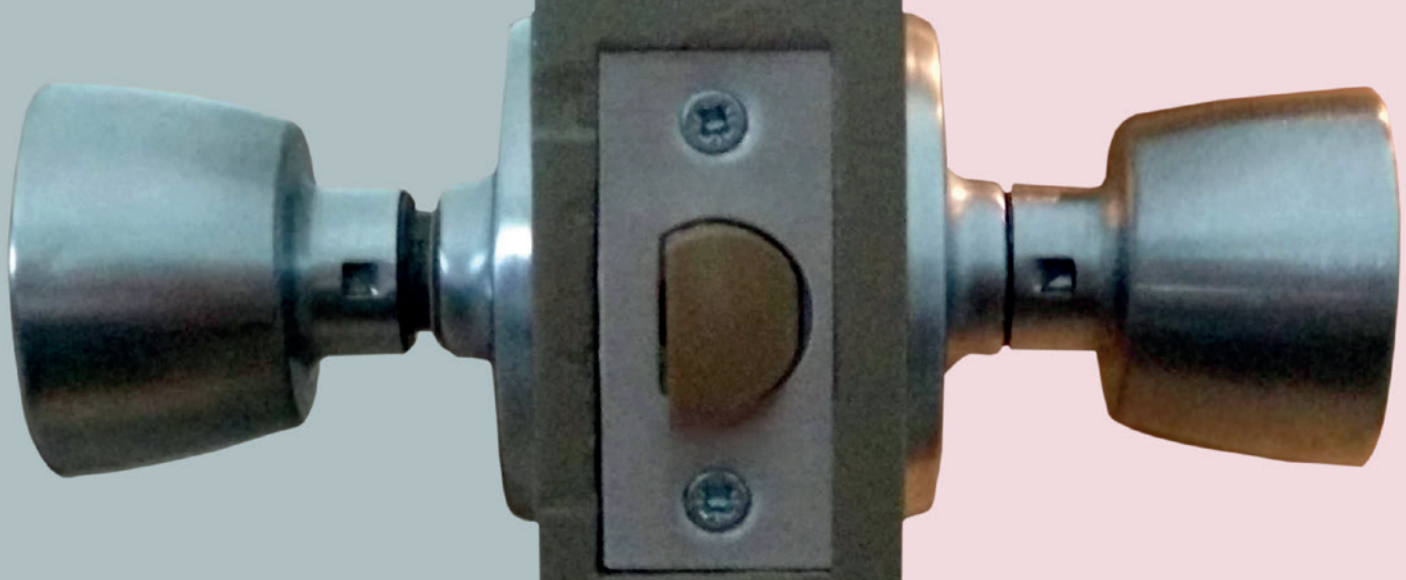
Step Back & Make Room

The role of youth work in formal education settings



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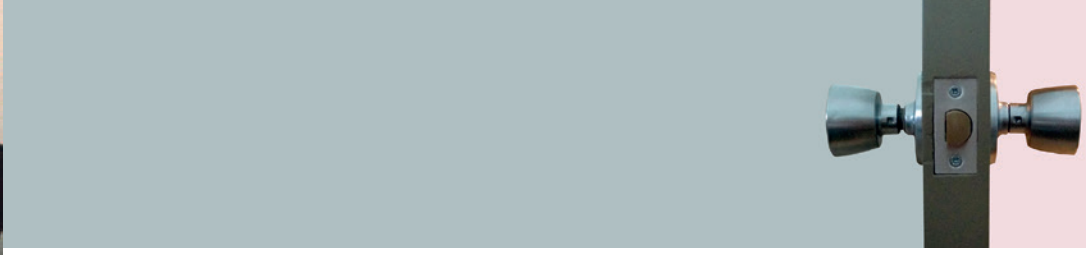

Foreword

During the past two years a strategic partnership project, Youth work and learning for life and work, has been undertaken with the aim of developing a non-formal curriculum that can be further developed and replicated on a pan-European level. The partners in the project - which is funded under Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+ programme - Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, YMCA George Williams College and Manor Education and Training Solutions Ltd., respectively represent the public, educational and private sectors.

The development and implementation of the non-formal curriculum is now in its final stages. The partners in the project developed it around a youth-centred approach with the aim of involving young people in their own process of development. A structured non-formal methodology which includes various structured learning situations was employed led by youth workers.

