

From Observation to Action:



Levels of Place-Based Learning



Welcome, Aims, and Purpose of the Methodology

We welcome you to the methodology for **Place-Based Learning (PBL)** designed specifically for secondary school teachers. The aim of this methodology is to support teachers in progressively "climbing the PBL ladder," helping them understand and implement various levels of Place-Based Learning (PBL) until reaching its pinnacle, service learning.

This methodology also provides practical activities, examples from partner schools, and tools for **Collegial Support (CS)** among teachers, making the entire process manageable, step-by-step, and teacher-supported.

Community as a Classroom is a project cofunded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union under the action KA220-SCH – Cooperation partnerships in school education, funding agreement no. 2023-1-CZ01-KA220-SCH-000165069.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Authors:

Editorial Coordinator: Katerina Borovinova, Environmental Education Centre SEVER

Design: Canny.ro

Contributors: SEVER (Czechia): Jakub Vebr

New Horizons Foundation (Romania): Alina Mustata, Andreea Tabun, Măriora Butyka, Roxana Afloarei

Green Foundation (Slovakia): Lucia Rossová, Silvia Szabóová

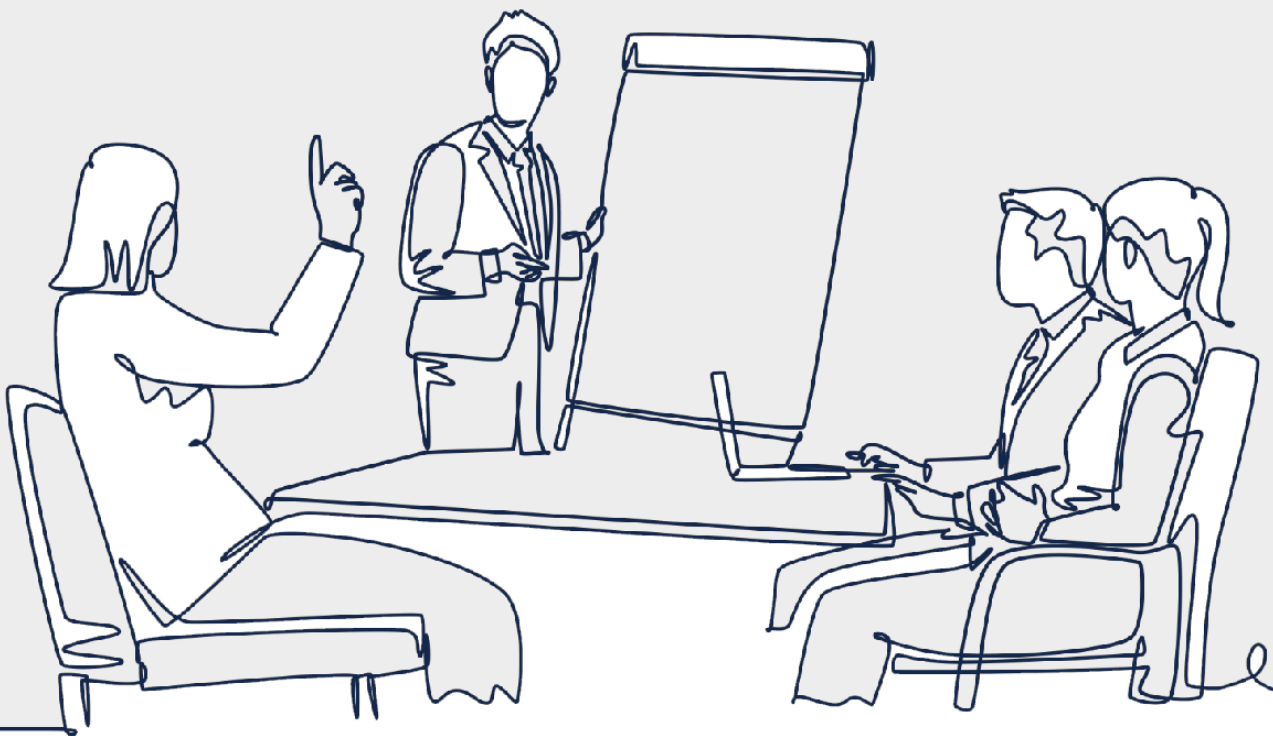
Code For Green Foundation (Poland): Małgorzata Snarska-Nieznańska, Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek

ENO Schoolnet ry (Finland): Maire Turunen, Ulla Pötsönen

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. METHODOLOGIES UPON WHICH THE PROJECT IS BASED	5
1.1 PLACE-BASED LEARNING (PBL)	6
1.1.2 HISTORICAL ROOTS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS	7
1.1.3 THE 12 PRINCIPLES OF PLACE BASED LEARNING	8
1.1.4 THE PBL LADDER: A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL	12
1.2 COLLEGIAL SUPPORT (CS)	13
1.2.1 WHAT CS IS: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING THROUGH COLLABORATION	17
1.2.2 WHY COLLEGIAL SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL FOR PBL	17
1.2.3 CS AS A WHOLE-SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT TOOL	18
1.3 WHY THESE TWO METHODOLOGIES ARE COMBINED	19
2. COLLABORATIVELY LEARNING WHILE CLIMBING THE PBL LADDER	20
2.1 LEVEL 1 – LEARNING ENRICHED WITH LOCAL EXAMPLES	21
2.2 LEVEL 2 – DIRECT ENGAGEMENT WITH PLACE	22
2.3 LEVEL 3 – COMPREHENSIVE PBL UNITS WITH EXPERTS & COMMUNITY	23
2.4 LEVEL 4 – SERVICE LEARNING: ACTION FOR THE PLACE	24
3. MAKING LEARNING PARTICIPATORY FOR PUPILS	26
4. CONNECTING LEARNING WITH THE COMMUNITY	31
5. POSSIBILITIES FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL	36
6. STARTING WITH PBL AND CS IN YOUR SCHOOL	39
6.1 GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING PLACE-BASED LEARNING ACROSS THE WHOLE SCHOOL (THE GUIDE)	42
6.2 CREATING AN ACTION PLAN	51
THREE AREAS APPLYING FIVE KEY CHARACTERISTICS	52
6.3 EVALUATING AND REFLECTING	54
<i>STUDENT PORTFOLIO FOR PBL (EVIDENCE OF LEARNING)</i>	54
7. PROJECT INFORMATION AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS	56

1. Methodologies upon which the Project is Based



Place-Based Learning (PBL) and Collegial Support (CS)

The Community as a Classroom project stands on two complementary methodological pillars: Place-Based Learning (PBL) and Collegial Support (CS). Together, they form a framework that helps schools gradually integrate learning connected to the local environment into everyday teaching, while ensuring that teachers are not alone in this process.

1.1 Place-Based Learning (PBL)

1.1.1 What PBL Is: Learning Rooted in Real Places

Place-Based Learning (PBL) is an educational approach that connects learning with the **local environment, community, and real-world issues**. It recognizes that learning becomes more engaging and memorable when it grows from the experiences, contexts, and cultures students already know.

In PBL, students explore the **natural, cultural, historical, and social** dimensions of their surroundings. Instead of learning concepts abstractly, they engage with *specific places, people, problems, and stories*. Learning becomes grounded, authentic, and personally relevant.

PBL is therefore not “just learning outside,” but an approach that makes the surrounding community, from forests and rivers to archives, local businesses, citizens, and public institutions - an integral part of school learning.



1.1.2 Historical Roots and Theoretical Foundations

Although the term *Place-Based Learning* is relatively recent (1990s, e.g., Lane-Zucker, Elder, Sobel), its principles reach much further into pedagogical traditions.

Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) insisted that education must begin “with what is near” and be based on reality, concrete things, and direct experience.

Reform pedagogues of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Jaroslav Petr and Eduard Štorch, emphasized learning outdoors, inquiry into students’ home environments, and the connection between school and real life.

