



Summary of the Lille-Leeds Comenius Regio project, 2013-2015:  
*Citizenship In action through Voice and Influence of Children (CIVIC)*

**Active Citizenship Training and Education Practices  
in the Classroom and Beyond**

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**Diversities and Convergences of Practice in France and Britain**

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**Contents**

**Introduction**..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Background**..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Diversities and convergences in practices and training in active citizenship in the classroom and beyond** ..... 3

**Developing strategies for improving interpersonal skills**..... 4

**Welcoming children's emotions**..... 5

**Leading children to make decisions**..... 6

**Shared truths**..... 6

**Conclusion** ..... 7

**Select bibliography** ..... 7

## Introduction

The main aim of this summary is to highlight the key features of the Lille-Leeds Comenius Regio project, 2013-2015 *Citizenship In action through Voice and Influence of Children* (CIVIC), by way of comparison. The French Report on the Lille-Leeds CIVIC project contains a detailed description of these features and puts them into context<sup>1</sup>:

*Diversités et convergences franco-britanniques : formations et pratiques d'éducation à la citoyenneté active en classe et hors classe (Lemoine, 2015, 52 pages).*

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This summary is intended to provide a wide community (of teachers, head teachers, and educational advisors) with avenues for exploring the conception of educational resources in France and Britain, enabling them to deal with issues of citizenship – whether they arise within school or outside school.

Descriptive in nature, this summary contains nonetheless some analytical aspects. It does not include any injunctions for implementation or transfer from one country to another of practices experienced or observed. The features discussed herein must be considered in the respective socio-educational contexts specific to Lille and Leeds.

This document has been translated into English by Leeds City Council's Translation Unit. The French version of this summary will be disseminated by Lille's International Relations Department and Office for Educational Activities.

## Background

The practices and training described, here, have to be understood in the context of the Comenius Regio, 2013-2015, 'Lifelong Learning Programme' which actively involves the project initiator, Leeds City Council (International Relations), as well as the City of Lille, and schools from both cities: Beechwood Primary School, Rothwell Primary School, Yeadon Westfield Junior School, in Leeds, and Chénier-Séverine, Sophie-Germain, Samain-Trulin, in Lille. These partners collaborate in a project concerning active citizenship education, 'Citizenship In action through Voice and Influence of Children' (CIVIC). The partners invite each other for planned exchanges of training which take place in the participating schools.

## Diversities and convergences in practices and training in active citizenship in the classroom and beyond

On the one hand, this study, comparing training and practices concerning active citizenship education in/outside the classroom in France and Britain, identifies **shared** issues; on the other hand, it reveals issues **specific** to each context. A concern shared by all those involved in the project, French and British alike, is the issue of 'Self and Other', in terms of relationships and situations involving communication. A number of activities have been designed to deal with these shared issues at the scheduled training sessions. However, it

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<sup>1</sup> The report includes details of 20 activities from France and Britain in the form of practical information sheets.

should be noted that particular linguistic features can be discerned in the two approaches. For example, discourse in Leeds is characterised by the word ‘community’, whereas the theme in Lille is ‘developing identity to make living together better’.

Comparison is expressed more in terms of ‘diversity’ rather than difference. Points at which the two vary are signposted within the text, thus: in grey text within dotted lines. This is intended as a visual aid to reading.

## Developing strategies for improving interpersonal skills

A strategy developed in Great Britain, widely practised in those schools visited, emphasises the importance of ‘welcoming’ the child as an emotional being. Using activities derived from **Restorative Practice**, the aim is to improve the quality of relationships between those involved, with a view to optimising teaching, education, learning, and taking responsibility. The strategy developed in France, on the other hand, is based on the principles of **Cooperative Learning** (as promoted by the French Central Office for Cooperation at School - *OCCE*). The aim of Cooperative Learning is to promote ‘Learning *through* others, *with* others, *for* others, but *not against* others’.

