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## WORKING GROUPS AS ACTION RESEARCH LABORATORIES

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“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

~ **Robert F. Kennedy** South Africa, 1966

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to support working groups in countries which participate in the PRECEDE project in developing their capacities to promote social change through active on-going use of action research methods.

Social change refers to any significant alteration over time in behaviour patterns and cultural values and norms. This is a broad umbrella to encompass a range of typical social and civic outcomes from increased awareness and understanding, to attitudinal change, to increased civic participation, the building of public will, to policy change that corrects injustice. Even though social change starts with the individual, the meaning of the creation of working groups in the PRECEDE project is to achieve an impact of social changes that happen at a broader institutional, group, or community level.

Having in mind that the overall objective of the PRECEDE project is to support civil society's influence through the reconciliation process and cohesion through education in early years in the Balkan Region and Europe, this guide is directed to the establishment of national working groups which will use action research methods in the process of an improvement of respect for diversity and peace building in early and preschool childhood, which includes the child's development and education.

The two main standpoints of this guide are<sup>1</sup>:

- peacebuilding, which reflects a general understanding that the underlying, structural inequalities contributing to violence should be addressed in order to achieve lasting peace and avoid a relapse into conflict (peacebuilding is a multidimensional range of measures to reduce the risk of or relapse into conflict by addressing both the causes and consequences of conflict, and strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management in order to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development)
- education, which can promote peace or perpetuate violence in myriad and complex ways (education systems can assist in conflict transformation and contribute to positive peace by promoting social justice, guaranteeing more equitable access to learning and the social and economic status connected to education, encouraging understanding and reconciliation between groups in conflict, and equipping children with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to interact with others in a non-violent and respectful way).

**The Action Research Laboratory is a place where civic society organisations, together with educational and other institutions, gather to generate clearer shared understandings, build**

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<sup>1</sup> According to: Reilly, E. (2013): Peacebuilding Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills: Desk Review and Recommendations. UNICEF, <http://learningforpeace.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Peacebuilding-Knowledge-Attitudes-and-Skills-Desk-Review-and-Recommendations.pdf>

**collaborative capabilities for reflection, and generate imaginative, well thought-out changes in management structure and practice according to peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and practice.**

The **main premise** of the creation of the Action Research Laboratory is that the best way to learn is through experience and continuous confrontation of theories and research with the real needs, challenges and opportunities in the process of peace building and respect for diversity. As participants of the Action Research Laboratory observe the consequences of their actions, by using an action research method, they are capable of creating new explanations and paradigms on how the culture of peace and respect can be reached and developed.

As every working group, the Action Research Laboratories developed in the PRECEDE project are based on **five main elements** of effective group work. Those are:

- **responsibility** (each participant contributes as much as he/she can and does his/her best in the implementation of the project's activities)
- **reliance** (each participant helps the others to learn from the project's activities and complete the project's tasks)
- **relations** (each participant shows acceptance for different personalities and encourages others to share information, to exchange viewpoints, to discuss learning strategies etc.)
- **respect** (each participant is sensitive to each other's needs, feelings and positions) and
- **reflection** (each participant is aware of the group process and cares about the working process, quality of communication, obtained results and other relevant aspects of the project).

**The general aims** of the Action Research Laboratories are:

- **exchanging ideas** freely and clearly among the participants about different aspects of inequity and discrimination in early childhood development and education
- **examining** objectively different aspects of inequity and discrimination in early childhood development and education
- **sharing ideas** and **accepting new ideas** about the ways in which inequity and discrimination can be solved and changed with respect for diversity and peace building
- **using action research** in the process of improvement of social justice, respect for diversity and peace building in early childhood development and education.

Having those components of working groups in mind, the process of establishing and work of Action Research Laboratories is explained in the following chapters.

