



**TITLE:**

Manual: „How to design a learning experience“

**PROJECT:**

“Learning in Youth Work of 21st century”, funded by the JUGEND für Europa, the German National Agency for the Erasmus+ Youth programme.

**Project partners:**

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Youth Power/UNG KRAFT, Sweden  
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**Berlin, 2022**

# Table of Contents

<i>1 - Introduction to Learning – defining learning</i> .....	4
Adult Learning Theory .....	7
<i>2 - Types of learning and types of learners</i> .....	9
Types of learning in non-formal educational activities .....	11
Individual learning preferences and styles .....	14
A few words about Learning zones .....	17
.....	20
<i>3 - Participatory learning principles in Non-formal education with young people</i> .....	20
.....	22
<i>4 - Learning in different aspects of youth work and different settings</i> .....	22
<i>5 - How to identify target groups and their needs</i> .....	25
Learning outcomes .....	26
Learning expectations, contributions, and challenges .....	28
<i>6 - Developing objectives of the learning activity</i> .....	29
<i>7 - Methods in non-formal education with youth</i> .....	33
Experiential learning cycle as a methodological base for designing a learning activity .....	34
<i>8 - Educational activity flow and group dynamic</i> .....	40
<i>9 - Debriefing in educational activities</i> .....	44
Debriefing flow .....	44
<i>10 - Discussion in educational activities</i> .....	48
<i>11 - Successful evaluation in the learning activities</i> .....	55
The Kirkpatrick Model .....	56
The CIPP Model .....	56
The Brinkerhoff Model .....	56
Systems Approach (Bushnell) Model .....	57
<i>12 - How to create successful educational activities</i> .....	62
.....	66
<i>13 - Challenges and obstacles in implementing learning activities</i> .....	66
<i>14 - Techniques and tools in educational work with youth (for face-to-face, online, and combined settings)</i> .....	69
<i>Resources:</i> .....	74

# 1 - Introduction to Learning – defining learning

“Welcome to our learning journey”

Being an educational practitioner, youth trainer, and facilitator didn't help to remember the definition of learning I “learned” many years ago while studying psychology. Memory curve happens naturally, and the “correct” answer is forgotten. To define learning, I needed to take a peek at my university textbook about the psychology of learning. I could look online for some other definitions, it would be faster for soreness, but this textbook was my first encounter with the complexity of learning as a science subject. I remember a long introductory discussion on forty pages about how to formulate a learning definition with scientific, logical, and methodological status, which will respect all different psychological learning theories. And the same feelings rise again while looking for the correct answer – a mixture of confusion, discomfort, ambiguity, and curiosity. This is how many of our participants feel when we are at the beginning of the training. Then someone from the team says: “Welcome to our learning journey,” and we start.

This is instead of welcoming words, just to break the ice.

To paraphrase my professor of learning psychology from the book of the same title, learning can be defined as a **relatively specific and permanent change visible in behaviour or change in a person's inner world, which can be outer in a particular behaviour by a specific circumstance. Learning is a result of previous activity or experience of individuals, both external and visible or purely mental or cognitive** (Radonjic, S. 1992, p.35-36).

**Learning is closely related to many cognitive processes such as perception, observation, reading, thinking, memorising, and focusing, but without an equal sign to learning.** These processes can be understood as sources of learning, and when they leave endless trails, we say that person learned something.

Defining learning can be as complex as understanding the behaviours of human beings. Ancient Greek philosophers were curious about how humans learn. Today, one can look at different sciences – neuro or biosciences- and focus on the plasticity of the brain, pedagogy, and the relationship between maturation and the possibility of learning in different stages of child development. Even from the perspective of one science, psychology, there are more learning theories/hypotheses about how learning happens. Educational theorists and practitioners see these theories as a source of possible approaches to teaching, managing learning in groups, communicating with learners, and as foundations for planning and designing learning activities.

By the 19th century, psychologists began to answer this question with scientific studies. The goal was to understand objectively how people learn and then develop teaching approaches accordingly.

In the 20th century, the debate among educational theorists centred around behaviour (external) **focus theory versus cognitive** (internal) **focus psychology**. Or in other words, do people learn by responding to external stimuli or using their brains to actively construct knowledge from what they already know and new data

This is just an overview of five primary educational learning theories (Fairbanks, B. 2021., McLeod, S 2020)

- Behaviourism learning theory

As all behaviour is just a response to environmental – external stimuli, the same is with learning. It happens by conditioning, classical or operant, when the learner responds (behaves) and gets a reward (or not). Rewards can be very concrete and lead to essential needs satisfaction, symbolic ones – like school marks or social. Learning is mainly connected with memorising and how to fill in learners' “memory banks” most efficiently. Following this theory, the learner is primarily passive, sitting, listening, and writing, and the educator, is the active participant aiming to pass the knowledge.

In the conventional learning situation, operant conditioning applies mainly to class issues and pupils' behaviour rather than learning content. It is very relevant for shaping skill performance. A straightforward way to support new behaviour educators, originating from the theory of reinforcement, is to provide constructive feedback on learner performance.

- Cognitive learning theories

Learning theory puts the learner's cognitive processes in the centre – reasoning, understanding, and memory. These theories focused more on children's cognitive development but served as inspiration for researching learning regardless of age. The main central postulate was – children are actively constructing their knowledge of the world. This is the story about the active participation of learners and considering them as a resource – when learning something new, individuals act, process, and construct their understanding of a topic based on previous experiences and knowledge. This is how learning becomes meaningful for the ones who learn. From this theory, educational practitioners embedded a learner-centred approach and (real or imagined) problem solving as learning through discovery.

A significant thinker from this conceptual stand is Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist whose 100 years old work still serves as fundamentals for today's research about sociocultural interventions in human development. In an overview of Vygotsky's theory, Saul Macleod (Macleod, S. 2022) summarises that “community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning." This sociocultural theory views human cognitive development as the result of our relations with more knowledgeable adults or peers. Our knowledge, values, beliefs first exist as something “in-between” us and others, then after being communicated (through language our thinking becomes possible), we develop our “internalised” mental constructions – thoughts, concepts, meanings.

The concept of the more knowledgeable others is integrally related to the second important principle of Vygotsky's work, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This principle inspired the concepts of Learning zones we will mention later when we speak about different learning styles and how to develop the flow of learning in the group. Vygotsky focused more on children, but we can relate it to any learning relationship. ZPD represents the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve through guidance and encouragement from someone who knows a bit more. This means it is impossible to learn things in a meaningful way if they are too far from us (the Zone of Future Development).

- Constructivism learning theory

Constructivism is ‘an approach to learning which holds that people actively construct or make their knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner’ (Elliott et al., 2000, p. 256 as cited by Mcleod, S. 2019). People acquire knowledge as they actively experiment with the world and create new meanings and understandings based on previous experience. A learner is not only active but a creator as well. Receiving information must be followed by thinking and reflecting on it. Knowledge is a personal construct – learning activity that we design may result in different learning outcomes for participants, as their views and interpretations differ. At the same time, theory introduces the importance of the social environment for learning – all knowledge is socially constructed. Learning happens in interaction with parents, teachers, peers, community, and participants. Language is one example of it. Through language (concepts), we internalize social roles, rules, norms, and understanding of the world and ourselves. But before we integrate different concepts, information learners actively look for meaning in previous personal experiences. We say that “there is one workshop with the group and the one in “participants' heads.” Here you can find the origins of our role:

- to create a collaborative alliance in a group willing to engage in problem-solving educational environments actively
- to support learners in finding new meaning by asking open-ended questions
- to encourage learners to ask questions to each other and enable multiple perspectives
- to support the development of meta-learning competencies (Learning to learn)
- experiential design activities contradict current beliefs and knowledge, encourage discussion, etc.

- Humanistic learning theories

Recognised through 3 theories of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and James Bugental, as summarised by Chris Hare (Hare, E. 2019, Nov 12), humanism brings the learner not only to the centre of the learning process but is the authority who determines goals, materials and value their learning. People are unique, they bring their own “inside” context with them, and their whole being is involved in learning – thoughts, observations, emotions, body, and experience. This also means hungry learners will have difficulty sharing or reflecting if their basic need remains unsatisfied. Learning is closely connected with human capacities for creativity, personal growth, and choice. This theory introduced experiential learning meaning that learners must be actively involved in choosing what and how they will learn. They set personal standards for their achievements – how much they need to learn and self-assess their outcomes. Educator’s role is closer to coaching – helping set individual goals and strategies in a safe and non-judgmental environment and encouraging each perspective and meaning based on experience.

Following the needs of the group – learner-centred approach, taking into account individual differences/personalities, learning preferences, personal goals, voluntary participation, and importance of the whole environment for the learning –we meet in education activities within youth work.

- Connectivism learning theory

Living in the modern world with constantly growing knowledge puts this theory into young people's reality. More now than ever, it seems that what we know today is not so important for tomorrow. From this perspective, the ability to learn for the future is crucial. Theory completely shifts focus from memorising and memorising (we have devices for that) to how and where to find information, analyse, prioritise... The essence of learning is making learning networks. It is not an internal, individualistic act but based on the existence of a diversity of opinions and

sharing in a learning community. The theory is influenced by technology but can be transferred in our youth learning settings in multiple ways. Through the lenses of this theory, learning in a group can be seen as making links between the knowledge and experiences of participants. In such a learning community, the role of the educator can be to support making connections. Digital devices are sources of information and tools for networking and are an integral part of the learning environment. However, learning is still a “socially connected process,” as a founder of this theory says (Siemens, G. 2014, January 22).

As young people, we work with are closer to adulthood, here we are adding andragogy principles for adult learning, which are deeply embedded in the educational approach of youth work.

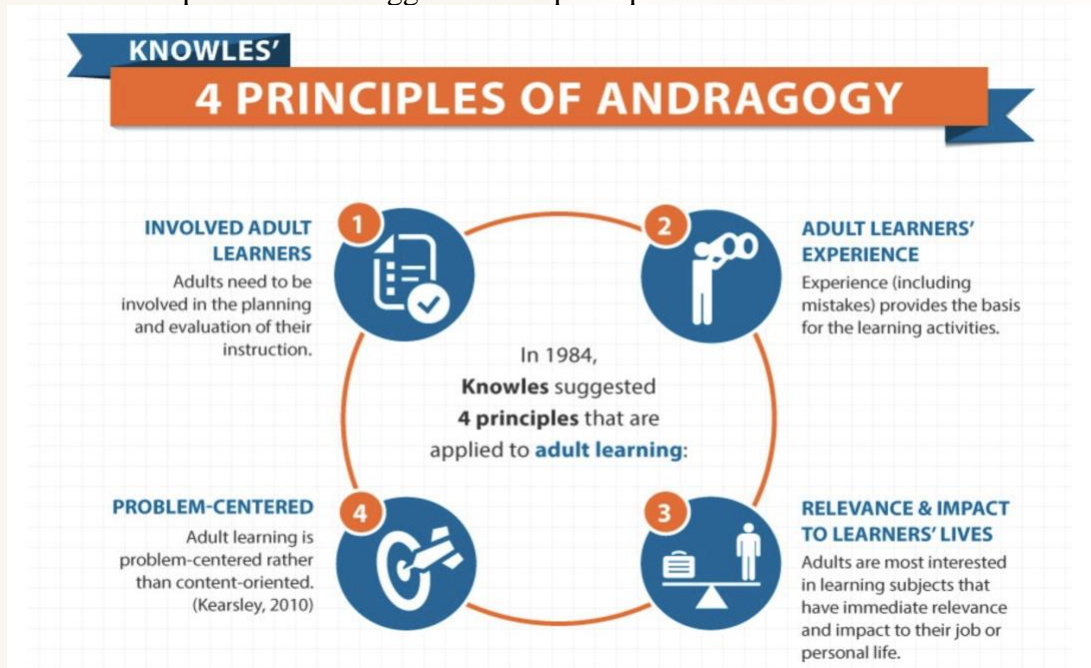
## Adult Learning Theory

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles introduced the adult learning theory and set the principles for andragogy as the art and science of adult learning (Pappas, C. 2013, May 9). The baseline of the new concept was that there are differences in how adults learn as opposed to children. Nowadays, practice and research have shown that his assumptions do not apply to all adults, nor do they not apply to children.

In working with young people, many of his principles can be easily recognised as learning principles in youth work. From his main assumptions, we can say that adults learn when:

1. they can self-direct their learning
2. they can use past learning experiences
3. they are/feel ready to learn and understand the value of it
4. they recognise reasons to learn – problems to solve
5. they have internal motivation/purpose, passion-driven

From these assumptions author suggested four principles educators should consider:



Infographic retrieved from <https://elearninginfographics.com/adult-learning-theory-andragogy-infographic/>.

From these principles, one can recognise the main principles of non-formal education for young people, such as active participation, learner centeredness, and experiential learning but more about them you can find in the following chapter.

Suppose all these theories weren't inspiring enough to think about how you would define learning. In that case, you could look at some quotes from all different ages and cultures collected in the "Learning out of the BOX" cards (Evrard & Markovic & Nemetlu-Unal, 2013) and think about how they associate with your understanding and so far, experience in learning.

*"The highest activity a human being can attain is learning for understanding because to understand is to be free."* de Spinoza, philosopher.

*"All development is self-development since other people can't do your learning for you."* Peter Honey, psychologist

*"It is what we know already that often prevents us from learning,"* Claude Bernard, physiologist.

*"He who learns but does not think is lost! He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger!"* Confucius was a teacher, philosopher, and politician.

*"Experience is not what happens to you; it is what you do with what happens to you."* Aldous L. Huxley, writer and editor.

Feel free to explore more in the online version <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/publications/card-game/> or try to use them as a tool...



## 2 - Types of learning and types of learners

In the contemporary world, there is a strong need for continuous learning of all generations to combat common economic, environmental, climate, social, or medical (such as pandemic) challenges aiming for sustainable development and a better future. It seems like young people found themselves in the middle of it all. Work-related or social demands toward them are constantly growing, and it is not enough anymore just to finish school to find a job and live a fulfilling life. For two decades, Europe has recognised three integral parts of lifelong learning: Formal education (FE), Non-formal education (NFE), and Informal education or learning (IFL).

- **Formal education** is a classroom-based learning setting provided by trained professionals (teachers, professors) relaying on planned and structured curricula with defined learning objectives set by some respective institution. The lecturer transmits the knowledge and holds the power to manage the learning process. From the learner's point of view, learning is conscious and intentional. Results are assessed from the “outside” – by a teacher, and in the end, they should lead to a formally recognised diploma or a degree.

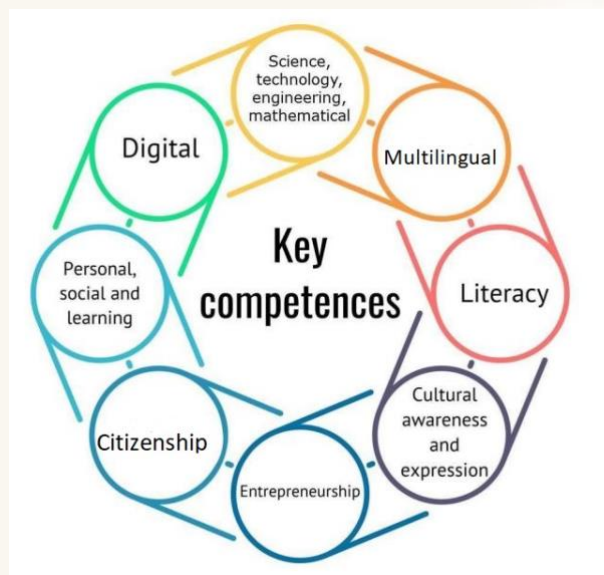
- **Non-formal education** mostly happens outside the formal system of education. It is a well-planned and structured program facilitated/led by professionals (trainers, youth workers), volunteers, and peer educators. It is based on participation and interaction between participants. The group is the leading resource for reaching learning objectives. It is competency-based, meaning it aims to develop knowledge, skills, and an attitude equally. It is also value-based – fosters inclusion and equality, respect for human rights, and democratic principles. Non-formal education should lead to the personal, social and professional development of participants, and in the end, they are the ones who are assessing their learning outcomes. On a European level, for participating in international non-formal educational and mobility activities, participants can get a Youthpass certificate about their learning experience in educational events. It is a self-assessment tool for recognising what a young person has learned during the activity. It is always the right place and time to say that Youthpass is not just a certificate of individual learning but a youth work non-formal education recognition tool Europe-wide. As the authors of the manual about how to lead Youthpass as a process says, when it is integrated from planning the activity to issuing the certificate to the participants at the end, Youthpass support the learning process in any kind of mobility: youth exchange, training course, international voluntary service can “...empower young people to become lifelong learners – self-confident and passionate about their development...” (page 12). And this should be the long-term outcome of any youth work-based learning activity, regardless of its content or type.

- **Informal learning** is best understood through the process of socialisation. It is unplanned and unintentional learning throughout life. Usually happens on an unconscious level by living in culture, society, community, and family with friends and accepting beliefs, values, learning different skills, and developing attitudes. In the modern world, digital media are becoming sources of informal learning.

The demanding world of knowledge-based economies seeks *more and more overlapping* of all three fields of learning to build competencies for its citizens or future employees. There are schools with the less and less ex-cathedra approach in transmitting knowledge from teacher to students, in which interactive methodology and active participation become everyday practice. On the other hand, there are youth organisations whose educational programs for empowering young people and raising their employability skills look more like courses for professionals with a bottom-up approach where all knowledge comes from the lecturer (e.g., online course development or digital marketing, etc.)

Learning in non-formal education with young people is understood as **competence development**. Competence combines several components: skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Sometimes, behaviour is added as a separate one (not just as a part of attitude). **To know something means being willing to do what you know to do.** This gives a dynamic and practical note to understanding learning. As a consequence, the process of designing educational activities and learning opportunities for young people needs to offer moments when participants acquire new information and concepts, practice and try new skills, playfully discover their passions, and motivation to act or be the best of them and through reflection with others raise awareness about what and how much they believe in something, attitudes and values they have.