The Youth.inc programme, operated by Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, was the setting for the development and implementation of the non-formal curriculum. Youth.inc is an education and learning programme for "at risk" young people between the ages of 16 and 21 who wish to continue to build on their educational experience and gain more knowledge, values and skills to either enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue in further education and training.

The objectives of the project are premised on the young people's journey from not being engaged in any form of education, training or employment (NEET) to being full and active participants in society, by way of non-formal/ relational approaches to learning. The project looks to innovate responses that can be deployed and/or adapted across Europe within a non-formal curriculum. In the process of the development of such a non-formal youth work curriculum, the project initiated training in non-managerial supervision. This will facilitate and promote the establishment of a learning organisation and culture.

The project has undertake research into outcomes, including looking at the impact of referral routes. Research also investigated learner destinations/progression. The project sought to address the requirements of the youthpass so that they can be met through non-formal means.

Following on the requisite research and training, the non-formal curriculum is now being used with the Level 1 cohort of the Youth.inc programme. Young people participating in the programme have experienced various learning situations such as preparing a lunch, organising a trip and a creativity week, home management, organising an activity for their peers etc. all of which are assessed through worksheets, peer to peer evaluations, self-assessment, and pictorial and youth workers assessment.

As a consequence, the skills and competences acquired by young participants include the ability:

- to acquire and apply basic general knowledge related to the immediate physical and social environment in which they live and are active in
- to understand and follow basic tasks and instructions and be aware of the consequences for both themselves and others and to participate fully and take responsibility for such tasks
- to further develop their communication skills within a team/group setting.

This publication 'Step Back and Make Room' is a record of the development and implementation of the project and as such constitutes its intellectual output.

Thanks goes to all the partners and Ms Deborah Bonnici who coordinated the project.

Miriam Teuma
Chief Executive
Aġenzija Żgħażagħ


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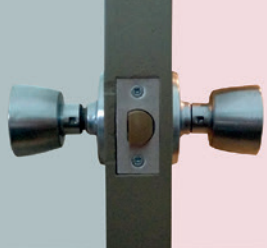
N' ROLL



Introduction

The Kick Off

The project 'Youth work for Learning and Working life', funded by Key Action 2 within the Erasmus+ programme, was focused on learning environments that offer services to young people with complex learning needs. It was concerned with the impact of youth work on young people's learning and development, specifically in respect of the soft skills essential to many fields of employment; and the relative capacities of young people with regard to life skills, such as communication, team work, self-confidence and so on. The comparative low attainment of such attitudinal abilities has consistently been, across Europe, a matter of concern over the last decade.

This, alongside cuts to public expenditure impacting on young people following the 2008 financial crisis, has meant that groups of educationally challenged older teenagers have had negative experiences engaging with employment and have thus been left at risk of poverty and social alienation.

The partners involved in this strategic partnership were organizations active in the fields of youth work and related vocational training in Malta and the United Kingdom. They hold the view that this negative situation needs to be addressed, understanding that youth work, when developed as an approach to education and training, does have a significant impact on young people's learning and development.

Fundamentally, this approach is premised on seeing young people from an asset based perspective. This means focusing on their capacities, both obvious and latent, celebrating what they can do, how these capacities might be developed and enhanced and what they bring to learning environments, This means questioning assumptions about what young people might relatively 'lack' (skills, confidence, common sense and so on). In short this means moving away from the 'deficit' model of young people.

Given this asset based approach, the emphasis of practice is to step back and make room for young people to explore and extend their capacities within non-formal learning spaces, rather than seek to regiment and constrain them within the confines of comparatively formalized educational corral.

The Youth.inc programme, operated by Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, was the setting for the development and implementation of the non-formal curriculum. Youth.inc is an education and learning programme for "at risk" young people between the ages of 16 and 21, who wish to continue to build on their educational experience and gain more knowledge, values and skills to either enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue in further education and training

The project partners set themselves the tasks to test, measure, vigorously question and reflect on how youth work can build and enhance the skills necessary for young people to find, gain and maintain employment, building their capacity to play a responsible and full role in their communities and society. Essentially the partners wanted to confirm and corroborate their experience of and evidence the positive role non-formal and relational approaches in bettering the life experience and chances of young people.

