Locating the position of non-formal learning: theory and practice[1]

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Our article argues that, while learning continuously surrounds us, being aware of its importance is not necessarily possible through formal learning opportunities alone. By briefly introducing the concept and main principles of non-formal learning, we illustrate how reflection, a key process of learning, can be effectively involved in the design and implementation of educational practices. By means of a case study investigating a project that aims to develop university students' intercultural competences, we show how the principles of non-formal learning can be included in formal, higher educational settings and how this approach and methodology can be fruitful in developing personal, social, and cultural competences. The case study also refers to the reflective competence of the facilitators of the project and how they have developed the content through their own learning processes and feedback from the participants.

Keywords: non-formal learning, reflection, learning preferences, case study, higher education

Introduction

Thinking about education, teaching, and learning naturally raises the questions of teaching, learning modes, and methods. Trends related to the priorities of inclusive education, the recognition of the importance of lifelong learning, and the emergence of digital technologies have been and are influencing discourses on the context and content of education. However, the recognition of learning outside formal learning environments is still subject to policy recommendations[2], a factor suggesting that the visibility of non-formal and informal learning has yet to improve.

Our article argues that, while learning continuously surrounds us, being aware of its importance is not necessarily possible through formal learning opportunities alone. We believe that non-formal learning provides space and opportunities
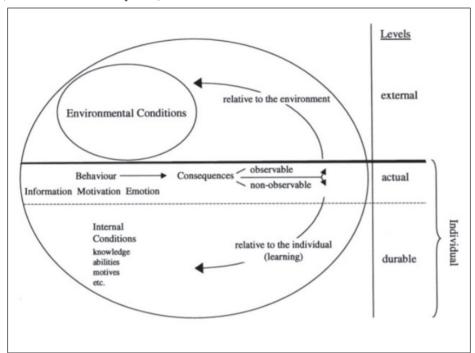
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[1] The article is an edited, extended, and updated version of an educational material prepared by the authors for the Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership project *Alliance3 – School, family and community Alliance against early school leaving.*

[2] In the European Union, the most important policy document is the *Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning*

for realising the importance of learning. A key element to understanding the means of effective learning processes is reflection, and as such, is a quality that demands deeper explanation. Reflection is the construction of meaning. 'Not only is reflection the bridge between information and wisdom, it is the process that turns information and knowledge into wisdom' (Carroll, 2010, p. 24). Even when it happens in a group setting, as it relates to individual learning, reflection upon learning new things is always an individual process. Yet thorough reflection often needs to be somewhat structured or guided. Although learning might happen in a number of environments and modes, it definitely needs an active and reflective relationship between the individual and the social environment.

Figure 1
The process of learning
(Source: Straka, 2002, p. 151)

According to Straka (2002), 'learning has taken place if, and only if the individual-relative consequences of the interaction between behaviour, information, motivation and emotion lead to a permanent change in the internal conditions of the acting individual' (Straka, 2002, p. 151). This article demonstrates how learning can take place outside a formal learning environment, where there are no formal tests or classical certificates to oblige and *officially* recognise the learning process and outcomes. We will mostly focus on non-formal learning, as this is a methodical way of learning (as opposed to informal learning) even if its visibility and general recognition is not as widespread as that of formal learning.

We also provide an example of how the methodological approach of non-formal learning can be implemented in a formal, higher educational context.

Concepts, contexts, and definitions

As was previously outlined, we mostly aim to describe the nature and *modus operandi* of non-formal learning, an approach that can be both remarkably easy and a genuinely difficult challenge, too. It becomes difficult when we aim to approach a variety of scholarly understandings, as there are many and these often possess different *foci*, or contradictory meanings. It becomes easy when certain policy documents are examined, although this approach could also become challenging if undertaken as a comparison study of different countries. To somehow overcome these difficulties, we will build upon the European Union framework for life-long learning and non-formal learning and interpret some of the scholarly literature related to these interpretational frames.