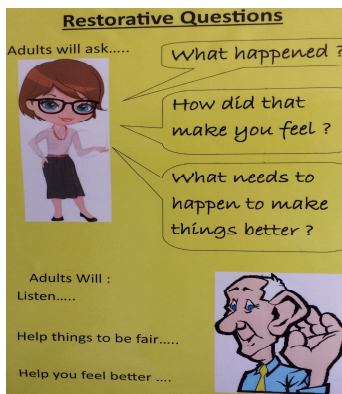
At the heart of ‘Cooperative Learning’ is a set of principles designed to facilitate a classroom climate that is conducive to learning. It begins with development: each pedagogical scenario should lead to a plus or minus contributing to the (re-)construction of knowledge (in the widest sense of the term). The need to learn must be linked to ‘real-life’ situations, in a context that is cooperative, safe, and in which judgment is ‘postponed’.

The approach of Restorative Practice derives from social sciences as they have developed in a socio-economically unstable and fractured environment, in which relationship conflict (within the family, at work, or at school) has become part of everyday life. Restorative processes are used to target, in a clear way, the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, whilst seeking to improve behaviour, generally, and to promote ‘reparation’ in interpersonal relationships. They focus on developing a sense of (taking) responsibility, listening to others, cooperation, and giving voice to feelings, particularly in situations of conflict. In this strategy, relationships with others are based, conceptually, on the term *with*; they avoid injunctions to do things *to* others, *for* others, or the neglectful approach of *not* doing anything. Restorative Practice is founded on three basic principles demanding of people an ‘engagement’, ‘explanation’, and mutually-understood decisions regarding the future (‘expectation clarity’).

In the context of education, two ‘processes’ are given particular emphasis: the **CIRCLE** and the **CONFERENCE**. The creation of circles (through placing individuals in a circle, enabling them to see each other, with no physical barrier between them) allows relationships to be established between individuals and allows them to debate a given issue. Like Restorative Practice, Cooperative Learning promotes the coming-together of individuals to undertake certain activities in a circle. Flexible and non-threatening, the circle is capable of welcoming individuals and serves as a ‘decompression chamber’, facilitating the transition from child to pupil.

This aspect of the role of the circle as an aid to developing the status of pupil is specific to the French approach, whereas the British approach is markedly and consciously focused on the quality of the communication.

At the heart of the conference approach is the aim to give individuals in conflict a highly structured setting that allows ‘opponents’ to face each other in a way that is completely safe. It is a cyclic process that enables individuals to describe what has happened (without ever asking why it happened that way), to discuss how the other(s) might be feeling, to articulate one’s own feelings, and to consider the future. The notion of conflict also figures in French concerns: conflict resolution is posited in terms of a respectful outlook, non-violence, strategy based on cooperation, and a rejection of any justification of violence. The French approach recommends the ‘clear message’.



Protocol of the Restorative Conference



Protocol of the ‘Clear Message’<sup>2</sup>

Comparison of the two protocols reveals that the approaches to conflict management in France and Britain are at variance. Restorative Practice envisages the intervention, initially, of a third person who will lead the exchange in the framework of a Restorative Conference, but eventually give way to the individuals to manage themselves. In contrast, the technique of the Clear Message takes as its starting-point the ‘I’ as an active subject; the notion of mediation by a third person only appears in the French protocol when the clear message is not received.

**Note:** Neither Restorative Practice or Cooperative Learning (as developed by the French Central Office for Cooperation at School – *OCCE*) are discrete activities that can be fitted into a particular time slot in the day. Rather, they are educational strategies – as relevant in schools as they are outside them – that deal with the quality of interpersonal relationships. However, these two strategies appear as ‘supplementary’ qualitative measures. They are not necessarily seen as innovative, yet neither can they be readily or even often observed in the classroom. What they do offer are processes which involve teacher, educator, and children, by linking the definition of a goal to improve social skills (well being) with oneself as much as with others, with implementing ‘welcoming’ activities, conflict management, or the debate of issues, on a daily basis, depending on more or less foreseeable events.

### Welcoming children’s emotions

The aspect of ‘welcoming’ is mentioned and handled in training sessions in both Lille and Leeds. With many ‘circle’ activities, the aim is not only to **welcome emotions**, but also to

<sup>2</sup> p.1: Clear Messages

‘I was hurt by what you did to me; I am going to give you a clear message.’