## **STANDPOINTS OF THE ACTION RESEARCH LABORATORIES**

The European Commission published in 2016, an independent report which reviews the most relevant European and international research on education policies and practice to foster tolerance, respect for diversity and civic responsibility in children and young people in the European Union. This report summarised the existing knowledge and distils policy lessons based on existing evidence<sup>2</sup>. Even though the report is focused primarily on ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, the practises and strategies discussed in the report are relevant for PRECEDE's Action Research Laboratories because all dimensions of cultural diversity most often interplay with other dimensions and identities such as gender, disability, socio-economic status, age, etc. That is why some authors' conclusions are highlighted here, which can be used as the standpoint of each Action Research Laboratory:

- **Respect for others can be taught.** From an early age there is a need to correct misconceptions and provide opportunities for genuine intercultural experiences.
- **Educational policies that encourage peace building create conditions for inter-ethnic cooperation and fostering respect for diversity.** However, simply bringing children from different backgrounds together physically is not sufficient to reduce prejudice and develop positive relations; institutions need to create the same conditions for all children and ensure that the staff have competences for developing an inclusive culture.
- **The way an institution operates makes a difference.** In particular, the whole institution's approaches and its strong and dynamic ties to the local community have great potential for promoting cohesion and social justice. Such institutions create a sustainable positive atmosphere, as well as a stronger sense of belonging to the institution.
- **New effective methods for creating inclusive environments have been developed in recent years.** Methods such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, service learning and peer education have demonstrated their value in developing peace building and respect for diversity.

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<sup>2</sup> Van Driel, B., Darmody, M., Kerzil, J., 'Education policies and practices to foster tolerance, respect for diversity and civic responsibility in children and young people in the EU', *NESET II report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. doi: 10.2766/46172.

- **Extra-curricular activities can promote tolerance and understanding.** After-school activities can help build on classroom learning and can contribute to the creation of a dynamic and inclusive school.
- **Approaches that foster social and emotional learning matter.** Educational approaches that facilitate a child's social and emotional development have been shown to be powerful tools in promoting peace building and respect for diversity.
- **Effective leadership and governance are essential.** The personal commitment of the persons involved in the process of peace building and respect for diversity to an ethos of diversity is critical. Such commitment needs to be reinforced by professional development in these field.
- **Staff involved in early childhood development and education need training for respect for diversity and peace building.** Evidence shows that intercultural competence of teachers, educators, managers and other staff which work with children in educational, social, health and other institutions need to be strengthened.
- **Education is a shared responsibility between educational institutions and other stakeholders.** Partnerships between kindergartens, schools, communities and parents help connect better to local needs. They also increase mutual understanding and trust between educational staff and community, as well as recognition of the assets and expertise of various stakeholders.
- **Educational institutions could benefit more from third-sector know-how.** Local and international NGOs with specific expertise in the field can enhance the expertise in educational institutions, but are underutilized in both formal and in-formal education.
- **Preschool and school curricula need to incorporate diversity better.** Minority children often find it difficult to identify and engage with the learning process and the content of a mono-cultural curriculum. Addressing religious, ethnic and other forms of diversity is a critical aspect of education. Culturally sensitive approaches can be effective in promoting inclusion. At present, there is a widespread failure among EU nations to adequately meet this challenge.
- **More research and data regarding what works to combat intolerance and promote respect for diversity is needed.** Though there is some evidence to show what works when combating intolerance and promoting diversity, most evidence remains anecdotal. Much more systematic and solid evidence is needed.

The abovementioned standpoints have at least two purposes:

- they improve the need to establish national or local action research laboratories directed at the improvement of respect for diversity and peace building in early childhood development and education
- they can serve as a source of possible themes or goals of work of such laboratories.

Anyhow, these laboratories should not be established just because of the need of the PRECEDE project. They should start a long and complicated process in each local community, which will lead to better societies in which every child and every family will be able to experience their rights on life free of any kind of discrimination, as well as all rights which are guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as in the Convention on Human Rights.

## GETTING STARTED

The CSOs' which participate in the PRECEDE project want to establish strong and long-term groups of people who will work together on the reconciliation process through peace building and respect for diversity issues in early childhood development and education. In each country, at least one Action Research Laboratory will be established and will work in the direction of increasing the awareness of community members about the importance of common work. To ensure sustainability of the Action Research Laboratory and its impact on the respect for diversity and peace building process, it is necessary to involve all relevant stakeholders who are active in this sphere and develop a strong collaboration amongst them. It is extremely important that no one is excluded and that all people and organisations have a chance to participate.