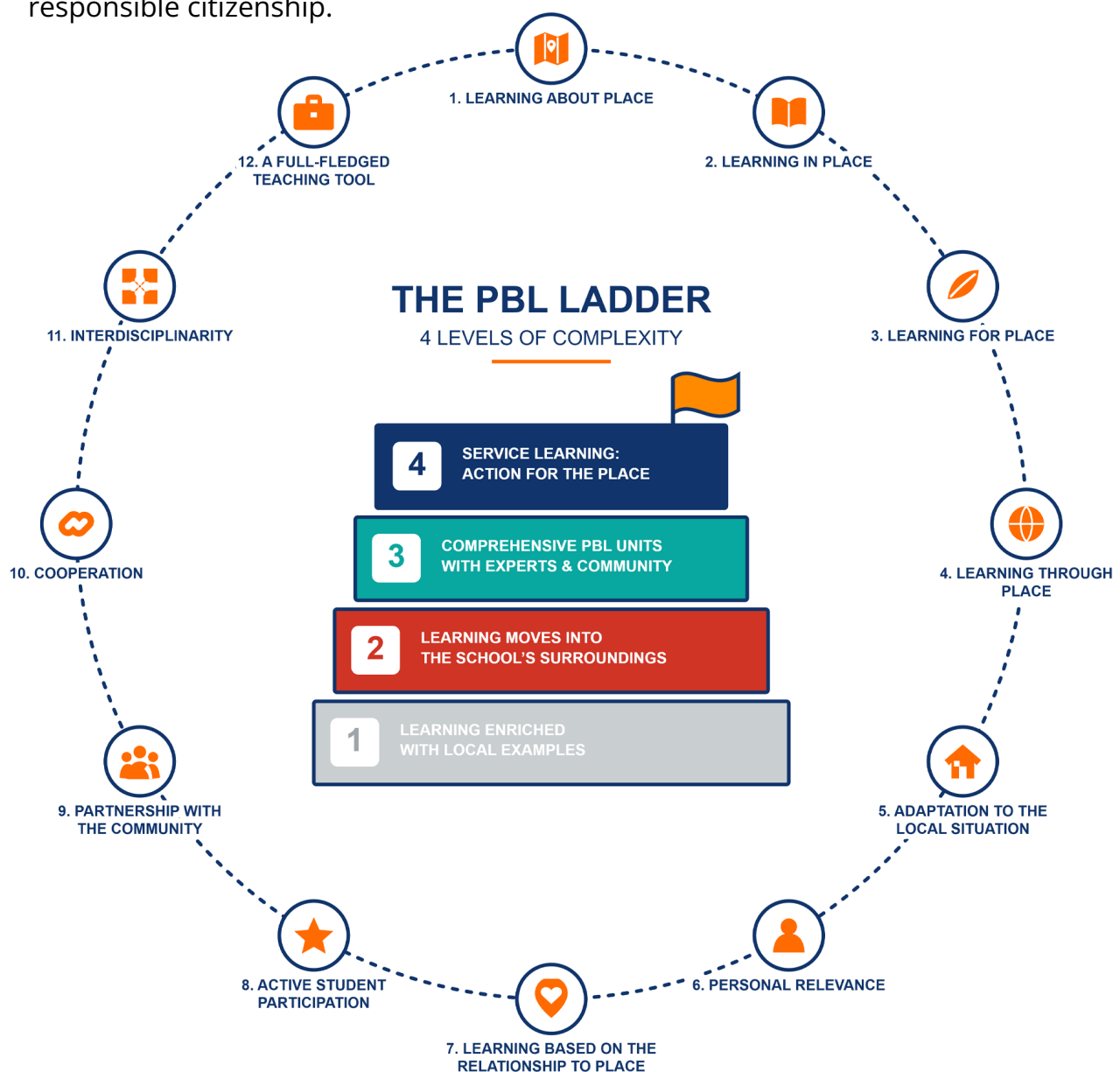
John Dewey advanced the idea of the school as a community laboratory, where students solve real problems through active inquiry.

In the modern era, **David Sobel** and others framed PBL as a response to environmental, cultural, and civic challenges, arguing that strengthening students’ connection to their local environment builds the foundation for responsible citizenship and sustainable development.

PBL therefore stands at the crossroads of **experiential learning**, **community-based education**, **environmental education**, **project learning**, and **service learning** - connecting what students learn with how they can meaningfully improve their communities.

1.1.3 The 12 Principles of Place based learning

The 12 principles presented below highlight how learning can take place about, in, through, and for the place, connecting school knowledge with real-life experiences. They emphasize active student participation, community partnerships, interdisciplinarity, and personal relevance. Together, these principles show how learning through place becomes authentic, engaging, and socially meaningful, helping students develop both academic understanding and responsible citizenship.



1. Learning about place

Learning starts from concrete local elements (objects, phenomena, places) used as the central focus of the lesson. The place provides the context through which concepts from different subjects are explained, helping students better understand theoretical content.

2. Learning in place

Learning takes place outside the classroom, directly in the community. The real environment becomes the “classroom,” where observation, research, discussion, and inquiry happen on site.

3. Learning for place

Students address real community issues, and the outcomes of their work bring concrete benefits to the place. Learning becomes a meaningful contribution to improving local quality of life and the environment.

4. Learning through place

Local places serve as a gateway to understanding regional and global issues. Students connect local experiences to broader topics such as conflict, resources, environmental challenges, and civic responsibility.

5. Adaptation to the local situation

Learning is adapted to the specific historical, social, cultural, and natural context of the place. Content and guiding questions are shaped by the real conditions of the local community.

6. Personal relevance

Learning is meaningful because it connects to students’ own lives, families, and personal experiences. Students understand why what they are learning matters to them.

7. Learning based on the relationship to place

Learning builds and deepens students’ emotional connection to place. Students reflect on their feelings, perceptions, and the value a place holds for themselves and the community.

8. Active student participation

Students are actively involved in the learning process, making decisions, proposing solutions, and taking responsibility. Learning emphasizes initiative, participation, and learner autonomy.

9. Partnership with the community

Learning is supported through collaboration with community members such as local experts, institutions, organizations, and citizens. These partnerships bring authenticity and real-world relevance to education.

10. Cooperation

Learning takes place through teamwork and collaboration among students, teachers, and community members. Many tasks can only be completed together, strengthening social and civic skills.

11. Interdisciplinarity

Learning is interdisciplinary and goes beyond traditional subject boundaries. Students combine knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines to understand complex issues.

12. A full-fledged teaching tool

Place-Based Learning is a complete educational approach with clear objectives, assessment, and curriculum integration. Teachers intentionally plan how learning through place develops knowledge, skills, values, and responsible behavior.

These principles create a solid backbone for planning lessons, projects, and long-term school-wide development.

For more information on PBL and its practice in schools we recommend to watch these videos:

An introduction to Place Based Learning



Place Based Learning How to do it in one subject



Place Based Learning How to do it in multiple subjects



1.1.4 The PBL Ladder: A Developmental Model

To support teachers and schools, the project uses the metaphor of the **PBL ladder**. It illustrates the increasing depth and complexity of place-based learning - from simple steps accessible to beginners to advanced forms requiring higher levels of teacher confidence, planning, and community involvement:

1. 3BLearning enriched with local examples

Teachers use photographs, maps, texts, stories, or natural objects from the local environment to illustrate curricular topics.

2. Learning moves into the school's surroundings

Students observe, collect data, and explore real phenomena outside the classroom—cemeteries, streams, public spaces, landscapes, etc.



3. Service Learning: Action for the place

Students collaborate with community partners to design and implement meaningful improvements that benefit the place and its people.

4. Comprehensive PBL units with experts & community

Students investigate authentic questions with support from local experts, institutions, or community members (e.g., mapping invasive plants).

The ladder shows that:

- teachers **do not need to start at the top**,



- not all topics must reach the highest level, and
- each step brings increasing benefits for learning and motivation.

1.2 Collegial Support (CS)

Collegial support is the collaboration of two or more teachers who seek the best teaching practices so that each student learns something valuable in their lessons and that learning brings joyful experiences.

Each member of a collegial support group brings their own expertise and only through joint thinking and jointly reflected attempts to solve a teaching challenge do they learn together.

There are many types of peer support, for the project we have leaned towards the 3T approach (we plan together - we implement together - we reflect together).

1. Collegial support begins with creating the team of two or more teachers who share a professional interest and who are compatible with each other. They do not have to be teachers of the same grade or the same subject.
2. Next, they create a framework plan (ideally based on an analysis) for the intended period of cooperation, agreeing on the rhythm (regularity is very important - preferably shorter meetings, but more often, at least once a month) and method of cooperation.
3. They plan the teaching together (a lesson, a block, ...). The goal for the plan is to be the best that they are capable of at that moment. The plan may change over time – it may be revised when obstacles are discovered, or it may become more ambitious.
4. They teach the planned lesson immediately, or as soon as possible.
There are several options:
 - a. They teach in pairs. They may or may not make a video recording.
 - b. One teaches, the other observes. According to the agreement, they collect information that the teacher and the observer will work with after the lesson. They may or may not use video.

c. They teach alone in their own classroom. They meet to reflect. They may or may not use video.

