



# *REciprocal maieutic Approach pathways enhancing Critical Thinking*

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## D7.1 SUPPORT FOR POLICY REFORMS



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## Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary .....	4
2. Systemic Level.....	6
2.1. Integrate RMA in educational curriculum .....	6
2.2. Create a teaching program.....	8
2.3. Create a network of teachers .....	9
3. Institutional and Community Level .....	10
3.1. Create an optimal learning space for implementing RMA.....	10
3.2. Tailor teaching practices .....	12
3.3. Support REACT workshops as external experts.....	13
3.4. Refine the RMA Manual.....	14



# 1. Executive Summary

The Reciprocal maieutic Approach: pathways to enhancing Critical Thinking project (REACT) intends to develop and implement an innovative methodology for the enhancement of critical thinking skills acquisition and to foster inclusive education focusing on values such as tolerance and acceptance of diversity as an enriching value. The first step is the application of the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) through dialogue to discuss and discover the process that is the seed of intolerance, and to better understand how prejudices and stereotypes are created. The use of RMA also aims to motivate teachers, students, and parents to learn autonomously following the Montessori motto “teach me how to do it by myself”. The piloting of the REACT project is done in four partner countries in the EU (Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, and Spain) and has proved to foster dialogue, reflection, empathy, and critical thinking among students in secondary schools and vocational training centres.

However, certain limitations have been recognised during the use and piloting of the RMA laboratories. The methodology is extremely effective, prompting enthusiastic responses from both teachers and students. The approach cannot, however, serve as a stand-alone basis for developing a whole subject or program. It can and should form part of school curriculums as it is an invaluable tool for enabling teachers to understand students’ feelings, aspirations and frustrations, and for students to become more aware of their own attitudes and prejudices.

The successful implementation of the RMA involves overcoming some fundamental barriers that were detected during the project implementation. Content-heavy curriculums leave limited time for this type of activity which requires time in order for significant learning to occur. The teacher training involved in preparation for the implementation of the approach may meet resistance from more traditional teachers particularly in terms of the role that RMA requires of them: as guide acting as a peer with students which may challenge some teachers’ ideas of their role in the classroom. A lack of institutional support and planning may result in a lack of continuity and the eventual disappearance of the RMA approach.

These, and other identified barriers could be addressed and overcome by taking actions at system, institutional and individual level. Below, we present some key recommendations for such actions. The immediate target of these recommendations are authorities, institutions,



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and policy makers at European Union (EU) and national level, municipal agents, administrative school bodies, students' and/or parents' associations, educators' organizations and the civil society.



## 2. Systemic Level

### 2.1. Integrate RMA in educational curriculum

**Aim:** The integration of this methodology will facilitate social inclusion and the elimination of stereotypes through a learning process based on dialogue. The RMA has pedagogic added value enhancing EU common values, promoting critical thinking, helping students to express themselves, to think critically and to work in groups in order to find elements of change and improvement. At an institutional level thinking about and promoting inclusive education with students and parents may enhance institutional policies and educational work.

#### **Actions**

- Create a recognition system for good practices in RMA, to identify and recognise educative centres that develop these methodologies. This will encourage schools to start applying RMA and maintain it over time.
- Introduce RMA as a transversal approach to be included in different subjects, as this methodology can be tackled from many different perspectives and applied to many different topics and purposes (English, Science, History...) as a step in curricular reform.
- Organize seminars in different countries to discuss experiences and define common actions. Create these forums to share what is being done in each country and extrapolate good practices to other contexts.
- Implement actions about RMA that are included in the school strategic plan or school documents. This should come from the school leadership.
- Work with the educational community to share experiences about the use of RMA in the school.
- Encourage students to conduct sessions alone either in or outside the school
- Use the RMA as a 'gateway to complexity', a means of working on the development of critical thinking skills in all areas of the curriculum.



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## **Relevant stakeholders**

Decision-makers at EU and national level – European Commission (EC), ministries of education, regional inspectorates, municipalities, and school staff and administrations (depending on country-specific arrangements).



## 2.2. Create a teaching program

**Aim:** This will allow the training of teachers in RMA methodology and the consequent application to their classes and adaptation to their contents and curriculum objectives.

### Actions

- Adapt the curricular content to all the different contexts of an educative center: institutional, social, families, students ...
- Offer RMA as a permanent training course for teachers. Include it in the official training catalogue offered by public institutions, to make it easily available to any school or teacher willing to start applying it.
- Organise meeting with educative communities or public government organizations to present them the project, show them good practices and experiences, and so boost the creation of programmes that promote the use of this methodology.
- Introduce the RMA as an active methodology in university programmes (degrees and master level courses in education).

### Relevant stakeholders

Decision-makers at EU and national level – EC, ministries of education, regional inspectorates, municipalities, and school administrations (depending on country-specific arrangements), as well as universities.