The first steps which should be done are:

1. **Make a list of all stakeholders in the community who deal with young children, respect for diversity and peace building** (having in mind the different actors: ministries, local authorities, academic society, educational staff, social and health institutions, NGOs, parents, citizens, etc.).
2. **Organise the initial meeting with several representatives from the community to introduce the idea of the Action Research Laboratory** (you can organise meetings with representatives of all institution identified in first point or choose some of them, as directors of kindergartens, representative of some NGOs which are focused or working with young children, other CSOs, representative of relevant ministries etc.).
3. **Conduct some individual initial consultations with potential partners or people that can support the initiative and give some positive impact on the action.** The purpose of these consultations is to become familiar with their ideas about peace building, respect for diversity and actions which could be taken to improve early childhood

development and education (how to implement them, who should be involved, in which circumstances etc.)

4. **Design a plan for the first meeting of the Action Research Laboratories.** In that plan, the presentation of the PRECEDE project, the goals of action research laboratories and discussion about the working plan should be included.
5. **Prepare an invitation letter for potential participants,** with an explanation of your motivation and expectations of the meeting. In the letter, the positive impact of the Action Research Laboratory should be expressed, as well as the key concepts of the work.

The personal qualities and practices of the Action Research Laboratory are integral to an action's success or failure. Staff can make as much impact through their modelling - or failure to model - the vision and values of the respect for diversity and peace building as through their actual activities. Due to these reasons, it is important that the NGO carefully chooses the representative who will lead the process of the establishment of the Action Research Laboratory.

Some **characteristics** required for the leader of that process are<sup>3</sup>:

- **Ability to establish relationships** with a wide range of different people and stakeholders through listening, patience, and demonstrating respect.
- **Prior community knowledge and credibility** will help in advocating for the importance of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education, as well as in the activities which will be implemented by the Action Research Laboratory.
- **Familiarity and rapport with the persons in vulnerable situations,** as people (especially children) who live in poverty, children with developmental disabilities, people who belong to national minorities, Roma communities, children who live in institutions etc. It means that the leader should have an understanding of how to approach and communicate effectively with them and have empathy for them.
- **Emotional maturity,** especially the ability to differentiate and properly identify one's emotions in collaborative situations and ability to prevent any conflict which can be caused by someone's emotions.
- **Ability to be indifferent to political topics.** Be cautious of any political ambitions that may influence the Action Research Laboratory members' approach or community perceptions of them.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Bolton, N. & Amaral, L. (2013). Strategic Community Peacebuilding in Practice. CRS: Catholic Relief Services

- **Interest, commitment, and passion for peace building and respect for diversity.** The NGO should choose a leader who has basic knowledge of the subject of the Action Research Laboratory, as well as an interest to learn and grow in that sense.

However, one person who will lead the establishment and functioning of the Action Research Laboratory is not enough. This should be team work which involves several members of the NGO. That is why **the preparation of a core team from the NGO** is also one important component which should be realised at the very beginning of the process. It is useful to allocate tasks to the staff based on their strengths and skills, but also pair less-prepared staff with more experienced colleagues for accompaniment and mentoring. This helps to ensure continuity and quality even in short-term or fast-paced projects. It is also important to create opportunities for team members to support and encourage one another in different stages of the process. However, the most important activity in the preparation of the core team is to provide **training/workshops** to make sure that all members understand the project's theories of change and how the activities intend to contribute to the desired results. The best way to organise such a training/workshop is to invite an external expert from the local community who will lead and monitor this activity. The training/workshop should involve concepts of peace building, respect for diversity, reconciliation, early childhood development and education, collaboration, as well as the concept and role of action research in these fields.

When everyone has a clear picture about the project, activities, tasks and their meaning, the Action Research Laboratory can start working.

## **THE FIRST MEETING**

Once the NGO succeeds to motivate different stakeholders and their participation in the Action Research Laboratory, the first meeting should be organised. As it has already been mentioned, each Action Research Laboratory should involve different stakeholders, including preschool teachers, managers of kindergartens, representatives of children in vulnerable situations (for example, NGOs which are working on the improvement of their rights), representatives of local or national authorities, some academic staff from universities or scientific institutions, some people who work in social welfare and in the health sector). It is a very diverse working group and the first meeting can be crucial to the integrity and success of the Action Research Laboratory.