These are life key competencies we try to develop through non-formal educational activities with young people:



Retrieved from <https://kivinen.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/key-competences.jpg>

For a summary of these competencies, which should be all equally important in contributing to successful individual education, work, and life in society, more in the online WordPress article: <https://kivinen.wordpress.com/2018/09/15/a-short-introduction-to-the-new-key-competences-for-lifelong-learning/>

## Types of learning in non-formal educational activities

NFE is an educational context where many types of learning can happen, even simultaneously. This is maybe why the ones in the role of learning practitioners – trainers, facilitators, mentors, and youth leaders... need to be skilled to design and guide it.

### **Holistic learning**

Considering the principles of humanistic theories, non-formal educational activities should equally engage participants' hearts, minds, and bodies. The more the whole person and not just “the brain” is involved, the deeper learning is. Here lies the need for a harmonised design that engages different sides of a person – observations, memories, perspectives, emotions, practical skills, motoric and perception, senses, and what’s sometimes deeper inside a person's inner world – beliefs, values, attitudes.

People outside NFE say:” Oh, you are just playing.” Well, yes, we play a lot, but with a clear purpose. When the body gets tired, we do energy-busting exercises (energisers). When the content is presented longer than “the brain can digest,” we do concentration games. To get to know each other, we look for more natural settings where people find it easier to open and talk by walking in nature or a park.

To make a balanced program, one of the educators' first responsibilities is to know their learning preferences – to develop their learning to learn competencies. This is important because sometimes we are unaware that our design in a methodological way “mirrors” how we like to learn. More about learning preferences will be mentioned in a chapter about different types of learners.

### **Group learning**

This type of learning has several aspects: in, with, and from the group. The group is a natural environment for human beings to live and learn, like family or friends. When connections between participants are made, and people feel they belong to the learning community, the group is their “home” where they can safely explore new things. When educators support connecting individuals, they start to learn together, collaborate and enrich each other. We say: “More heads think better than one”; the same stands for more hearts and socio-emotional support. Learning from the group is usually planned in program design. Activities engage individuals or subgroups to share previous experiences, opinions, or reflections. Whatever is shared “in the circle” or around small group tables becomes a resource available to all. On the other hand, when training starts, much-unstructured learning happens in informal time, which is an integral part of non-formal education. Like in real families, people share skills, contacts, resources, jokes, and affection.

### **Contextual or context-specific learning**

Shortly, it means that learning in NFE is relevant for the learner. In a broader sense, competencies developed through educational programs ease young people's transition toward adulthood, strengthen their independence by gaining different skills and knowledge and encourage them to actively participate in building their communities for a better future. In the sense of specific training and its content, relevance results from connections learners make between new knowledge and concepts with their previous experience, realities, and possible applications in real life.

Educators introduce the activity in three steps – what we are going to do, what is the purpose of doing the activity, and what are possible applications of it, allowing the space for learners to rethink and give individual meaning after experiencing the activity.

### **Interactive learning**

Interactive learning can both happen on and offline. It means that learning happens through guided social interaction. Simply, people work together to solve a problem, develop ideas about real-life challenges, and participate in simulation or role-play. Sometimes interactive learning reminds me of beehives...Much talking, sharing, showing, laughing, explaining, loud thinking, etc. Learning is happening somewhere “in between” all that people share, as proposed by connectivism theory. Without interacting with each other, giving and receiving, learning in a group would be impossible.

### **Social learning**

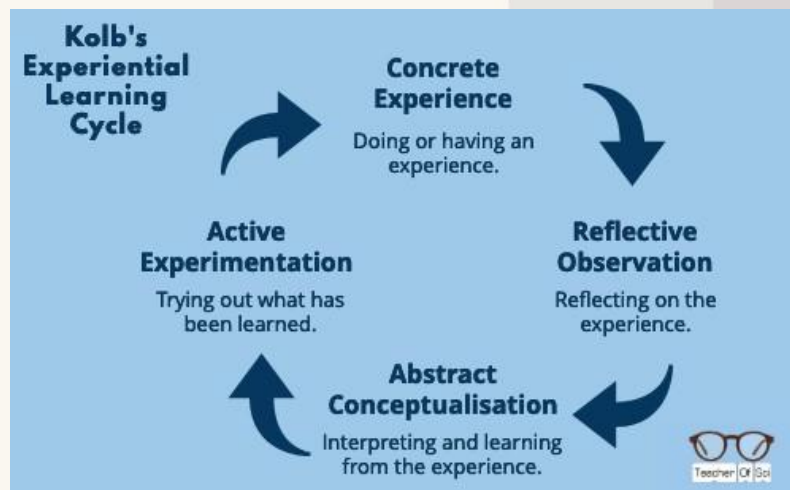
A group is a resource for individual learning as there are many opportunities for observing and imitating others. Participants learn by mirroring each other, but more importantly, they learn from trainers – content related, and a lot from their behaviour toward the group and individuals. This is why educators need to be a model of what they wish to see in the group. “Walk what you talk” is one of the most practised sayings in youth work and youth education.

### **Experiential or learning by doing**

As the words suggest, this type of learning starts and ends with the active involvement of the learner in multiple ways – practically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. Like you have behavioural, cognitive, and constructive learning in one.

David Kolb’s experiential learning cycle explains that it “...works on two levels: a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles’ (McLeod, S. 2017.). Due to this, it’s widely used to design training programs and as an explanatory model of different learning styles with a developed inventory. We will mention it on multiple occasions. There are many sources related to non-formal education with young people where you can discover more about experiential learning – from the newly revised European training manual T-kit 6 *Training essentials* (2021) to going way back to zero issues of Coyote magazine (1999), about essential issues in and around youth work in Europe and beyond. For more than 20 years, the model has played a significant role for educational practitioners in youth work. In Coyote's article “Some thoughts about Experiential learning” (De Vilder, D., 1999, July) is written that “*the basis of experiential learning is the idea that **only doing (experiences) is not enough. It is reflecting upon the experience and the learning from this experience that can lead to better understanding and change. The experiential learning cycle makes this basis clear... The reflection process turns experience into experiential learning.***”

Diagram of the experiential learning cycle



Retrieved from <https://www.educationcorner.com/learning-theories-in-education/>

*“Kolb views learning as an integrated process with each stage mutually supporting and feeding into the next. It is possible to enter the cycle at any stage and follow it through its logical sequence.” (McLeod, S.A. 2017).*

When creating a learning experience, there are two leading roles of an educator:

1. to choose/design an appropriate method/activity for participants to engage
  2. to facilitate – support experience transformation into new knowledge or behavioural change.
- Transformation happens during reflection that follows phases of the cycle. Each phase leads to the next one, but people can spend different amounts of time on different stages – they differ in learning styles—more about the reflection you can find in the chapter about debriefing.

One exciting description of the experiential learning (EL) process from the perspective of reflective practitioners in NFE with young people is offered by Monika Kėžaitė–Jakniūnienė and

Mark E. Taylor. They created the MonMar LEARN Model (Kėžaitė–Jakniūnienė & Taylor, 2018, p. 14) to present all preconditions for individuals to learn from this type of learning. It looks like a linear model, but learning can go forward and backwards in practice. Very important to keep in mind that according to individual preferences, not all participants will be in the same spot at the same time. Some people enjoy doing things more than thinking about them; others will try with reluctance but like sharing what was happening while doing it or connecting experience with some previous knowledge or practice. Still, this is what the whole experiential process looks like:

- L** – LIVE IT
- E** – EXPERIENCE IT
- A** – AWARENESS DEVELOPS
- R** – RECORD YOUR FINDINGS
- N** – NAME YOUR LEARNING

Experiential learning happens when you have a person. A group focused on what is happening, involved in trying and experimenting, thinking – reflecting about different sensations, feelings, observations, and insights produced by being involved in the action, and practising how not to forget what they want to remember so far (in school usually teacher tells us to take notes about what must be remembered regarding lesson). Here, participants are the ones who choose what new important “peace of mind” they would like to record (write, tell, take audio, image, filmed representation of personal insights). And last but not least, it is essential that what the learner discovers gets a name. This aspect of learning originates from constructivism – identifying which concept, category, competence, newly gained knowledge, skill, and behaviour can fit so we can communicate our findings to others. If what’s learned does not get the name, when your participant goes back home or to the organisations, they won’t know what to say if someone asks:” What have you learned there.” They would only describe what they have experienced (L&E) and talk about the games they played :).

## Individual learning preferences and styles

Different educational and learning theories, from humanistic to constructivist (cognitive or social), point to individual differences in learning. The one based on this assumption is David Kolb's experiential learning theory mentioned above.

As explained by Mcleod (2017) in his article, Kolb sets out four distinct learning styles based on a four-stage learning cycle with learning theory. Influenced by various factors such as social environment, educational experience, or individual cognitive structure, people naturally differ in preferring a single learning style.

As explained further by the same author, these preferences are the product of two separate 'choices' we make:

1. how the person approaches a task – by doing or watching (Processing Continuum)
2. how the person responds to a task – by feeling or thinking (Perception Continuum)

“Or” is here because Kolb believed that we could not perform both at the same time on a single continuum (e.g., think and feel). These two choices on each continuum describe four learning preferences:

### **Divergent** (feeling and watching)

- able to look at things from different perspectives
- instead, observe and gather information, then do
- use imagination to solve problems
- sensitive

In a learning context, they perform better in situations requiring ideas generation, such as brainstorming. People with diverging learning styles have broad cultural interests and are open-minded people-centred, and cooperative. Feel good in a group environment. Can have artistic strengths.

*Example in a group: the ones who gather the group, encourage contributions, always have an idea, plus...*

### **Assimilating** (watching and thinking)

- attracted to theories, ideas, and abstract concepts
- tends to solve problems logically
- seek explanations rather than practising
- less focused on people

They are good at understanding wide-ranging information and organising it clearly and logically.

People with this style are more effective in information and science careers. In a learning context, they prefer readings, lectures, analysing models, and having time to think things through.

*Example in a group: the ones who will enjoy inputs and ask for resource pack or names of the referent book :)*

**Convergent** (doing and thinking)

- tendency to look for practical solutions when solving problems
- prefer technical tasks
- seek to find answers to questions
- less focused on interpersonal relations

They are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. People with this learning style have technical abilities and are not afraid to experiment with new ideas or work with practical applications.

*Example in a group: the first to try a new app or enjoy thinking about creative use of something old...*

**Accommodating** (doing and feeling)

- relies on intuition rather than logic
- seeks information from people
- carefully listen but conclude on their own
- prefer experiential approach

They will actively participate in new challenges and experiences. This learning style is prevalent within the general population.

*Example in a group: the ones that go with a flow and then enjoy reflection moments*

Education practitioners should know how to design participant-centred learning opportunities. This means learning experiences that enable people with different learning preferences to engage. In such a way, we create chances for young people to be active in the best possible way. On the other hand, stretching learning competencies is always a horizontal priority, whatever topic you address. Through engagement in the whole experiential learning cycle, participants practice less preferred and developed abilities, so their learning can have transformative potential.

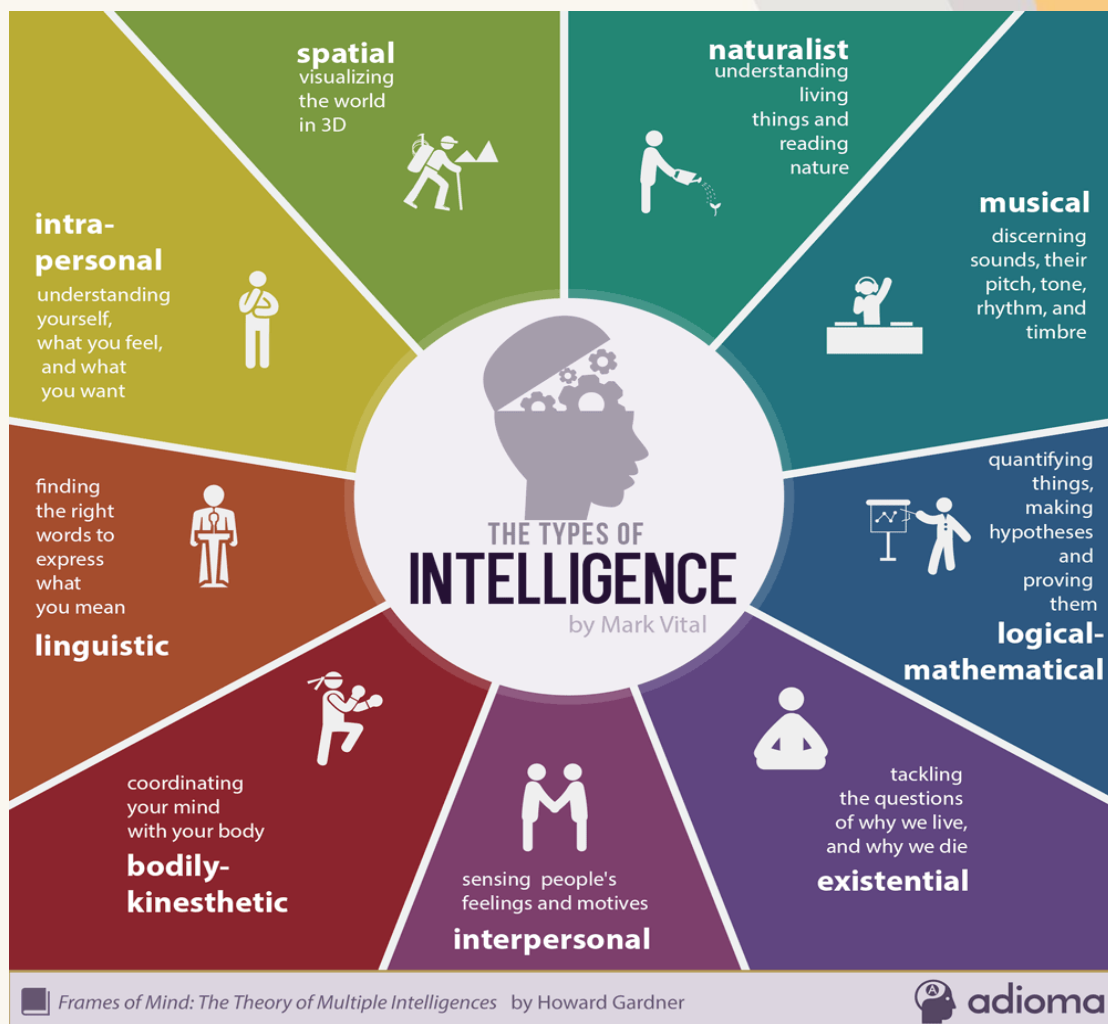
Differences among learners are often mentioned in the context of dr. Howard Gardner's Theory of multiple intelligence (MI) and how it reflects on the role of teachers – as the book author about MI in classrooms dr Thomas Armstrong from American Institute for Learning and Human Development, writes in his article (Armstrong, T. 2020).

The theory explains that humans do not have one general intellectual capacity to discover the world and adapt but more of them. We are born with multiple intelligences, and not all are cognitive. It may seem that some intelligence is more represented in the general population (such as linguistic or logical-mathematical) than other human "talents." The truth is that these are more developed due to the concept of formal education, where assignments and lectures are adjusted to those. "We esteem the highly articulate or logical people of our culture," further explains Armstrong based on Gardner's theory.

One of the most remarkable features of the theory of multiple intelligences is how it provides eight different potential pathways to learning, both from the positions of learner or educator.

The overview of these capabilities/learning approaches is good to know, so a person who learns can learn in the best possible way; on the other side, a trainer and facilitator design a program using different activities. Sometimes, participants look surprised when you invite them to make body sculptures, present content in a specific movie genre, close their eyes and listen to guided imagery or walk in nature and observe. This is because a considerable amount of learning experiences is associated only with our verbal or logical “part of the brain” – understanding what’s been said and written.

Theory gives us a variety of channels through which we can create learning opportunities for the whole group. Participants with different learning style preferences will feel more invited in different moments. People will learn more or less in different moments. Still, everyone will have their moment if your program uses: words, numbers or logic, pictures, music, self-reflection, a physical experience, a social and an experience in the natural world. Remember – we are born with all of these:



Nine types of intelligence Infographic by Mark Vital  
Retrieved from <https://blog.adioma.com/9-types-of-intelligence-infographic/>



## A few words about Learning zones

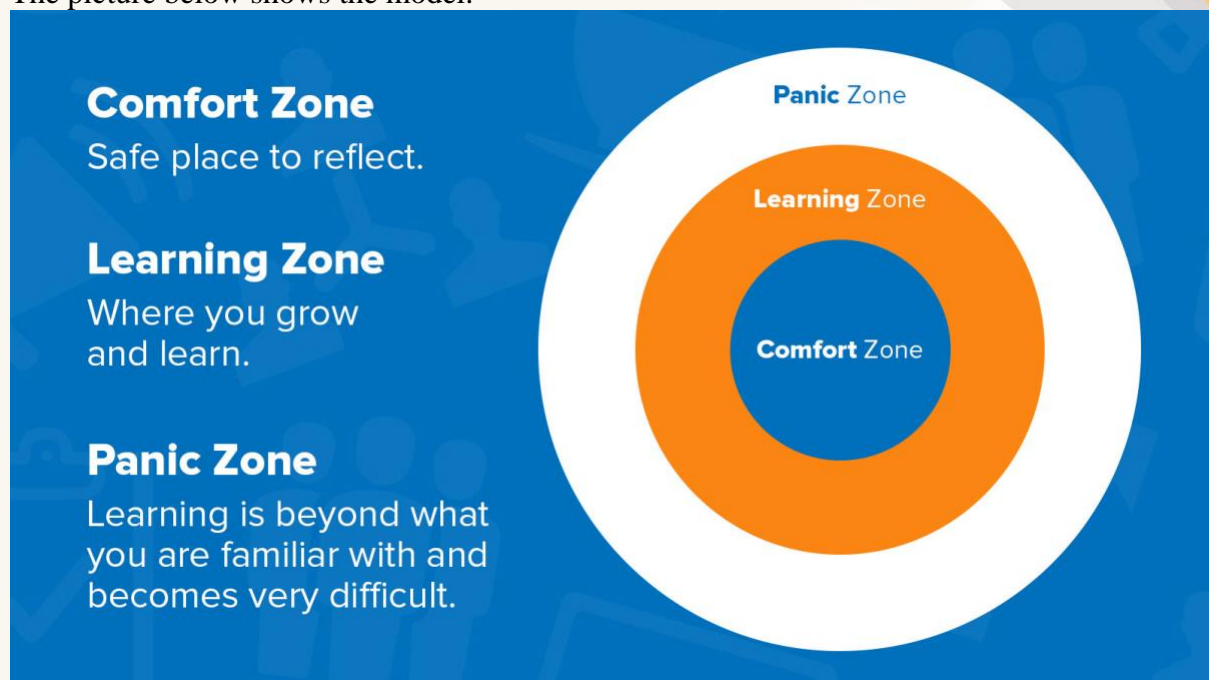
We need to mention that individual learning preferences are not the only reason people emotionally, behaviourally, or interpersonally react differently to the same activity. There are many reasons: previous experience (maybe they already played “the game”), different needs (some just don’t see the reason behind massaging, some can be shy), body state (tiredness), loss of motivation (something else is happening in their lives), etc.

