why we have prepared these FAQs as to try to help to handle the potential uncertainties and questions that you may face during the transformation process.

1. Does the school transformation process need the support of the management?

Yes, this is absolutely key. It is one of the most important axes for a successful school transformation.

When you as a teacher decide to endorse the School Transformation Method, you will make significant changes in your class. So firstly it is important that the management is informed and approve it.

However, simply approving the project could not be enough. Active support of the management is a signal for motivating and encourage the staff to make efforts to step out of their comfort zone and facilitate their journey, by informing them about the traps and providing them with the tools.

To have more information on the role of supportive management, please read the document "Principles for Helping a School to Transform Itself".

2. I would like to implement the School Transformation Method. Where should I start?

As a single teacher, a straight start at the class level is going through the 4 Cycles (see question nr 6).

As a team, the very first step to start the implementation process is the Application phase (see question nr 3). Then you will go through 4 Cycles (see question nr 6) and in a more advanced phase, you may even arrive at Cycle 5.

The Application phase is based on 3 principles to prepare the ground for implementation:

1. A supportive management
2. Actors who take ownership again of their school

3. A flexible and systemic approach

To have more info on the Application phase and the 3 principles, please read the documents "Application process for a school to be coached" and "Principles for Helping a School to Transform Itself".

3. What is the application process? Why may the school undertake it?

The application process precedes the actual take-off of the transformation process. This is not an "administrative" or "bureaucratic" phase. This is an important phase for your team, during which you prepare the fertile ground for mentalities. Please look at it as a brainstorming phase during which you, the management and the staff involved can express their feelings, expectations and fears towards the process to undertake.

Whether the transformation is officially guided or not, the school will put resources into it. Formalizing an application enables teachers to confirm with certainty that they were asked for their opinion. The time taken at this stage will ensure that it is saved later by avoiding conflicts.

To have more info, please read the document "Application process for a school to be coached".

4. What is the difference among the documents "School transformation guide" and "Transformation phases" in the management and coaches folder and "Transforming my class" in the teacher folder?

The three documents represent step-by-step processes to transform a school, but seen by different perspectives.

As suggested by the division in two folders, one for management and coaches and one for teachers.

- The "School Transformation Guide" includes the perspective and the monitoring action over the transformation process of a headmaster;
- the "Transformation phases" document see the process with the eyes of a coach (see question nr 5);

- the "Transforming my class" document focuses on the actual implementation process in class and the 4 cycles and includes a more practical approach.

The difference is that headmasters and coaches support and monitor the development cycles. Teachers turn the cycle into practice and are active players of the implementation of working in the field with the students.

5. What is a coach in the school transformation process?

"*You can not transform someone or an organization like a school. We can just help her to transform herself.*" This is one of the beliefs of the method.

In School Transformation Lab, a coach is a person already expert in the method that can support the school in the transformation process. He/she does not have a magic wand. The coach can look at the dynamics as an external observer, thus helping to adjust some behaviours and routines that naturally may tend towards traditional methods.

For the time being (Sept. 2020), coaches experienced in the methods are the project partners of the School Transformation Lab project located in Belgium, Greece, Italy and Norway. You can contact them from the project's web site: SchoolTransformationLab.eu

6. How many steps are included in the transformation process?

The School Transformation Lab process is composed of the application process and 4 Cycles. The very first step to start the implementation process is the Application phase (see question nr 3).

Then you will go through 4 Cycles. Cycle 1-2 and 3 are thought to prepare the ground for the core transformation, to softly implement actual changes and starting to understand the logic behind. Cycle 4 is the core implementation of the method in the class. That is why, in addition to the "Transforming my class" for teachers for Cycle 1-2-3-4, we have created more detailed instruction for Cycle 4 in a separate document. The 4 Cycles are accompanied by a grid to monitor the progress of the transformation process.

In a more advanced phase, you may even implement a 5th cycle.

To have a guide implementing the 4 Cycles, please read the following documents: "Transforming my class-course & tests", "Transforming my class-progress grid", "Cycle 4 Implementation guide".