At least three umbrella terms are often used in connection with non-formal learning, and all of these terms require some clarification. They include lifelong learning (LLL), experiential learning, and youth work. According to the currently used EU definition, lifelong learning 'means all general education, vocational education and training, non-formal learning and informal learning undertaken throughout life, resulting in an improvement in knowledge, skills and competences or participation in society within a personal, civic, cultural, social and/or employment-related perspective, including the provision of counselling and guidance services' (European Parliament and the Council, 2013).

As Nina Volles (2016) points out, the concept of lifelong learning has undergone two conceptual shifts since its emergence:

> (1) from 'adult', via 'recurrent' and 'permanent' to 'lifelong' – stressing the idea of a cradle-to-grave approach; and
> (2) from 'education' to 'learning' – reducing the focus on structures and institutions, and increasing the emphasis on the individual at the centre of the educational process who has the responsibility of taking charge of his/her own learning (Volles, 2016, p. 344)

Volles (2016) notes that the practical relation of the EU to lifelong learning has shifted from a humanistic approach that was characteristic of European discourses originating in the 1960s and '70s and focused on the development of human personality, solidarity, and democracy. Today LLL takes the form of a utilitarian, neo-liberal perspective "characterised by economic determinism that changes the relationship between civil society and the state and places more responsibility on the individual" (Volles, 2016, p. 360). As a very critical approach notes,

> employability seems to be the only LLL objective that is compatible with neoliberalism. The Commission promotes it as the dominant goal in the majority of the policy documents analyzed, overshadowing the remaining three

objectives, since all policy proposals and criteria set to measure performance revolve around employability … individuals lacking the education that will allow the pursuit of personal fulfilment, active citizenship, and smooth integration into society will always be limited to the role neoliberalism reserves for them: the role of the consumer. (Mikelatou & Arvanitis, 2018, p. 507).

Although these interpretations perhaps imbue LLL with a sense of narrow mindedness, we want to underscore that its underlying concept is often the reason and foundation for many non-formal learning activities. LLL therefore presents a good cause and explanation for the necessity for such activities.

Another umbrella term, under which non-formal learning is often mentioned both in policy documents and in scholarly literature, is *youth work*. The 2010 resolution of the Council of the European Union defined youth work as the following:

> Youth work takes place in the extra-curricular area, as well as through specific leisure time activities, and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes and on voluntary participation. These activities and processes are self-managed, co-managed or managed under educational or pedagogical guidance by either professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and can develop and be subject to changes caused by different dynamics.
>
> Youth work is organised and delivered in different ways (by youth-led organisations, organisations for youth, informal groups or through youth services and public authorities), and is given shape at local, regional, national and European level, dependent for example on the following elements:
> – The community, historical, social and policy contexts where youth work takes place,
> – the aim of including and empowering all children and young people, especially those with fewer opportunities,
> – the involvement of youth workers and youth leaders,
> – the organisations, services or providers, whether they are governmental or non-governmental, youth-led or not,
> – the approach or method used, taking into account the needs of young people,
> – in many member states local and regional authorities also play a key role in
> – supporting and developing local and regional youth work. (European Commission, 2010, C 327/2)

Beyond this information, the resolution notes that youth work

> complements formal education settings – can offer considerable benefits for children and young people by providing a wide and diverse range of non-formal and informal learning opportunities … youth work should provide the opportunity for young people to develop a wide range of different personal and professional skills, free from stereotypes as well as key competences that

can contribute to modern society. Therefore it can play an important role in developing autonomy, empowerment and entrepreneurial spirit of young people. In transmitting universal values regarding human rights, democracy, peace, anti-racism, cultural diversity, solidarity, equality and sustainable development, youth work also can have added social value… (European Commission, 2010, C 327/2)

Although a such widespread content analysis of the policy documents outlining youth work has not been done, in the case of lifelong learning, we can suppose that the perceived neoliberal shift of the concept of LLL is much less present in these fields. The reason for this can lie in the stronger involvement of the actual target group and practitioners in shaping the policy directions, such as can be seen in the example of regular conventions on youth work. Held online, the most recent one in Bonn, 2020, enabled a number of professionals to gather and reflect about the situation of youth work and shape policy contexts, too. Another reason can be found the community aspect of youth work that is a very strong characteristic of it. Generally, the lack of legislative context surrounding youth work in many European countries creates a special atmosphere within which youth work has developed and improved naturally and in *ad hoc* ways. The stakeholders of these processes are often from a variety of different contexts and the content and development of youth work often lacks strategical thinking (see e.g., Dunne et al., 2014).