One of the reasons we expect is that everything is too different, too new, and consequently, too scary.

Do you remember that from the beginning, when we introduced learning theories, we mentioned Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist who developed the sociocultural theory of cognitive development? We introduced his principle of the Zone of Proximal Development – as a difference between what we still do not know but are yet to know. Simply said, there are things we know well, others that we can learn with a bit of support, and some that are “too far from us” from our current capacities for learning for different reasons. In this “unreachable” zone, there is no learning even if we get help and guidance.

As mentioned in the article “The Learning zone model – Moving beyond your comfort zone,” the authors say that German educator Tom Senninger, inspired by Vygotsky’s zones, developed the Learning zone model.

The picture below shows the model:



Retrieved from <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/learning-zone-model.htm>

Comfort zone – where we feel safe, cosy and confident, space where we reflect and make sense of things, where we return to from time to time to relax, recharge, or run to in a state of emergency, as the first months of the pandemic were for many of us.

Learning zone – comes with a mix of feelings, some a bit uncomfortable, like uncertainty, dread, and anxiety, but with the proper support of others (this is what Vygotsky accentuated) and inspiration, we can still take a risk and discover the unknown. Here we live out our curiosity, and with each step, we make into the learning, our Comfort zone expands. This is how we

GROW from INSIDE. Sometimes, same as with physical growth, you can end up with stretch marks when it is too much, too fast, and there is a lack of support. But, your group can usually absorb a lot with adequate support and learners. Just do not rush into the learning zone no matter what – maybe some participants would like “to know all and know now,” but here you have a group learning process where only people grow collectively. Trainers have to create a safe space for learning to happen in a group.

A panic zone is a red zone where fear prevails, so it is impossible to learn without being traumatised. This will happen if you start your training by asking people to do some jumping, running, and climbing team activity just after the “welcome.”

### **We are setting the foundations: How to create a comfort zone at the beginning of a group learning experience?**

We set the time frame and agenda which should bring out the best in people.

We arrange the space nicely for the group to feel comfortable.

We introduce the ground rules for establishing respectful communication and present a model of it by showing that what people are saying is worth listening to.

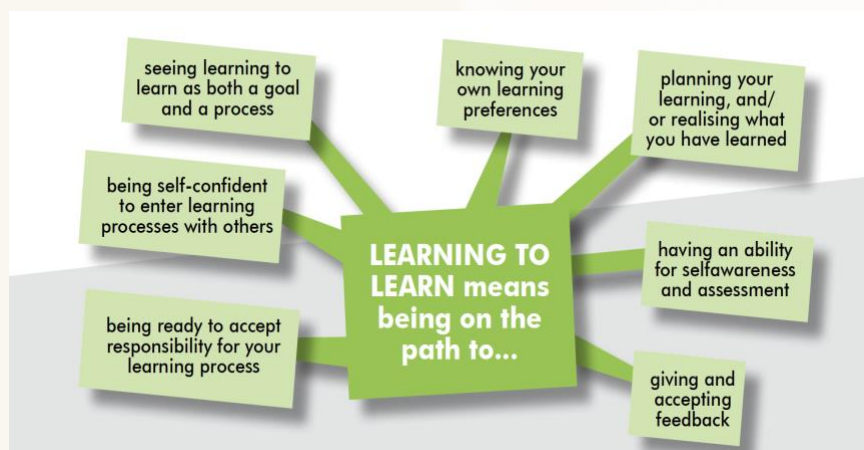
We help participants to get to know each other better and connect no matter how different they are. Because we count on this diversity in a group, this is a source of learning.

To start the magic of learning together, people need to feel:

- Safe enough to BE,
- Safe enough to DIFFER,
- Safe enough to EXPRESS themselves.

**Never rush a learning process before enabling safety in this meaning.** There is a galaxy of activities such as icebreakers, name games, getting to know each other, program introduction activities, exploring expectations techniques, group building exercises...

Just before we close this chapter, point out that apart from being the ones who create and offer learning opportunities for young people, being a youth trainer or facilitator, or youth leader means **being a learner** as well, as explained in *Youthpass unfolded* (p. 14) “When you know yourself better as a learner, you will be in a better position to facilitate the learning of others,” (taking into account that different people learn in different ways from you).



Mind map: What is learning to learn about? (Taylor, M. & Klosterman, P., 2012, p.10)

Some questions to help you reflect on being yourself a learner or your Learning2Learn competence, as presented in the above mind map, can sound like this:

1. What do you think is your learning style or preference?
2. How about your motivation for learning? Where does it come from?
3. What supports you when learning? What stands in your way?
4. What are your thoughts about you being a lifelong learner?

### 3 - Participatory learning principles in Non-formal education with young people

NFE with young people is based on a few main principles. Inspiration for the following lines comes from personal training experience, the opinion of colleagues from an international community of trainers in youth work (Youthtrain video project, 2019, June 07), and principles of non-formal learning from the European Training Strategy (A Competence Model, 2016). It is of great importance for any practitioner in the field, professional or volunteer, trainer or peer educator, youth leader or facilitator to know them by heart, believe in them, and respect them when planning and implementing educational activities. Learning in NFE is based on:

- Voluntary participation
- Active participation
- Group is a source of learning – participants are co-creators
- Learner-centred approach
- Value-based
- Experiential learning
- A safe space for learning

Non-formal education is **VOLUNTARY** – as your participants choose freely to join learning opportunities, they can also choose not to step into some activity; a trainer or a facilitator can try to motivate and empower young people to participate, but the choice is theirs.

NFE see learners as **ACTIVE** creators of the learning process and the primary **SOURCE** of change – young people participate in the learning process by sharing their previous experience, perceptions about the world, realities, emotions, or beliefs without having a fear of evaluation of their contributions or achievements by anybody but themselves. This principle allows individuals to feel ownership and take responsibility for the learning process and outcomes.

NFE is a **GROUP LEARNING** experience where people act, interact and reflect together. The group serves as a source of motivation, diverse knowledge and experiences, empathy, creativity, and fun. One of the most critical roles of an educator is to create a group willing to take the learning journey together.

NFE has a **LEARNER CENTERED** pedagogical approach which respects differences in the group and the existence of different types of learners and learning – consequently has an arsenal of numerous tools and a variety of methods created by the community of practice of youth work learning practitioners all over Europe. This offer of toolboxes and manuals shared online (for example, SALTO Youth Toolbox) unlocks creativity in designing learning opportunities and makes it exciting and fun. However, we as practitioners show creativity in designing activities; participants have the “final word.” It is up to them how and when they want to learn and what is relevant to their context.

NFE is structured and has an in-advance planned program. But, no matter the content, the training should always be **BASED ON VALUES** that enable participants to acquire critical competences which contribute to their personal or professional development, social inclusion, active participation and citizenship, and human rights values. Therefore, it should be open and

accessible to all young people, no matter their social, cultural, economic, educational, or religious background and possibilities.

NFE is **PLANNED** but still **FLEXIBLE** in reaching educational goals. This often comes from the richness of methods used and the fact that one can always find “another way” to achieve the set learning objectives and expected outcomes. Still, more importantly, it comes from educators’ ability to follow the group's needs constantly. Learners have different paces, temps, and learning needs. The primary role of the facilitator of learning is to support participants in their learning journey, respecting their differences as learners and individuals. This is an empowering aspect of learning in a non-formal educational context. Young people are listened to, respected, and called to participate actively.

NFE is a **SAFE SPACE** for young people to learn not only because of all those mentioned above but because educational designs need to follow group dynamics and choose methods with an appropriate level of challenge.

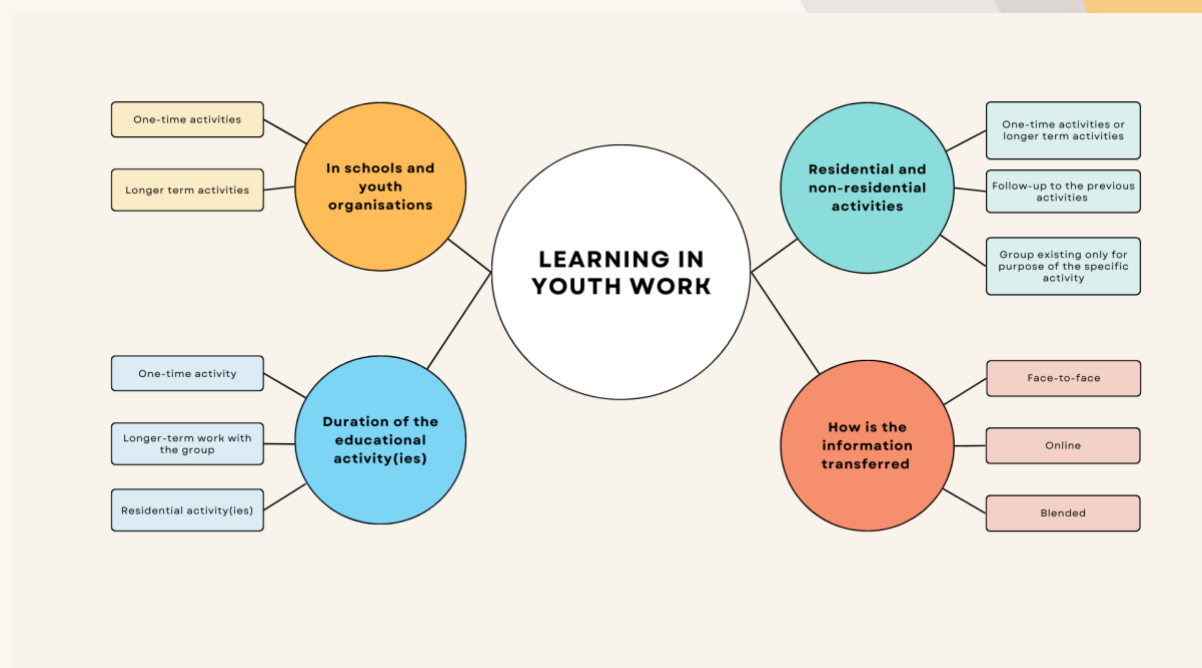
NFE is based on the **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE** model of learning. It is an educational method that incorporates several assumptions on how adults should learn. The model has transformative potential (to bring change in behaviour and further...) because it respects meaningful and purposeful connection to the learner; based on previous experience and knowledge, learning is self-directed but supported by the facilitator’s reflection questions about the experience, group, personal feelings, topic related associations and practical use of new experience. Educator's role is to choose the method according to learning objectives and facilitate group discussion related to past or present experiences participants gained through some exercise. It would be perfect if the activity awakened curiosity and brought balance between fun, playfulness, and deep thinking and reasoning.

To be able to design and facilitate learning activities respecting all the above principles, there are several things educational practitioners should know (“stolen” from Table of contents of *Youthpass unfolded* manually because we believe it is true):

- Know yourself as a learner
- Know yourself as a facilitator of learning
- Know your target group
- Know your concepts and tools

## 4- Learning in different aspects of youth work and different settings

Learning in youth work happens in different settings; from schools and youth organisations, to activities organised for multiple days and one-day educational activities. This chapter will introduce you to different settings where youth work educational activities occur and provide some practical examples to understand the divisions in a more practical/concrete way.



*Learning in youth work - graph of types of activities*

Division of learning settings in youth work can be done in a more complex way than presented in this material, but for the manual, we kept it simple and in line with the settings most newcomers to youth work will face.

As presented on the graph above, learning in youth work is primarily divided according to the place where activities are taking place, duration, and ways in how information is transferred. We have the following 4 settings:

### - **Learning taking place in schools and youth organisations**

Educational youth work activities often take place in schools, organised through different projects and cooperations youth organisations establish with schools. Activities in schools can be **one-time activities** in the form of an educational workshop organised for a specific topic, i.e. educational workshop on the prevention of STDs (Sexually Transmitted

Diseases). Activities in the schools can also be organised for a **longer period**. This approach requires more resources but also has better and more-sustainable longer-term outcomes. Long-term projects usually last several years and focus on providing knowledge and changing attitudes on specific negative social phenomena, such as violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and adolescent pregnancy. These projects' educational activities are divided into workshops organised with larger groups over one or more school years.

Organising educational activities within schools makes it easier to reach out to young people and involve them in the activity - since you are the one coming to their territory and providing them with new information. The downside is that school management can often interfere with the activities; thus help of more experienced youth workers is more than welcome to handle the possible complications in the best possible way.

When it comes to the surrounding of youth organisation, the same principles apply as when the activities are taking place in schools in the format of either one-time or longer-term activities. Examples of one-time and longer-term activities can be the same as for the schools. Settings of youth organisations offer more opportunities for discussion with young people since they are no longer in formal educational institutions. This is the benefit of educational youth work activities that take place within the organisation. The downside is that it can be harder to ensure the constant participation of youth in longer-term activities since they control when and for how long they are joining the educational opportunities you offer.

#### - **Residential and non-residential activities**

**Residential activities** require the group to be together in a specific location for a longer period and share the learning and living aspects of being together. Examples of residential activities are training courses for youth workers and youth exchanges. The benefit is that the group goes faster through the stages of group development while they are all together. Thus the youth workers/trainers have more possibilities to make the group do their best while everyone is together. The downside is that the group will most likely not function in the same format again once the residential activity ends.

**Non-residential activities** are activities that can be organised as one-time or longer-time activities. They get the group for a specific period of time to meet and learn together, while everyone goes back to their homes after the activity has finished - the group is not spending time together and living together for days at a specific location.

#### - **Types of educational youth work activities based on the duration of the educational activity or activities**

Based on the duration of the educational activity or more of them, we can divide educational youth work activities into **one-time activities, long-term activities and residential activities**. All of these have already been explained above since the educational activities taking place in different surroundings can last for short or long periods. Purposely, we involved residential activities as a separate type of activities based on the duration, since the residential activities as a specific format offer great possibilities to build meaningful education that will raise the level of knowledge of participants and contribute to change of their attitudes. Residential activities provide youth workers and trainers with the opportunity to monitor and facilitate the

process of group development but also to plan and adjust learning objectives based on the development stage(s) the group is at; in the current period of time.

- **Types of educational youth work activities in regards to how the information is transferred**

**Face-to-face activities** are activities that are happening live – outside the online environment. Face-to-face is the best type to ensure that everyone participates actively.

**Online activities** are online educational activities that take place through tools for online meetings and online participation. While the online activities proved useful in times of the Covid-19 pandemic, organising an activity fully online prevents the group from going through the development process, and learning objectives are harder to achieve.

**Blended learning** is the combination of both face-to-face and online. Blended learning can be organised so that you have part of the group join the activity online while the rest of the group participates face-to-face. Blended learning can also be organised so that one part of learning activities is live, while the follow-up is organised online. This can be especially useful when there is a limited budget for organising activities. The benefit of blended learning is that it can contribute to the accessibility of your learning activity. On the other hand, it can be difficult to secure participation when participants are joining online (bad connection and old equipment are some of the problems that you can face).

It's important to be well aware of where the educational activities are taking place and for how long since these aspects influence how the group will go through the development phases and which learning objectives are achievable. When working in schools and with different classes, it's important to know that the group has already formed. For organising activities within a youth organisation, you need to be prepared to facilitate the group through different phases of development and what to expect from the group depending on the phase they are currently in. The same principles regarding group development and learning objectives apply to organising residential or non-residential activities.

One-time activities, especially when they are happening for one or only a couple of sessions, cannot result in some huge changes in attitudes. Be aware of this when setting the learning objectives. And remember that you cannot expect a group to go through different stages of group development if you organise educational activities with them only a few times.

In the end, when planning an educational activity, remember that you can organise it in different ways - face-to-face, online or blended. Blended learning offers possibilities for those who cannot physically join your activity, to still gain new information, build or improve skill(s) and eventually experience a change of attitudes.



## 5 - How to identify target groups and their needs

Conducting a needs assessment is the first crucial and fundamental step in creating any learning activity. Only fully understanding the needs of learners will directly lead you to the successful creation of the activity, as well as all other necessary steps you will need to develop later: creating objectives, planning methodologies, developing activities, or doing the evaluation. And here, we don't speak about conducting an assessment of the general needs of young people at the local, national or international levels but about the needs of your specific target group at the individual and organisational levels. No matter how good ideas, colossal motivation, and developed activities you might have, if they are not based on the needs of your target group, there will be no success. T-kit number 6 "Training Essentials" explains a few usual problems youth organisations and educators have when conducting needs assessments: "First of all, undertaking a serious needs assessment within organisations/institutions and their immediate environment requires a lot of effort, knowledge, and money. Secondly, organisations/institutions and people working for them are often convinced that they already know the reality and needs of their target group very well and that there is no need for additional effort in deciphering". (Klocker, 2021)

The same publication defines needs assessment done by youth organisations before the development of learning activities to be involved in four different levels:

- Organisational or context assessment
- Task assessment
- Competences assessment
- Environmental scan

### Organisational or context assessment:

Organisational or context assessment means considering the framework in which learning activity will occur. This involves analysing the existing situation: previous experience, topics the organisation was working on, number of staff members and their expertise, and ongoing and previous strategic plans. A needs assessment process aims at identifying the organisation's main areas of focus, the needs this highlights, and the necessary strategy to address the highlighted issues. For example, we can take a youth organisation that wants to work on the topic of the inclusion of young migrants and asylum seekers. That means this organisation will need to explore existing situations on inclusion at local, national, and international levels and undertake general organisational adjustments to manage the specificity of the subject it plans to prioritise.

