

# ABOUT THE JUMPSTART PROGRAMME OF THE ZÖLD KAKAS LÍCEUM

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This is a story about Kristóf, Noi, Betti, Bendegúz, and the others — about a bunch of kids. This is a story about Lívia, the teacher. This is a story about Zöld Kakas, the school. Let me tell you a story about all of them.

We founded our high school, Zöld Kakas Líceum, ten years ago, for students who have not been successful in other high schools. For all of us who work at this school, there is nothing as interesting and beautiful as to work with these young people. It is not an easy job — far from it. Everyday we have to face new difficulties, and every day we look for new solutions.

Looking for new solutions is how we found restorative techniques — conflict resolution conferences, to be precise. We've learned this method and have successfully employed it to mediate all types of conflicts — conflicts between two students, between a student and a teacher, and also between two teachers. We have succeeded



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in integrating this method into our daily lives to such an extent that when someone walks down the corridor with a plate of cookies, the students start going, ‘Aha! There’s going to be a Face to Face.’ By now, everyone knows what we use this method for, and exactly what is going to happen.

However, we soon found out that this is just a single tool. And tools alone, by themselves, are never enough. It became ever more important for us to deepen our perspectives, in addition to using more and more tools. Here, we call these perspectives restorative.

By the time Lívia Hadházi’s class graduated in 2005, it became obvious that the ‘Face to Face’ method, these restorative techniques, are so exciting and so important, that she wanted to be looking into them in the next year. In our school, all homeroom teachers are entitled to a sabbatical year after they’ve graduated their classes. Lívia said she wanted to spend her sabbatical year of 2005–2006 looking into restorative techniques. The school leadership encouraged her to do so, as we all thought it would be very important to integrate this method into the school’s everyday life. And so it came to pass that Lívia travelled to meet with Ted Wachtel. When she returned to Hungary, she put her experiences into a programme we ended up calling Jumpstart. We had many debates and meetings on setting up our own programme as we tried to incorporate all the specifics of our student population and of our school. Lívia put together a team to put Jumpstart into practice. This initial team expanded over time; the psychologist was joined by a student in psychology, and by the second term we also had an art teacher.

To start this special programme, we collected a group of children we had not seen before. Lívia looked for students that had already finished their eighth grade, but had not yet started high-school studies. She contacted them through teaching counsellors, so she collected a group of students we had never worked with before. I don’t have to tell you that all of the students recommended by the teaching counsellors came to us with a whole lot of problems.

In the fall of 2006, our special Jumpstart class entered school. We thought we’d never put so much work into a programme before; we’d never been so prepared. And what happened is what tends to happen when a long-expected child is finally born. You’ve read all the books,

you’ve bought all the toys and accessories, and yet when the child arrives you start to wonder about all the things you just simply didn’t think of. I have to tell you, when those dozen or so Jumpstart kids first showed up at the school, they turned everything upside down in no time at all. Our older students just looked on, completely stunned: Who are these uncontrollable greenhorns?

Our initial idea of intensive support combined with intensive oversight didn’t quite turn out as we wanted. It’s a classic tale, really — you can read about it in all teachers’ manuals — following the first few weeks of the honeymoon, expect stormy skies. By November, with a season of heavy emotional thunderstorms, we asked ourselves often whether this was even worth the bother. At the time, even Lívia, who conceived of the programme, just stood there, weathering the storm, and not really understanding why things turned out the way they did. It was obvious that our tools were inadequate, and it was a welcome break to finally have someone to turn to for support. Vidia Negrea kept an eye on how the events developed every week, and she provided great support to the team. This was not only organizational support and leadership support. We also needed, and received, team counselling and professional advice.

In September, at the beginning of the school year, the enthusiastic teachers and the equally enthusiastic students flowed into the school and plastered their own rules all over the classroom. As a result of their enthusiasm, they made so many rules that we could hardly keep up with reading them, let alone remember them. As a result of intensive oversight, every time someone wound up breaking one of these rules, everyone sat down and talked it over: what happened, who was involved and what impact did the events have on them, how could it all be restored to a good situation. I don’t have to tell you that they ended up doing nothing else but sit at restorative meetings. You can’t keep on doing this all the time, and eventually both the teachers and the students got worn out. Thank God, at the turn of November and December, they put aside all teaching classes to sit down once and for all and decide on some new rules. There would only be three rules, but they are to be strictly adhered to. They wrote these three rules on posters and gladly tore down all the other posters with all the other rules. They found out that too many rules do not provide for a

safe and secure environment; it turned the environment into a prison. Tearing down these rules provided great relief to all, and they were able to start rebuilding with this newfound liberty. And the reconstruction was a success.

Then we had the afternoon programmes. Almost every afternoon our students participated in some sort of group activity: self-awareness group, man-woman group, addiction group, child-adult group, team-building group, feedback group — one for almost every day. In a few months they got so tired of it all that just on hearing the word ‘group’, they were ready to run off into the wilderness. At first we were still hopeful, but the signs of fatigue became ever more obvious. After long deliberations, we realized that the kids had already participated in similar counselling situations. As most of those attempts were failures, they tended to have unpleasant memories of the process. Our colleagues were faced with difficulties stemming from either running up against a brick wall and receiving no cooperation, or from the opening of great wounds and having to figure out how to put the genie back into the bottle.