7. Why should I change? Why should I embrace the School Transformation Method?

Schools approaching the method are usually looking for solutions to address the following needs:

- improve academic performance;
- motivate and empower students, making them autonomous;
- boost relational skills and foster collaboration;
- lower the stress of teachers;
- embrace the differences of level among students and propose the desynchronization of learning (personalized learning).

The School Transformation Lab method believes that trying to answer these needs separately leads to poor and short-term answers. The School Transformation Lab method represents a paradigm shift within your class and your school, and the mean to comprehensively intervene in the above-mentioned areas.

To have more information, look at this video: https://youtu.be/6txsUyjEfIc

8. Which are the main changes I will see in a transformed school?

To answer this question, we collected the responses of the hundreds of visitors to the School for Dialogue (see question nr 9) in 2018 and 2019 when asked the following question: "what surprised you the most during your visit?"

The answers can be categorized as follow:

- Autonomy

- Organization

- Working climate

- Differentiation

- Assimilation

- Immediate feedback

- Instructive error

- Progress board

- Mutual assistance

- Relationship

- Co-ownership

- Delegation

- Versatile teacher

- Observer teacher

- Involved parents

- Adapting premises

- Meta-cognition

- Motivation

To have a detailed description of the main visible changes within a transformed class, please read the document "Operating principles of a transformed classroom".

9. What is "School of Dialogue"? What is its connection with "School Transformation Lab"?

School of Dialogue is the school founded by John Rizzo in Brussels.
Rizzo has coached schools all over the world for years. His main problem was that teachers had a hard time to visualize the change he proposes. He decided to open his own school based on the method with real pupils, as a visitable place for teachers to visualize the proposed change. That school serves as a visitable innovation lab to facilitate the transformation of traditional schools.

In 2017, School of Dialogue won a 3-year Erasmus Plus Partnership project with 3 other partners from Italy, Greece and Norway, to develop resources to help schools from all over Europe to be involved in the transformation process. One fun fact: the initial name of the project was "Talent Lab". During the implementation of the project, project partners realized that the name was not very appropriate and transformed it in "School Transformation Lab - all students' got talent".

To have more information on John Rizzo and the history of the method, please read his book "Sauver l'école?" (in French): http://johnrizzo.be/sauverlecole/

10. Which are the main risks in the transformation process?

Change resistance will be the number one enemy of your school's transformation. Resistance may come from the management, colleagues, parents, students and the society as a whole. Change always requires some forms of courage and risks. But the magic happens outside the comfort zone.

The inertia of a school system is a recurring problem encountered by innovative teachers, associations at the school's bedside and even by ministers wishing to bring about a sustainable change. Considering the magnitude of the problem allows us to understand the issues and overcome them.

You can read the document "Understanding the inertia of the school system".

11. How should I face internal and external resistances? What may help during the transformation process?

Change is not an easy task. Deciding to change is an act of courage. Pursuing the change requires strong resilience.

There are some actions that may help you in the transformation process.

The most significant can be engaging with stakeholders, e.g. explaining and communicating constantly with those having an impact from the project like students, colleagues and families. Be kind and humble, recognizing publicly that not every teacher of the school need to change.

We identified some principles that can help you in implementing smoothly the project:

1. A supportive management.

2. Actors who take ownership again of their school.

3. A flexible and systemic approach.

To have more info on the principles, please read the document "Principles for Helping a School to Transform Itself".

12. Could visiting another school be useful?

Yes, of course! Looking with your own eyes the transformation happening in other schools can be very powerful. You can understand the dynamics of the method by observation.

Visiting an experienced school is also an objective to reach in Cycle 1 of the method.

To have some suggestions from teachers visiting a school applying the method, please have a look at this video: https://youtu.be/CREIMFzf9PQ

13. If I am the only person willing to change, may I quit?

Creating a team and sharing the experience with colleagues, of course, is more effective. But still, if you manage to obtain at least the support of the management, you may try to start hoping to launch a spillover effect.

There are many examples of innovative teachers who try disruptive changes in their class successfully, even without the support of their management. Usually they feel alone on the long run, having a hard time to convince their colleagues to change too despite their success. Yes, you may undertake this change alone in your class. Just be kind with yourself on any dissemination expectation.