Before continuing to the conceptual framework, two elements must be mentioned: the role of the Council of Europe and the recognition of youth work. The Youth Department of the Directorate of Democratic Participation within the Directorate General of Democracy has contributed greatly to both the intellectualization and the mainstreaming of youth work. Its 2017 Recommendation on Youth Work defined the concept in the following passage:

> Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making (Council of Europe, 2017, p. 2).

The second, notable element comprises the actual recognition of youth work. Despite (or in addition to) the pursuit of definitions and finding common understandings on the European level, "it should be recognised that at the local level youth workers are often seen merely as 'playing with children'… in large parts of society there is no clear understanding of youth work or its impact on young people and the wider community" (Zentner & Ord 2018, p. 20).

The third contextual element or umbrella term to be mentioned is experiential learning. This article does not aim to delve into the questions of definition, as

there is an extensive literature on the subject (see e.g., Kolb, 2014). Here we settle with the following interpretation from Beard and Wilson (2018):

– *Experience* is central to the learning process and it takes centre stage.
– The *experiential* dynamic is fourfold: *of* and *for*, affecting the whole person in terms if their *inner* and outer *world* experiencing
– There must be a certain *quality* to experience so as to engage the learner, and be *memorable.*
– The *conditions*, for learning, and learner *motivation*, active *engagement* and *immersion* are significant ...
– Learning flows, and is derived from other *experiences* …
– Experience is a complex composite, made up of information from the constantly changing interacting inner world and outer worlds …
– Experiential learning acknowledges the issues affecting power and control: learners take responsibility for their own learning.
– Experience acts as the bridge unifying typical dualisms such as action and thought, doing and knowing, body and mind, nature and person, practice and theory (Beard & Wilson, 2018, pp. 12–13).

The many definitions and directions of experiential learning seem to agree that it can be understood as learning by experiences and/or learning by doing; the differences between these definitions are more observable when it comes to the understanding of the concept and process of learning.

Non-formal learning is often associated with experiential learning (see e.g., Norqvist & Leffler, 2017), however, the latter might happen in all educational contexts. 'Informal experiential learning is described as incidental learning and everyday experiences, often learning "on your own"…. Non-formal learning experiences are planned by instructors and include goals, but are less structured and occur outside of formal educational setting…. Formal experiential learning is connected to classrooms in schools and universities, occurring in classrooms or laboratories, using experiments, projects, and other hands-on activities' (Hedin, 2010, p. 108). This final comment already takes us to our main question: how to understand the differences between the three ways and spaces of learning: formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

Instead of separately and exhaustively listing characteristics of each type of learning, we offer a systemic approach wherein the different aspects are complete as a whole. As a guide through this complicated context, we anchor our understanding to the approach within the perspective that the *individual,* i.e., the *learner* is in focus. Thus, in our understanding, the learner is the key to all of the aforementioned three types, even though the ways of learning are *different.*

In formal learning, we follow a structure that is designed for the learners (not inclusively or necessarily together with them) and there is often less flexibility in different aspects (environment, content, requirements, etc.). This characteristic is understandable given the approach's formal nature which is often shaped by official (government or organisational) policies. When it comes

to standardised, universal educational contents (such as theories, procedures, definitions, etc.), formal education is a feasible way for transferring these forms of knowledge. By considering different learning needs and linking these to their own learning styles, formal learning can still offer a certain flexibility for its learner to perform in the best way. What does this mean? During the process of teaching, it is more than possible to allow learners to decide on their own about how they prefer to learn. 'Learning style is the format in which a student learns and the most favourable way in which a person receives, processes, and stores information.… Learning style can also be considered as the most effective way to explain how a student concentrates, remembers old information, and stores new information' (Dutsinma & Temdee, 2020).