The first meeting has at least three aims. These are:

- **to build a respectful initial relationship among participants** (it helps to create a working atmosphere and environment, as well as to support participants to be relaxed and active)



- **to create and to adopt the rules of common work** (ground rules articulate a set of expected behaviours of participants and provide expectations how the meeting will run, and how participants will treat each other during discussions and common work)
- **to present the PRECEDE project**, the goals of the Action Research Laboratory and discussion about the working plan (these materials should be prepared before the meeting, as is mentioned in the previous chapter).

The most common way to reach **the first aim of the meeting** is by using **ice breaker games**. An ice breaker is an activity, game, or event that is used to welcome and warm up the conversation among participants in a meeting, training class, team building, or other event. Any event that requires people to comfortably interact with each other and a facilitator is an opportunity to use an ice breaker<sup>4</sup>. An effective ice breaker will warm up the conversation in your training class or meeting, reinforce the topic of the session, and ensure that participants enjoy their interaction and the session. When participants don't know each other, the ice breaker will help them introduce themselves to other participants.

Here are some examples of ice breaker games<sup>5</sup>:

- **Known – Unknown**: Divide the group into pairs. Ensure that the persons in the pair do not know each other. Give them some time to introduce themselves. They have to say something about themselves which is well known and something which it is not (For example: My name is Indira. A lot of people know that I work in a social welfare centre as a social worker. People also know that I am married and that I have two children. It is not well known that I like to ride a bicycle and that I used to live in Barcelona ....). At the end of the activity, each participant presents her/his partner to whole group.
- **Bingo**: Make a Bingo list with different questions with lines under each for a signature. Each participant should have their own list. Participants walk around while asking questions and try to find someone who will sign on the line under the question. It has to be the signature of the participant who can answer the question with a "Yes". The first participant to complete their list wins. An example of the Bingo list is:

Have you ever been to the USA?	Do you have a pet?	Do you live in a house?
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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from [humanresources.about.com/od/glossary/g/what-is-an-ice-breaker.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/glossary/g/what-is-an-ice-breaker.htm), at 9<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

<sup>5</sup> See also: 40 Icebreakers for Small Groups, at: [https://insight.typepad.co.uk/40\\_icebreakers\\_for\\_small\\_groups.pdf](https://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf) or <http://icebreakerideas.com/best-icebreaker-games-adults>.

Have you ever participated in a marathon?	Do you speak a second language?	Have you ever met a celebrity?
Have you ever played an instrument?	Have you ever lived in another town?	Do you have a favourite singer?

- **Fact or fiction:** Ask each participant to write on a piece of paper three things about themselves which may not be known to the others in the group. Two are true and one is not. Taking turns they read out the three 'facts' about themselves and the rest of the group votes which are true and false. This simple activity is always fun, and helps the group and leaders get to know more about each other.
- **My name is:** Go around the group and ask each participant to state his/her name and attach an adjective that not only describes a dominant characteristic, but also starts with the same letter of their name (for example: generous Grahame, dynamic Dave). Encourage participants to accompany each participant's statement with applause.

Of course, each NGO and facilitator is free to choose his/her own ice breaker activities to start the meeting.

**The second aim of the first meeting** is directed to the creation and to the adoption of the rules of common work. These rules should cover:

- **The meeting norms** (How often and where will Action Research Laboratory take place? Who will facilitate the meetings? Is the facilitator a rotating position? Who will take and share meeting notes and how?)
- **The communication norms** (How will participants communicate during meetings and outside of meetings? How will they ensure that each participant feels well and respected by others?)
- **The work norms** (What will happen if someone does not follow through on a commitment – misses a deadline, does not show up to a meeting etc.?; Which kind of procedure will the group choose for the decision making process?; Who will be responsible for the agenda, etc.)

Each question should be answered in each Action Research Laboratory, depending on the needs of each of the PRECEDE project's participants. However, it is important to ensure that each Action Research Laboratory guarantees the following standards:

- **to promote** respect of each participant – by respecting each other's ideas, the group members, by counting on everyone's opinion, by honest communication ...

- **to develop** a work environment where all participants will do an equal amount of work – by equal division of responsibility of the tasks
- **to help** each participant to have a common understanding of goals that the Action Research Laboratory should achieve
- **to encourage** effective communication and openness to compromise – by willingness to cooperate with others on their ideas, voting on disagreements, by supporting each participant to give his/her own ideas, by avoiding any kind of criticism ...
- **to be aware** of time management – by attending and arriving to meetings on time, by respecting deadlines, by orientation and remaining on task ....