Our message is "you can try: either you may succeed or you may learn!"

Is there a difference between values and principles?

The method has 5 values learned by pupils and teachers: excellence, empowerment, instructive mistake, mutual aid, benevolence. Your school may have other values, such as the love of nature or some religious aspect. We propose 5 values specific to the transformation. For example, the instructive mistake value makes you give the exercise solutions upfront to the students, in case you still have any doubt about that. These values are explained in the "Values of a transformed school" document.

Besides to that, we propose around 20 operating principles (see question nr 8), such as delegation. These are more tangible than values and directly visible in the class. For example, the teacher asks a student to explain a topic for 5 minutes to a small group of other

students. It's a visible example of delegation which is more specific than the "empowerment" value. Principles are explained in the "Operating principles of a transformed class".

14. Why does the School Transformation Method include so many assessments for the pupils?

This is one of the questions teachers ask when reading the course document "Transforming my class, course and tests". The reason for basing the method on supplying many tests to students and teachers is that it aims at triggering the learning process of students. The method is not about how to teach, but how to make students learn.

Assessments have many advantages for the following reasons:

- **Congruence**: Having an objective-oriented method with repeatable tests is congruent with what this method requires of students in their school subjects.

- **Exemplary**: When the teacher also takes the test, he puts himself in the same boat as the students and strengthens their bonds, especially if he takes care to fail the first test corrected by one of his students.

- **Communication**: These tests allow you to better master an explanation, a description of the method made by both sides (teacher and students). These "better" explanations will reach colleagues and parents, thus making it possible to defuse certain crises.

- **Memorizing**: The first test is a small task of easy memorization (it is only necessary to outline, not to reproduce the whole diagram). This is a closed question, which is much easier to assess than asking to explain the whole method.

- **Implication**: The first test makes it possible to involve the student from the start by presenting an overview. If we only explain one step at a time without telling him where we are heading, he might not get involved and may resist later.

15. Why does the School Transformation Method include drills?

Drill is a practice involving repetition of an activity in order to improve a skill, or a particular occasion for such practice.

It is very effective as:

- It helps to assimilate automatisms into unconscious thinking and information into long-term memory, in order to free short-term memory that can only remember 5 to 9 things.
- Understanding is not enough, you also need to practice to assimilate. Just because I understood how Lionel Messi plays football doesn't mean I can play football like him.
- To fill in the gaps, allowing each student to practice at his or her own level, even if he is several years behind.
- Training at an ambitious but attainable level increases motivation. This is the proximal development zone.

16. Why I as a teacher should change the posture in class? Isn't my role underestimated?

The reasons why you change from a traditional posture to a personalized learning environment one is explained in question nr 7. Done well, it will boost students motivation and enable you to cope with different levels in the class.

In the School Transformation Lab method, the teacher is no longer responsible for teaching lessons. Students become responsible for taking them. The teacher becomes the coach for triggering their learning process. This means that students will be free to select their source of information: a book, a video, the sources of information selected by you, your own lessons if they need.

Your role as teacher facilitator is key in the School Transformation Lab method. You will create the environment to make your students learning, but above all, you will have to pay attention to them. Controlling and monitoring students is very important, because they need motivation for studying and someone preventing them from cheating.

TIPS: try to give short lessons only to students that will require them only, or organize short lessons as an award for your students.

17. Why working with objectives and assessments?

Focusing on the student's assessed results enables you to focus less on how they learn. The School Transformation Lab is an objective-oriented method. It means that the progression of

the students depends on the achievement of selected objectives, obtained by succeeding tests. As a consequence, lessons must be developed around objectives to be reached and test to practice in order to be able to succeed the formal assessments.

The combination of objectives and tests affects students' motivation and trigger learning. Motivation is the key of the whole transformation process. As a student, am I doing an exercise because I've been told to do that specific exercise? Or am I deciding to practice with an exercise that I choose because I'm required to pass an assessment?