### Task assessment:

Task assessment identifies the work, concrete tasks, and activities that must be fulfilled within the organisation to achieve the goals it is focused on. Suppose we continue to use the example from the previous paragraph. In that case, a relevant task analysis will identify specific tasks, or work profiles, related to its program of inclusion of young migrants and asylum seekers.

### Competence assessment:

Competence assessment follows logically from the identification of tasks and required competences. It involves an initial overview of current capacities and competences of people for the activities planned and also identifies those in need of further development. Competence assessment encompasses volunteers, board members, staff or project officers, and so forth, and can be based on self-assessment, external assessment, or both.

### The environmental scan:

The environmental scan analyses the immediate and broader environment of the youth organisation or institution. This is important as a separate analysis because of the outside environment's significant influence on youth organisations' work (for example, policy documents and developments, support of significant donor organisations, and so on). This element of the needs assessment maps out the possible collaborators in the field, identifies the relevant competition, maps the key “actors” in the field, and investigates the relations between them.

## **Learning outcomes**

Once you explore and recognise potential learners' needs, developing learning outcomes is next. Learning outcomes provide an overview of what students should know, be able to do, or value after completing a course or program. They mean how much knowledge or skills a participant should acquire through various assignments, courses, classes, or programs, by the end of a specific period. They are observable and measurable by knowledge, skills, abilities, values (Korde, 2021).

The educational psychologist, Robert Gagne, in 1985 classified learning outcomes into five categories, including the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The five learning outcomes are intellectual skills, cognitive strategy, verbal information, motor skills, and attitude. The intellectual skills, cognitive strategy, and verbal information are in the cognitive domain. The motor skills are in the psychomotor domain. The attitude is the affective domain (Gagne, 1985).

- Intellectual skills: description of capability for this type would be to apply general concepts and rules to analyse issues, solve problems and generate novel problems. The practical example would be to be able to create a project proposal by fulfilling specific previously set requirements.

- Verbal information: description of capability for this type would be to state, tell or describe previously stored information. The practical example would be to tell significant dates from the history or name the capital cities of the European countries.
- Attitudes: description of capability for this type would be to choose a personal course of action. The practical example would be adapting existing educational sessions for young people after training for trainers' education.
- Cognitive strategies: description of capability for this type would be to manage one's thinking and learning process. The practical example would be to selectively use three approaches to identify the needs of young people in the local community.
- Motor skills: description of capability for this type would be to execute a physical action with precision and timing. The practical example would be to learn to climb a 20 meters high rock or do a backflip.
- After we theoretically discovered how we could divide learning outcomes, it is essential to make a connection with regular youth work learning activities we are planning and implementing. We must be aware of the models mentioned above to distinguish the type and level of educational activity provided. In most learning activities we organise, we will not be able to target all the models, but most development of intellectual skills (learners can develop successful project proposals or able to conduct successful evaluation), cognitive strategies (learners can use three different methods for daily self-reflection), and development of attitudes (learners will be able to organise workshops by using non-formal education methods after completing the training of trainers). Even though the verbal information model is not the best applicable in the activities we usually do (working in multicultural and multilingual environments), motor skills seem to be engaged more frequently nowadays with the development of outdoor educational activities and learning in youth work by using sports methodologies.

In youth work, developing learning outcomes is closely connected with the competence development we mentioned and described earlier. When youth educators are developing learning outcomes, they mainly concentrate on competencies that learners must develop or improve to fulfil the needs recognised in the first place. So the process of developing learning outcomes cannot be fully achieved if we don't know the learning needs of our target group, and later we will not be able to develop the final learning objectives presented in the next chapter.

## Learning expectations, contributions, and challenges

The final step of exploring and adjusting to the needs of the participants is usually happening just before the start of the learning activity. Suppose a learning activity takes place for extended periods (more days or weeks). In that case, this assessment can be done during the introductory part, before the start of working on the activity topic itself. If a learning activity is shorter, then there is also the possibility to complete this assessment before the start through regular communication with the participants. The goal of this assessment is to facilitate the expression of personal expectations and fears of the participants about the learning activity and to stimulate their active participation through the reflection on their role and personal contribution to the development of the learning process.

One of the tools that can be used for this assessment is a specially prepared worksheet with images of libra and light bulbs presented in the SALTO toolbox database by Davide Di Pasquale, used for the needs of the youth initiative “Disability & Sexual Identity.”

“First of all, it is necessary to print a personal worksheet with the image of a libra as a symbol of the activity for each participant. After the general explanation of the activity, the announcement of the objectives, and the description of the activities to be implemented, the facilitator/youth trainer should deliver the personal worksheet to the participants asking them to reflect on their expectations related to the results of the activity and write them in the upper weighing pan, to think about their fears and concerns about the obstacles to the implementation of the activity, the efficacy of the activities, their involvement in it and write them in the lowest weighing pan; finally the participants should reflect on their contribution to the activity, writing down in the light bulb what they can practically do during the project to support its implementation and which among their competences and abilities could be made available for the group” (Di Pasquale, 2013).

After completing the task, it will be more visible how previously prepared needs, learning outcomes, and objectives are linked with the participants' expectations and desires. This enables you to make final changes and adjustments that should make the learning process more comfortable, smooth, and productive for the participants.

## 6 - Developing objectives of the learning activity

“The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don’t define them or ever seriously consider them as believable or achievable. Winners can tell you where they are going, what they plan to do along the way, and who will share the adventure with them.” Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959).

In order to successfully develop and implement any educational activity, you must have clearly defined objectives. In general terms of education, we can define learning objectives as statements that should clearly define the expected outcome of a course in terms of demonstrable skills or knowledge that the learner will acquire as a result of the instruction provided (Wengroff, 2019). When we speak about developing objectives of youth work activities specifically, we can modify the definition mentioned. T-Kit number 6 “Training Essentials” developed by The European Commission and Council of Europe defines learning objectives as a set of statements, or projections, which the team and participants will try to achieve within the life of a training activity. (Klocker, 2021). **When defining your objectives, you are defining what young people, as a direct target group, will be able to know, do or change when your learning activity is successfully implemented.**

The confusion that can often arise among youth educators, especially those less experienced in the field, is how to differentiate aims and objectives, and what actually each of them means. Aims are defined as broad joint statements, overall final objectives of the projects, and general affirmations (Walker, 2022). When we compare with the definition of the objectives previously explained, it is evident that objectives present small steps needed to be completed to achieve the overall aim. The aim presents the overall intentions of our activities, while objectives are specific actions taken to achieve those. If we create even more confusion, we will try to break it out for you by using a simple real-life example:

Let’s say we aim to get in shape next summer.

Then our objectives could be defined in the following way:

- Doing 30 minutes of physical exercise every day for the next two months
- Following a strict keto diet for four weeks
- Reducing sugar by 50% in daily consumption
- Attending at least two online courses about healthy lifestyles until next summer

As clearly visible, objectives are much more defined, clear, and realistic. And it is for the reason that they are made in a SMART way (and yes, we mean it!):

**S – Specific:** For more effective planning, all objectives must be clearly defined and narrow. Objectives should never be too general and clearly describe what needs to be achieved.

**M – Measurable:** All objectives must include metrics ensuring that you can measure your success. If you cannot track your success, you will never know how good you are at achieving your objectives, whether you managed to complete them, or if there is still some space for improvement.

**A – Attainable:** All objectives must be realistic and achievable, with the available tools and resources. Too optimistic objectives will make you feel powerless and unable to achieve the change you want to see. It is also important that you don't put your objectives too low; ideally, they should be challenging but still achievable.

**R – Relevant:** All objectives must be connected to what you want to achieve, what values you want to promote, and what needs you recognise. If your objectives are relevant to your target group, it will now only make you more energetic and enthusiastic. Still, it will help you to attract more young people to attend your activities.

**T – Timed:** All objectives must state an exact end time in the future. It will motivate you to stay on track and allow you to prioritise tasks and keep focused. By not putting a realistic timeframe for achieving your objectives, you are directly risking giving up too early and getting discouraged.

When developing youth work activities in specific circumstances, for example, when you already know the exact number of participants/learners, or duration of the activity (one day workshop or seven days long training course), then you don't need to lose too much time on thinking about timing or measurability of your objectives. But if you have learning activities taking place for extended periods and involving different target groups, those segments are crucial and should never be forgotten. Objectives in youth work learning activities are also specific because they need to be set on individual and organisational levels. T-kit 6 "Training Essentials" states that "the first set is composed of specific objectives at an individual level, outlining the benefits of the training for participants. The second set relates to the organisation the individual participants belong to and addresses the potential uses and influences of the learning in the organisation and its environment. If the course aims to create and motivate multipliers, this second set of objectives becomes even more important." (Klocker, 2021).

#### Competences: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes



Retrieved from <https://www.itcilo.org/design>

In youth work, when we speak about creating learning outcomes and objectives, we mostly speak about the development of competences of young people. Competences are understood as having three interlinked dimensions:

- **Knowledge:** it presents a cognitive dimension of competence. It is the ability to understand specific concepts and consists of different subjects' facts, information, and theoretical understandings. Knowledge includes everything you manage to absorb from school, work, friends, and the environment in general. The practical learning examples would be to learn ingredients for making chocolate cookies, names of the world leaders, or parts of the aeroplane.
- **Skills:** it presents a practical dimension of competence. It is the ability to perform a specific task or role. Skill sets are acquired through training and experience. Skills are different from knowledge because knowledge is a prerequisite to skills. The practical learning examples would be learning how to make cookies, how to fix an automobile or send an email.
- **Attitude:** it presents a dimension of competence related to attitudes needed to be espoused. When we speak about attitudes, it isn't necessarily about having a "good" or "bad" attitude but how your awareness of your own outlook and state of mind on a given task influences your performance. The practical learning examples would be to value good customer relations and be motivated to work hard or appreciate other people's contributions.

Another important aspect when developing your objectives is to have appropriate wording, as by repeating common verbs such as "understand" or "learn," you can easily get lost in the meaning and become too specific (two objectives are maybe not supposed to target the same level of success, but by using the same verb, you might make it look like that). For this reason, Jordan Meyers, in her article for Bob Pike Group, is bringing a list of action verbs that can directly help you when developing your objectives:

- **ATTITUDE**  
Advocate • Accept • Agree • Allow • Analyse • Approve • Assess • Believe • Choose • Collaborate • Comply • Conform • Convince • Cooperate • Decide To • Defend • Endorse • Evaluate • Pick • Recommend • Select • Support • Tolerate • Volunteer
- **KNOWLEDGE**  
Compare • Define • Describe • Designate • Discover • Distinguish • Explain • Identify • Itemize • Label • List • Name • Recite • Recognize • Recount • Relate • Retell • Specify • Spell Out • State • Tell • Term • Write
- **SKILLS**  
Actuate • Adjust • Administer • Align • Alter • Assemble • Build • Calibrate • Change • Copy • Demonstrate • Design • Develop • Draft • Execute • Form • Handle • Manipulate • Measure • Mend • Perform • Prepare • Process • Record • Regulate • Remove • Repair • Replace • Set • Service

Avoid having more than one action verb for each level of learning, and make sure it's a verb that can be measured (Meyers, 2014).

By involving everything previously mentioned, here are some examples of well-developed objectives:

At the individual level:

- To explore different forms of youth participation within the context of the Erasmus+ Program;
- To gain a better understanding of how existing European Programs can be used as a tool for combating youth unemployment;
- To discuss possible ways of including youth participation and active citizenship in regular daily work with young people;
- To equip youth workers with tools and techniques for working with NEET youngsters at the local level;
- To experience youth participation from grassroots organisations through good practice examples;
- To provide a space for sharing best practices focusing on non-formal education methods in youth work.

At the organisational level:

- Bring positive and long-lasting effects on participating organisations by enhancing knowledge management and capacity development through the creation of educational hubs

Ultimately, it is essential to remember that objectives serve as single checkpoints leading to the completion of the aim. They must be discussed with the target group (potential learners), always adjusted to their needs, and possibly improved/corrected based on input and feedback.



## 7 - Methods in non-formal education with youth

Experiential learning represents the pedagogical (and philosophical) logic for designing the methods which can create learning opportunities for young people. The method is an activity offered to young people to have experiences connected with a specific learning purpose (objective). When choosing a method, an educator needs to answer many “whys” or “how’s” questions but what may come first and last is:

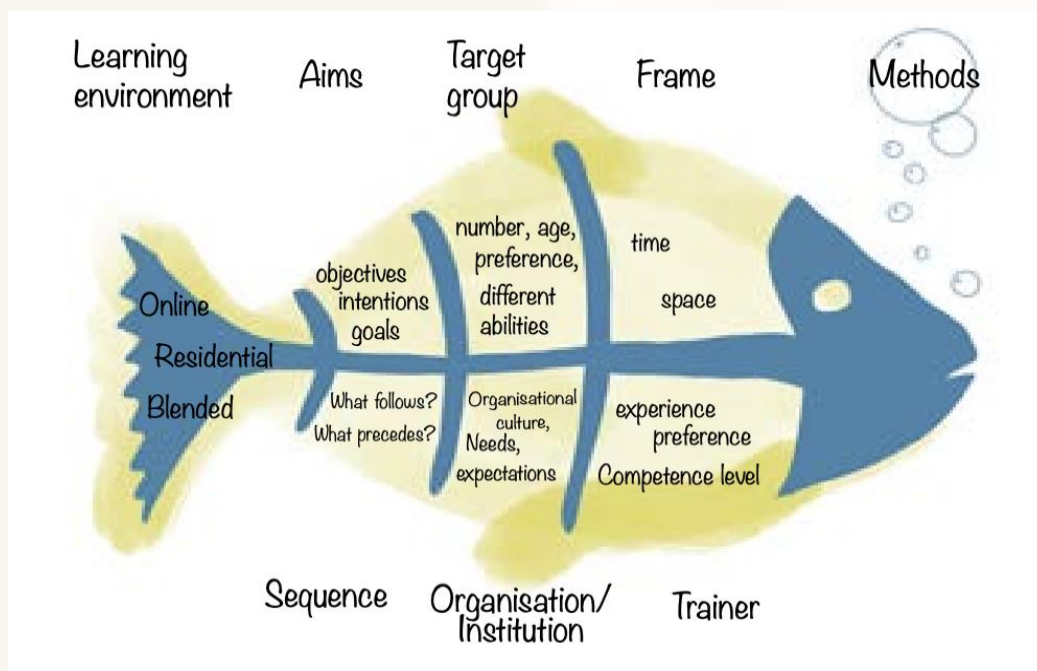
**“Does this method align with the values behind your program and the principles of NFE?”.**

Having fun when learning in NFE is almost necessary. This does not mean that the method you choose stays because it's fun – participants enjoy teamwork but can't find a connection with their group and learning content in the program.

The same goes for having too much directive and formal approach, being very serious about the topic, and trying to introduce participation or active citizenship in a training room where your voice is the only one that's heard.

Educators must be the model for values behind non-formal education; the same stands for chosen methods to be inclusive and participatory and respect individual contributions. How to do it all? There is a “fish” we usually use “to catch” the methods.

FISH Model What to think about when choosing a method



(Clocker, S. (Ed). (2021)), T-Kit 6 Training essentials (2nd, p.70)

<https://pip-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/128207003/T-KIT-6-023322-GBR.pdf/5f9a09c0-e69c-93b2-0fd5-fe9fa6f421f3>

A trainer or facilitator can use a model for thinking about what kind of methods are the best to use in a specific part of the program because the model takes into account:

- how the method contributes to the communication or collaboration in the group or is the group “ready” for it
- how the method creates opportunities for different individuals to participate or how it motivates them to reflect
- how method replays to the learning objectives, what knowledge or skills learners need to have to be able to engage and not feel overwhelmed
- is there a red line between what the group did before and will do after
- questions related to how feasible it is for you to apply a method – do you have enough time, space, or means (devices, materials) to manage the activity from start to end
- can YOU prepare, implement and debrief it in a whole cycle

## Experiential learning cycle as a methodological base for designing a learning activity

Experiential learning has been mentioned many times so far. Learning method design based on a complete cycle has two main elements:

- I. Experiencing (instruction) part of the activity
- II. Reflection (debriefing) part of the activity

Here we would like to look at the Experience part and what it can be.

We learn through life experiences in a very natural way. Sometimes it takes more than several trials (or mistakes) that we finally have an “AHA” moment or insight about why something is happening to us and then do things differently or not.

Experience can also be arranged in training programs to provide opportunities with specific learning purposes (to create group dynamics, to introduce or explore topics, to encourage practising some skill or behaviour). Once specific learning objectives are identified, they can be reached through many different activities. Activities can be cooperative and problem-solving exercises, simulation games, role-plays, group discussions, etc. They can be done by the whole group or in smaller ones. The same method can be modified in various ways depending on educators' creativity, the needs of the specific group, and the program concept. For example, you can lead a group discussion about any identified issue using several techniques:

- with a whole group in the circle by defining what's the issue about and opening the space for sharing different opinions (plenary verbal discussion);
- you can identify the issue(s) with a group and put it in written form-then, invite participants to react in silence by writing, drawing their opinions (silent floor discussion);
- you can define several statements around some issue or a concept and ask participants to show their attitude – agreement or disagreement about the topic discussed (space barometer or Where do you stand? debate, etc.).