In particular the project focused on young people's learning and competence acquisition, specifically the capacity to participate in civil society, employability and intrapersonal and interpersonal empowerment. It aimed to develop a model of youth work delivery, with associated tools and approaches, which facilitated young people's development in the latter respects.

The partners were:

- George Williams YMCA College London, which specializes in youth work professional and vocational qualification.
- Aġenzija Żgħażagħ (the Maltese Youth Agency), a government entity that has developed work with young people experiencing or at risk of difficulties gaining access to employment.
- London based Manor Education and Training Solutions Ltd. (METS) an agency with close to 20 years involvement in developing employment skills with young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

The Approach

A good deal of the work undertaken by partners in the consultation period was connected to broadening perspectives to enable comprehension of cultural contexts

Diagram 1: Developmental stages in the project

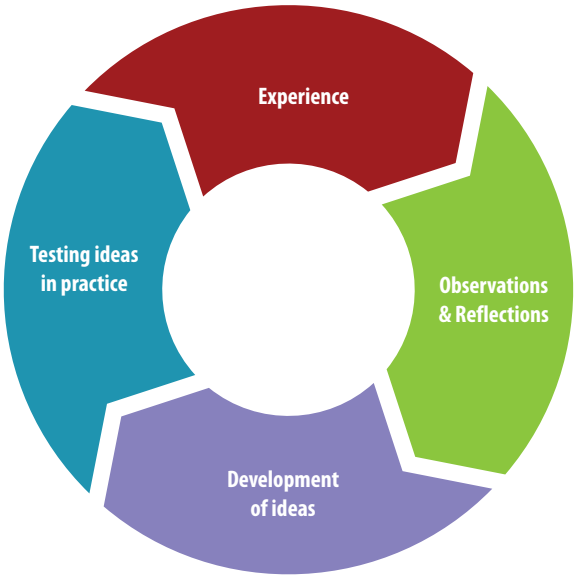


Diagram 2: The learning cycle based on Kolb

in relation to education within and between the partner countries. The accomplishments of the project have helped staff, management and learner relationships and built consciousness of the necessity to put in train inventive and reviewable delivery.

Generally, although an appreciable amount of energy was taken up with groundwork, the partners have achieved a collective understanding of the joint task and how thus it could be realised.

The project was progressed and delivered, in the field, by the three partner organizations, using existing or freshly-contacted groups of young people. Over the two year duration of the project the partners worked through a number of overlapping and continuing stages as illustrated in Diagram 1.

The training aspect was started immediately after the consultation period, wherein the partners decided on their baseline research, training and practice strategies, worked out logistical considerations and how they would work collaboratively, promoting the sharing of practice and promulgating mutual learning.

Following initial peer learning groups, looking at the process and purpose of practice supervision, supervisors were identified and regular supervision of all staff involved commenced. This continued throughout the duration of the project. This supervision was geared toward developing the capacity of the partners as learning organizations and as a means to energize the continued reflection on and learning from practice. Thus the familiar Kolb learning cycle was effected as in Diagram 2.

A 'tree' of non-managerial practice supervision was put in place as described in Chapter 3. This was designed to ensure the continuation as well as the extension of the learning cycle. The structure and process of the super vision embraces the consistent analysis/evaluation of practice. The partners established that this will act as a means of on-going quality assurance that will assist in collaborative and informed action. This practice generated useful data (via supervisor reports and practitioner self-assessments) about the project experience and impact, but also proved to be crucial with regard to the ongoing review of both client and practitioner learning across all three partner organizations.

A range of learning assignments and tasks were designed, for and alongside, young people. Learning outcomes were identified and mapped within the local qualifications framework. All staff were also involved in evaluations of practice outcomes.

Building sessional plans that were flexible and amenable to review, matching the latter to accreditation requirements was a creative but demanding process. That said, it heightened staff awareness about the character of learning and teaching, extending their horizon of understanding of educational processes, practice and learner potential.

An impact/assessment process using focus groups was initiated (that can be extended, modified and reviewed for the ongoing evaluation of practice). Young people also made assessments of learning to generate and inform the baseline as well as provide an on going means of measuring the effectiveness of practice. The partners called this process (undertaken by young people) as another means for young people to build their range of relevant social and personal skills (team work, negotiation, observational capacities, personal awareness, recording, assessing, self-confidence and so on).

