

# School transformation guide

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Most schools are large groups of people with dozens of teachers and hundreds of students who cannot change overnight. This document is an overview on how to transform a school.



# Introduction

## *How to transform a school?*

Do not even try to answer that question: people and organizations cannot be transformed, they only can transform themselves from the inside. Some may not be ready to be transformed.

If you want a school to go through a transformation, your role is to:

- Present a goal to be reached, it has to be a motivating goal that can encourage people to make efforts to step out of their comfort zone.
- Facilitate their journey, by informing them about the traps and providing them with the tools.

This document outlines a path developed through our personal experience. It directs the reader towards all other documents that describe each step in more detail.

1. The support of the management
2. Training session for the management
3. Information session for the teachers
4. Volunteer teachers and classes
5. Certified school visit and teacher training
6. Official team application
7. Start of cycle 1 in the classes
8. Teacher training
9. Start of cycle 2 in the classes
10. Teacher training
11. Start of cycle 3 in the classes
12. Teacher training
13. Start of cycle 4 in the classes
14. Teacher training
15. Closing ceremony & celebration

## 1. The support of management

One of the first steps is to ensure management support.

It is one of the most important axes for a successful school transformation:

1. Supportive management.
2. Actors who actively take ownership of their school.
3. A flexible and systemic approach.

The document "Principles for Helping a School to Transform Itself" fully explains what is meant by "supportive management". Simply approving the project is not enough.

## 2. Training session for the management

Devoting a day to training is a reflection of the support of the management team:

"I spend time on it because:

- this project is important to me,
- by being informed, I will be able to provide better support to the program".

This training can be carried out by one of the partners of the project.

If the geographical location does not allow for it, it can be done by reading and watching the videos of the lessons.

It is important for management:

- to visualize the expected **result** in class,
- to understand the **Values**: excellence, empowerment, mutual aid, benevolence, etc. (see the document "Values of a transformed school").

## 3. Training session for the teachers

Prior to starting such a project, you must seek the advice of teachers.

But even before that, you must tell them about the project and give them some time to draw reflections and to discuss with each other the following:

- identifying existing problems,
- coming up with a concrete goal.

The session may involve the whole school or a part of it, depending on its size. If the school is large, we would usually limit it to a part of the school, to begin with. For example, we can target a specific age group of students and invite only specific teachers to participate.

During this session of one or two hours, you can:

- convey your own interest in this project by, for example, emphasizing the aspects of the current situation that raise concerns for you.
- show videos,
- have a teacher from an already transformed school, give a speech (face-to-face or through video conference).

## 4. Volunteer teachers and classes

### Teachers

Often, teachers can be divided into 3 main categories:

- 15%: early adopters

- 70%: cautious individuals
- 15%: resistant to change

The 'cautious' category requires the early adopters' to take the risk first and set a path. The segment that demonstrates resistance to change needs to be respected in their desire to maintain their conservative approach.

Your role is to inspire and motivate the 'early adopters' and to reassure the 'resistant to change'.

It is counterproductive to ask all the teachers to change their practices at once.

You must therefore identify a team of pioneers and 'early adopters' and to do the following:

- decrease their workload on other projects,
- officially appoint them,
- ask them to remain humble and not to provoke the resistance to change.

The first point is important because these 'early adopters' normally tend to be in charge of all the major innovative projects of the school. All of these projects compete with each other. Why then should this class transformation project be favoured over others? It is because, after an in-depth transformation, your school will start saving time that was chronically wasted prior to it. This newly liberated time will then become devoted to your other projects. If you don't set the priorities correctly, your projects will begin to swallow each other. It is like becoming used to bailing out water from the boat while navigating it at the same time. What project should be taken care of in the first place? Either a music workshop or repairing the hull of the boat? If music is so important, then let's have it on a dry deck during the time that was saved from the daily tasks of scooping out the water.

## Groups of students

Often, we target specific students. In kindergarten and in primary school, one group of students is assigned to an 'early adopter' teacher. In secondary school, it's more complicated. Many schools start with the more difficult group of students in which there are many differences and gaps that have been accumulated from the previous years.

For example, a secondary school can start off with 2 groups of students and 8 teachers assigned to them, plus 4 teachers who are displaying interest but who will not teach in these 2 classes.

## 5. Visits of a certified school teacher training

Before initiating the theoretical part of the training program, you must visit a classroom in a school that has already been transformed. Ideally, it should be a combination of the two in one day: a visit and discussion time outside the classroom the pupils.

## 6. Official application as a team

At this stage, you have put together a team of teachers. They understand what the transformation consists in, but who have not applied with their students yet.

Before investing further into their posture change, it is time to ask them to take the time to officially commit:

- by showing that they understand what the program is about,
- by agreeing to make the necessary efforts,
- by asking what they would need.

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.

The “Application Process” document guides this writing for the team.

Then it's time to start the transformation in each classroom.

## 7. The class initiation - cycles 1 to 4

The course and the progress plan for the transformation of your school are both aimed not only at students but also at teachers. It is sometimes easier for an expert to come in and to speak to students in the presence of their teacher to kick start the process.

The first step is to explain to students the intended changes and their benefits by, for instance, showing a video. Then, comes the phase of motivating the students, to ensure that they follow up. This time spent with the students will then be regained thanks to their enthusiasm.

After the start, the teacher will carry out lessons alongside a progress plan for each of the 4 cycles. Each cycle is concluded with a motivating visit of the management.

## 8. Coaching - teacher training

Regularly, for instance, once during each cycle, a visit of an expert to observe the class, enables to enhance the progress. They not only observe, but they also suggest changes to the teacher and students immediately. They swiftly move around from one class to another to observe and encourage the changes they have just proposed.

The day ends with writing up a report together with the teachers that have just undergone training. During this process, the expert strengthens the observations made in class with theoretical elements.

## 9. Closing ceremony and celebration

After the transformation is complete, at the latest within the school year, it must be officially finalized in order to:

- recognize the progress made by the teachers and their students,
- avoid the feeling that the process will never end,
- start working with teachers that have less of a 'early adopter' attitude.

This celebration generally has both the parents and the students involved. For Instance, students would share their testimonial and show videos they made about how their group operates.