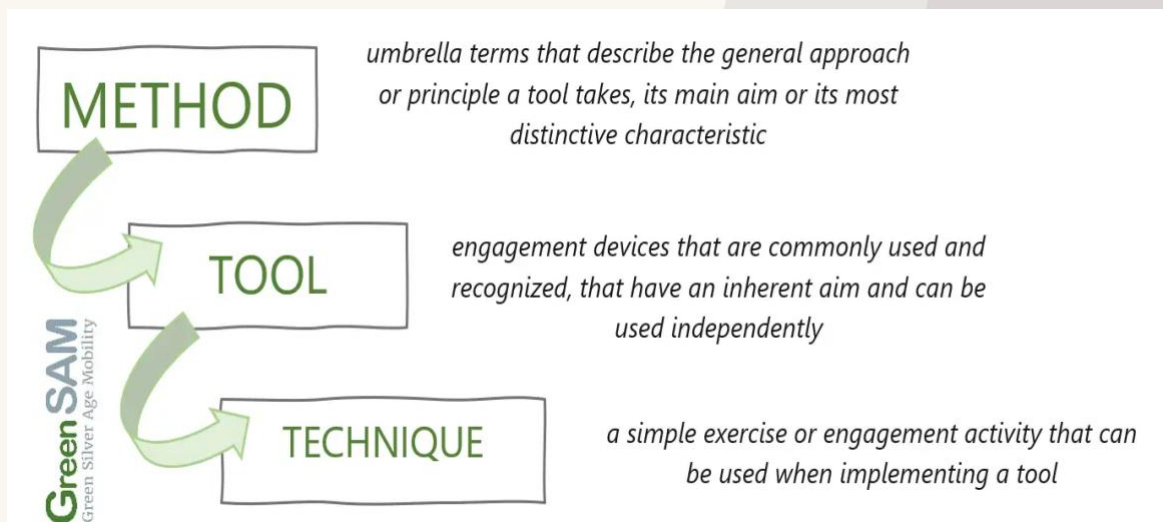
Important to notice is this is just the beginning of learning support. You do not stop here. For example, if you choose a simulation exercise as a method that can provoke all sources of different behaviours or/and intensive emotions, like intercultural learning or conflict management simulations can be, and you finish as the “game” ends, all learning is left to chance, you can be responsible for emotional or interrelationship “chaos” instead of being responsible for the facilitation of participants' learning.

More about this facilitator responsibility, particularly in intercultural learning methods, can be read in the article “Albatross Dilemma” in the Coyote issue (Taylor, M. 1999, July).

There are many games and exercises available today, off and online. For educators in NFE with young people who want to try some of them but still lack practical experience, important are those with at least clear descriptions of the contextual or conceptual background of the activity, the size of the group and duration of implementation, learning objectives, and reflection questions. The job is the same for those practitioners with more experience designing and leading group learning processes willing to start adapting existing methods or creating new ones. Before you stand in front of the group, be aware of the group needs and your objectives, how learning flows before and what needs to happen after this activity. Then choose a method that will serve the purpose and carefully (re)design your debriefing questions as they are an integral part of the activity.

Before we continue listing different methods we use in our work, we'd like to try to distinguish between methods, tools, and techniques. Take into account that in many manuals, websites, and online courses, there is an overlapping and multiple uses of these terms. Concrete methods developed to deal with specific topics in summaries of manuals are called methods, activities, exercises, workshops, and tools.

Here we present methods in a broader meaning as umbrella terms for different tools based on the same principle but possible to adapt for the specific purpose of your work. A method is a general approach or principle a tool takes. The main distinction between tool and method is the level of specificity. Techniques are exercises, games, and activities created when we want to implement some tool in our educational design.



Graphic from the article “Are all approaches equal: the difference between technique, tool and method” (GreenSAM Communication, 2020. June 18) Retrieved from: <https://greensam.eu/technique-tool-method/>.

Below is the result of our brainstorming (one of the methods for generating and exploring different topics) on what different METHOD(s) or types of methods we use in NFE. Remember that the list is not exclusive; others would probably make different groups or categories.

### **Introduction activities and Energizers**

This is a diverse group of methods that include name games, welcome and warm-up activities to break the ice and set a comfortable and positive group atmosphere. Name games support establishing communication in the group, so don't rush through them. Feel free to repeat them or use different ones for re-calling the people's names during the first days/times of more extended educational activity. Name games can serve as energisers when used in competitive team activities. As introduction activities, we see those for “getting to know each other.” They are longer than name games and energisers. These kinds of activities are primarily verbal and help participants discover their similarities and differences and lay the foundation for creating safety through feeling ok while sharing personal things about each other.

Energisers must be done with joy, fun, and passion, or their magic will not appear. They can be bodily-kinaesthetic, including running, dancing, singing, and shouting. Hence, they lift the energy in the group or the ones who bring focus, and collective attention, release tensions, and awake care and trust toward each other – like walks in pairs, group massages, group counting, etc. There is a type of energiser we use for minor group divisions. They have a clear purpose within a program and can lift the energy before “more serious” tasks. Often, we ask the people to find their group by “playing the same instrument,” pretending they are specific animals, dancing specific dance steps, etc.

### **Trust and Group building activities**

These methods support creating team spirit in the group by overcoming a challenge put on by a facilitator. Usually, it is the first time you invite participants to make a step toward their “stretching zone.” Individual and group experiences after these exercises must be debriefed because they serve as a learning tool. Trust and group building can happen during 2in1 complex simulation exercises, such as when participants must be physically engaged and lean on each other in many different ways to complete the task. Typical activity here is “Electric wire,” where a piece of string or rope is tied about 1,2m high from the ground. The object is for the entire team to get over the “electric wire” (the string or rope) safely without getting “electrocuted” (touching the rope) and not going under the rope. Such intensive physical, socio-emotional, and communicational collective experiences stimulate trust building and bring “unknown” people closer to each other. These activities lay the ground for developing group dynamics in which people are willing to learn with and from each other. You can start group building inside and outdoors with one big or a series of more minor activities. You can start with exercises in pairs (like moving as holding the balloon with heads, noses, bellies...), continue in small groups with a bit of competition (when the task is to discover things everybody has in common... or not at all), then do something with the half or whole group (like the whole group to pass the ball under 10 sec) where more communication and change of strategies is essential. All of these can be mixed in complex exercises like “Mission impossible,” explained well by You train project trainers [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTo\\_4D9Ghlw&list=PLalcxnicShPNomxjp6wtFGuaEX7xu6YF](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTo_4D9Ghlw&list=PLalcxnicShPNomxjp6wtFGuaEX7xu6YF).

Always keep safety, individual differences, and the purpose of the activity all the time. Do not rush through reflection after it. You can use it for writing a group agreement for the rest of the training.

### **Methods for generating ideas and opinions**

These methods are more content related and serve to explore previous knowledge, different views about specific topics, or broader usual ways of seeing something through divergent thinking (looking for more solutions to a specific problem or a question). Here we use different brainstorming activities and word associations, usually in plenary, written on flip charts, and in the circle. But more creative approaches are welcome such as creating an alphabet for specific concepts, etc.

### **Methods for presenting concepts, ideas, or opinions**

Moments where non-formal education resembles the most formal education, are when the trainer stands in front of the group and presents a theory or new approach or gives a comparison and overview on a subject. It looks similar, but it shouldn't be. Speakers do not tend to pure information but call for interactivity during these inputs. Questions are welcome from multiple directions, with no one holding a position with “more power,” maybe just a bit more experience.

Inputs and presentations can come as a result of small group work. Then the trainer sets the time and type of presentation and, group by group delivers their findings.

Some methods cannot be firmly put in one category because they are more of a tool for division of group attention. One is called “Fishbowl,” where the presence of small group findings or opinions happens in the small circle observed by the rest of the group sitting in the outside circle. This is a tool both for presenting results from smaller groups and for discussion between group members who present different opinions.

### **Group discussions and debate methods**

Group methods to exchange ideas, improve knowledge and reasoning skills, and practice being open-minded toward different viewpoints. Confrontations are facilitated and structured in different ways depending on the tool used, but one commonality is that any kind of verbal violence is forbidden. The methods set the ground for developing democratic thinking, having a non-judgmental attitude toward different opinions or practices of critical thinking and argumentation.

Many different tools we use here, some already mentioned: “Where do you stand” activity which enables the expression of opinions with agreeing or not to prepared statements by a facilitator, the “World Caffè” a complex group discussion activity where the whole setting reminds of a cafe where friends chat about topics of their interest. In the training situation, tables are set, each with a written topic to discuss, and participants choose the first topic to sit around. After a given time, everybody goes in the same direction and sits around the table next in a row. Discussion continues till the next switch. After all, groups visit all the tables and reporters from each present discussion results. When you have already had too much verbal discussion in the group, you can always go for “silent floor discussion,” where people can write, draw, and put emoticons on what’s written on the big flipcharts on the floor. Music in the background is very welcome.

### **Role plays and simulation exercises**

Role-plays are group activities in which one or more persons take roles in a defined simulated situation. Both roles and situations can be familiar to the participants playing the role or extraordinary and new to their real life. This method is “borrowed” and usually very much adapted from psychodrama, a type of group therapy. Situations and roles can be set by the facilitator in advance or can come from the “director” in the group, a person willing to share the situation – a case and would like to be consulted about it through the “eyes” of others, willing to play different roles in the presented situation.

Here we can mention Forum theatre, as well. The method offers many opportunities for skilled facilitators to engage young people in an active search for the transformation of conflicts and practice empathy. This method can consume more time, so it needs to be calculated in a plan. If not, the process of “getting out” of the role will not be completed, and people can emotionally and mentally stay stuck in the “role” no matter if they go further with a program. For basic information, you can look at the short tutorial “Forum Theater: How to Use it in Non-Formal Education?” from Youtrain project (2019, June 24).

### **Reflection methods**

Besides the reflection facilitated within a specific activity (during debriefing) which completes the learning cycle related to set learning objectives, here, we need to remember individual preferences and the pace of learning in the group. Reflection methods offer the opportunity to everybody in the group at the end of the day or “unit” in the training program to “digest” and think about their learning outcomes up to that point and try to integrate and create their own “red line” in the program.

Reflection methods can be individual, group, or combined. They can use creative visual tools such as Dixit cards, photos, magazines to make collages, etc., to choose or create any visual representation of their learning during the day. You may write an (empowering) reflection question such as:” What was your AHA moment today? or “What from today, in your head,

screams for more...?” or “What is still “on pause” and why?” on a flipchart and people answer by putting a post-it with their thoughts.

We often create group reflections for daily reflections with a closed circle of people to support each other, share and listen to even more private thoughts. It is up to the facilitator to decide in which way or should the groups give feedback to the team.

Purely for individual reflection often is to use a “learning diary” – a tool for the entire training, where people can write, draw, and put anything they want to remember – this tool stays much longer with a person after the educational activity ends.

### **Evaluation methods**

how to assess different aspects of your program you can discover in the chapter of the manual about the evaluation (see **Chapter 11 of this Manual**)

### **Closing activities**

Activities have the purpose of ending the training because it can be painful for different reasons. Even when it's not, trainers responsible for “building the group” now need to focus on individual participants again, empower them to appreciate the experience and how it enriched them, and think about connections and relations they have made between them as grounds for possible future cooperation. Here you can use local postcards for people to write what/whom they want to remember “in many years” after the training. Participants can take postcards with them or ask to be sent to them by organisers. Giving each other certificates is an excellent way to remind participant’s “ownership” of the training.

Sometimes we like to do fun closing games or ending energisers (which can be the group’s favourite) and finish in a positive atmosphere.

Once you start facilitating an experiential learning process, educators must be aware of the complexity of elements in the life of a group. Some of these elements raise questions such as: Are these planned activities best suited to my group?

Is the time and place for a particular activity in the program still correct, or should it be reconsidered?

What are the signs that it is time to change the plan?

Trainers need to use what they have in working with a group. These are just some of the recommendations:

- Prepare healthily – try to understand the group needs and context or plan for them to tell you; use the environment you are in and do not isolate learning from surrounding – it brings informal aspects into the structured program and helps by making it closer to real life; prepare some activities in reserve; if you are a little unsure of a particular activity, try it with a team; make your notes in the program or write your guiding cards.
- Observe – use your and the group's nonverbal communication, and feel the group with your own body what is going on.
- Be present and open – have a flexible focus on all the experiences you are getting from the group.
- Record – take your notebook with you to write down what you observe and thoughts related to what has happened.
- Communicate – use your team to reflect on group or individual learning and participation and adjust further.

## 8 - Educational activity flow and group dynamic

The training group is created to exist for a limited time and for specific educational purposes. It is an intensive experience formed and unformed by the team in charge. Between the start and end of it, many other, personal or professional, outcomes from gathering young people in NFE activities can also happen, like establishing new friendships, project partnerships, activist groups... Educators usually observe that learning groups undergo similar changes that need to be supported and recognised within educational program design. The following text is strongly inspired by online notes written by a colleague and international facilitator, Mark Taylor. He summarises what was discussed during the workshop “Group dynamics and model of experiential learning” many years ago, unsure when.

Positive group dynamics can strongly influence individual learning. Mental, emotional, and energy level in the group changes and moves through several stages of group development. The number of stages varies from 4 to 18 to the opinions of different authors. Some groups go linearly through stages, others go back and forward, and some can be stuck in one of the phases or skip some. One of the roles of the trainer/facilitator is to design the learning process, appreciating the life cycle of a group. It means to design group learning carefully aligned with different stages. In our work, we usually rely on Tuckman’s five group developmental stages (Tuckman, B. 1965).



Wikipedia: *Tuckman's stages of group development*, retrieved from:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuckman%27s\\_stages\\_of\\_group\\_development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuckman%27s_stages_of_group_development)



The flow of your training needs to be in line with this stage in a way that:

**You are forming** – laying the foundations for the group to form and learn together. Creating a safe space for your participants starts from the beginning when all is unknown. You arrange the place, welcome all, introduce the reasons behind the educational activities, allow participants to know the team, offer learning objectives and content steps, explore expectations, introduce values behind and principles of NFE methodology, and set opportunities for your learners to get to know each other on a personal level, what connects them with the topic, share about previous experiences and start with group building exercises.



Why? Because in their heads, people are asking:

What kind of group is this? Who is who? Will I be accepted?  
What's expected of me? Will I be able to do what's needed to learn?

**Storming** – at this stage, the main question is, “can it be done?”. After you presented the plan and participants got to know each other a bit, some started doubting themselves or the group or the team if the program would meet the objectives, will they learn from it, how they expected, etc. A lot of silent dilemmas. People react differently when they are a bit scared. They can resist being silent or loud in many ways, arguing with other participants, rebelling against trainers, refusing to engage, etc. They are thinking about how different they are, and there is still no unity. The question of who (will) control the process is also in the air. This is why we need to create space for collaboration and choose activities in which using differences between participants leads the group to accomplishment. Interpersonal competitiveness changes focus toward the task, time, complexity, and sometimes the trainer, but in an enjoyable way. To manage all this, the educator is a model for wanted behaviour in a participative way:

- sets the ground rules about constructive communication and a collaborative atmosphere,
- clarifies roles and responsibilities,
- enables space for sharing previous experience in topics and realities of your participants and the so far group performance,
- show appreciation for active contributions from learners and merge all perspectives on the main topics as resources and richness in diversity of experiences, opinions, knowledge, perceptions, etc.

The existence of many differences in the group learning process can be pretty confusing and painful. Individuals will try to understand how they can personally contribute with what they can offer in a learning circle, shaping their roles in this particular group. Some will go full speed, but others may will need a bit of encouragement and no judgment.

**Norming** – Learning in a group with many differences can be confusing and painful but inspiring. Previous and this stage sometimes happen simultaneously. Individuals in the group become sure about their role after their contributions are accepted. Feeling of belonging to the group no matter the individual differences creates a shared safe space, and learners can show readiness to grasp and give more content related. Interaction is based on trust. As cohesion and confidence in each other rise, the group seeks feedback from trainers “we can do it!” feels in

the air. This is a moment in a program flow where you can introduce novelties in content, some food for thoughts, inspirational quotes, small group defining concepts, or presenting theoretical backgrounds. Avoid lectures, give short inputs and provide enough resources so participants can research and learn from each other.

**Performing** – To perform/produce, a group needs a mixture of discomfort and comfort. Otherwise, it may stick in the "norming" phase. This is the part of the design fuelled with content and topics. The group is no longer concentrating on itself. The group becomes a driving force for learning. Individual differences and competencies are valued and recognised in solving group problems. People are willing to experiment, make mistakes, and try again. There is a high level of support for each other, so the trainer moves on the margins of learning and takes more of a role of facilitator, helping when needed – people are not afraid to ask for help. This group stage can be described as a stretching zone of learning.

Participants' main questions maximise their performance and evaluate it. There is a need for reflection space, both group and individual.

**Ending or adjuring** – this group stage includes closure, transfer of what's learned, and goodbye. It is as important as previous ones and should not be rushed or undervalued. People



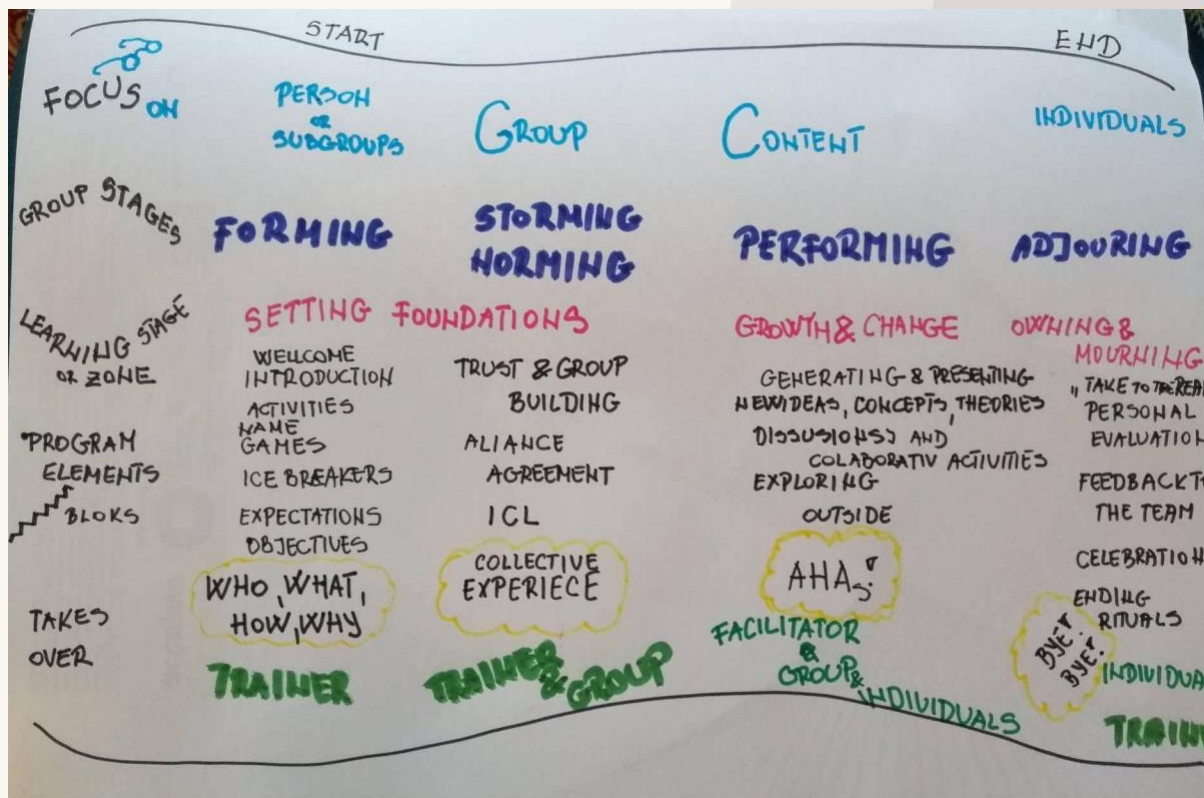
ask themselves:

- What does this group mean to me?
- How am I going to live without these people?
- What am I taking with me from this group/training?