5. They reflect thoroughly and as soon as possible after the lesson – either immediately or in the afternoon after the lesson. They base their reflection on how they think the students did in the lesson, what contributed to the student’s success in the lesson and what hindered the student. The aim of reflection is to reach conclusions that can be used immediately for further planning, but also to permanently enrich the pedagogical thinking of the teachers involved.
6. The knowledge gained through reflection and evaluation of what worked will be used for further planning, whether collective or individual.

For more inspiration on how the individual phases of the 3T approach can be carried out, you can watch the following videos, which were created in collaboration with the participating schools:

- [3. Collegial support – planning together,](#)
- [4. Collegial support – implementation together,](#)
- [5. Collegial support in Place Based Learning Importance of Evaluation together](#)



There are many activities and methods for reflection. In our project, we used some of them, which can be applied to reflecting on educational activities and the process of collegial support. For example, two of these methods are:

Reflective Procedure

A useful tool for reflection is a reflective procedure. It provides a recommended sequence of reflection points. Following it is not mandatory; we always decide based on the available time, the length of the activity, and the purpose of the reflection.

1. Description of the situation: Outline the steps we have taken.
2. Feelings (emotions): How did you feel—what felt good, what did not? What caused these feelings?
3. Learning outcomes: What did we learn, and did we achieve the goals?
4. Evaluation of methods: What worked, and will we do the same next time? What did not work, and how would we approach it differently?
5. Specific benefit: What do I take away from this experience, and how will I apply it in the future?

Five Finger Reflection

It is a method of simple and effective technique for quick evaluation.

How to proceed:

Draw the outline of your palm on paper.

Write the answer in each finger according to the key below.

Then evaluate the answers, or share them with others.

Each finger represents a specific question that will help you sort your thoughts after the project, workshop, etc. is over.

Assigning individual fingers:



1.2.1 What CS Is: Professional Learning Through Collaboration

Collegial Support (CS) is a structured process that helps teachers develop their practice **together**, rather than individually. It is based on the ideas that:

- teachers learn best when they **collaborate**,
- feedback is most effective when it is **non-evaluative**,
- innovation is most sustainable when supported by a **team**,
- and change is easier when teachers **feel safe, motivated, and accompanied**.

CS provides opportunities for:

- **shared planning** of lessons, projects, and PBL activities
- **peer observations** focused on learning process, not inspection
- **reflective discussions** after lessons
- **problem-solving and mutual encouragement**
- **sharing examples, materials, and inspirations**

Across partner countries, CS proved crucial in keeping teachers engaged and confident as they navigated new methodologies, time pressures, and curricular expectations.

1.2.2 Why Collegial Support Is Essential for PBL

PBL is meaningful, but it is also demanding. It requires:

- interdisciplinary planning,
- flexibility,
- contact with community partners,
- outdoor work, and
- integrating student participation.

These processes can be overwhelming for a single teacher working alone. Collegial support (CS) provides the conditions that make PBL feasible:

- Shared workload: A team divides tasks, reducing the burden on individual teachers.
- Emotional and professional support: Teachers encourage and assist each other.
- Reflection: Sharing experiences helps refine ideas and prevents repeated mistakes.
- Diverse perspectives: Different subject backgrounds enrich interdisciplinary work.
- Feedback and observation: Colleagues' input accelerates professional growth.

Simply put, collegial support is one of the engines that enables teachers to climb the PBL ladder.

1.2.3 CS as a Whole-School Development Tool

When CS becomes a regular part of school culture:

- innovation spreads beyond individual enthusiasts,
- more teachers feel confident to experiment,
- management sees evidence of growth and supports it,
- students experience more coherent, participatory learning,
- and the school builds a shared vision of meaningful education.



1.3 Why These Two Methodologies Are Combined

The combination of Place based learning and Collegial support is intentional and strategic:

Place based learning gives purpose and direction

It answers the questions:

- *What should students learn?*
- *Why is this learning important?*
- *How can learning connect with real life?*

Collegial support gives process and sustainability

It answers:

- *How can teachers implement PBL safely and confidently?*
- *How can we ensure continuity even when staff changes?*
- *How do we turn individual innovations into a school-wide approach?*

Together, they create a model through which schools can:

- strengthen students' connection to their community,
- support inquiry, participation, and citizenship,
- increase teacher motivation and shared expertise,
- and develop a sustainable, whole-school culture of meaningful learning.

2. Collaboratively Learning While Climbing the PBL Ladder



The already mentioned PBL ladder represents the progressive depth and complexity of place-based learning. Each rung shows how learning can evolve from simple, beginner-friendly activities to advanced forms that require higher levels of teacher confidence, careful planning, and active involvement of the local community. Every stage integrates collegial support (CS), ensuring that teachers share experiences, reflect together, and enhance the impact of learning. Not every topic needs to reach the highest level, and each stage offers its own value for students and teachers.

2.1 Level 1 – Learning Enriched with Local Examples

Description: Classroom units are enriched with local examples (examples of architectural styles of important buildings in the village in photographs, reading from the texts of a local native writer, etc.).

- Teachers introduce local elements (photos, maps, stories, artifacts) to illustrate curriculum topics.
- Learning is anchored in familiar, tangible examples.

Practical Application & Case Studies:

- **Example 1:** In a history lesson, students examine old photographs of the town square to compare with present-day structures. Teachers use these images to explain historical events.
- **Example 2:** Science class uses leaves and soil from the schoolyard to explore plant biology and local ecosystems.
- **Example 3:** Literature teachers integrate local folklore or oral histories into reading assignments.

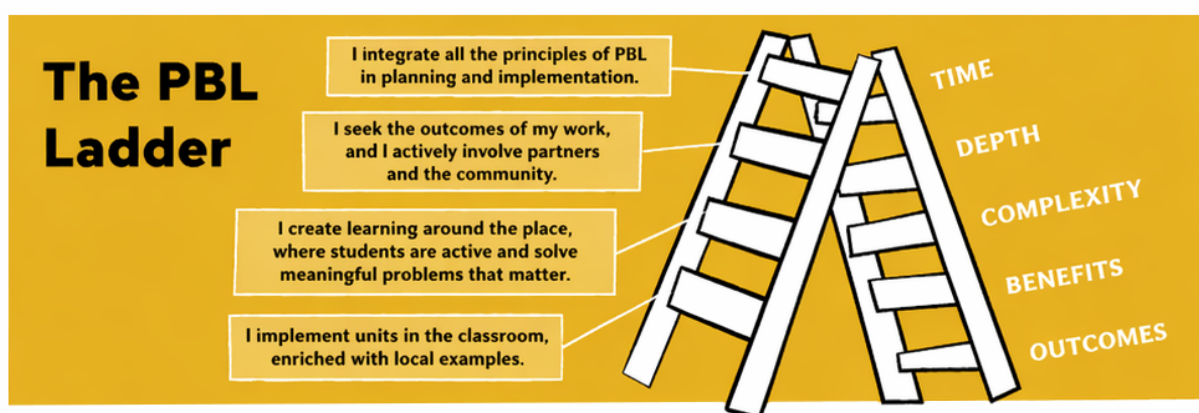
Collegial Support:

- **Share local materials** (photos, maps, artifacts) among colleagues to inspire each other.
- **Discuss lesson ideas** in short meetings or online groups before implementing.
- **Observe each other's classes** informally to see how local examples engage students.

- **Reflect together** on what examples worked or didn't, noting student engagement.
- **Co-develop a simple resource bank** of local stories, objects, or images for multiple subjects.

Added Value:

- Strengthens teachers' instructional skills.
- Beginner-friendly step accessible to all teachers.
- PBL principles: *Learning about place, Personal relevance.*



2.2 Level 2 – Direct Engagement with Place

Description: As students move up the ladder to the second level, some of the learning moves beyond the classroom walls into the school's surroundings (a walk to the cemetery, learning about the graves of important local citizens, finding out about their contribution to the development of the community). Students explore the school's surroundings (parks, streams, monuments). Learning shifts from classroom theory to observation, exploration, and real-world interaction.

Practical Application & Case Studies:

- **Example 1:** Students conduct water quality tests in a nearby stream, measuring pH and biodiversity, linking results to biology and environmental science curricula.
- **Example 2:** Geography class maps the local neighborhood, identifying land use, green spaces, and urban patterns.

- **Example 3:** Art students sketch buildings or natural landscapes around the school while learning perspective and cultural context.

Collegial Support:

- **Plan field activities jointly**, deciding roles, safety, and learning goals.
- **Coordinate reflection sessions** after field visits to discuss what went well and challenges.
- **Share practical tips** for organizing outdoor lessons, including materials and timing.
- **Peer feedback:** one teacher observes students' interactions while another leads the activity.
- **Document outcomes together** (photos, data sheets, student notes) for future reference and adaptation.