These findings of this area of the research informed the production of a manual of tools and practical exercises, including the step-by-step detail of delivery, processes and the means to measure the impact of youth work on young people's learning and development.

There were transnational meetings to support the process and then the final multiplier activity. Each partner hosted transnational meetings. Multiplier events were convened both in the UK and Malta. All meetings and presentations were used to share and embed practice knowledge and understanding.

The partnership developed the above tools to assess the overall impact of the project, believing that worldwide effective assessment of youth work outcomes, especially in relation to skills, is necessary for the continued justification of youth work practice. As such this project adds to the potential to be vitally important for youth work across Europe but also globally.

The generation of learning environments, with active and vibrant learner participation (promoting practitioner learning from learners) has included group identification of practice and learning patterns, which has enabled the collective grasping of some of the primal incentives and motivations for learning.

The project partners also made significant headway in laying plans for the delivery of a curriculum premised on non-formal/relational youth work education.

Diagram 3 and 4 illustrate the range of activity undertaken and the processes put in place to ensure the overall establishment of a more critical and explorative approach to practice.

The partners built a foundation which implicated:

- practice delivery;
- the examination of methods and approaches;
- observation and recording skills.

The training programme enabled personal and collective review, analysis and exploration of some of the tools related non-formal/relational approaches.

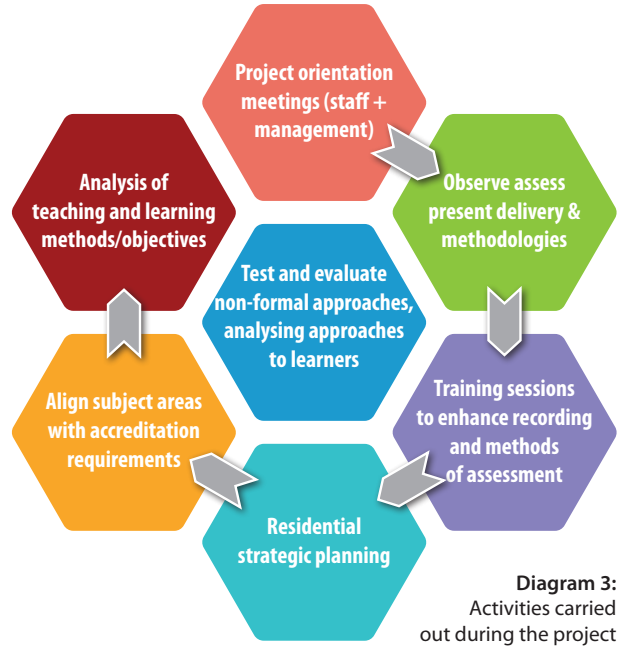


Diagram 3: Activities carried out during the project

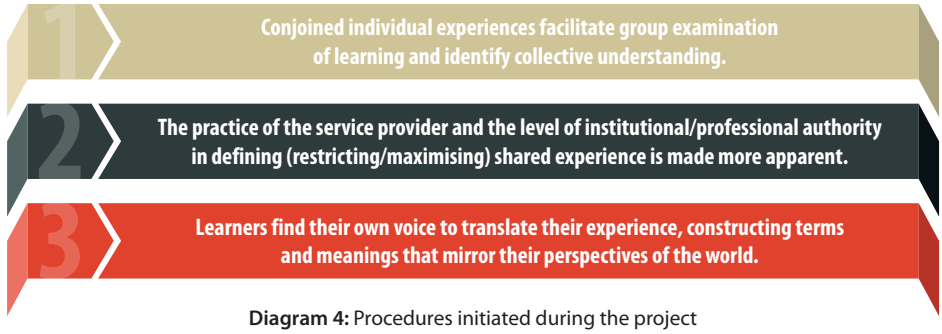


Diagram 4: Procedures initiated during the project

The Promotion of the Learning Organizational Ethos

Staff organization, understanding of and persuasion about the value of working collaboratively was perhaps the project's principle initial challenge. This included foreseeable and comprehensible uncertainty in relation to new approaches and practices; the predictable resistance to change. Perhaps the crucial ameliorating response to the latter was the development of skills and the concomitant confidence in non-formal/relational approaches.