Educators need to plan activities that will give enough space and time for individual evaluation and thinking about how personal learning outcomes can be transferred back into reality, feedback to the team, goodbye from the group, and overall experience. Closing the event is the responsibility of the educators, but it does not mean ending learning for participants. Sometimes in the ending stage, groups or empowered individuals are offered to start planning new possible experiences so the learning spiral can continue.

The following model was inspired by the visual from the T-kit 6 Training essentials manual (Klocker, S. (Ed) 2021, p.125), highlighting the connections between the group learning process, stage of the group dynamic, and suitable methods and activities. We added more elements crucial for us in program design, such as who holds more control (takes more responsibility) for the learning process – a team or a group; and stages in a flow about learning zones (setting grounds for comfort then stepping into the stretching).

Our visual represents the relation between different aspects and elements of educational programs that need to be considered when you design a program flow from start to its end and choose appropriate methods.



The main questions in front of the team when designing a flow are:

- Who/what is the focus of the program?
- How do the activities follow group development stages?
- Do we create learning zones with our flow and how – start with creating comfort by lessening the all unknown about the people, program, and process, slowly invite the group to step into the stretching – mostly connected with content and encourage growing and change and prevent panic from leaving all by owning the outcomes and close the process?
- What are the concrete steps in our program? Big blocks? Their objectives? What are the smaller ones – activities, exercise...?
- Who takes more responsibility for the realization of activities? Are you more of a trainer or facilitator at a given moment, meaning you lead and give more or follow and support the group?

## 9 - Debriefing in educational activities

We have already mentioned Huxley's quote from the “Learning out of the box” collection of cards, how experience is not something lived through but what we did with what happened (Huxley, A. I. as cited in Evrard et al., 2013).

The experiential learning cycle has four phases, as we already mentioned. Here we are at the part that follows substantial experience gained through exercise.

Debriefing is a planned conversation with the group after participating in a concrete activity. It is framed by defined learning objectives, with a series of questions planned, and educators guide participants' reflections. Possibly, the group will raise some questions as well.

Reflection is supposed to lead participants toward the transformation of experience into a new understanding, a new standpoint on previous knowledge, a new belief, a different way to do something, a different look at personal inner drivers or motivation, a new level of self-confidence, etc. Facilitating – supporting experiential learning means that choosing a “great” topic-related activity is not enough. You need to know how to do a debriefing. This means planning and formulating appropriate questions connected to the learning topic and leading the group conversation “knitted” around them. It includes a lot of listening and verbal and body language because debriefing questions include participants' “whole person” thoughts, perceptions, emotions, body reactions, behaviours, behaviour, previous knowledge and conceptions, and beliefs.

Shortly it is about: what happened, why, and what we (the learners) will do with it.

### Debriefing flow

After having an experience with instructed activity, usually, the group is asked to join the facilitator in the circle. This is when it seems that debriefing starts. Debriefing started in the designing program phase. It is an integral part of the activity plan where you first consider:

what you want that your participants realise (objectives);

what is the level and type of their involvement (learning zone);

What are the previous and next steps in the program best connected to where your learners are after you close the cycle with the debriefing?

How to design debriefing reflection?

A quick look at the main points to cover, as Kolb's cycle suggests, are:

- feelings and behaviours during the activity;
- making connections to reality or introducing concepts/topics;
- exploring applications of individual learning in outside contexts.

Micro look at the process of leading the group through the three remaining phases of the experiential learning cycle can look like this:

**Reflective Observation questions** – direct participants to observe and think about concrete experiences they just had (what did they see happen, how did people behave, communicate, what did they (individuals) do and how did they feel, how and what changed during the activity, what was the result of the activity, if any, any inconsistencies, what was difficult, what was easy...).

**Abstract Conceptualization questions** – a re-focuses conversation from the concrete experience is bringing it closer to the topic, trying to achieve an understanding of what happened and why (what similarities can be drawn from experience with personal/social/work life of participants, with other contexts, can they recognise and connect some concept, theory or more generalized knowledge with observed so far, can they make some definitions about the concept, what conclusion can be related to their training or outside reality content related...).

**Active experimentation questions or applying Qs** – for testing what's concluded or experimenting with new knowledge, the facilitator can ask questions to awaken thinking about work/life situations where a particular idea applies. Skill or behaviour can be put into practice (people can imagine where they can try doing something different in new situations, think about some first steps that can lead to a change of behaviour, what can stand in their way, what support would they need to practice a new skill or have a different attitude toward some discussions issue...).

The entire experiential learning cycle is deliberately used to train learners on how to reflect and derive learning conclusions from any life experience. This is not what we learn in schools and is a big part of learning competence.

Why do we say learning goes in a cycle? The conclusions they made, learners can again test in different contexts and realities and check if they apply or not. Then they have a new experience from another context to reflect on, and the learning spiral continues through life.

Example

*Method and activity:*

*Trust building activity – "Secrets in the circle," beginning of the training*

*Objectives:*

- *to encourage exchange between participants by providing a safe space*
- *to pass through the challenging situations together*
- *to gain the first feeling of trust in the group*
- *to reflect on the relationship between giving and taking in the group learning process*
- *to reflect how trust is built and maintained in a group*
- *to understand why we need trust in learning groups*

*Description:*

*In silence, participants write a secret on paper. Everyone folds their papers, comes, and forms the circle. The facilitator asks for one word about how people are feeling around the circle at that moment. Participants share a word. The new instruction is that everyone gives their paper to the person standing opposite the circle. Without unfolding the papers, they hold each other's secrets on the papers in silence. Then, they exchange the place in the circle and paper they hold with their 3rd person on the left; then they exchange the papers with a person now standing opposite them, then they exchange papers with a 5th person on their right, and after that few times more randomly so that no one knows where their secret is and whose secrets they are holding. Finally, the facilitator asks for all papers and puts them all in a closed box in a safe place.*

*Debriefing:*

*How did you feel while writing your secret?*

*What were your thoughts when you heard the instruction – to give?*

*What was happening afterwards? How did other people behave? How does what others did influence you?*

*Did you notice anything changing during the activity – since giving your paper secret, holding somebody else's secret, giving papers with secrets of other people around the circle?*

*How can you connect all these feelings with the process of building trust in a group?*

*Why is trust needed for the group to learn?*

*What can you do to feel safe and build trust during our training?*

Remember that more than two or three questions per phase can sound like an interrogation. Reflective observation may take more time, especially when participants are emotionally, physically, socially, or even intellectually deeply involved (like during psychical team building exercises or debates about issues rooted in beliefs). **Provide enough time for the debriefing. Conceptualisation** may take less but is crucial for individual and group learning insights. You must support participants to step aside “training experience” and look into reality. Some may have real AHA moments; for others, new windows can open by looking at the world or themselves. This is a peak moment when the facilitator uses all communication skills needed – active listening, paraphrasing, and summing to follow and lead the discussion, support exchange, and empowered expression. Let’s not forget the importance of encouraging and respecting different opinions within the group.


Authentic reflection requires the development of a personal point of view on the topic, a deep insight or felt sense in which learners connect thoughts, feelings, values, intuition, and experience. This can only be done appropriately if they ‘plug into’ their intrinsic motivation for learning.

In “Holding the space” (Concetta, T. et al., 2016, p. 48), a publication with a collection of letters from trainers working Europe-wide with young people, we found a valuable list of principles on **how to create a reflective learning environment** shared by all in the group, both educators and learners. The list can be inspirational food for thought about the kind of environment debriefing reflection can happen:

1. Raising awareness within learners to ‘own’ their learning in a personally meaningful way (it is not about taking over the expertise of the educator! and learning from them!).
2. Developing a relationship between educators and learners based on trust, openness, empathy, transparency, dialogue, and feedback.
3. Co-creating the reflective process.
4. Managing to balance “control” over intrinsic learning processes.
5. Directing the thoughtful attention of learners.
6. Slowing down and valuing moments of not-knowing.
7. Deepening questions progressively.
8. Recalling that reflection can never be imposed, only kindly invited.
9. Always consider reflection a broadening, deepening, and holistic process.
10. Be careful how to assess reflection (or not at all).

These principles communicate educators' needed attitude when asking people to share their personal views and emotional thoughts. Among them are simple communication tricks, question design advice, and a request for creating a balance between being “in control” and letting learners decide what’s essential for them to reflect on, so they can own the outcome.

In letter No 3 of “Holding the space” (p. 22), the author, Björn Vilhjálmsson, says: “fine-tune with learners at the beginning which questions are relevant to them to pose right now, what evokes their attention and energy concerning the learning topic, and what makes sense for them here-and-now in their learning process.”



How come we need to talk about “fine-tuning” with learners at the end of this part? The importance of reflection for connecting all the dots for the entire learning cycle is undoubtful. But, sometimes educators can be too enthusiastic about reflection – by asking all planned questions further away from the group or imposing attention on some irrelevant aspect to learners. As in schools, participants in our non-formal activities can complain of too many debriefs and too many reflections. All may lead learners to start withdrawing themselves from participation, and you do not want that to happen.

## 10 - Discussion in educational activities

Discussions in a learning context may end up as rewarding or quite disappointing experiences for many. The biggest challenge here (both for you as a facilitator and for the group as a learning collective of young people) lies in **handing over** the responsibility for learning from the team to the participants. This does not mean that the facilitator lets go of the group, to drive by themselves.

Then, what does facilitation mean?

### Facilitation means:

- 
- To create supportive learning environment  
Low-stress - high challenge
  - To ease learning process
  - To foster communication and cooperation
  - To Be a model not an expert

Drawing inspired by an explanation of facilitation from COMPAS (2002)

Facilitating discussion for learning purposes means encouraging the group to learn from itself through communication and cooperation in a supportive learning environment.

The job is to:

1. Start the discussions

Imagine yourself as the person who's holding a direction sign – pointing the direction to an empty open road for participants to explore. “Starter” questions need to be inviting– to ensure everyone in the group can safely participate according to their level of experience or abilities and to come from authentic curiosity. For more about how to ask curious questions, be patient. Here, we can say (to feed your curiosity) that these questions do not lead to the correct answers (because even you do not have them). For these reasons, we do not ask closed questions – where the answer is YES or NO. Open questions start with – What? How? Where?



Like:

What about ..... would you like to explore now?

What is the part of..... that is not clear?

What would be the example of .....?

How do you feel about .....?

What other angles of..... can you think of?

How would you like it to be?

Where can we look for.....?

## 2. Keep the focus and keep moving.

Suppose the group functions as a learning collective and a safe environment for differences to be accepted, the same stands for different opinions. In line with that, you shouldn't have a problem keeping the discussion on the move. But, keeping the focus can be as challenging as "getting stuck." Facilitators can use different communication skills to manage the direction of communication in the group, such as active listening followed by paraphrasing, clarifying, and giving feedback to the whole group on how they observe the specific moment in the discussion. But, "going nowhere" moments can happen, and then the facilitator needs: a) to acknowledge that state in the group and b) try to identify the cause. It can be because the theme has been exhausted, or it is too emotional for some people. After identifying the cause, the decision on what to do next is always on the facilitator. Still, the trilemma can be communicated to the group (you keep the participative approach).

"I am wondering, should we go further into this direction... or do something slightly/completely different, then continue or move on...? What do you feel is the best option?"

Regarding the content of the discussion, the group itself must find its answers through listening to each other and sharing. They may seek your opinion or advice, but you need to be careful not to sound like an expert and take responsibility for participants learning from that position. The group needs to take this responsibility even in difficult moments.

Helpful questions when discussing stuck can sound like this:

What do you mean when you say...? What can you say more....?

What is the part that is not clear here? What do you feel you want now?

What else? Tell me more...for instance?

## 3. Close it

There are different ways this can be done, even by another facilitator from the team; if you agree that they take notes/drawings/mind maps... Offer appreciation for contributions that seem integrative – opinions that merge more of what people shared and repeat what stayed open. For further exploration, offer additional resources.

Are you still curious about **why curiosity** is something a facilitator **MUST HAVE**?

Children are naturally curious but as we grow up, what usually happens is that there are so many social norms about which we cannot show our natural curiosity, so sentences like: "Do not look" and "Don't ask that!", "It's not polite..." are often heard. And "childish" curiosity about the world and people around us slowly turns off. When we as adults stay connected with such curiosity, it becomes a source of passion, openness, energy, empathy... Curiosity perfectly prepares the brain for learning, as well.

When preparing and leading training or any learning activity, trainers are in the position of learning just as the group is. The team asks themselves many questions about the group, the objectives, the context, the place, the activities, informal time, rest time, etc. These questions

facilitate – help them understand and realise why, what, how, and when... The same curiosity they hope to awaken in participants, especially during discussions in the program.

Questions can be great learning tools. As good questions can open the mind, bad ones can close them. Curiosity builds relationships; interrogation creates defences. What a powerful question does is that it creates a kind of dissonance in our usual way of thinking or looking for answers. Participants can first feel a bit uncomfortable, in silence, thinking how they do not know what to answer, following with their question, "What do you mean by that... Did you mean...? And this is the start of having meaningful discussions... from participants' standpoint.

We have already mentioned that when we ask from authentic curiosity, we ask without knowing the answer (stop being an expert and become a listener). People feel when there is a "correct" answer behind the questions and tend to resist answering. But, when asked to look for answers within, they feel invited to explore personal opinions, ways, or whys...

To practice this state of mind, you can simply start your question with: "**I am curious about...**" This approach comes from coaching practice – coaches don't need to know; it's their job to be curious. We see the facilitation of group discussions like that. It is not a process of finding a correct answer to please all. It's a shared space of exploration, started with curious questions – with no correct answers expected.

But, when it comes to facilitating plenary group discussions, defining inviting questions is just part of the way. Listening is maybe the most critical job; the facilitator must understand what's coming from the group and keep the focus on the theme.

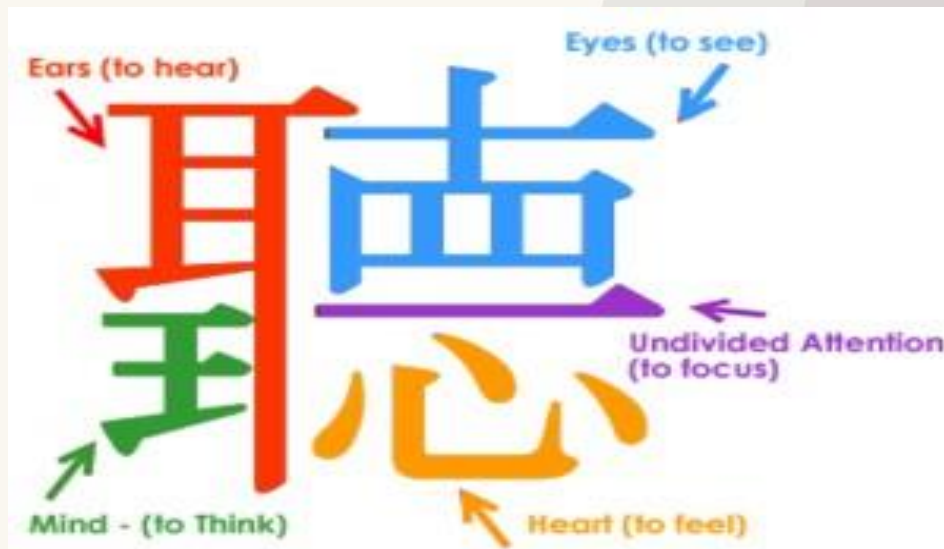
Communication skills for keeping moving and keeping focus during discussions, as well as for "stay tuned" with a group:

#### Active listening

According to dr Albert Mehrabian's study (Belludi, 2008), only 7% of communicated message are channelled through words. The rest is tone or voice, and 55% is through nonverbal elements (facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact, touch, space, voice, inconsistencies).

Most communication is nonverbal (keep in mind when facilitating online!). Nonverbal behaviour is the most crucial aspect of communication and has much more channels (8 at least) than verbal. This is essential for the facilitator to be aware of and behave accordingly.

Both directions (yours and learners') of communications are equally important. Your body language supports and shows interest, readiness, presence, and focus. How much you are open and receptive to all verbal or nonverbal messages the group and individuals are sending – it all says about you **being an active listener**. Using nonverbal signs and verbalising them for group and individual learning is a skill all facilitators need. Active listening is an attitude that comes from listening with your ears, eyes, heart, mind, and undivided attention (your presence).



Retrieved from <https://www.skillpacks.com/chinese-character-listening-5day-plan/>

As mentioned in the publication *One to One: Supporting learning face to face* (Taylor & Kėžaitė–Jakniūnienė, 2018), there are different (orientations) and types of listening. We have passive listening when we pretend to listen while thinking about something else, when we participate in a conversation, listening, but some part of our attention is still directed to ourselves, our thoughts. Then we have active listening, when our focus is on the speaker, listening to the whole person with your whole person.