Added Value:

- Develops data skills, collaboration, and engagement with place.
- Introduces moderate complexity requiring teacher confidence in outdoor learning.
- PBL principles: *Learning in place*, *Active student participation*.

2.3 Level 3 – Comprehensive PBL Units with Experts & Community

Description: The 3rd rung of the ladder is the creation of comprehensive teaching units based on the principles of the PBL and the involvement of people from the site and experts on the subject in teaching. Students address authentic local questions, collaborating with experts, institutions, or community members. Projects are interdisciplinary, connecting multiple subjects to real-world contexts.

Practical Application & Case Studies:

- **Case Study 1:** Students work with a local environmental NGO to map invasive plant species in a park. Biology, math, and IT skills are integrated to collect, analyze, and visualize data.

- **Case Study 2:** Social studies and language classes collaborate on an oral history project, interviewing local elders and producing a podcast or written archive.
- **Case Study 3:** STEM students partner with a local water management authority to propose solutions for local flooding, presenting findings to municipal stakeholders.

Collegial Support:

- **Co-plan interdisciplinary projects**, aligning subjects, roles, and timelines.
- **Invite colleagues to observe or co-teach** during project activities.
- **Conduct regular progress meetings** to share challenges and ideas for improvement.
- **Share networks and contacts** with local experts, NGOs, or institutions to expand opportunities.
- **Reflect collaboratively** on student outcomes and community engagement, adjusting future projects.

Added Value:

- Encourages interdisciplinary collaboration, professional growth, and sustainable community engagement.
- Requires careful planning and confidence to involve external partners.
- PBL principles: *Learning for place, Partnership with community, Cooperation.*

2.4 Level 4 – Service Learning: Action for the Place

Description: Eventually the class may move to 4. rung of the ladder, namely to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes through service learning, i.e. pupils working in collaboration with partners in the community to plan and create a meaningful, useful product for the benefit of the place and the community (a year-long project focusing on traditional glassmaking in the community - the history of glassmaking). Students implement projects with tangible benefits for the community. Projects involve planning, action, and evaluation to create real-world impact.

Practical Application & Case Studies:

- **Case Study 1:** Students collaborate with the local council to design and plant a community garden, integrating biology, civic responsibility, and project management.
- **Case Study 2:** Art and design students create public murals representing local history or environmental themes, working with local artists and residents.
- **Case Study 3:** A school-wide campaign on recycling involves students in planning, awareness-raising, and monitoring waste reduction in partnership with municipal services.

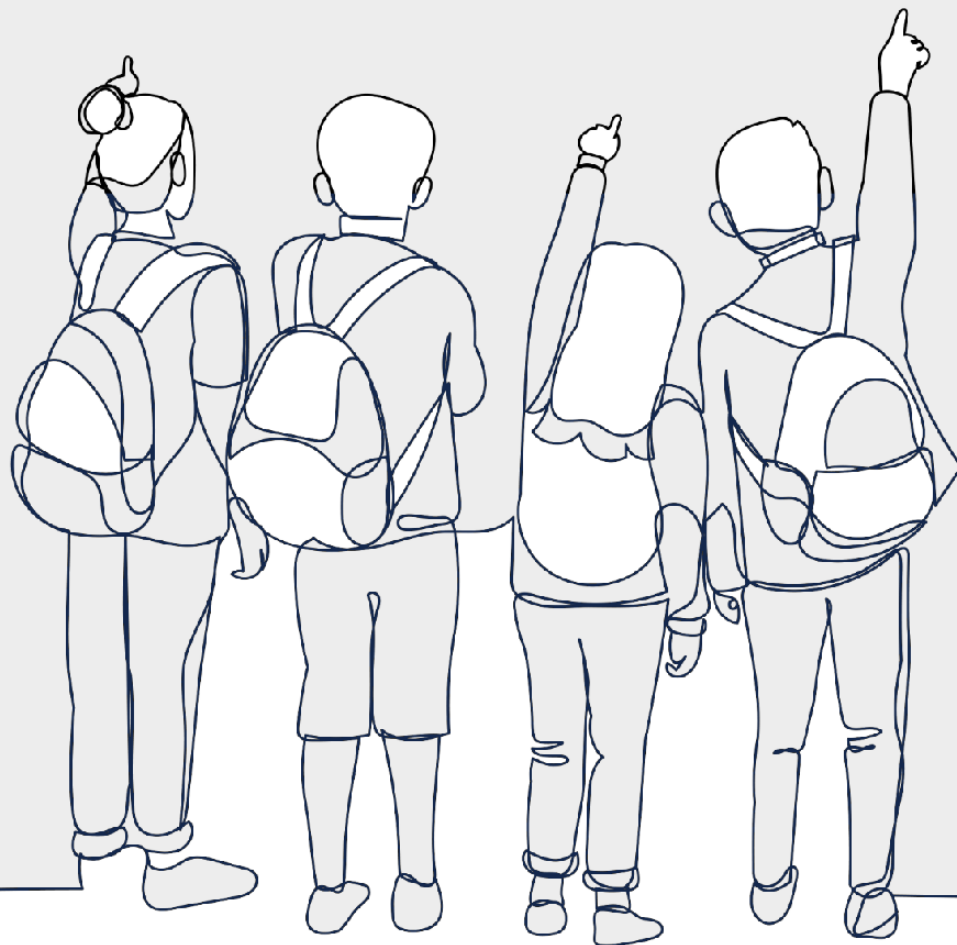
Collegial Support:

- **Mentor less experienced teachers** in managing complex community projects.
- **Plan and evaluate project steps together**, ensuring alignment with learning goals and community needs.
- **Share success stories and challenges** to inspire other teachers and improve practice.
- **Reflect as a team** on the impact of the service project on students and community.
- **Develop a toolkit or checklist** for future projects, documenting lessons learned and best practices.

Added Value:

- Maximizes student engagement, civic responsibility, and teacher leadership.
- Highest level of complexity, requiring strong teacher confidence, advanced planning, and deep community involvement.
- PBL principles: *Learning through place, Active student participation, Full-fledged teaching tool.*

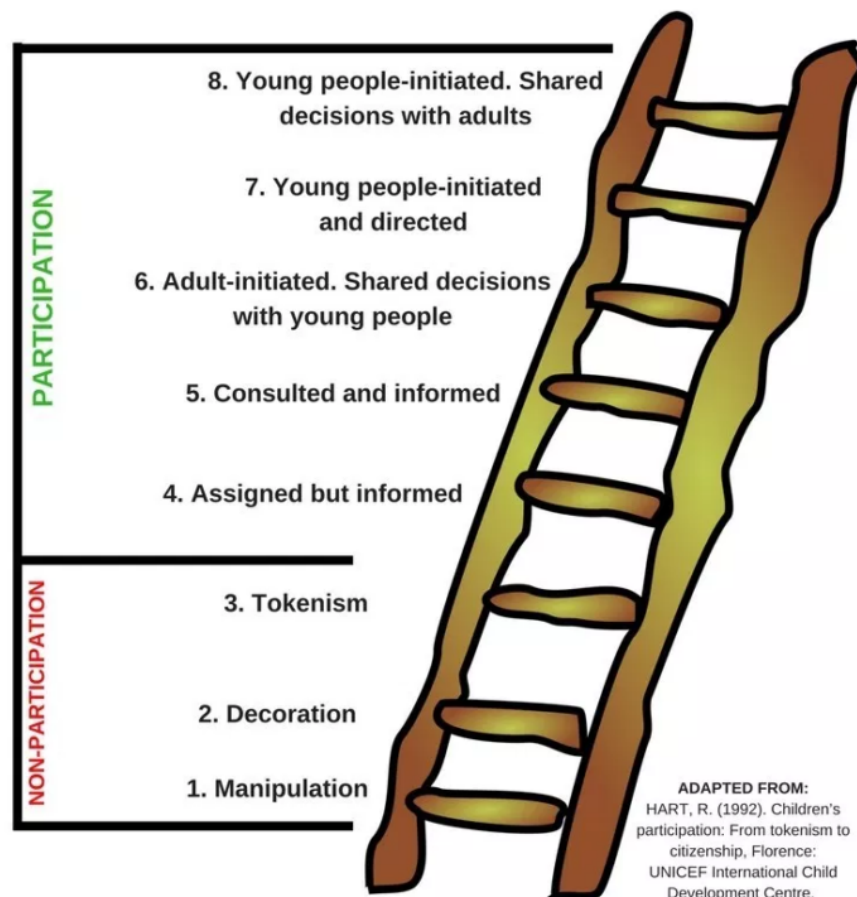
3. Making Learning Participatory for Pupils



Active student participation is at the heart of meaningful and effective learning. This chapter explores strategies, principles, and practical approaches to **engage pupils as active contributors** in their learning process. Participatory learning goes beyond passive reception of knowledge: students make choices, investigate questions, collaborate with peers, and contribute to real-world outcomes.