Different learning preferences can also be taken into consideration within the formal setting given that it is a matter of planning. The VARK modalities, a theoretical framework that provides a widely used typology of learning preferences (see e.g., Fleming & Blaume, 2006), offer a clear framework for how students and teachers perceive learning information.

Table 1
Summary of the learning preferences proposed by the model
(Source: Robertson et al., 2011, p. 37)

Learning style	Characteristics
Visual	Preference for using visual resources such as diagrams, pictures and videos. Like to see people in action
Auditory	Need to talk about situations and ideas with a range of people; enjoy hearing stories from others.
Reader/Writer	Prolific note-taker; textbooks are important; extensive use of journals to write down the facts and stories.
Kinaesthetic	Preference for hands on experience within a 'real' setting and for global learning

The authors refer to learning styles, but, as Fleming (2012) argues, a 'learning style would indicate preferences for a wide range of learning behaviours such as preferences for learning at a particular time of day, or in a particular temperature or lighting as well as structural options such as learning with others or with adults or peers or alone or in mixed groups. VARK is about people and their learning and it focuses on modalities that they might prefer when learning' (Fleming, 2012, p. 1).

It should also be noted that the author of the concept also acknowledges multimodality: 'Life is multimodal so it is unlikely that any population with VARK data will exhibit more than 40% as having a single preference. And, a single preference is indicative of the strength of one of the modalities not an indication that the other three VARK modalities do not exist.' (Fleming, 2012, p. 1).

Formal learning can be also less result-oriented and thus less stressful for the learners when focus falls more on the process. In alternative pedagogies, this process-oriented approach is often more welcomed; even in the field of higher education, a growing number of projects and propositions aim to

downgrade the importance of grading. As a 2014 article of a journal focusing on life sciences education puts it: 'accuracy-based grading may, in fact, demotivate students and impede learning. Additionally, the time-consuming process of instructors marking papers and leaving comments may achieve no gain, if comments are rarely read by students. One wonders how much more student learning might occur if instructors' time spent grading was used in different ways' (Schinske & Tanner, 2014, p. 165).

While informal learning is a constant, diverse and rich arena surrounding each learner, it is often not reflected or recognized in its importance. Because of its nature, informal learning is often unintentional but can be planned as well, such as when spontaneously attempting something to ascertain whether we are able to do it (running 1000 meters in less than five minutes). When learning informally, it is important to be able to understand and assess the individual achievements of it. Parts of this come naturally: through socialization we learn about ourselves. We furthermore learn about the social world around us and the norms and expectations that guide our everyday actions.

As more complex situations emerge, the more important it is to reflect upon them. For instance, obtaining a visa demands an understanding of complex information and most likely requires knowledge of a foreign language, etc. While we learn during this process, we perhaps do not reflect upon its stages in favour of realizing its success: the approval of the visa is a sign. Travelling is often referred to as a medium of informal learning. While getting acquainted with new cultural and social contexts, 'there is plenty of information to process and travellers, both for survival and for pleasure, are likely to acquire new perspectives and skills' (Pearce & Foster, 2007, p. 1286).

Non-formal learning is a way to be guided and supported in the constant learning that surrounds us, with a clear purpose. One competence to which non-formal learning can make a valuable contribution toward acquiring is learning to learn, a valuable skill for anyone who often struggles with studying. In the process of non-formal learning, we are exposed to situations and activities that purposely enhance learning. Very often this happens through experiencing first and then reflecting upon what happened. Non-formal learning thus can be understood as 'Purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity.... The activities and courses are planned, but are seldomly structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects' (Chisholm, 2005, p. 49).