For all this, it became clear that a non-formal curriculum, based on relational practice, constitutes a rich methodology that offers valuable tools, building on the personal experience of learners to produce shared examination of group challenges.

Crucially the process of the project has encompassed the generation of commitment by partner organisations to foster critical analysis of practice, to facilitate the on-going review of service delivery, its appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness (and so safety).

The partners in the project developed the non-formal curriculum around a youth-centred approach, with the aim of involving young people in their own process of development. A structured, non-formal methodology, which includes various structured learning situations, was employed and led by youth workers. ***This is Stepping Back, Making Room***.

The partners have come a long way in relational but perhaps more critically practical terms, most notably in the delivery of pilot sessions with 'real-time' learners. They encountered and successfully scaled a series of significant learning curves, particularly with regard to the cognizance of the constraints and potential of context. For all this, they have discovered how new and innovative learning processes can be richly informed by cross cultural exchange and multi contextual interaction.

The Baseline Research

The Methodology

The following data was generated at the start of the project with the response of 55 young people engaging with practice delivery with partner agencies.

The emphasis of the research was to gauge and evaluate the impact of building non-formal learning environments, premised on the idea of 'stepping back and making room' relevant to asset based practice. We were looking to develop, hone and extend the capacities of young people, facilitating and encouraging the inclination of adolescence to explore, push boundaries and thus learn from their environment and interaction.

Working with focus groups of young people the partners isolated four areas of focus that were pertinent, in terms of establishing outcomes, to young people taking part in the project. These were their;

- Goals
- Expectations
- Challenges and
- Fears

It was envisaged that, in terms of review, evaluation and the establishment of outcomes of the project approach, the partners could use these statements to ascertain the extent to which;

i) Goals were feasible or attained (demonstrating use and limitations of personal targets);
ii) Expectations were realistic (if young people tended to under or over-estimate their capacities – relative self-confidence);
iii) Challenges were appropriate (exploring their abilities to identify obstacles deal with them by both understanding personal limitations and potential);
iv) Fears were managed or overcome (showing the development of resilience).

The young people were asked to briefly say something about each of these considerations. Some young people chose not to respond to all of the above, others made a single, relatively straightforward statement, for example 'to learn new things'. Others were more expansive, including a number of considerations in some or all areas. For instance, "To help me improve my work skills, to help me get more friends, to help me be a better person." All statements were seen as relevant and indicative and were included in the data analysis.

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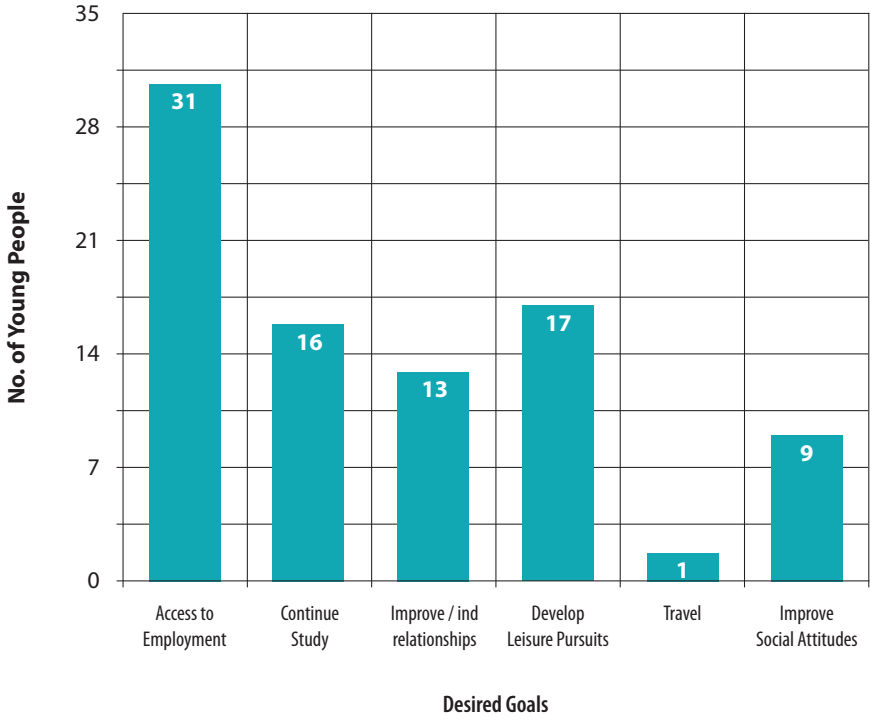
The project partners were able to categorise the statements into a five general aims and ambitions;

