

Learning to Deal With Conflicts and Cultivating Empathy at School



Introduction

Could your school use some assistance to deal with conflicts in a constructive way? My name is Nina Koevoets and I'm the author of the children's book *The First Great Journey* (available in Dutch, English, Italian and Greek) and a trainer in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding, educating youth workers through the Erasmus+ program since 2015. Schools can invite me as an expert with Erasmus+ funding (Key Action 1).

As a guest expert, I can provide an interactive lesson for students from 7 to 14 years old. The book serves as a starting point to reflect on how we can deal with differences, work together, and listen to each other with empathy.

After discussion and creative processing (drawing, writing) children can go through a mediation process to solve conflicts by role-play and teachers can practice how they can support a healthy school climate.

Within Erasmus+ Key Action 1 (KA1), schools can include an “Invited Expert” in their mobility project. This means that:

- Erasmus+ can contribute to costs such as preparation, implementation and travel,
- my contribution is embedded in the school's international and pedagogical goals,
- the school submits the application, but I am happy to work with the school to determine how this activity can be appropriately formulated within an Erasmus+ application.

The book in short



An adventurous and educational story with everyday lessons for children, parents and teachers.

The First Great Journey is a beautifully illustrated book for children aged 7–9. Four young bird siblings go on their first big migration. Along the way, they face disagreements, get separated, and must find their way back to each other... learning important lessons about listening, taking responsibility, and working together.

This adventure introduces children to peaceful conflict resolution, based on real-life practices like (peer)

mediation and restorative justice. It inspires them to problem solve and reflect on the importance of cooperation, listening and developing empathy.

Skills such as empathy, cooperation, nonviolent communication and responsible decision-making are essential for a healthy school climate and active citizenship, yet teachers are not yet very familiar with ways to deal with these in an engaging and age-appropriate way.

The children's book *The First Great Journey* provides a narrative through which pupils can reflect on conflict, responsibility and cooperation in a concrete and accessible manner. Using literature as a starting point allows pupils to connect abstract values to lived experience and personal reflection. Moreover, students practice language skills as the activity will be in English.

The project will also support innovation in teaching through creative and participatory methods and strengthening the international dimension of school education.

Expected Impact

On pupils:

- increased awareness of emotions, choices and responsibility
- improved ability to express opinions and listen to others
- greater confidence in addressing conflict constructively

On teachers and the school:

- inspiration and practical tools for integrating SEL in the classroom
- contribution to a positive, inclusive and reflective school climate
- strengthened international outlook through Erasmus+ cooperation

A Teacher's Review

In May 2025 I was invited to five schools, two primary and three secondary schools in Northern Italy. One of the teachers shared:

“Nina's book is very useful for addressing the topic of non-violent conflict management in an educational context. It has been used at the Comprehensive Primary School of Demonte, Cuneo. The students appreciated the story, the discussions in the classroom, and the author's presence during Europe Week. It was also important to discuss the topic in both Italian and English in class, in order to address it in a cross-curricular manner. Also other schools read the book and continue to work with it in the current school year, (with new classes) as they saw the book helped the children step by step to resolve their conflicts more peacefully.”

- Cristina Broseghini, primary school teacher Demonte



Two of the three primary school classes in Demonte, listening to the explanation of their task.