Here are some commonly used ground rules which could help reach the abovementioned standards<sup>6</sup>:

- Everyone participates, no one dominates
- One speaker at a time
- Share your experience (not others)
- Be positive, non-judgmental and open to new ideas
- Staying on schedule is everyone's responsibility – honour time limits
- Have fun
- ...

Each facilitator from each NGO is invited to choose his/her own way in which the rules of the Action Research Laboratory will be adopted. They can be proposed by the facilitator or they can be offered by the participants. Anyhow, once the rules have been agreed upon, they should be respected by all participants. It is helpful if the rules are visible at each meeting or given to each participant.

**The third goal of the first meeting** is directed to the presentation of the PRECEDE project, the goals of the Action Research Laboratory and discussion of the working plan. This goal could be reached by the presentation of the way in which the PRECEDE project has developed in the country in which the Action Research Laboratory will work. The presentation should be short, interesting and concentrated on the results reached by all the project's components and activities. It is an opportunity to emphasise to all persons and organisations which factors are meritorious for the success of the project. The international connects and aspects of the project should also be mentioned. The presenter should open the possibility for questions after the presentation.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from <http://getthepicture.ca/a-list-of-ground-rules-for-effective-meetings/>, at 10th July 2016.

The introduction of this guide can be used for the goals of the Action Research Laboratory. However, this general framework should be adapted to a national or local context. It is closely connected with the working plan which should be developed in each Action Research Laboratory. Due to the fact that each Action Research Laboratory is based on the collaborative learning and working process, it is not recommended to prepare a detailed working plan in advance. It is more acceptable to finish the first meeting with a discussion about the possible ways to reach the goals of the Action Research Laboratory. It is very important that all participants have a chance to propose their idea about that. The discussion about the working plan could be organised by workshops. The participants could be divided in smaller groups and propose the ways in which each goal of the Action Research Laboratory could be reached. Each group should offer:

- tasks connected with a particular goal of the Action Research Laboratory
- activities which will lead to the expected results
- time-table and participants for each activity.

At the end of the meeting, each group presents their work. However, it is not necessarily that work plan that is adopted. It is better to let some time for reflection and make an agreement that the work plan will be adopted at the next meeting which will be organised in the close future. It means that the first meeting should be closed with an agreement on the time and place of the next meeting.

## GO FURTHER

Even though each Action Research Laboratory should develop a unique work plan, they should have some common characteristics and field of work.

**Firstly**, it is important that each participant has an opportunity **to present the work of the organisation in which he/she works**. The point of the presentation of each participant is to highlight the ways in which her/his organisation contributes to peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education. In that way, everyone will have an opportunity to know each other's work better and the facilitator will be able to build a picture of the existing practice in this field in each national or local community contest. Moreover, it is the first step in building connections among different institutions which are necessary for the beginning of a collaboration between different sectors and institutions.

**Secondly**, each Action Research Laboratory should **define the main barriers, bottlenecks and enabling factors in the process of respect for diversity and peace building in early childhood development and education**. To gain insights into this, the conclusions of the Country Analysis Report conducted in 2013 and 2016 in the framework of the PRECEDE project could be used. This analysis could serve as an introduction to the common work on

that topic, based on a SWOT analysis. As it is well known, a SWOT analysis is a process that identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of an organisation, community or group in some specific domain of work. Specifically, the SWOT analysis is a basic, analytical framework that could assess what the Action Research Laboratory could and could not do in the process of the improvement of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education, as well as its potential opportunities and threats.

Following questions could help in the process of the SWOT analysis:

- Strengths:
  - What advantages does the Action Research Laboratory have in the field of respect for diversity and peace building in early childhood development and education?
  - What kind of resources does the Action Research Laboratory have that institutions do not have if they act separately?
  - What do participants see as strengths of each participant of the Action Research Laboratory?
  - What factors contribute to the strengths of the Action Research Laboratory?
- Weaknesses:
  - What should exactly be improved in the field of peace building and respect for diversity in a concrete local community/state?
  - What should be avoided as the results of work in that direction?
  - Who and how can the work of the Action Research Laboratory be jeopardised?
  - Who and how can the process of improvement of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education be jeopardised?
- Opportunities
  - What opportunities exist that the Action Research Laboratory can use to improve peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education?
  - What kind of actions could be helpful?
  - What are the resources of the Action Research Laboratory, as well as the resources of national or local policies and laws?
  - What activities are participants ready to take?
- Threats

- What obstacles exist in the field of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education?
- Do participants have some negative experiences in working in the field of peacebuilding or promotion of diversity?
- Which standards should be reached?
- What jeopardises the achievement of quality standards in the work of the Action Research Laboratory?
- Could any weaknesses seriously threaten the work of the Action Research Laboratory?