To better understand the role of objectives and tests, please read the documents: "Transforming my class - course & test", "Cycle 4 implementation guide" and "Objectives VS Activities"

18. What is the difference between objectives and activities?

It is very important since the beginning to make a difference between objectives and activities: clarifying the objectives does not mean telling your students what to do in order to understand that subject. For example, if you want your student to learn to lace shoes, your objective may be "being able to lace my two shoes in less than 60 seconds", while they may have different optional activities to reach this objective: watching a video on the tablet, training to the first part of the knot 10 times, practicing on a shoe placed on a table.
If you are very clear about final goal with them (lace your shoes in 60 seconds), then they will find their own way to reach that goal. Your students need objectives to be motivated and to select their step-by-step learning path.

To have more information on the difference between objectives and activities, please read the document "Objectives VS Activities"

19. What is the difference between mistake and instructive mistake?

Progressing requires leaving our comfort zone in order to have sufficiently difficult learning. Getting out of our comfort zone often involves making novice mistakes. To encourage students and teachers to move out of their comfort zone to progress, it is necessary to reduce their fears of making mistakes. An error is no longer a fault, but informative

information for progress. A 3/10 is good news, that we are in our proximal development zone. A mistake does not mean "you failed", but "you have not succeeded yet".

Having 3/10 is not a problem. Not working hard would be a problem. A student having 10/10 without working hard should be asked to change, to take more difficult goals. A student having 3/10 because he did not train should be asked to change his behaviour as well. A student having 3/10 after having worked hard, should be encouraged to continue.

To have more information on the instructive mistake, please read the "Operating principles of a transformed class", and the "Values of a transfomed school" documents.

20. If I as a teacher stop teaching, from what will they learn?

Each student is different. Each student has a different learning process. Some students will prefer learning from videos, some from books, some from you. Most will prefer to learn from each other, so having a few more advanced students helps.
For you as a teacher and facilitator of their learning process, it is important to provide them with multiple sources for learning.

TIPS: You will be surprised when they will come to you and ask for explanations! In such cases, remember to provide such short lessons to those requiring them, don't stop the other already active in their learning process.

21. Why should I stop teaching and taking frontal lessons?

Most teachers spend 50% to 90% of the class time giving explanations to the whole group. With this method, this should be reduced to no more than 20%.

This method is not based on frontal lectures given by the teacher. This is not because they are not necessary or valid, but because it could be that they are not useful for the entire class. One hour explanation could be interesting for one student, and very boring for the remaining pupils. Each student must be free to select his/her own information source: let's start from a written source that does not depend on you. Then they could make a research on the internet, ask an explanation to you or to another student. Let first collaborate students among them.

You will see that at one point they will ask for your explanation and will be very happy to hear your (max. 15 minutes ;-)) speech! Especially if you tell upfront that it will only last 15 minutes and that you keep your word, for example with the help of a wall timer.

22. Which are the main features of assessment to implement the method properly?

The School Transformation Lab is an objective-oriented method. It means that the progression of the students depend on the achievement of selected objectives, obtained by succeeding assessments. You should think to such assessments as the proof to proceed to a next level of learning. They are a mean to learn, and students need to make exercises to learn.

The assessment should have the following features:

- Answers must be available to students during training to check themselves immediately if they are wrong.
- If a student fails the assessment, he should be authorized to try again the same assessment later, but with a random factor (remembering the previous attempt answers should not enable him to pass).
- Assessments should be simple to correct by another student having the answers provided.

23. Why answers of assessment should be available to students in advance?

In order to be able to succeed the "formal assessment", students must make practice. Having answers in advance means being able to test themselves when training.

TIPS: of course, when taking the "formal assessment", students don't have to have the answers anymore. They must be able to answer questions without cheating.

24. Is the organization of the class relevant for implementing the method?

Yes, it is. In most situations, teachers ask students to move the desks/chairs for the following reasons:

- to limit the number of neighbours each student has. The aim of the organization is to support students to focus;
- to have one or two tables (or a corner of your own desk) for students to take assessments with limited cheating opportunities;
- for you to watch the back of your students from where you sit;
- to get the distracting of distracted students close to you;
- to have a silent zone (such as the class) and a collaboration zone (such as the hallway where standing up limits the collaboration time).