- Gaining access to employment;
- Continue in study;
- Improving or starting relationships;
- Develop leisure pursuits;
- Improve social relationship skills.

This allowed the projected partners to work with young people to drill-down into what they understood as their goals, challenges and so on, making these general headings more personal and specific.



Graph 1: Young people's goals

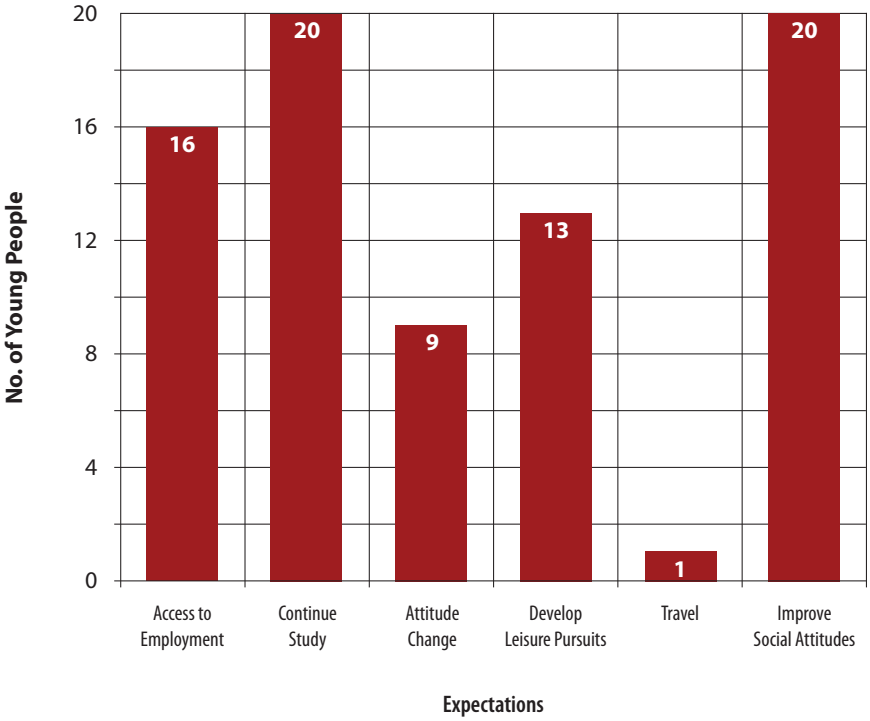
Word Cloud 1

Analysis of baseline research outcomes

As can be seen from Graph 1 with regards to goals, young people saw their involvement primarily to be in relation to access to employment; put simply getting and holding on to a job, ideally one that matched or might stimulate their interests. Other goals were pretty much supplementary to this one when looking at all the young people involved.

This conclusion is to some extent backed up by the Word Cloud 1 which reflects the hope for new experiences and learning. As such, it would be reasonable to conclude that the goal to get into the world of work was understood to be moving towards new experiences but certainly necessarily connected to the need to learn new skills.

Access to employment was also high with regard to expectations young people had of involvement in the project. Once more, given the high number of responses related to continuing learning and study, it appears that these expectations are not mutually exclusive in the minds of young people. However, young people seemed to have equally high expectations related to improving