## 2.3. Create a network of teachers

**Aim:** The creation of an international virtual network of “Educators in RMA”, through which teachers from different countries can keep in contact and share their experiences and knowledge.

### **Actions**

- Train more teachers, who can train more professionals in turn, so a network of trainers is developed to extend the implementation of the RMA methodology creating, good practices, experiences, and shared knowledge.
- Offer technical support and consultancy services relating to how to apply this methodology in a class, how to solve difficulties, and how to adapt the methodology to the particularities and specific needs of every school.
- Open a directory in the institutional project website with all the teachers and/or educational centres which have adopted this methodology, as well as a forum for the exchange of good practices among RMA practitioners.

### **Relevant stakeholders**

School staff and administrations, local and international parents’, teachers’ and students’ associations/councils, civil society.



## 3. Institutional and Community Level

### 3.1. Create an optimal learning space for implementing RMA

**Aim:** This will involve the adaptation of physical spaces for the adequate development of RMA laboratories in every school, as well their compromise to provide enough time in the school calendar to implement them. Quality time and appropriate learning spaces are the backbone of RMA. Spaces can be developed both inside the educative centre facilities, and outside as well.

#### Actions

- Generate time slots in the school schedule to develop this methodology, within subjects or in a context outside the regular teaching schedule.
- Involve schools in planning and creating new classroom physical settings specifically for RMA, as specific spaces to develop the laboratories will be needed.
- Guarantee those physical spaces are big enough to accommodate groups of students seated in circles, with the necessary furniture involved (chairs, whiteboards...).
- Guarantee the willingness of schools to be physically transformed according to what students participating in RMA activities may identify or suggest.
- Organise field trips, social retreats, or get-togethers as more playful contexts in which this methodology can be implemented. This will provide the opportunity to share with and open up the RMA workshops to other members of the schools' educative community: families, local associations, sports clubs, NGOs...
- Prepare and develop a plan of action for parental involvement with activities involving RMA.



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## **Relevant stakeholders**

Decision-makers at EU and national level – EC, ministries of education, regional inspectorates, municipalities, school staff and administrations (depending on country-specific arrangements), local and international parents', teachers' and students' associations/councils, civil society.



## 3.2. Tailor teaching practices

**Aim:** The appointment of “teacher of reference in RMA” as an ambassador in every school, with the required training, knowledge, and experience to train his/her own colleagues in the development of RMA methodology. This will ease the adaptation of the laboratories to the peculiar context of each classroom and/or educative centre.

### **Actions**

- Name a “teacher of reference in RMA” and train as many teachers as possible in each school, trying to cover all the different academic areas (social sciences, health, humanities, technology, languages...).
- Offer technical support within each school through a reference teacher, with the aim of adapting the methodology to the different specific arising needs. This will grant the educative centre a quality trainer who will help to solve the difficulties in the implementation of RMA laboratories from a deep knowledge of the culture, know-how, academic curriculum, and students of the centre, as he/she will be a member of its own teaching staff.

### **Relevant stakeholders**

Decision-makers at EU and national level – EC, ministries of education, regional inspectorates, municipalities, and school administrations (depending on country-specific arrangements).



### 3.3. Support REACT workshops as external experts

**Aim:** Availability of the RMA teachers as external experts to guide and advise those non-exclusively educative organizations (but with similar social-educational goals), which are willing to implement this methodology as part of their activities. The support to these workshops would strengthen the benefits of RMA methodology, and the enhancement of critical thinking in local communities and broadly in society.

#### **Actions:**

- Take an active role in planning interventions in schools.
- Strengthen cooperation between non-exclusively educative organizations with schools applying RMA methodologies.
- Present this methodology in other centre/organizations that are not familiar with it and show them examples of the laboratories and their results.
- Find the way to extrapolate RMA laboratories and their methodology to non-regulated educational contexts, such as NGOs, youth associations, foundations...
- Facilitate the training of non-exclusively organizational teachers and teacher exchange/supervising network.

#### **Relevant stakeholders**

School staff and administrations, local and international parents', teachers' and students' associations/councils, civil society.



## 3.4. Refine the RMA Manual

**Aim:** The RMA Manual is the basis for the design and development of RMA laboratories and must be updated. New experiences and good practices from around the world must be incorporated periodically to the Manual to improve it and maintain its relevance.

### **Actions**

- Make procedures clearer and more detailed as the implementation of RMA workshops expands, faces new challenges, and explores new socio-educational contexts.
- Add more instructions about broader concepts which may be tackled by RMA.
- Collect the best practices of every country through the network or RMA teachers, add them to the RMA Manual, and establish a periodicity to do this in.
- Include a Q&A section in the Manual with frequent questions about the design of the laboratories and the development of the methodology. The international teacher's network/directory will facilitate the identification of these aspects.
- Make the updated Manual available and easily accessible through the website of the project and send a notification to the teachers of the international directory every time an updated version is launched.

### **Relevant stakeholders**

School staff and administrations, local and international parents', teachers', and students' associations/councils.