The teachers took a deep breath and nudged the programme in a different direction. From here on, team-building group was really team play, with everyone finding joy in it. It was so much more fun to go out in the courtyard and play table tennis or basketball or just do anything that involved moving around. This did wonders to, in fact, building a team. One afternoon was spent doing artwork, instead of intense group therapy. Jumpstart became a separate art faculty within the school. Once again we experienced the personality-building effects of art and were also fortunate to see wonderful pieces of art result from the process. The Jumpstarters were present at prom night, at the graduation ceremony, and at the gala reception of the Arts Day. They became highly accepted at the school, as everyone could see how very talented these young persons were, not just some yahoos that found their way to the school and didn’t even know what they were doing there.

Our mornings weren’t devoid of problems either. Most students thought that skill-development courses weren’t even something to learn from. A few people rebelled straight out, saying their time was more valuable than that and that they wanted to spend the time study-

ing ‘serious’ subjects. They thought that courses such as ‘orienting in space and time’ and others with similarly funny names and content were way out of line for what a school was supposed to be teaching. They became very tense about when they would start learning serious things.

It became obvious to us that this determination should not go to waste. The students with the best results from the first term were allowed to sit in on ninth-grade classes. Therefore Noi, Bendegúz, Betti, and Kristóf studied arts, music, and physics with the ninth graders. They received a certificate of completion for these courses, and next year, when they will all enter ninth grade, these four will no longer have to attend these classes, as they have already completed them. An unexpected windfall was that the Jumpstarters’ enthusiasm increased work morale for everyone else. The ninth graders had to study their subjects day in and day out. For the Jumpstarters, these subjects were not an obligation, they were a reward. They loved it and worked very hard.

And then we had to face issues on the individual level. From time to time, almost every week, we had to deal with issues that were obviously impossible to solve within the group. We found behaviour problems that the group was just not prepared to deal with. We had to look for individual discussions and individual solutions. From this need came one of the cornerstones of the Jumpstart programme — every student is to participate in a series of sessions tailored at solving his or her behavioural and learning problems. As a case in point, let me tell you about Ricsi, as his story is one of the dearest to us all.

Ricsi was the kind of kid that by himself was able to destroy an entire class session. He could never stay put, he could never keep quiet, and he would never do what he was supposed to be doing. He did all these things very loudly, too. Still, he was such a sweet and likable kid that we fell in love with him anyway. During one of the team meetings we decided to teach Ricsi a lesson: He was to behave well, not disturb the class, keep quiet, pay attention, work hard, and so on. The trick was that he didn’t have to be ‘good’ for very long: five minutes to start with, then ten minutes. He got up to fifteen minutes of being good by the end of the year. We controlled all this by setting an alarm on the mobile phone we always have in class. The teachers holding class would

give Ricsi a token every time the alarm would sound. If Ricsi did not behave, they told him he was not entitled to a token this time around. By the end of the school year, Ricsi was able to stay put for the duration of entire classes — three times fifteen minutes. At the end of the day, the whole class counted up the number of tokens Ricsi had. At the end of the week, when everybody saw the large pile of tokens Ricsi had amassed, they broke out in cheers and congratulated him. We never thought Ricsi would be a student who could sit through a class; now we are certain that he would be welcome in ninth grade.

The 2006-2007 school year came to an end, and so did the time to draw conclusions from it all.

The first and most important conclusion is that regardless of how good a method is, even if it is the best there is, by itself a method is not enough. We have to come up with an entirely new way of looking at issues, founded on solid bases. These solid bases set the teachers free and allow them the flexibility of using efficient solutions for given situations. We need a continuous dialogue between students and teachers. The harder the task, the more serious this cooperation has to be. We can only shape the students if we can shape ourselves, the teachers.

Our second conclusion was that the group is not a substitute for individual attention, personal oversight, and personal attention. In the traditional classes each student has a mentor, but for Jumpstart we did not plan for mentors at all. Slowly, however, informal mentoring relationships emerged, and these reinforced the relationship of not only students, but also the teachers. Youngsters and adults alike developed stronger bonds with the school. For example, a college and a university trainee developed into our colleagues over this single school year.

My story is almost over. Where to go from here?

We've closed a chapter in the history of Zöld Kakas. The Jumpstart programme was a one-year-long experiment. We've used its findings to enrich our day-to-day work. Next year, we'll also have a pre-ninth-grade class. We'll be using the successful elements of the Jumpstart programme in this class. We'll have the daily opening and closing sessions; we'll have the large feedback session; we'll have our restorative techniques. In addition to the pre-ninth-grade class, we'll also be using successful elements of the Jumpstart programme in the ninth

and tenth grades. Homeroom teachers want to use certain Jumpstart elements for team building. We are deepening our work as mentors; we'll be learning new elements of restorative techniques and plan to use them all in our daily work. In fact, we are making a conscious effort to move our organizational culture and outlook towards more effective restorative techniques.

Lívía's story also goes on, although the direction is different. She's not here, because she has a new, beautiful and very challenging task in front of her — she is nursing her recently born baby. Lívía helped for a long time to grow the children of others — now she will be concentrating on helping her own children to grow. She's with her first now already, and we wish her all the best.

We also have the nine Jumpstart kids. Kristóf, Noi, Bendegúz, Betti, and the others are now proudly part of the ninth graders. They have a place of their own here. They've changed a lot over that one year, and we've changed a lot in them over that one year. At the end of the year, they summarized what happened to them: We've learned punctuality. We've learned to respect our fellows. We've learned to cooperate. We've learned to be serious in serious situations

What more could we expect? Thank you for your attention.