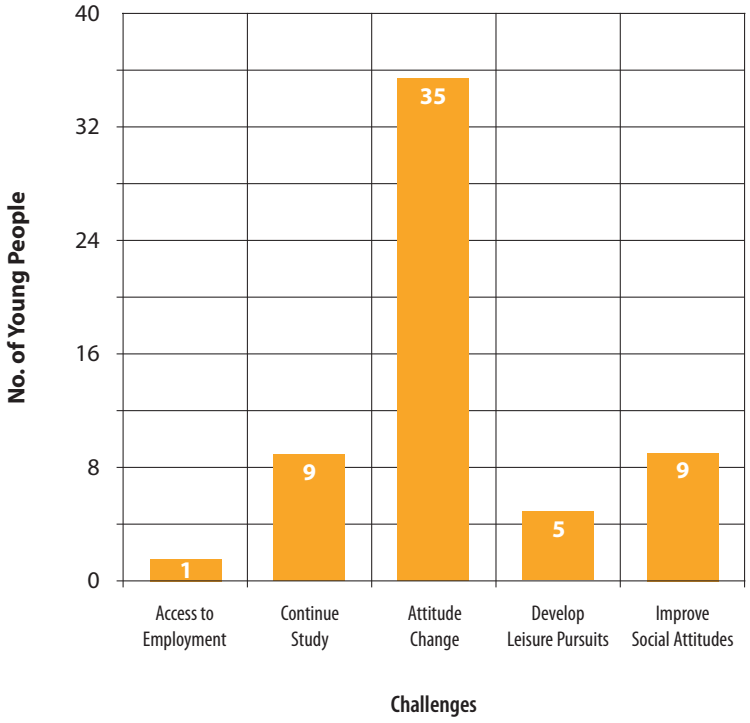
Graph 2: Young people's expectations of involvement

Word Cloud 2

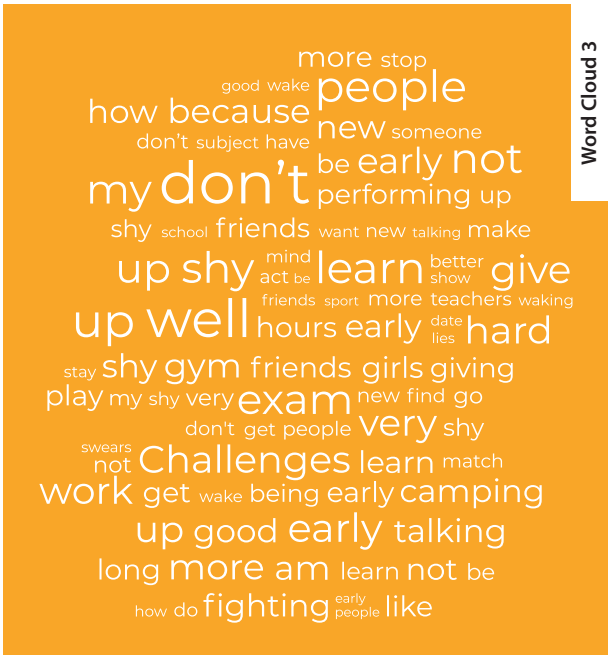
their relationship and social skills (see Graph 2). Here one can see an inextricable link between social learning, personal relationship skills and the necessity of the same in terms of entry to the world of work and sustaining employment. Statements about 'getting a girlfriend' and even a marriage partner might at first sight appear to some to be somewhat jumping the gun and not much to do with employment, but it does not take too much imagination to see that these considerations are part of the motivation to gain independence, that in our society is only possible for most via the successful transition from education to employment.

Word Cloud 2 reflects the seeming association with social skills and work, but again, the drive to move into a new sphere of life is evident. This is part of a consistent emphasis that the young people exhibited to move on with their lives, away from the old and toward the new; new skills, new experiences and relationships that constitute a new life, no longer set in the world of childhood and dependency.

Considering challenges, attitude change was by far and away the greatest concern for young people (see Graph