#### Empathic understanding and use of nonviolent language

As a facilitator, you need to have an empathy button “on” all the time, both for what is going on with the group and what is happening in you. Empathic communication is highly dependent on nonverbal communication signs because this is a natural channel for sending and receiving emotions. The facilitator must know how and when to communicate their feelings to the group. Keep in mind that learning benefits from your empathy. Verbalise the message using the nonviolent language of compassionate communication, as Marshall Rosenberg, father of nonviolent communication, named it.

You can't get too much wrong with empathic listening and speaking. It is a simple formula that allows you to check if you have “understood” something by mistake and try again. This kind of communication puts you in absolute presence, gives you full attention, and makes contact with other people. When you give empathy, you connect. When you connect, you demonstrate understanding. Intellectual understanding – of thoughts, ideas, words, content... it's called paraphrasing. Empathy is more profound, comprehensive, and fuller (Rosenberg, M. 2016).

Empathy in 4 steps:

1. Say what you observe, hear, and see without judging – just facts (this is an active listening skill – you are listening to the whole person)
2. Guess and express a feeling behind the behaviour, words
3. Guess and express, met or unmet, the need behind the feelings
4. Express a concrete request or question what can be the action that will meet a need

Example:

This is the third time you speak when another person has already started, and you look enthusiastic about having a say. It makes me sad and confused because I need to make equal

space for everyone to express themselves by doing something you do to others – interrupt yourself. What do you think about that? How do you feel when interrupted? What can you do to be engaged, as I see you are, and still listen to others without interrupting?

*Be careful with concentrating too much on the personal feelings in the group. Sometimes you feel in the group more about you, and you need to understand the difference. The guiding principle helps you stay connected with a group; this is what you follow. When something is happening inside you, that disconnects you from being able to follow the group process, acknowledge how you feel, and later ask the team to listen and help understand what happened – so you can learn.*

Following listening skills can help you understand better the content of the discussions and debriefings. The whole list originates from the Manual for facilitators in non-formal education of the Council of Europe (Clocker, S 2009).

#### Paraphrasing:

It shows that you are listening and trying to understand. Help speakers understand themselves as well. When you paraphrase other people's sentences, be careful not to add something that was not said, like your own ideas, just shortly in your own words, repeat how you understand what was said.

How: "If I understand you correctly...?" "In other words, it could be...?"

#### Constructive feedback:

We understand feedback as a gift, not as another person's criticism. To construct your feedback in such a way, first, you must check if it is needed. The whole purpose and intention of giving feedback are for the person to do something with it – change some behaviour, do something differently. It is never about the person – feedback starts with facts, a description of the situation, and behaviour and continues with nonviolent language – using I message.



How: “When I hear you saying/doing...I feel, I think”



Then you offer another solution, suggest what the person can try to do in the given situation like: “Maybe you can try.....?” and ask how it sounds. There is always a question mark at the end of the feedback.

It is always good to start your feedback with a positive example of a person's behaviour. This is how you can raise the confidence of others, pointing to their strengths.

Drawing out:

A way of supporting people to take the next step in clarifying their ideas. It makes the speaker understand that you are with them and that you understand them so far.

How: paraphrase the speaker's statement, and then ask open-ended non-directive questions: “As I understand, you said that... Can you tell us more about what you mean by...?”

Encouraging:

The art of creating an opportunity for people to participate without putting any one individual on the spot.

How: “Who else has an idea?”, “Is this discussion raising questions for anyone else?”, “Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken for a while,” etc. Summarising:

Excellent skill in knowing to move the focus of the discussion if needed. First, you repeat the main ideas of the discussion so far and then take it a bit further.

How: “So far, I have heard... Now, how does it sound to look more at this aspect...? Where would it take us?”

Integrate:

Listening for common ground serves to resolve disagreements – integrative contributions.

How: First, indicate to the group that you will summarise the group's differences and similarities. Second, summarise the differences. Third, note areas of common ground. Last, check for accuracy.

If you so far still do not have an idea what the facilitator does, this is what they never do:

Look at me – I'm the star.

Some facilitators think of themselves as ‘gurus,’ loving the sound of their voices. Participants quickly tire of one person talking, whether the facilitator or another.

Forget the group potential.

Your job IS to try to understand your group before facilitating a workshop and later on to acknowledge participants' skills and knowledge during training sessions. Suppose you do not

use the participant's skills and knowledge. In that case, it may create a power play during a learning process with participants and the facilitator trying to "measure" each other's expertise.

#### Enforced affirmation

Expecting the group to recognise the facilitator's superior wisdom. Examples: "Am I right?" "Do you agree?". The critical question is not whether you are right but whether the group is right. And the focus is not on you but the subject matter.

#### You do not walk as you talk.

Working with young people always puts you in the role of a model, not an expert. Participants pick up very quickly when a facilitator is insincere. Insincerity may stem from a disbelief in the content and program (or some elements of it) or a disbelief in the overall goal of the project the training is part of. Never invite young people to join you in something you do not stand behind. Even when you do not like doing energisers, start with that truth about yourself and choose the one you "enjoy" from time to time. Self-directed humour is an excellent way always to tell the 'real truth'...

#### Accepting less

When you efficiently respond "good," too superficial answers. This is also committed when we let people mumble and don't require their full participation. This approach does not bother to demand the best and assumes that people cannot produce authentic responses to genuine questions. As an alternative, we can disagree, like, "Well, maybe, but have you considered it this way...?".

#### Fulfil every silence

Intentional silence is highly underestimated. It consists of a pause, lasting 5-8 seconds, to give participants "extra quiet time" to discover what they want to say. Some facilitators just can't endure it.

Stay still, relaxed, with eye contact and body language, and pay attention. Have trust that group wisdom will arise. If not, you can always come back later on the issue if the learning process needs it.

## 11 - Successful evaluation in the learning activities

“Evaluation is creation: hear it, you creators! Evaluating is itself the most valuable treasure of all that we value. It is only through evaluation that value exists: and without evaluation, the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear it, you creators!” (Friedrich Nietzsche).

As human beings, we are constantly evaluating ourselves and everything around us. Whether preparing dinner for your friends or attending a music festival, you will (un)consciously collect information, give them value, try to draw conclusions from them, and think about things that could be changed for the next time. Was the band you were listening to good enough; Were your standards too high compared to your friend’s; were people at the concert having fun because they were dancing all the time; was it worth paying that much for the ticket to attend, etc.? There is also not much difference in evaluating your learning activity, but one thing we try to make different is to make educational evaluation systematically, with clear explanations and conclusions.

T-Kit 10 “Educational Evaluation in Youth Work” (Garcia Lopez, 2007) defines educational evaluations as a systematic and ongoing process that includes:

- Researching and collecting information, from different sources, about the learning process, the content, the methods, the context, and the outcomes of educational activity;
- The organisation and analysis of that information;
- The establishment of specific criteria (evaluation criteria);
- The discernment and judgment of the analysed information (according to the set evaluation criteria and in the light of the educational objectives);
- Drawing conclusions and recommendations allow the re-orientation and eventual improvement of the educational activity”.

### When to evaluate?

Based on descriptions and conclusions of T-Kit 3 “Project management” (Dussap & Merry, 2004) about several stages of the evaluation of the project, revised T-Kit 6 “Training Essentials” (Klocker, 2019) concludes the four key points when evaluation of the learning activities should be done:

- 1.) Ex-ante evaluation: This evaluation is carried out after identifying the learning activity needs and designing an educational program for the activity. At this stage, the assumptions and needs on which the program is based and the program design itself should be evaluated and, if necessary, adapted or fine-tuned.

- 2.) Ongoing evaluation: This evaluation is done during the learning activity. The program is reviewed regularly to see if it answers the needs and succeeds in reaching the defined objectives (examples include small evaluation groups, mid-term evaluation, oral and written feedback from participants, etc.).
- 3.) Final evaluation: This evaluation is implemented at the very end of the learning activity. The main focus is on participants' reactions, their appraisal of the learning outcomes, evaluating the attainment of the goals and objectives, and so forth (examples include evaluation questionnaires, presentations by participants, oral evaluation, visual evaluation, and planning team evaluation).
- 4.) Ex-post evaluation: This evaluation is also known as impact evaluation. It is performed sometime after the activity and mainly focuses on the perceived personal development of the participants. The main goal is to check the kinds of impact the learning activity has had on the participants and how that impact is reflected in both personal terms and its registration in their organisations (examples include in-depth research, evaluation questionnaire, assessment of entire organisations, etc.).

Klocker (2019), in the same publication, is, defining and explains four different evaluation models:

## The Kirkpatrick Model

Four fields of the evaluation:

- Reaction: a personal reflection from participants, i.e., on satisfaction, effect, and utility of the training program;
- Learning: growth of knowledge, learning achievements;
- Behaviour: changes in behaviour, transfer of competencies into concrete actions/situations;
- Results: long-term, lasting transfer, organisational national and institutional terms.

## The CIPP Model

Four fields of the evaluation:

- Context evaluation – Are the chosen goals the right ones for this activity?
- Input evaluation – Is the program well planned? Are there enough resources to implement the activity?
- Process evaluation – How was the flow of the activity? What feedback was received from the participants?
- Product (outcome) evaluation – Were the objectives reached?

## The Brinkerhoff Model

Six fields of the evaluation:



- Goal setting – What are the needs? Are these needs real?
- Program design – What is required to meet these needs? Is this design going to meet the needs?
- Program implementation – How do we evaluate the program in practice?
- Immediate outcomes – Did the participants learn? What did they learn?
- Intermediate or usage outcomes – Are the participants implementing their learning?
- Impacts and worth – Did it make a worthwhile difference to the participants' organisations and personal development?

## Systems Approach (Bushnell) Model

Four fields of the evaluation:

- Input – What goes into the training effort? (Trainee qualifications, trainer competence, resources, etc.)
- Process – How adequate are the activity's planning, design, development, and implementation?
- Output – What are the participants' reactions? Have they gained knowledge or skills? Did they reflect on their behaviour? Did their attitudes change?
- Outcomes – What are the effects on the participants' organisations?

The Kirkpatrick Model – Explanation and real-life examples



Retrieved from <https://www.isixsigma.com/dictionary/kirkpatrick-model-of-evaluation/>

The Kirkpatrick Model is an internationally recognised tool for evaluating and analysing the results of educational, training, and learning programs. It consists of four levels of evaluation: **Reaction**, **Learning**, **Behaviour**, and **Results**. Each successive level of the model represents a more precise measure of the effectiveness of a training program.

Donald Kirkpatrick, former Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin, first published his model in 1959. He updated it in 1975 and again in 1993, when he published his best-known work, "Evaluating Training Programs."

### The first level of the evaluation – Reaction

After implementing any educational activity, the first thing you want to measure is the involvement of the learners in the activity, their energy, and enthusiasm. You will want to explore what learners are thinking about your activity, how significant their contribution was, how extensive their involvement was, how relevant it was to their learning expectations, etc.

This evaluation is usually done by implementing different surveys with previously prepared questions at the end of the learning activity or in the middle if you are implementing a mid-term evaluation.

Mindtools team is suggesting the following questions to be asked to learners/participants at the end of the educational activity to measure their reaction (Mind Tools Content Team, 2009):

- Did you feel that training/activity was worth your time?
- Did you feel that the training/activity was successful?
- What were the most significant strengths and weaknesses of the activity?
- Did you like the venue and presentation style?
- Did the training/activity accommodate your learning expectations?
- Were the training activities engaging?
- What are the three most important things you learned?
- What do you plan to apply from what you learned in your future career?
- What support might you need to apply what you learned?

These are just some examples of the questions you might use or adjust based on the nature of your educational activity. Once you collect all answers and inputs, it is essential to analyse them and improve/adjust future educational activities based on them.

### The second level of the evaluation – Learning

As previously mentioned in this manual, learning in non-formal education is closely related to developing competencies, learners' attitudes, confidence, and commitments. As in non-formal education, we don't have specific tests or exams to measure the learning success of the participants; there are several other ways to evaluate the group's learning. One of the most practical is conducted through comparing skills, knowledge, and experiences before the start of the educational activity and just after it is finished: before the start of the learning activity, learners are given previously prepared forms where they need to quantitatively grade (1-5 or 1-10) their existing knowledge or skills in specific topics relevant to the educational activity (for example knowledge about existing policies, skills in teamwork, skills in organising educational workshops, awareness of social problems in their local community, etc.), and once the educational activity was implemented. In this way, participants will be able to grade their learning process, which can be a starting point for you to evaluate the overall achievement of

the learning objectives you set at the beginning of the process. However, to enable participants to be fully aware of the learning process and things they improved during the activity, it is essential to give them as many opportunities to practically implement everything they learned by using non-formal learning methods such as roleplays, simulations, or interactive presentations. Also, suppose you are doing more workshops or more days of educational activities. In that case, it can be helpful to enable participants to evaluate their learning after each workshop (or chapter of learning) by using some of the tools as from the examples:

### **1.) Three things evaluation**

- One new thing I learned today/during the workshop/during the specific part of the educational activity
- One thing I knew before the workshop/specific part of the educational activity
- One thing I will explore more after the workshop/specific part of the educational activity

### **2.) Different corners of the room**

- There are several corners in the room:
- A suitcase (drawn on flip chart paper or built from a cardboard box) hanging/standing in one corner asking for “This I am taking home.”
- A big question mark in another corner says, “Questions left unanswered.”
- A light bulb in another corner says, “Ideas, suggestions...”
- A trash can in another corner says, “This I'm leaving here.”
- The participants are asked to think about these things and note their answers on the papers.

### **3.) Target evaluation**

- Participants place one mark or sticker in each segment of a printed target/dartboard according to their rating of that activity or outcome, the best being closest to the bullseye and the worst being furthest away.
- Target evaluation is perfect for different rating elements of an event. However, it can also be used to reflect on overall outcomes or any other questions that can be placed along a rating scale response.
- Visual approaches are often more fun for participants than standard questionnaires.

## The third level of the evaluation – Behaviour

This level of evaluation aims to analyse changes in the behaviour of learners changes based on the previously described learning. However, compared with the previous levels and methods, this level of evaluation is impossible to be done at the very end of the activity, but after some time, and for this reason, it presents a longer-term process. It is logical that if you are training trainers or young leaders, there is no way to recognize or evaluate if they became trainers or leaders through specific questions or exercises. Still, only through things will they implement in the following period. Their involvement in regular activities/jobs they will be doing. As in youth work, we are usually limited with the funds for meeting with the participants at the same venue and the same group; this process is usually done online by using specially prepared questionnaires sent to participants after some time (usually over weeks or months). Mindtools

article mentions the following questions as crucial to include in this process (Mind Tools Content Team, 2009):

- Did the participants put any of their learning into use?
- Can participants teach their new knowledge, skills, or attitudes to other people?
- Are participants aware that they've changed their behaviour?

#### The fourth level of the evaluation – Results

Same as the previous level of the evaluation, this one also presents a long-term process that can't be analysed as soon as a learning activity is conducted. As opposed to level 3, where we are more concentrated on the individual learning results, here we are more thinking about the organisational level and how educational activity results impact participants' organisations and what benefits they see in their daily work through improved competencies of the participants. Evaluation at this level is even more complicated than the previous one as we are not directly learning about the individual learning success of the participants. Still, we need to identify specific results we want to analyse from previously developed learning objectives. The methods and tools we are using for evaluation will target youth workers and staff of the organisations who were not directly involved in our learning activities but working with participants who were part of those activities. For this reason, there is always a specific risk that even if our learning activity was successful, due to internal factors inside the organisation, results might not be achieved as we envisioned.

#### Quantitative vs qualitative evaluation

When doing any kind of evaluation at any stage of the learning activity (prior, mid-term, or final evaluation), general evaluation can be divided into quantitative and qualitative.

**Quantitative evaluation** in T-kit 10, “Educational Evaluation in Youth Work” (Garcia Lopez, 2007), is defined as the evaluation that focuses on the “quantity of the experience” and aims to count or measure different phenomena. It is answering on questions “how many,” “how much,” and “how often,” for example:

- How many young people attended the conferences in local communities?
- How many workshops were implemented during the project?
- How often where young people meet every month?
- How often were you exchanging emails and information with participants after the learning activity?

This type of evaluation is strictly connected with measurements, and conclusions are always based on the analysis of collected data.

**Qualitative evaluation** is defined as the evaluation that focuses on the meaning of the experience for participants and relates to the quality of the program and the learning activity in general. It is answering questions “how” and “why,” for example:

- Why are young leaders now more interested in working on climate change?
- How do the methodologies used during the learning activity answer the needs of the participants?
- Why did more female participants attend the learning activity than male participants?

This evaluation is somewhat connected with an explanation of phenomena accrued, and conclusions from observations depend on interpretation.

Although both quantitative and qualitative evaluation has their advantages and disadvantages, in evaluating youth work learning activities, it is essential to combine both of them to get different information that will help you create a larger and clearer picture of your learning activity and find the things that could be improved in the future.

## 12 - How to create successful educational activities

Apart from the theoretical inputs we defined earlier in the manual, we will provide you with practical examples from our experience. Summarising everything previously mentioned, no matter how well you have conducted a needs assessment, developed learning objectives, and thought about methods and types of activities, there are still some things that can make implementing your learning activity more challenging and complex. Based on the rich experience of the authors of this manual, as well as conducting analyses and reading material from the (EU)European training organisations, here we provided you with some practical examples and advice that should be taken into consideration when organising and implementing any the learning activity in youth work:

- Facilitation (interaction with participants)

Even if you can find more information about basics and theories of facilitation in the specially designed chapter, here we will provide some additional practical advice based on the personal experience of authors in working with different groups in non-formal education settings at both local and international levels:

- 1.) Always speak and present that everyone can understand you (don't use too complicated words, adjust vocabulary and terms based on your target group, try not to use foreign words if not working with multilingual groups, use “the grandma rule” – if your grandma who is not related to the topic is not able to understand you clearly, then also your participants will not be able to).
- 2.) Never impose your opinions on the participants (this is specially related when working with young people, as they are often growing up in a society that is trying to impose them the norms they must follow, so you need to be sure they feel comfortable and relaxed enough to be able to participate in the activity fully).
- 3.) Always keep your energy – even if it is hard to define energy when facilitating educational activities, be sure that participants will be able to recognise that if you are not present at the activity with your 100%, that will make them feel less motivated and encouraged. There is no magic advice we can give you regarding this. Still, we ensure you that the energy level and happiness you will feel after successfully implementing the activity when you have a chance for someone to improve themselves both personally and professionally will “recharge your batteries” and make you feel ready to continue.