By creating opportunities for participation, teachers help students develop critical thinking, agency, and ownership of their learning. Readers will find practical guidance on designing lessons and projects that **foster decision-making, collaboration, reflection, and action**, making learning both **student-centered and contextually meaningful**.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation



Source: <https://www.mefirst.org.uk/resource/arnsteins-ladder-of-participation/>

THE LEVEL	EXAMPLES OF INCLUSION OF STUDENTS
 8. From Children, by Children, for Decision-Making and Impact	- Students with diverse backgrounds lead a campaign to improve an inclusive playground based on community needs. - A student council with representatives of all learners co-designs school policies and presents them to local authorities. - Students create a community festival celebrating different cultures and traditions, with everyone contributing and deciding together. - Peer leaders with different strengths ensure every voice is heard in community meetings. - Students reflect together on the impact of their actions and plan next steps that include all.
 7. Children and Their Own Realizations	- Students choose inquiry topics that matter to them and connect to their own lives and identities. - Learners with different abilities use various ways (drawing, speaking, writing, recording) to explore and share their questions. - Students interview family members and neighbors from diverse backgrounds to understand different perspectives. - Every student selects how they want to learn and what role they want to take in group work. - Students celebrate discoveries together and value each other's unique insights.
 6. From Completed to Influencing Children	- Students collaborate to plan a project that addresses a real need for all learners in the school. - Roles are assigned based on individual strengths and interests so everyone can contribute meaningfully. - Materials and tasks are adapted so all students can participate fully. - Students give feedback to each other in ways that are respectful and supportive. - All students co-evaluate the project and suggest how to improve it for everyone.
 5. Children Are Informed and Involved	- Students receive information in multiple formats (text, images, videos, simplified language) so everyone can understand. - Everyone is invited to share ideas and experiences during discussions. - Group tasks are designed so each student has an important role. - Teachers check in with each student to make sure everyone feels included. - Students support each other by listening and encouraging all contributions.
 4. Children Are Instructed and Informed	- Lessons connect to real places and issues that reflect students' diverse lives and communities. - Examples, stories, and case studies include people from different cultures and abilities. - Students are invited to ask questions and relate content to their own experiences. - Activities are adapted to different learning needs and preferences. - Students work in mixed groups where everyone can learn from each other.
 3. Symbolic (False) Participation	- Students are invited to give input through surveys, votes, or quick polls. - Multiple ways are offered to share opinions (speaking, writing, drawing). - Teachers acknowledge all responses and explain how they are considered. - Group work encourages participation from everyone, not just a few. - Students feel their opinions are welcomed, even if decisions are already made.
 2. Learning in Place – Direct Experience with Place	- Activities are hands-on and accessible for all abilities (e.g., sensory, movement, visual supports). - Students explore places in ways that suit their strengths and needs. - Paired or small-group exploration helps everyone feel safe and included. - Students share observations using different tools (photos, drawings, notes, voice recordings). - Reflections honor different ways of expressing thoughts and feelings.
 1. Manipulation	- Students follow instructions and tasks given by adults. - All students complete the same activity, regardless of individual interests or needs. - Little or no choice is offered in how or what students do. - Students are not asked for their opinions. - The focus is on compliance, not on student voice or inclusion.

Source: Generated by ChatGPT (2026), based on the PBL ladder framework and Arnstein's ladder of participation.

**Young people won't start taking
action just because
we tell them, 'be active.'
They will start when someone
takes them seriously.**

**Participation requires
character.**

*Without character, participation turns into a struggle of
interests, activism without responsibility, or noise without
listening.*

Participation is the moment when a critic
becomes a co-creator.

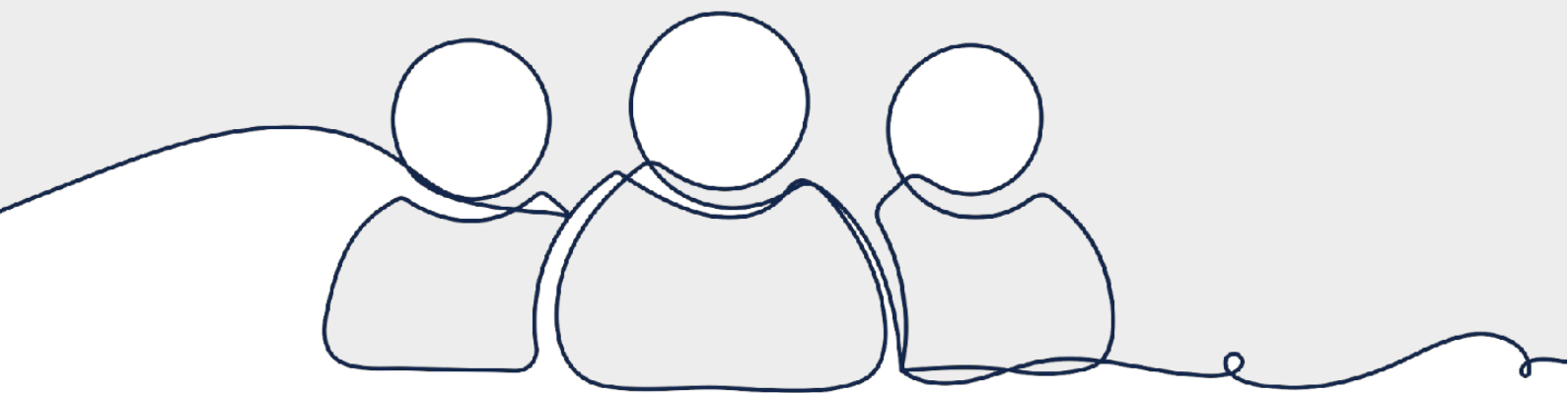
**It's not just about young people knowing
how to act. It's about them acting well.**

Not activities. Environment.

An environment where young people experience that they have influence. Where they learn to take responsibility. Where trust is not just a word, but a lived experience. **Participation is not a method. It is a culture of relationships.**

Quotes about participation from Center for Character Development, Czechia

4. Connecting Learning with the Community



In today's education system, integrating schools with the broader community enriches students' learning and strengthens school-community bonds. This chapter explores ways to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world experiences, offering students opportunities to engage with local culture, history, and contemporary issues, while promoting active citizenship and social responsibility. By utilizing community resources, schools can provide authentic, meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom, helping students develop practical skills and connect what they learn to their everyday lives. This chapter presents **44 ways** to connect learning with the community, from simple activities to larger-scale projects, adaptable to different age groups, subjects, and school resources.

1. **Open Doors Event:** Invite community members into the school to observe classes and student presentations.
2. **Parental Café:** Organize informal meetings where parents can discuss school topics and engage in workshops.
3. **Community Fair:** Host a fair where students display and sell products they've created based on their learning.
4. **Student Art Exhibit:** Set up an art exhibition featuring student artwork that explores local culture and history.
5. **Service Learning Project:** Organize a project where students help a local charity or create a community garden.
6. **Local Business Visits:** Take students on field trips to local businesses to learn about the community economy.
7. **Guest Speaker Series:** Invite local professionals and alumni to share their expertise with students.
8. **Cultural Heritage Day:** Host a day where students explore and share the cultural backgrounds of their local community.
9. **Career Day:** Invite community members from various fields to discuss their careers with students.
10. **Local History Walking Tour:** Organize a walking tour of historical landmarks in the area, guided by local experts.

in a student science fair.