Once a SWOT analysis has been completed, the Action Research Laboratory is ready for its concrete action. It means that when the results of the SWOT analysis are presented and discussed, each Action Research Laboratory **should plan at least one piece of action research which will be implemented.**

Precise instructions about action research are available in The Action Research Guide for Respect for Diversity and Peace Building, which was developed in the framework of the PRECEDE project and available at ????. The action research can be organised in each organisation which participates in the Action Research Laboratory, but the Action Research Laboratory can also be used as a place for specific pieces of action research. All depends on the results of the SWOT analysis, as well as the work plan of each Laboratory.

Here is just one example of a possible action research which could be implemented by some specific Action Research Laboratory.

**Problem identification:**

According to the results of the SWOT analysis, there are several problems in the field of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education. The main problems are:

- stakeholders do not have the same picture (understanding) of social injustice, inequity and discrimination
- staff and institutions involved in early childhood development and education do not collaborate enough
- a lot of preschool teachers do not feel that they have the necessary competences to improve peace building and respect for diversity.

Each of the listed problems can be a separate theme of one action research, but they also can be treated together. That can be possible if all participants are to be active in the research process. A precondition for this are that all participants

- have basic knowledge about conducting action research (on-line guides and training animations can be used to ensure that)
- understand that these problems are broad enough to allow an important range of insight and findings, and narrow enough that they can be manageable.

### **Data collection:**

Case studies, focus groups, attitude and rating scales or questionnaires or vignettes could be used to measure all three mentioned problems. The Action Research Laboratory can develop their own instruments, but the participants' experience can be used, also.

For example:

- each participant can write their own experience in the field of respect for diversity and peace building in early childhood development and education
- participants can make an agreement that each of them will organise one focus group in their own organisation
- some smaller group of participants can prepare a few vignettes and each participant can ask her/his colleagues to write their answers on questions connected with each vignette
- participants can propose questions which they find important for the topic and a common questionnaire can be developed
- the Action Research Laboratory can be divided into three groups, and each group can collect data for one of the three problems.
- Anyhow, everyone should know what, why, where and how the data will be collected.

The facilitator should ensure that all three problems (or other problems which were highlighted in the SWOT analysis) are covered by collected data and that collected data will be used in the action plan, as well as in the evaluation of the planned action. The best is to use different forms of data, to ensure that multiple perspectives of the problems will be available.

### **Plan of Action:**

The plan of action depends on the data which were collected in the previous phase, especially those which show some weak points regarding each problem.

For example, to harmonise the picture of social injustice, inequity and discrimination of all stakeholders, several actions could be implemented:

- some trainings and workshops about respect for diversity and peace building in early childhood education for different stakeholders can be organised (however, the NGO needs to ensure some financial support and human resources for such activities)
- materials arising from the PRECEDE project could be delivered and presented in each organisation which participates in early childhood education and development
- some interesting media campaigns can be developed and implemented (this activity usually also implies some financial resources, but voluntarism of some non-profit media is also possible)
- participants of the Action Research Laboratory can be additionally educated in the field of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education, to expand their new knowledge and skills in their own organisations.

The following activities can be organised for the improvement of collaboration between the staff and institutions involved in early childhood development and education:

- some meetings of representatives of different stakeholders can be organised with the aim of developing a protocol for collaboration
- a working group for the analysis of existing documents, laws and practice can be organised - the results of these efforts can be presented at a conference, in the media, in the special edition of some local/national journal
- a few of the participants of the Action Research Laboratory could develop the protocol of collaboration of their institutions and tests its usefulness over a specific period (2 or 3 months)
- a special SWOT analysis could be organised with the representatives of different institutions, directed at the identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of collaboration amongst them in early childhood development and education, respecting the peace building and respect for diversity (some agreement among institution should be the results of this SWOT analysis).