- Sitting in the circle (everyone is involved, every opinion matters)

We have often mentioned that youth work learning activities must be inclusive and voluntary and that everyone involved must feel comfortable and safe to participate. The space and environment where the learning activity is taking place play an important role in how successful that activity will be and how many participants will be involved and interested in participating and participating. Only if participants feel comfortable enough will they be able to openly discuss, ask questions, share opinions, and be involved enough that the learning activity will have some long-term effects on their development (both personal and professional).

Unlike the traditional classrooms in schools or universities where the teacher/professor/educator is sitting on one side and all students are on the other, in youth work learning activities working space must be open and accessible for everyone. There shouldn't be any barriers between participants (such as big tables, chairs, walls, etc.), but they should be able to face each other at all times. It is usually done by creating a circle or semicircle arrangement where all participants will be equal and able to make contact with others.

In specific cases when you might not have enough space or enough time to create such structures, try to improvise and make a structure that will enable at least most participants to be involved. In specific cases, you can even ask participants to help you move the table and facilities inside the room as part of the energising and team-building activities :)

- Working in pairs or smaller groups

Youth work learning activities should encourage participants to work in pairs or smaller groups. Apart from making your learning activity easier to facilitate and more enjoyable to participants, here are some other advantages of working in pairs and smaller groups:

- 1.) It allows all participants to share experiences related to the topic and learn more about each other
- 2.) Foster cooperation rather than competition in the educational process and the group
- 3.) Develop a sense of group identity among the participants
- 4.) Create opportunities for input from less confident participants who might not decide to participate otherwise
- 5.) Allows participants to tackle more complex tasks and problems than doing it individually
- 6.) Allows participants to finish and complete the tasks that they might give up if working alone

- Time management

When preparing and implementing any educational activity, it is essential to take care of time management. When developing planned activities, you should always estimate the duration of every part of the activity and assume possible risks that could happen and make your activity last longer or shorter than expected. Non-formal education activities depend on successful interaction with your participants. Prepare in advance possible questions or statements that you can use to make your discussion more interactive and exciting, but also practice being aware of the time and knowing when the exercise or activity should be concluded and you need to move on further.

- Who is who in the group

Before the start of the learning process, it is essential that you know your participants and their backgrounds. In some activities, you will have more preliminary information about your group (such as their educational background, professional expertise, interests, etc.) than in others. However, it is always recommended to use “meeting each other” exercises at the beginning, not only that participants meet with each other, but also that you get a better picture of the learners and possibly adjust some parts of the activities based on it.

- Use only reliable sources and information

When preparing and developing flows of educational activities, always use reliable and trustworthy background information and materials. Try to find information from materials published by relevant institutions and organisations in youth work and the general topic your educational activity will be about. However, no matter how well prepared you are for the implementation of your activity, you will never be able to fully prepare for the possible questions, and doubts participants might have during the implementation. For this reason, it is crucial that you never present or give answers to the things you are not 100% sure that they are right. Any wrong or unreliable information that participants (learners) receive during educational activities can seriously affect them and their actions later. Also, if you are using or sharing any statistical data and information, you must know your sources and the period of the data. To conclude, never share information you are unsure about with participants. If needed, tell them that you will give them answers after the educational activity when you can confirm them and their sources.

- Participants (learners) are the ones creating a flow of educational activities.

When you develop the plan for the educational activity and implement it in the same way with a few different groups of participants, you will realise that each time it was different, and the final results were never the same. Those educational activities will be similar in the methods, activities, and exercises you are using, but in the end, participants will be the ones who create the final results. Discussions will never look the same and last for the same amount of time; brainstorming will always be different, and conclusions will be similar but different in a



specific way. Another reason that your educational activities will be different is based on the different needs of the participants and that some topics and exercises will be discussed more or less when working with several groups. Always follow the needs of the participants, but also take care that you are following the previously prepared flow leading you to fulfil final objectives and learning outcomes.

## 13 - Challenges and obstacles in implementing learning activities

No matter how well your educational activities are prepared, there are still some things you cannot influence, which can present you with a challenge when achieving your desired objectives and results.

In the work “Obstacles and challenges identified by practitioners of non-formal science learning activities in Europe” (Christidou et al., 2022), based on inputs of 22 youth work practitioners from Europe, described the most common challenges that directly don’t involve learning goals and process of the activities. Still, they seem to impact them directly and their learning potential. These challenges and obstacles can occur before the start of the activity and are more connected with the successful preparation and development of the process:

- Participants

It includes the varied backgrounds of the participants in terms of age, skills, knowledge, and experience, and the difficulty for the organisers to know participants’ backgrounds well in advance. Knowing the number and the participant's background, needs, and interests in advance would allow practitioners to prepare better and design activities tailored to the participant's interests and profiles. This uncertainty can become even more challenging when you are running learning activities with young people from specific backgrounds and on sensitive topics (such as reconciliation, peace-building, etc.), where you might have youngsters being taught differently through formal education systems and interpreting the same terms differently.

- Time constraints

The time constraints of the activities are triggering several challenges for the practitioners. As most of the learning activities are organised either as one-time events or for a limited time, they require both practitioners and participants to follow a breakneck pace of the activity, during which they have to switch from one step to the other at the correct time. This rigid structure of the activities, with practitioners following specific steps at a specific time, often restricts the time available for the participants to experiment, complete their tasks and showcase their progress during the final stages of the activity. Although the time limit is undoubtedly necessary for practical and organisational reasons, it seems that the content and structure of the activities should consider and allow enough time and space for both the participants and practitioners to express themselves and, if needed, deepen or expand the tasks at hand. For this

reason, it is crucial to take care of and practice the time management we mentioned in the previous section.

- Design and availability of educational materials and resources

When planning a learning activity, your desired outcomes and objectives can sometimes be directly limited or driven by your available resources. First of all, participants in the group will never be the same, and while some will be satisfied with learning simply through discussions and small tasks, some will need more practical and advanced methods to encourage their learning process. However, due to limitations in the working space or funding, you will not always be able to fully implement or turn into the practice ideas you had in your head. Not being able to use resources you might need challenges the whole design of the activity. If you don't have your desired resources, you must use simple materials and approaches that might threaten to ruin the entire activity. This can be particularly challenging nowadays when using digital resources and tools due to their fast-paced, changing nature and competition with existing commercial options. For example, digital exercise can be quickly outdated or graphically inferior compared with existing mobile games young people are playing and be boring for them to use.

- Conflict with formal education settings

Implementing non-formal education activities with participants coming from school settings can be challenging mainly due to the constraints of the curriculum and the available time that appear to be in from school settings can be challenging mainly due to the constraints of the curriculum and the available time appear to conflict with the more open-ended approaches and learning objectives of a non-formal science learning activity.

On the other side, even when you prepare everything well and think about all the small details, every group of youngsters you work with will be different and bring some specific challenges. Manual "Program Y" (Micijevic & Slijepcevic, 2022) brought a list of the most common problems and challenges you might encounter when implementing/facilitating youth work learning activity and possible solutions you might use to resolve them:

Potential challenges and problems:

- 1.) Participant(s) are speaking between each other and disturbing the others
- 2.) Participant(s) are constantly interrupting others and don't let them finish their thoughts
- 3.) Participant(s) are not actively participating, and no matter what questions you ask, you are getting no answer
- 4.) Participant(s) are using their mobile phones or other smart devices in the middle of the workshop
- 5.) Participant(s) are insulting others and is having offensive comments to others

Potential solutions to use:

- If some participant(s) are not actively involved in the workshop and are making trouble and disturbing the rest of the group, always try to make the first step to include that participant(s). You can directly ask that person for their opinion about something, use him/her as a partner in the next exercise, or give them some task that will make that person feel important (such as writing on the flipchart, collecting papers, being group leader, etc.)
- Suppose you are working with more sensible topics, and you feel that the group doesn't feel comfortable sharing their opinions even after you implemented ice-breaking games. In that case, you could try to share your own story regarding the topic and ask the group if they had similar experiences. This will help participants to know that all young people are facing similar problems and will feel more comfortable speaking with you and the rest of the group about those.
- When implementing youth work activities and using principles of non-formal education, it is essential to remember that no one should ever be removed from the learning activity. In formal education, we all are used to the idea that if you are not following the class or proposed rules, you will be directly punished (removed from the class, get lower grades, etc.). In the activities we are implementing, we always must show young people that we are there because of them, to listen to them, and give our best to understand them.
- Before starting any learning activity, it is recommended to give a few minutes to participants to create their own rules and jointly agree on them. If you think they might forget some essential rules, you can propose them and put them on the list only if the group accepts them, but not force them. Later, it will make your facilitation much easier as you can recall those rules if participants break them.
- If you are asking questions that participants are not answering, these could be some of the reasons:
  - 1.) Participants are shy or do not feel comfortable enough to answer: in this case, you can be the one to offer the first answer and ask the group to continue. Also, always repeat to the group that there are no wrong or stupid answers and that all opinions are equally respected and accepted.
  - 2.) Participants are not interested in your topic or don't understand your questions well enough: in this case, try to see what the group is interested in. Always openly speak with your group, and as we mentioned before, don't be afraid to change some things in your activity flow based on the inputs and needs of the participants. If participants don't understand questions, try to explain them better and redefine them.

## 14 - Techniques and tools in educational work with youth (for face-to-face, online, and combined settings)

In one of the previous chapters, you had a chance to read and explore more about different methods in non-formal education. Also, you learned the difference between methods, tools, and techniques. This chapter will give a few practical examples of tools used for different methods and in different settings (face-to-face, online and blended).

METHODS	FACE TO FACE	ONLINE	BLENDED
<b>Introduction and name games / energizers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Name and movement” - <a href="#">2 Name Games: Name and Movement, Princesses and Dragons</a></li> <li>2.) “Passport “- <a href="#">Getting to Know Each Other Activity: Passport</a></li> <li>3.) “Walk and talk” - participants are divided into pairs and provided with previously prepared questions on the paper that help them meet each other better (by discussing their hobbies, favorite movies/music/food etc.)</li> <li>4.) “I am good at...” - <a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/-i-m-good-at...-">https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/-i-m-good-at...-</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “What else could it be...” - <a href="#">Super simple Zoom energizer - what else could it be? ☺</a></li> <li>2.) “Brain gym” - <a href="#">Brain gym   simple brain boosting exercises   brain exercises easy   7 ultimate brain gym exercises</a></li> <li>3.) “Making personal e-cards” - <a href="https://bighugelabs.com/deck.php">https://bighugelabs.com/deck.php</a></li> <li>4.) “Wheel decide game” - <a href="https://wheeldecide.com/wheels/">https://wheeldecide.com/wheels/</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Making personal e-cards” - <a href="https://bighugelabs.com/deck.php">https://bighugelabs.com/deck.php</a></li> <li>2.) Using specially prepared forums and exchange rooms to enable participants to introduce themselves</li> </ol>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Team-building and group-building activities</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Mission impossible” - <a href="#">Team Building Group Challenge: Mission Impossible</a></li> <li>2.) “Creating spider web” - <a href="https://smallbusiness.chron.com/team-building-exercises-ropes-18685.html">https://smallbusiness.chron.com/team-building-exercises-ropes-18685.html</a></li> <li>3.) “Knots exercise” - <a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/knots">https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/knots</a></li> <li>4.) “Hula hoops activities” - <a href="https://www.leadbyadventure.com/2015/06/30/7-team-games-with-hula-hoops/">https://www.leadbyadventure.com/2015/06/30/7-team-games-with-hula-hoops/</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Gather town platform” provides a space for creation of treasure hunt and similar exercises - <a href="https://www.gather.town">https://www.gather.town</a></li> <li>2.) “Haiku poem” is an exercises where participants create joint haiku poem by adding a single word (1 participant = 1 word) by using Jamboard platform - <a href="https://jamboard.google.com">https://jamboard.google.com</a></li> <li>3.) “How tall is Alfred” - <a href="https://projectmanagementacademyweb.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/how-tall-is-alfred-team-building-task/">https://projectmanagementacademyweb.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/how-tall-is-alfred-team-building-task/</a></li> </ol>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>For generating ideas and opinions</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Traditional brainstorming in plenary” by using papers and post-it notes</li> <li>2.) “Word cloud” on several activity topics by using Mentimeter - <a href="https://www.mentimeter.com">https://www.mentimeter.com</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Word cloud” on several activity topics by using Mentimeter - <a href="https://www.mentimeter.com">https://www.mentimeter.com</a></li> <li>2.) “Silent brainstorming” by using Jamboard platform - <a href="http://jamboard.google.com/">http://jamboard.google.com/</a></li> <li>3.) “Comments on image/story/question posted” by using Padlet platform - <a href="https://padlet.com">https://padlet.com</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Creating mind maps” by using Popplet platform - <a href="http://www.popplet.com">www.popplet.com</a></li> <li>2.) “Showing results” by using Mentimeter platform - <a href="http://www.mentimeter.com">www.mentimeter.com</a></li> </ol>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>For presenting ideas and opinions</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Traditional presentations” by using verbal inputs</li> <li>2.) “Wall exhibition” where participants use graphical presentations and drawing to present several topics</li> <li>3.) “Creative presentations” by using performing small role-plays or using audio/video inputs (preparing videos or filming podcasts)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Verbal inputs” in Zoom or similar platforms where presenter is taking a host role and is able to share the screen</li> <li>2.) “Powerpoint presentations” by using Microsoft Office or Google Slides tools - <a href="https://www.google.com/slides/about/">https://www.google.com/slides/about/</a></li> <li>3.) “Creative presentations” by using Padlet - <a href="https://padlet.com">https://padlet.com</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Individual practical assignments” that are later uploaded in the specific platform (common working space used)</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Group discussions and debates</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “World Cafe” - <a href="#">Get Groups Moving - World Cafe</a></li> <li>2.) “Where do you stand?” - <a href="#">Facilitating Group Debate: Where Do You Stand Method</a></li> <li>3.) “Silent floor” - <a href="#">Facilitating Group Discussion: Silent Floor Method</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Agree/Disagree” where participant can choose between offered options by using Mentimeter platform - <a href="https://www.mentimeter.com">https://www.mentimeter.com</a></li> <li>2.) “Create a middle line” where participants can upload their avatars on which side of the line they are standing about opinions they are sharing by using Jamboard - <a href="https://jamboard.google.com">https://jamboard.google.com</a></li> <li>3.) “Breakout rooms” where participants get divided into smaller groups based on their opinions and stances by using Zoom platform</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Forum discussions” where participants leave posts about their opinions by using Reddit or similar forum platforms - <a href="https://www.reddit.com">https://www.reddit.com</a></li> </ol>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Role-plays and simulations</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Five Tricks” - <a href="#">Classic Intercultural Simulation Activity - Five Tricks</a></li> <li>2.) “Where do you stand?” - <a href="https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262514/Act20.pdf/0fab8805-9116-ffb8-a66f-c10b42d9b455">https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262514/Act20.pdf/0fab8805-9116-ffb8-a66f-c10b42d9b455</a></li> <li>3.) “Fishbowl exercise” - <a href="https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/fishbowltechnique">https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/fishbowltechnique</a></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “TV show simulation” where participants get a different roles such as director, actor, host etc. and need to prepare tv show/podcast by using breakout rooms in Zoom</li> </ol>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reflection</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Weather report” - <a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/weather-report">https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/weather-report</a></li> <li>2.) “Personal learning diary” where participants write their own learning diaries that help them track their learning process</li> <li>3.) “Combined reflection” - <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30Bmhads4rA&amp;list=PLalcxnicShPNomcxjp6wtFGuaEX7xu6YF&amp;index=15">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30Bmhads4rA&amp;list=PLalcxnicShPNomcxjp6wtFGuaEX7xu6YF&amp;index=15</a></li> <li>4.) “Dixit cards reflection” where participants are reflecting on daily situations by using Dixit cards</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Object reflection” where participants are using objects placed in room around them to reflect on the working day</li> <li>2.) “Questionnaire reflection” by using previously prepared reflection questions in Padlet - <a href="https://padlet.com">https://padlet.com</a></li> <li>3.) “Wheel decide reflection” by modifying statements/questions in Wheel Decide platform - <a href="https://wheeldecide.com">https://wheeldecide.com</a></li> <li>4.) “Dixit cards reflection” where participants are choosing Dixit cards who has been previously prepared for online use and share by using Docs or similar platforms</li> </ol>	



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Evaluation and feedback</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “End game” - <a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/end-game">https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/end-game</a></li> <li>2.) “Target evaluation” where big flipchart with drawn target is placed on the floor and participants are asked to rate several features of the learning activity. As closer they place their dot to the middle, they are more satisfied with it</li> <li>3.) “Questionnaire” prepared by using Google Docs or similar platforms</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Letter to myself” by using Futureme platform - <a href="http://www.futureme.org">www.futureme.org</a></li> <li>2.) “Survey” where participants are rating different aspects created by using Mentimeter - <a href="https://www.mentimeter.com">https://www.mentimeter.com</a></li> <li>3.) “Questionnaire” prepared by using Google docs or similar platforms</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Questionnaire” prepared by using Google docs or similar platforms</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Closing activities</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “Yarn-Toss exercise” - <a href="#">How to Evaluate Individual and Group Learning? 2 Evaluation Methods</a></li> <li>2.) “Say goodbye to your teddy bear” where participants are imagining that they are saying last messages to their favorite toys that were present during the whole learning experience with them</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) “One sentence” where participants write last message to the group/or individuals by using chat option in Zoom or similar platforms</li> <li>2.) “Creating mailing list” where participants share their contacts in order to write messages to each other, but also keeping contact for future networking and cooperation</li> </ol>	

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Funded by the European Union. 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.