All in all, we believe that a humanistic approach to lifelong learning might create a useful and valuable framework for the concepts, environments, and modes of learning. We also believe that non-formal learning can provide powerful methods to develop the competence of learning to learn. As Kloosterman (2014) notes, educators might feel the need to become the facilitators of learning. 'Supporting learners in a process in which they walk their own unique learning path, deciding themselves what and how to learn, means a radically new role for educators.... The "new" educator ensures that the different paths learners take are pleasant, motivating and challenging. The

"new" educator also helps facilitate each individual learner to negotiate their chosen path' (Kloosterman, 2014, p. 280). This also shows that non-formal methods can provide means for inclusion (see e.g., Argyropoulos & Kanari, 2019) and empowerment (see e.g., Ravenscroft, 2020) in education.

A case study about non-formal learning in a university setting

As was stated previously, different ways or methods in learning are not alternate but can complement one another. Based on this and the need for better recognition of non-formal learning, a pilot project titled *Among Others* was designed in the early 2010s. The main aims of the project were to introduce non-formal learning methods to students in higher education institutions with the aim of developing intercultural competences in future educators and youth workers. By doing so, the long-term goal is to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation between youth work and the higher education sector. Initiated in Poland, by 2014 this project had become international, as the funding scheme of Erasmus+ Youth allowed more opportunities for the coordinating National Agencies to cooperate under the framework of a strategical partnership[3] (Kielak et al., 2018).

The involvement of Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education started in 2015. After joining this international network, the Faculty started to offer a seminar in an elective course format for incoming Erasmus+ students and Hungarian students. The content was designed in cooperation with other Hungarian institutions (University of Debrecen and University of Szeged) with the support of Tempus Public Foundation as the National Agency coordinating the Erasmus+ (including its youth chapter). Tempus Public Foundation (and its predecessors) has launched a working group consisting of lecturers and experienced facilitators in non-formal education. Thus, at each university a co-managed approach was suggested from the beginning that also offered an unintentionally informal learning opportunity for the professionals involved.

Our case study demonstrates how the course was developed at ELTE[4], and how the principles of non-formal learning can be implemented at a university setting. The course builds upon a modular system developed by the Polish partners[5]. The modules were adapted to our settings to adjust to the best solution for educating future primary school teachers and kindergarten educators. The Polish modules are built upon single training activities, each

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[3] Erasmus+ and particularly its Youth chapter promotes cross-sectoral cooperation, thus it offered a base for Among Others strategic partnership project. The network has been created by interested National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth and became a unique good practice among youth work practitioners and academics. The Youth chapter of the Erasmus+ programme offers a wide variety of mobility and learning opportunities for young people from the age of 13 years and promotes non-formal education.

[4] The authors of this article are the facilitators of the course at ELTE University.

[5] https://www.miedzyinnymi.org.pl/en/for-higher-education-institutions/conceptual-design-of-the-workshops/modules/

requiring certain contact hours: we instead organised six workshops spanning 180 minutes throughout the semester. This time frame required adaptation of the modules in a way that allows us to foster intercultural competence through exploring concepts of culture, non-formal learning, and human rights. Since the beginning, the course has been held in English, thus participants were also offered a chance to improve their language skills.

The existence of the course allowed facilitators to participate in a learning process not only through applying the principle of mutual learning but because the Among Others course is a reflective practice – it strongly builds upon the reflections of both participants and facilitators (Kolb & Fry, 1975; Schön, 1983; Brookfield, 1998; Batsleer, 2008). While continuously seeking improvements in the content, performance, and applied methodologies, the course was developed throughout every semester till reaching its final format by 2019. The facilitators became more aware of some elements of the course that needed more improvement (eg., including more theoretical input related to concepts, clearly stating the course requirements for participants, and having quality time for reflection) and by the process of our reflection we had summarised our implicit knowledge and experiences that became the basis for the new course structure as of 2019. Undoubtedly, the participants and their feedback given in different forms (partially related to the impact assessment of the project) also fed the development of the content. Yet the practice of constant reflection also had an impact on the course format. From 2019 we developed four modules:

– *Introduction* (The content focuses on the methodological approach *cf. non-formal learning* and introducing European youth programmes for participants. The module emphasises the importance of learning and self-awareness as themes.)
– *Intercultural learning* (The module focuses on different concepts of culture and provides context for developing intercultural competence *cf. European Training Strategy's Competence framework.* The activities encourage participants to share and discuss about their own perceptions and values regarding culture and diversity.)
– *Human Rights Education* (This part of the program concentrates on perspectives and definitions of human rights, and it also challenges participants to understand and become aware of their own bias and stereotypes).
– *European mobility possibilities and self-directed learning* (Unlike the other modules, this has a horizontal approach by building most of its content to each workshops *cf. reflection and assessing learning outcomes.* As one of the objectives is to promote European youth programmes, the module also fosters and encourages participants to participate in and initiate their own projects in the future.)

The Among Others seminar at ELTE has reached over 100 participants from various countries from China to Ireland. The seminar itself is still an elective course at the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education, but mandatory for

incoming Erasmus+ students. In 2021, a Hungarian-language version of the course was launched at ELTE's Faculty of Education and Psychology.

The seminar strongly builds on non-formal learning methods and aims to offer an opportunity to become more sensitive and aware of intercultural competence. It also aims to help participants in their personal and professional development. Building upon the characteristics of non-formal learning described above and as an implication of our reflective practice related to our classroom experiences, we collected the main principles we apply during Among Others seminar. These include the following:

– *Voluntary participation*
The learners themselves decide if they want to take part in the learning activity. Once participants have enrolled in the course (for some of them, especially the Hungarian participants, this is already a result of individual choice) the formal, higher educational rules must apply and attendance is taken into consideration for course completion. Voluntary participation thus more applies to the right to say no and that it is up to participants how much they get involved in group discussions. Learners are thus encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. The voluntary nature appears in the course of our workshops in a different way, too. Participants are free to design a 'final project' that enables the reception of a formal grade. This helps overcome the controversy regarding voluntariness and the formal requirements, as the final project is completely free to choose and develop, as long as it has connections with the topics and approach of the workshops.

– *Non-hierarchic nature*
In the non-formal learning process, all participants are *equal*, and there is *no hierarchy* among anyone, including the facilitators of the learning process. This means that we seek a mutual partnership among all those involved and we value the fact that everyone can contribute to their own and others' learning process. For those participants who are used to more formal learning settings, these conditions might be challenging, thus not only the content, but the context of non-formal learning must be set, too. From the beginning the facilitators try to use inclusive language and practices, e.g., by actively participating in the activities *together* with the participants.

– *Self-assessment*
It is important to identify learning outcomes. In the process of Among Others this is done collectively, although the learning achievements are not always the same. At the seminar we create an open space for reflection and leave time for processing to provide means for gathering from the learning process later on. In the course of non-formal learning, it must be kept in mind that learning is a process, it does not happen immediately. Taking part in an activity does not necessary mean that we already understand and learn from it. Sometimes this aspect needs more time and because a large part of non-formal learning is about the individual. Reflection is a key element: at the end of the workshops and through a planned longer break between workshops during the semester we provide space for participants to digest and reflect upon their experiences.

It is clearly visible that youth workers and facilitators of non-formal learning in the European (especially European Union) context have a similar view on the core principles. For reference, Kloosterman and Taylor (2012) described the characteristics as follows:

- voluntary participation – people choose to be involved and want to be there;
- curriculum is focused on the participant – their learning needs are central to the process;
- the group is a source of learning – in addition to the curriculum;
- assessment starts from self-assessment – people judge their own progress first
- before any external assessment;
- any certification of learning is only implemented if the participants want it (Kloosterman & Taylor, 2012, p. 9).

In this understanding is an active, learning is voluntary and creative relationship with the learning environment and occurs on both the individual and group level.