The activities for the improvement of competencies of preschool teachers for peace building and respect for diversity could be:

- to motivate some preschool teachers to participate in the special training for the implementation of the toolkit developed in the PRECEDE project
- to develop a network of mentors who will support preschool teachers in their daily practice
- to establish peer-support, where each preschool teacher will be associated with her/his colleague, to discuss and to improve their practice



- to organise regular supervision of their work (at a local level, with trained supervisors)

Each activity should be accompanied with careful observation, and should be based on the data collected in the previous phase. Moreover, all implemented activities should lead to a new strategy or approach to peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and care.

### **Analysis of Data:**

The purpose of the data collected at the beginning of the action research, as well as all actions, is to understand better all dimensions of the process of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education and to experience the value of the actions taken. The members of the Action Research Laboratory should take some time and discuss what they have learned from the data and actions, as well as which patterns, insights, and new understandings they have of the researched problems and fields they have discovered.

The lessons learned should be written and published in a way which will ensure that all persons and organisations involved in early childhood development and education can profit from them. Furthermore, the participants of the Action Research Laboratory should present the findings in their own organisations and try to use them to improve their own practice. These findings can be **used in the preparation of a position paper on issues related to the well-being of children, which each Action Research Laboratory will develop.**

If it is possible, some local conference about the results of action research can be organised. At that conference, each participant of the Action Research Laboratory should be active and present its own contribution to the project's success. All people who participate in each stage of the research, should be invited. Media should also help in dissemination of results and main ideas of the Action Research Laboratory.

### **PLAN FOR FUTURE ACTION**

All abovementioned processes and activities will surely lead to the achievement of the general aims of the Action Research Laboratory. However, one piece of action research cannot change everything that needs to be changed and improved in the field of peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education. That is why active action research laboratories should work long-term and continuously.

They have to give support to each participant to do their own action research in their own institutions or communities. Experiences which participants gained through work in the Action Research Laboratory is a good starting point for their further action research. The Action Research Laboratory should continue organising meetings, on a regular basis (for

example, once in each three months). At each meeting, agreements about further actions of each participant should be achieved. All activities should emerge from and contribute to the position paper on the issues related to the well-being of children, especially regarding peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education.

The purpose of the Action Research Laboratory meetings is **to ensure that all actions will affirm principles which are important for changes in behaviour patterns and cultural values and norms that lead to quality development and education of every young child, regardless of its abilities, social background and other characteristics**. Those principles are:

- **Comprehensiveness** – the ability to see the overall picture in order to make changes in behaviour patterns and cultural values and norms according to peace building and respect for diversity in early childhood development and education. Intolerance, disrespect, discrimination and conflicts come from multiple sources at multiple levels of society. This suggests that action research laboratories need to develop lenses to identify the needs of children in vulnerable situations, a vision of the laboratory, and actions that can get them there, having in mind the broader vision and purpose of the laboratories.
- **Interdependency** – the ability to support the interdependent relationships of members of action research laboratories that are necessary for pursuing and sustaining desired changes. Work on peace building and respect for diversity involve a system of interconnected people, roles, and activities. Not one person, activity, or level of society is capable of designing and delivering the culture of peace on their own. This is why the quality of relationships among members of laboratories is essential for their success.
- **Sustainability** - the ability to discover and strengthen the resources rooted in the context of early childhood development and education. Improving social justice is a long term prospect. This suggests that action research laboratories should serve as on-going capacity and resources for responding to and transforming recurring discrimination, conflicts or intolerance, by empowering their members.
- **Strategic pragmatism** – the ability to respond proactively to different social needs and situations, as well as to reinforce a larger, longer-term change process. It means that action research laboratories need to link to the actual needs of society, and to the desired vision of change. In other words, the laboratories should strategically assess the activities they are working on.

However, the long-term activity of action research laboratories requires adequate infrastructure, such human resources, finance, and logistical mechanisms. In the case of action research laboratories developed in the PRECEDE project, the foundations are people, their relationships, desire to volunteer, and the social space that the NGO, as a partner in the PRECEDE project, ensures to support the process of transforming the society.

“Peace does not mean an absence of conflicts; differences will always be there. Peace means solving these differences through peaceful means; through dialogue, education, knowledge; and through humane ways.”

~ Dalai Lama