I am calm. 1. When you... 2. ... it made me... 3. Do you understand?

p.2: Clear Messages

I am calm. 1. I am looking at you. 2. I am listening to you. 3. I am telling you what I have heard and understood.

**empower children** to express their feelings. *'Le ciel des sentiments'* ('The sky of feelings'), *'Comment Chat va?'* ('How are you *feline?*'), 'Injustice', and 'Think of a person' are so many activities designed to enable children to express what they are feeling and/or thinking that their classmate may be feeling, particularly in cases of conflict. Doing these activities on a regular basis gives children an opportunity to learn protocols governing talking, putting a situation into words, feeling unhappy, and seeking redress. One activity from Britain – 'bucket filling' – is particularly in evidence in schools. In this activity, the teacher leads children to identify what things may be done or said that are 'good or bad for others'.

In schools in Leeds, unlike what can be observed at schools in Lille, feelings are systematically expressed in pictures or words and posted up on walls. Great numbers of posters, found everywhere throughout school buildings, bear witness to the privileging of making the message accessible: to authorise oneself to express oneself. Moreover, the posting of this information goes beyond the (classroom) space for teaching; indeed, posters are often to be found in corridors and common areas.

### **Leading children to make decisions**

The aspect of leading children to make decisions takes a characteristic form in each of the cities. In Leeds, for example, the City Council promotes the role of the **Children's Mayor**. This initiative gives a voice and influence to a child elected to represent children and young people within Leeds City Council, and participate in council decisions: the aim is to make Leeds a model of a 'child friendly city'. In Lille, on the other hand, schools involved in the project work with the Association *'Entreprendre pour Apprendre'* ('Learning Through Entrepreneurship'). The aim of this initiative is to **educate children in entrepreneurship** and to develop the spirit of enterprise. The pedagogy implemented in the classroom is designed to lead children to reflect collectively in order to make decisions, to come up with suggestions, and to create an end product. In the *'Entreprendre pour Apprendre'* framework of *'C ma ville'* ('Smy city'), children in Lille produced a model of the ideal city. School meetings of parents, teachers, and class representatives further served to enhance collective decision-making, in a context of mutual respect and shared rules.

The Children's Mayor in Leeds is an extension of pre-existing projects in other UK cities. However, the emerging learning through enterprise in Lille is based on economics and seeks solutions to economic problems. The pedagogy privileged by *'Entreprendre pour Apprendre'* has much in common with that of the project and promotes the participation of all in creating an end product related to 'life in society outside school'. The form of expression promoted in Leeds, in contrast, involves one child representing other children.

### **Shared truths**

Training sessions in schools in both Lille and Leeds have explored the traditional form of teaching, and have even challenged or criticised it. The teaching and learning practices of these strategies aspire to more authenticity in the sense that they aim to better consider the individual, his/her emotions, and interpersonal relationships.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this summary was to show (succinctly) the convergences as well as the variations in training and practice, comparing Lille and Leeds. I have deliberately chosen to eschew labels classifying ‘practice in Britain’ opposed to ‘practice in France’, as the Britain/France dichotomy risks leading to generalisations and positing one as superior to the other.

This experience has been exciting and motivating for the partners of the Comenius Regio CIVIC project (as can be seen from the reviews following the project’s activities). In conclusion, it is important to re-consider a term that appears often in literature surrounding institutional programmes and in reports following initiatives in Leeds. Namely, that of ‘*applying* this method [Restorative Practice] in/to schools’ in Lille (*V. report of 27/03/2014*). More thought needs to be given to the links between content taught at the training sessions and practice, in relation to the specific contexts. What are the links between *OCCE* training and practice within schools in Leeds? What are the links between Restorative Practice training and practice within schools in Lille?

It is therefore necessary for partners to maintain debate regarding the nature of their respective practices (in terms of knowledge, know-how, and life-skills) beyond the formal framework of the Comenius Regio, 2013-2015, CIVIC project. Continuing debate will ensure that *Restorative Practice* and Cooperative Learning are not posited as truths or dogmas posing as immutable ‘good practice’.

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