To have more info on the organization of the class and the spaces, please read the document "Cycle 4 implementation guide"

25. Is the collaboration important for implementing the method, or should students work autonomously?

Collaboration is key in the method. Developing the autonomy of a student and at the same time fostering collaboration among them are not opposite. We talk about "collective autonomy". On the one side, students need to progress according to their own learning path. They don't have to follow all together the same programme. At the same time, if they need help, they first should ask their colleagues. This will help both the more and less advanced: the former, as acting as teachers means consolidate even more knowledge; the latter, as collaborating with pairs is easier and more comfortable than asking to a teacher.

To have more information on the collaboration and mutual aid, please read the document "Operating principles of a transformed class"

26. How can I create an objective-oriented assessment? Is it a big work?

We advice to start in a very easy way. Try to create an an objective-oriented assessment, for example, taking your book with exercises, selecting 30 of them, and then establishing the objective "you must be able to answer to 8 out 10 of the randomly selected ones". Your students will start training with the 30 exercises having the answers too, in order to prepare themselves to take the "formal assessment". When they are ready to take the assessment, you can select randomly 10 exercises that they will have to take autonomously and alone.

Once you are more confident with the method and making assessments objective, you will find more solution to propose them to students.

To have a step-by-step guide, please read the document "Cycle 4 implementation guide"

27. How should I create assessments for "no-objective" subjects like history, philosophy etc?

It is true that creating objective-assessments is easier for some some subjects like languages, grammar, mathematics etc. But it is still possible for other subjects too. Let's start creating your assessments on basic facts. In history and literature, you could use dates and facts, for example, to create set of tests. Remember that creating an objective-assessment means saying to your students "you must be able to achieve this objective" instead of "you must read from pag. 10 to 15 of the book". So for more theoretical subjects that need oral examination, an objective could be "you must be able to connect and comment at least 3 philosophical schools of thoughts, knowing my given assessment criterias".

To have a step-by-step guide, please read the document "Cycle 4 implementation guide"

28. What happen after the "formal assessment"? Why is celebrating important?

Motivation is key in the method. When a student takes an assessment alone, manage to accomplish the objective set and proceed to the next level, he/she put a check on the progress board in the classroom. Celebrating that "check" is important to show your appreciation towards student's hard work and motivate them.

To have a step-by-step guide, please read the document "Cycle 4 implementation guide"

29. What should I do if my students never claim to be ready to take the "formal assessment"?

Most students are not naturally keen on studying, not cheating, taking assessments etc. In other words, they are not naturally autonomous in making wise choices for themselves.
That is why the role of the teacher as coach is even more important. If your students do not propose themselves for the formal assessment, you can create deadlines by which they cannot take the test anymore (and get a 0/10 for that topic). Still you can encourage them to take assessments.

To have a step-by-step guide, please read the document "Cycle 4 implementation guide"

30. Is the method compatible with the academic curricula foreseen by the Ministries?

Yes, why not. The method does not aim at transforming the curricula, but the way of learning. You will do the same programmes, but in a different way. At the end of the year your students will take the same exam as before.

To have an opinion about this topic of teachers that transformed their school, please have a look at this interview to 2 involved teachers from Brescia (Italy): https://youtu.be/CREIMFzf9PQ

31. Is the method linked with personalized learning?

This method is about personalized learning. One of the main advantages is to respect and reach different kinds of students, and to support diverse learning processes not imposing the same for everyone. But without exhausting the teacher.

To have more information, please read the document "Operating principles of a transformed class"

32. Are there experts, scientific research and academic supporting the Method?

Yes, various fields are supporting the efficiency of the transformed class:

- **history**: great pedagogues such as Montessori and Freinet have experienced and refined many techniques that we propose. Some school systems have operated it at a large scale for decades (such as France in the early XIXth centudy).
- **cognitive psychology**: thousands of researches over the last 50 years have explored and scientifically proved the efficiency of many aspects gathered in this method. John Hattie is a good source for these evidences.
- **neuroscience**: at a biological, scientists know much more about how the brain learns and our motivation circuits than 20 years ago. For example, they are showing why repetition or immediate feedback is important.

We did not invent much on how a class should be operated. Our main findings are about how to turn a traditional school to have such "personalized learning" classes.

On SchoolTransformationLab.eu, you will find teacher training specifically on this.