- 11. Tree Planting Day:** Partner with local environmental groups for a community tree-planting event.
- 12. Community Clean-Up:** Organize a neighborhood clean-up day where students work alongside community members.
- 13. Farmers' Market Booth:** Students can run a booth at a local farmers' market selling their school projects.
- 14. Community Talent Show:** Host a talent show that invites students and local residents to perform.
- 15. Intergenerational Storytelling:** Organize events where older community members share stories with students.
- 16. School Play with Local History:** Create a school play based on local history or legends, involving local actors.
- 17. Food Drive for Local Charity:** Host a food drive to collect donations for a local food bank or shelter.
- 18. Local Heroes Week:** Celebrate local heroes (firefighters, police officers, teachers) with presentations and activities.
- 19. Science Fair with Local Experts:** Invite local scientists or engineers to judge or participate in a student science fair.
- 20. Field Day with Local Sports Clubs:** Partner with local sports clubs for a school-wide sports event.
- 21. Farm Visit for Agricultural Studies:** Take students to a local farm for hands-on learning about agriculture.
- 22. Parent-Teacher Workshops:** Host workshops for parents to learn new educational tools and strategies.
- 23. Poetry Slam:** Host a poetry slam where students perform original works related to community issues.
- 24. Community Health Fair:** Students create projects about health topics and present them at a local community health fair.
- 25. Documenting Local Traditions:** Students interview community elders and create a documentary or scrapbook of local traditions.
- 26. Recycling Program:** Launch a school-wide recycling initiative in partnership with local recycling centers.
- 27. Neighborhood Mapping Project:** Students create maps of their neighborhood, noting important landmarks and features.

28. **Community Theatre Performance:** Organize a community theatre event where students perform plays or skits written by local authors.
29. **Sustainable Gardening:** Partner with local horticulturists to create a sustainable school garden.
30. **School Newspaper with Local Stories:** Start a school newspaper that includes stories about the local community.
31. **Social Media Campaign for Local Issues:** Students create a social media campaign to raise awareness for a local issue.
32. **Classroom Pen Pal with Seniors:** Establish a program where students correspond with seniors in the community.
33. **Local Museum Collaboration:** Partner with a local museum for educational tours, exhibits, or interactive experiences.
34. **Celebrating Local Artists:** Host an event celebrating local artists, musicians, or dancers.
35. **Public Speaking Event:** Students give speeches on topics related to their community or current local issues.
36. **Public Art Installation:** Collaborate with local artists to create a public art piece that represents the community's values.
37. **Tech Workshops for Seniors:** Students teach seniors in the community how to use modern technology and social media.
38. **Farm-to-School Program:** Partner with local farmers to supply fresh produce for school lunches.
39. **Local Issues Debate:** Organize a student debate on a current issue affecting the community.
40. **Walking for Charity:** Organize a community walk to raise funds for local charities.
41. **Create Local Business Promotional Materials:** Students design marketing materials (flyers, websites) for local businesses.
42. **Community Read-Aloud Event:** Organize a community event where students and local residents read stories to each other.
43. **Art and Craft Workshops for Community:** Students run art and craft workshops for community members to showcase student creativity.
44. **Charity Run or Fun Walk:** Host a charity run or fun walk to support local causes or schools, involving students and local residents.

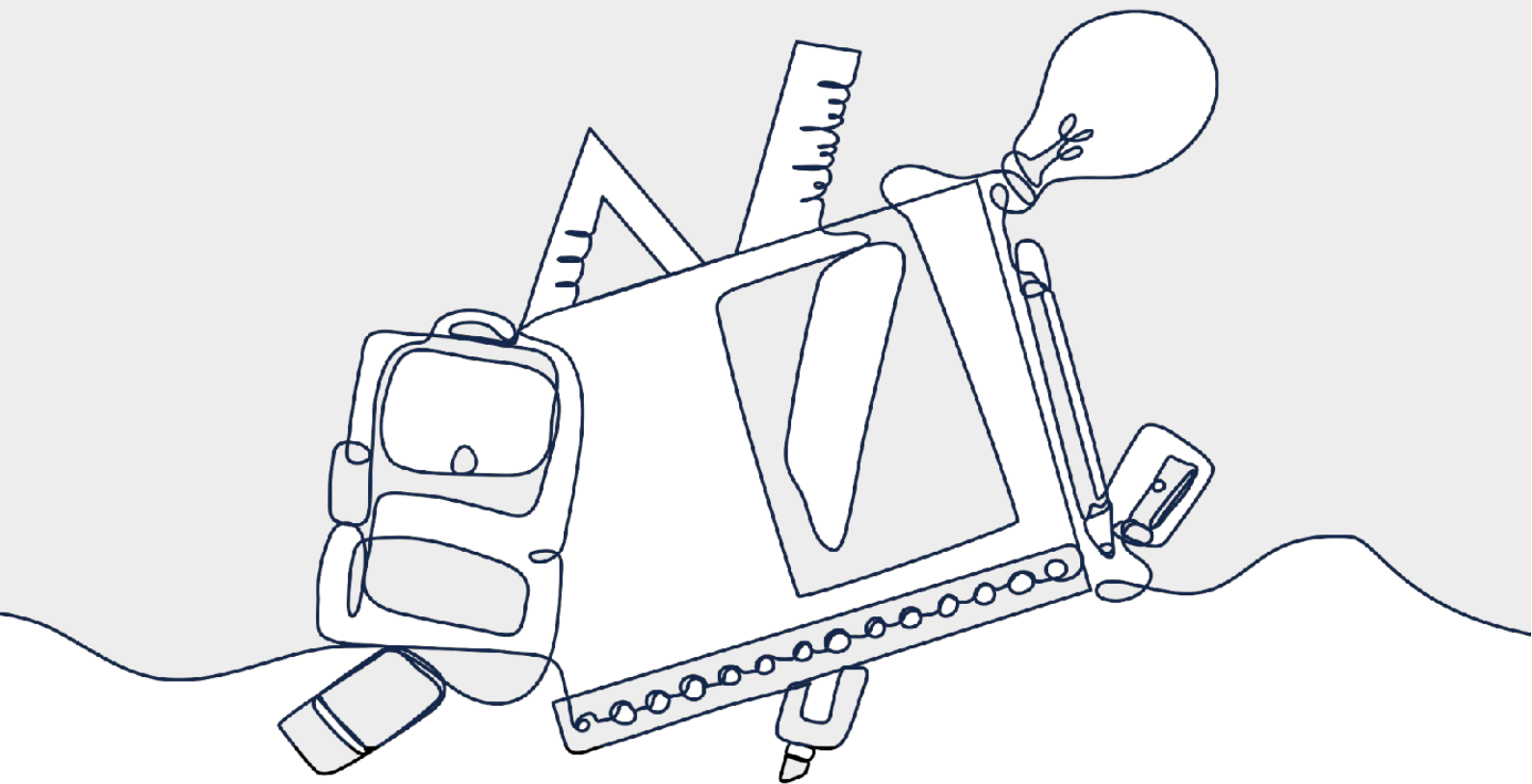
The activities in this chapter illustrate that connecting learning with the community is not just about inviting the community into the classroom, but also about taking students out into the community and using their surroundings as a dynamic learning resource. By incorporating real-world issues and local partnerships, schools can cultivate a learning environment that prepares students for both academic success and active citizenship. Through these community-driven educational activities, students are empowered to see their learning as something that matters, not just for exams, but for the betterment of their own neighborhoods and the world at large.

Recommendations:

- **Set Clear Educational Objectives:** Align learning activities with specific competencies and PBL principles to ensure students gain both knowledge and practical, real-world skills.
- **Focus on Competency Development:** Design community-based activities that help students develop competencies like collaboration, problem-solving, and communication.
- **Incorporate PBL Principles:** Ensure that learning is connected to local issues, involves active participation, and engages students in meaningful, hands-on experiences.

By focusing on these goals, schools can enhance the effectiveness of their community-engagement efforts, creating a richer, more dynamic learning experience for students while fostering a deeper connection to the community.

5. Possibilities for School Management at the National Level



The following chapter illustrates how PBL can help fulfill the national educational curricula of the countries involved in the project: Czechia, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, and Finland.

Czechia:

Place-Based Learning as a Clear Path to Grasping the New National Curriculum for Primary Schools (RVP ZŠ)

Information about the revised National Curriculum for Primary Schools (RVP ZŠ), which schools will follow starting in the 2028/2029 school year, is gradually arriving at schools. The new curriculum places greater emphasis on the development of key competencies, literacy, and the connection of teaching to real-life situations. At the same time, it gives schools more freedom, with no fixed hour allocations for individual subjects or areas of education. One of the ways to implement the new curriculum meaningfully and gradually is through place-based learning (PBL). This approach connects teaching to the surrounding environment of the school, the community, and the local area, helping children learn from real-life situations and challenges.

Place-based learning fits well into the new curriculum – for example, the entire cross-cutting theme of Sustainable Environment is directly based on it. When implemented at the highest level, for instance, in the form of a student service project, this approach has the potential to develop all eight key competencies outlined in the new curriculum.

How Place-Based Learning Supports Key Competencies

- **Learning Competence**

Students learn by observing the real world around them, working with local data, and connecting theory to practice.

- **Communication Competence**

Students communicate with community members, conduct interviews, present project or survey results, argue, and work with various types of information in the context of their locality.