Participants of the learning process

Finally, as an interpretational note to the terminology that has been used in the case study, we briefly introduce the participants to the learning process. The terminology is not accidental as the principles of non-formal learning usually distance the practitioners from using the conventional narratives of *students* and *teachers* as this implies a hierarchical relationship between the parties. Thus, practitioners usually talk about learners or participants (especially when talking about specific projects or training courses), and facilitators.

Learners

In non-formal learning processes, the largest category of those involved is that of the learners. Regardless the technical role, we believe that everyone is a learner in the process. It is important to mention that usually a group context is preferred in non-formal learning activities. Factors related to inclusion, motivation and reflection could be mentioned as reasons for this: 'Reflecting in a group enables other perspectives to be offered and considered; unlike solitary reflection, it is more likely to facilitate learning' (Goodall, 2015, p. 49). This might vary in the numbers of participants, even in bigger events a non-formal learning activity can be carried out with enough learning supporters. The learners have their own individual as well as group process; the more diverse settings we use during the non-formal learning program, the more one can benefit from participation. (For example: a variety of small, diverse-mixed group activities, peer-to-peer activities and individual times gives different learning experience to everyone.)

Facilitators

In non-formal learning processes, there are participants/learners with a special role in supporting the learning process generally. They are the facilitators whose role it is to support the learning process and take into account the needs and styles for each learners. They foster mutuality among the learners and give directions, mainly in the form of reflection. According to a manual of the Council of Europe, a facilitator is someone who acts as:

- a consultant who designs work sessions with a specific focus or intent;
- an adviser who brings out the full potential of working groups;
- a provider of processes, tools and techniques that can get work accomplished quickly and effectively in a group environment;
- a person who keeps a group meeting on track;
- someone who helps to resolve conflict;
- someone who draws out participation from everyone, to ensure that the full potential of the group is achieved;
- someone who organises the work of a group;
- someone who makes sure that the goals are met;
- someone who provides structure for the work of a group;
- someone who is empathetic;
- someone who organises space and time (Klocker, 2009, pp. 37–38)

To better understand the position of the facilitator, it might be helpful to differentiate different roles in learning assistance, as is shown in the following table:

Figure 2
Roles in learning assistance
(Source: Titley, 2002, p. 14)

Educational roles	Teacher	Trainer	Facilitator
Process	Less important	Important	Important
Task/content	Central role	Important role	Co-responsible
Educational methods	Often frontal	Methodological mix	Methodological mix
Communication style	Mainly input	Range depending	Minimal input
Power	Absolute	Absolute-shared	Shared
Examples	School teacher	ICL trainer	Conflict moderator

The role of the facilitator is crucial: while they also fully take part in the process, their attention is more on the other participants than merely on themselves.

Summary

This article aimed to clarify the meaning and approaches of different ways and structures of learning. We once again underscore that our understanding of the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning are mainly shaped by the frameworks developed and used by the youth programmes of the European

Union and the Council of Europe. We believe that both practically (as a lot of resources, programmes and scholarly materials are accessible under these frameworks) and theoretically these understandings might help practitioners to better understand the different ways of how learning might happen. We do not want to suggest that any type of hierarchy exists among formal, non-formal and informal learning modes, environments and outcomes. Instead, we content that the context and aims of learning and the characteristics of the learners must be taken into consideration when planning and assessing learning. While in many cases formal methods are crucial for transferring knowledge to the *students*, when it comes to competences such as personal, social and learning to learn, citizenship, or cultural awareness and expression (to use the vocabulary of the EU key competences to lifelong learning – see European Council, 2018), a non-formal approach to learning can be a powerful addition to the formal learning environment, especially when it comes to motivation and integration of the learners.

We also believe that a strong focus on reflection and reflective practices might not only boost the quality and longer-term effects of learning from the perspective of students: reflection can be taken into consideration and applied by facilitators, too. A constant, dialogical, and methodical monitoring of the success of the participants' learning process and of the teaching/facilitating modes can contribute positively to course development.

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