- **Personal and Social Competence**
Students work in teams, divide roles, take on responsibility, and experience the meaningfulness of their work through real outcomes.
- **Citizenship and Sustainability Competence**
Students explore how the community functions, the role of citizens and institutions, participate in solving real local issues, and contribute to sustainability and quality of life.
- **Entrepreneurial and Work Competence**
Students create their own solutions to problems, plan steps, work with resources and materials, and collaborate with local partners. They develop creativity and project management skills.
- **Problem-Solving Competence**
PBL builds learning around real local challenges – students identify problems, collect data, investigate causes, propose solutions, test them, and evaluate the results.
- **Cultural Competence**
Students explore the cultural heritage of the region, work with monuments, stories, traditions, and the cultural landscape, which fosters respect for local values.
- **Digital Competence**
Students meaningfully use digital tools to map, document, and present local issues, creating and evaluating digital content.

Programs such as School for Sustainable Living can help schools meet the expected learning outcomes according to the new revised Czech National Curricula. In upcoming editions of the newsletter, we will offer specific examples of how to easily incorporate PBL into teaching – in individual subjects and across the school.

6. Starting with PBL and CS in Your School



In this chapter, we are introducing you to **GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING PLACE-BASED LEARNING ACROSS THE WHOLE SCHOOL (THE GUIDE)**. It is presented in the form of a table (matrix) designed to help schools and coordinators implement Place-Based Learning (PBL) across the whole school, ensuring that key principles and conditions are not overlooked. By using a common language, we hope it can be better introduced, understood, and applied by schools, and subsequently monitored during evaluation of PBL.

This Guide is a supportive tool for analyzing the school's situation with teams. It should be introduced gently and further explored through well-facilitated discussions with teachers by someone who has a solid understanding of PBL and character development (CS) and who sees the table as a practical orientation document for all involved.

It is important to remember that the primary purpose of this Guide is to **raise collective efficacy within the school**, so that the impact on each student's learning is greater and faster, teachers enjoy teaching, and the whole school culture thrives (Hattie). If this is not the case, schools should not feel constrained by the model.

Structure of the Guide

The Guide is divided into **three Areas**:

1. **Supportive School Management**
2. **Cooperative and Learning Community of Teachers**
3. **Place-Based Learning**

We have identified these three areas as essential for the school community - including school management, teachers, students, parents, and wider stakeholders - to be aware of and continuously work on, with clarity about where they are and where they want to move.

These areas are interconnected: improving one area often has a positive impact on the others, leading to more competent and engaged students.

Subareas

Each Area is broken down into **Subareas**. For example:

1.1 We have a clearly formulated shared vision, where the place we live and work plays an important role. There is consensus around this vision.

The aim of each subarea is to indicate what needs to be in place or considered to develop the corresponding Area (e.g., Supportive School Management).

Five Key Characteristics of PBL

To implement PBL across the school without losing its educational philosophy, we have distilled key elements from the SEVER perspective's Eleven Principles into **Five Key Characteristics** that are common to all schools:

1. **Participation**
2. **Work with the Place**
3. **Sustainability**
4. **Interdisciplinarity**
5. **Partnership with Community**

For each characteristic, we provide **suggested questions** to guide reflection and discussion. These are intended as prompts to help teams think deeply about each Subarea, rather than prescriptive rules.

Purpose of Questions

These questions help school teams assess the current foundation of their school and identify where they want to move, forming the basis for an **Action Plan**.

Way of Verification

The **Way of Verification** column suggests documents and sources that can help gather information about each Subarea. This list is illustrative, not exhaustive.

Notes Columns

The **Notes** columns are for recording observations and insights from school team discussions. They will support the creation of a concrete **School Action Plan**.

6.1 GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING PLACE-BASED LEARNING ACROSS THE WHOLE SCHOOL (THE GUIDE)

Self-Assessment Guide for Implementing Place-Based Learning Throughout the Whole School										
AR EA	SUBAREA (an ideal state or condition)	FIVE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PLACE BASED LEARNING					POSSIBLE WAYS OF VARIFICATION	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION FOR EACH SUBAREA (what are our thought on this, questions)	WHERE WE ARE NOW (SCALE 0-5) Note: Before assigning a number, allow the team to discuss what 0 means to them and what 5 would look like (what they hear, feel, and see in their current situation). Take notes for reference.	Questions to Consider:
		1. <i>Participation</i> – involvement in information sharing and decision-making.	2. <i>Working with Place</i> – learning about, in, and for the place; developing a relationship with it; adapting to the local context.	3. <i>Sustainability</i> – fostering sustainability within the school: the school's contribution, interconnections between socio-economic and ecological aspects.	4. <i>Interdisciplinarity</i> – connections between subjects and fields of study; applying the universal principle of interconnectedness	5. <i>Partnership with Community</i> – engaging locally and globally with parents, municipalities, the public, organizations, and pursuing international cooperation.				
1. SU PP OR TIV E SC HO	1.1 We have a clearly formulated shared vision in which the place where we live and work plays an important role. There is consensus around this vision.	How did you create your school vision? Who participated in its creation, and how do you keep it alive?	What role does the school's place play in shaping your vision? What impact does it have on your students?	How does the idea of sustainability manifest in the life of the school and among your students?	Does your school aim for an interdisciplinary approach, coordinated themes, or project-based teaching? What benefits does this bring to your students?	How important is it for your vision to be connected to the local community (e.g., parents, local municipality, NGOs)? Who knows about your vision, and do you consult it regularly?	School vision, student profile, school strategic plan, school curriculum, interviews.			

OL MA NA GE ME NT	1.2 We have a “living” school curriculum, derived from our vision, which guides everyone; it incorporates the place we live in and emphasizes its importance for teaching and learning.	<i>How is your school curriculum developed? Who co-creates it? How do you work with it, evaluate it, and revise it?</i>	<i>What can each student learn through PBL? What outcomes do you define in terms of PBL?</i>	<i>How have you integrated the principles of sustainable living into your school curriculum?</i>	<i>What opportunities does your curriculum provide to interconnect lessons and subjects? Does it include integrated blocks, thematic units, or PBL?</i>	<i>What role does your community play in the curriculum? Who are important local partners for PBL? What benefits does it bring to student learning?</i>	School curricula, revision documents, and evaluation records.			
	1.3 We strive to create optimal conditions for implementing PBL across the whole school. Examples of conditions: Nurturing a healthy school climate for all, including students and parents. Supporting lifelong learning for teachers and school management. Providing suitable facilities and equipment for teaching and learning outside the classroom.	<i>Do you know what teachers and students need for PBL? How do you find out? How do you decide what is essential to create the right conditions for PBL? Are student representatives included at the class or school level?</i>	<i>Have you mapped the learning opportunities available for PBL? What learning opportunities does your local environment offer? What suitable conditions can school management provide to support PBL?</i>	<i>How do school operations, facilities, environment, and resource management reflect the principles of sustainable living?</i>	<i>How does school management motivate teachers and create time and space for collaboration across subjects, planning, and teaching?</i>	<i>How do you maintain partnerships? What benefits do partners receive?</i>	School rules, internal guidelines, feedback from students, teachers, and parents.			

	Using local resources effectively. Ecological operation of the school and sustainable management of finances. Organizing a timetable that supports PBL									
2. COOPERATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY OF TEACHERS	2.1 Every school teacher continuously and regularly engages in professional development. Description: Teachers understand the purpose of PBL, its pedagogical aims, principles, and the PBL “ladder.” They are able to apply relevant teaching methods and integrate them effectively into their lessons. Teachers evaluate their work based on self-assessment and feedback gathered	Teachers reflect on and assess the application of all Five Key Characteristics of PBL .					Teacher plans, teacher portfolios, interviews with teachers and school management.			

ERS	from students, peers, and school management, and revise their teaching to achieve learning goals.					
	2.2 A collaborative community of teachers, where cooperation enhances the effectiveness of teaching and increases the impact on each student. Description: Teachers plan together, teach together, observe each other's classes, and provide constructive feedback.	The community of teachers reflects on and assesses the application of all Five Key Characteristics of PBL.	Meeting minutes from team meetings, teaching reports, video recordings, photos, and learning evidence.			

	2.3 Within the team of teachers, one teacher acts as the PBL leader (coordinator), who is experienced in implementing PBL and motivated to guide colleagues. Description: The coordinator initiates meetings, formulates themes and questions related to PBL, and facilitates discussions among colleagues and school management.	The coordinator supports the teacher community in reflecting on and assessing the application of all Five Key Characteristics of PBL.	Meeting minutes, interviews.			
	2.4 The community of teachers regularly consults with an external PBL expert (consultant or critical observer) to ensure quality and support professional growth.	The external consultant provides feedback to the teacher team and guides them in the application of all Five Key Characteristics of PBL.	Meeting minutes, reports.			

3. PL AC E BA SED LEA RNI NG (PB L)	3.1 Teachers plan and implement PBL taking into account the learning needs of each student.	<i>What is the role of students in PBL? What aspects can they influence (e.g., theme, lesson objectives, process, methods)?</i>	<i>Does your teaching plan use concrete local phenomena and examples? Does the community or surrounding environment often become your classroom? Are you successful in teaching about locally important themes or challenges, such as climate change? Does your teaching contribute to the improvement of the local community? Does your teaching help develop students' connection to the place?</i>	<i>Do you demonstrate the difference between sustainable and non-sustainable ways of life? Do you reinforce sustainable practices? Do you share and show the importance of nature preservation, respect for all forms of life, understanding the interconnectedness of phenomena, and developing students' ability to anticipate future outcomes?</i>	<i>How do you interconnect subjects? How do you apply a multidisciplinary approach when investigating a local phenomenon?</i>	<i>Who do you involve in teaching from outside the school? What is their role (e.g., expert, co-teacher, consultant, project partner)?</i>	Teachers' planning and reflection documents, interviews, learning evidence.			
	3.2 Teachers monitor the impact of their PBL teaching, especially on students' competency development. Focus Areas: Student participation and	<i>How has the level of participation and students' confidence in their influence changed? How do you know?</i>	<i>Has students' relationship with the place, including knowledge, perception, and interpretation, strengthened? How do you know this is happening?</i>	<i>Does students' sustainability competence develop (e.g., respect for all forms of life, foresight thinking about the future, applying sustainable solutions)? How is</i>	<i>Does students' systems and holistic thinking develop while investigating a particular phenomenon?</i>	<i>Does communication and cooperation with people or groups outside the classroom improve? Does students' understanding of the importance of social relationships, diversity of needs, and differing opinions grow?</i>	Teachers' reports and planning documents, student portfolios, learning evidence, interviews.			

	their confidence in their own influence. Development of students' relationship with and understanding of the place. Sustainability competence. Ability to apply interdisciplinary approaches Cooperation with different partners. Development of knowledge and skills in specific subject areas (e.g., languages, mathematics, natural sciences)			this observed for each student?						
	3.3 Teachers guide their students in collecting evidence of learning to help them recognize growth in competencies within PBL. Focus Areas: Student participation	<i>Do students reflect on their own participation? How have they progressed in their role?</i>	<i>Do students reflect on their relationship with the place where they live? What has this brought them?</i>	<i>Do students reflect on their reasoning and behavior from a sustainable living perspective? Are they aware of their progress over time?</i>	<i>Do students reflect on their experience applying knowledge and skills from different fields to solve practical problems?</i>	<i>Do students reflect on the local community around the school? What have they learned from these interactions?</i>	Student portfolios, collected learning evidence, interviews with students and teachers.			

and confidence in their own influence. Development of students' relationship with and understanding of the place. Sustainability competence. Ability to apply interdisciplinary approaches. Cooperation with different partners. Development of knowledge and skills in specific subject areas (e.g., languages, mathematics, natural sciences)										
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

6.2 Creating an Action Plan

Template: School Year Action Plan

1. INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Name of the school:

Address of the school:

School profile: (e.g. Where is the school located? How large it is - staff, students? How does it present itself?)

Key contact person at the school and their role:

Website of the school:

2. TEAM MEMBERS IN THE PROJECT

<i>Name</i>	<i>Teaching qualification, subject</i>	<i>Role in the team</i>	<i>Personal expectation the project of each member</i>

3. KEY SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN APPLYING PBL ACROSS THE WHOLE SCHOOL, BASED ON THE SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDE

Three Areas Applying Five Key Characteristics

1. Supportive School Management:

Where are we on the scale 0–5? Please describe your situation:

2. Cooperative and Learning Community of Teachers:

Where are we on the scale 0–5? Please describe your situation:

3. Place-Based Learning:

Where are we on the scale 0–5? Please describe your situation:

4. YEAR PLAN OF THE SCHOOL TEAM

Aim (SMART-formulated)

Guiding Questions Using Scaling:

- Where do you want to move on the scale in each Area?
- What does this change look like—what do you see, hear, and feel?
- What actions are needed to achieve this change?
- Is everyone on the team aligned and motivated? Is the goal realistic?

...

Impact of Our Aim on Students:

- What impact do we want to achieve for each student?
- How will we know that we have achieved it?

...

Common Plan to Achieve Our Aim (Sample Plan)

Include objectives, activities, responsible team members, timeline, and verification methods.

KEY STEPS: What actions do we need to take to achieve our aim?	DEADLINE: When does it need to be completed?	SOURCES and NEEDS: What resources, tools, or conditions need to be in place to carry out each step?	PERSON RESPONSIBLE

Further Work (to be done later, as team cooperation progresses)

- **Revision of Aim and Plan:** Midterm review and updates whenever needed.
- **Yearly Assessment:** Evaluate the overall cooperation, achievements, and progress at the end of the school year.

6.3 Evaluating and Reflecting

Student Portfolio for PBL (Evidence of Learning)

(This may also support teacher professional growth in Area 2: Collaborative and Supportive Team of Teachers.)

Purpose

The portfolio is designed to:

- *Systematically and continuously prioritize professional learning goals*
- *Gather materials related to one's own growth in a single, easily accessible place*
- *Reflect on and recognize one's own learning and adapt practices as needed*
- *Motivate professional development in the teaching career*

To Make It Work

- *It should be enjoyable and meaningful for teachers*
- *Participation should be voluntary*
- *Teachers should see clear professional value in using it*

Suggested Key Content

A. Professional Learning Plan

1. Starting Point – Analyzing My Teaching Career

- *Identify strengths, opportunities, and areas for improvement*
- *From a PBL perspective, consider where each teacher, including management, currently stands*

2. Professional Learning Goal

- *Define a clear learning goal for the school year: what you want to learn and how you plan to progress*

3. Plan

- *How will you achieve your learning goal as a teacher?*
- *What resources or support do you need?*

4. Impact

- *How will you know your learning has positively impacted students?*

B. Gathering Material – Mapping My Learning Goal

- *Lesson plans and outputs from lessons*
- *Student reflections*
- *Feedback from colleagues, school management, and external consultants (e.g., tandem teaching, open lesson observations)*
- *Seminar or workshop materials related to your learning goal*
- *Photos of your work, video recordings*
- *Self-reflection notes or markings – including ideas for adjustments if things do not work as planned*

Possible Formats

- **Paper format:** *Folder with sheets of paper, notebook, binder, or box*
- **Digital format:** *Online platform or web-based collection*
- **Combination:** *Both paper and digital resources*

7. Project Information and Partner Organizations



This methodology is developed within the framework of an international collaboration among five partner organizations:

SEVER (Czech Republic) - the methodological center for **Place-Based Learning (PBL)** in the Czech Republic since 2004. It specializes in experiential learning, community learning, outdoor education, and whole-school approaches. It has a nationwide network of schools (School for Sustainable Living) and provides teacher training, consultancy, and educational programs.

Website: <https://www.sever.ekologickavychova.cz>

Green Foundation (Slovakia) – operates educational, environmental, and social innovation programs. Its flagship program Roots & Shoots (based on service learning and SDGs) is implemented in more than 140 Slovak schools. It emphasizes local community engagement, youth leadership, and sustainability competencies.

Website: <http://greenfoundation.eu/en>

New Horizons Foundation (Romania) - organization promoting experiential learning, service learning (SL), and community engagement. It coordinates the largest SL movement in Romania through IMPACT clubs and the Community Service-Learning Schools program.

Website: <https://www.noi-orizonturi.ro>

ENO Schoolnet ry (Finland) - a global school network based in Finland, focusing on climate awareness, sustainability, and collaborative international learning. It connects thousands of schools worldwide in

environmental projects.

Website: <https://enoprogramme.org>

Fundacja Forum Inicjatyw Społecznych (Poland) - focuses on social initiatives, civic involvement, and support for local communities. It works with schools, local authorities, and NGOs to develop participatory approaches in education.

Website: <https://www.ffis.edu.pl>



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Community as a Classroom is a project funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union under the action KA220-SCH – Cooperation partnerships in school education, funding agreement no. 2023-1-CZ01-KA220-SCH-000165069.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.