Graph 3: Young people's challenges

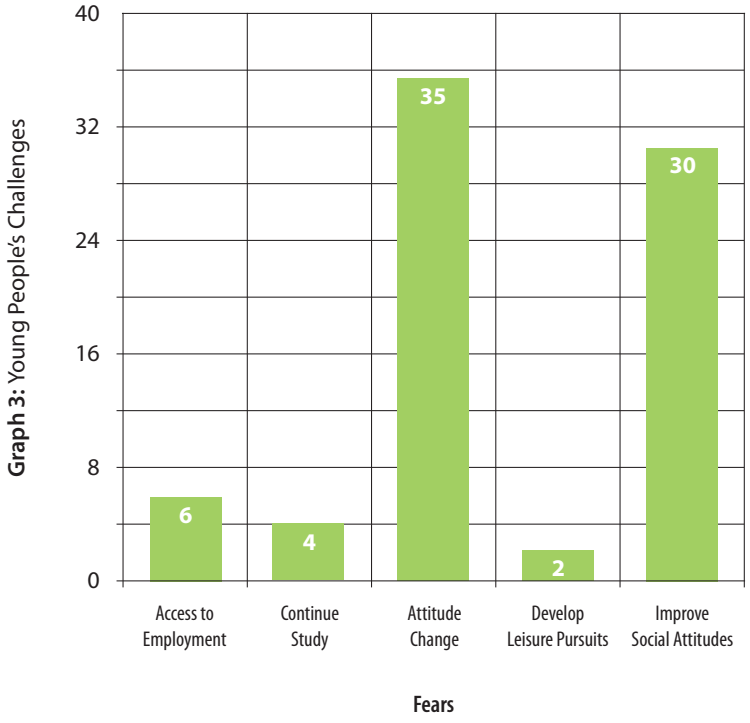


Word Cloud 3

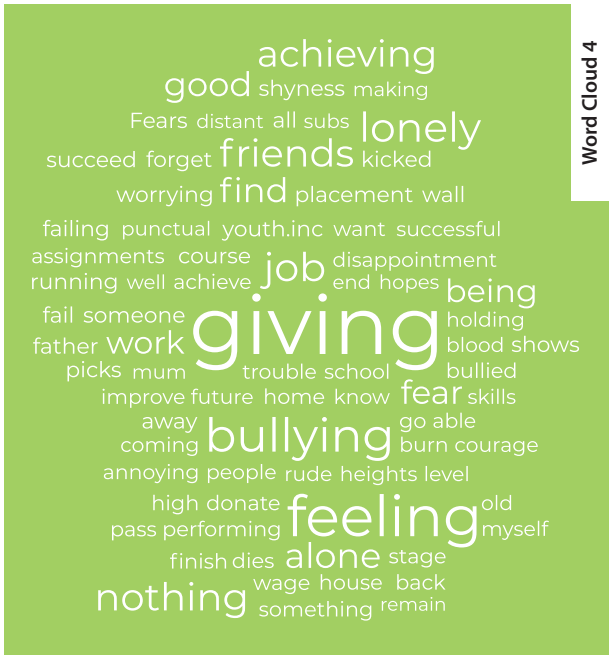
3). Anxiety about being 'shy', giving and getting 'respect', getting to a place or situation where they could get up in the morning and becoming more attentive were all areas that were connected to attitudes, what might be thought of also as states of mind, that young people wanted to change or acquire. For the youth worker this is a key focus of their skills and educational insight.

Word Cloud 3 demonstrates the areas of attitude change. Shyness, early rising and the response of other/new people are evident. The fortitude not to 'give up' was relatively frequently expressed.

It is perhaps telling that qualms about current attitudes and the ability to change the same figured high in young people's responses in relation to their fears. However, this anxiety seemed to coincide with uncertainties about social skills or the need to develop the same. These considerations are clearly linked for anyone (adults and children alike) and it is interesting and informative that young people grasp this at some level. Once more it seems that they might be ready and motivated to concentrate on these areas of their development (see Graph 4).



Graph 4: Young people's fears



Word Cloud 4

Word Cloud 4 demonstrates some of the perceived outcomes (fears) of the failure to improve social skills and change attitudes. The presence of and the propensity for bullying is an evident source of potential and actual distress, which involved the attitude of the bully of course, but also the attitude of those subject to bullying in terms of dealing or preventing the same (the act of bullying requires someone to bully and another person to be the bullied). Feelings of loneliness and the concomitant fear of not making friends can be detected, but there also seemed to be a certain level of apprehension related to not being able to be 'giving' enough. This lays out the basis of a strategy that youth work and relational practice might be best placed to work with young people to address.

Clearly, the collective expression of young people in relation to the project (see Chart 1) was about the fears, challenges, expectations of and goals connected to attitude change. The key to their motivation for involvement can thus be understood as predominately about this. They might as such not so much believe they lack capacities, but the means to identity, hone and deploy the same. This mirrors the asset approach of relational practice in youth work and thus

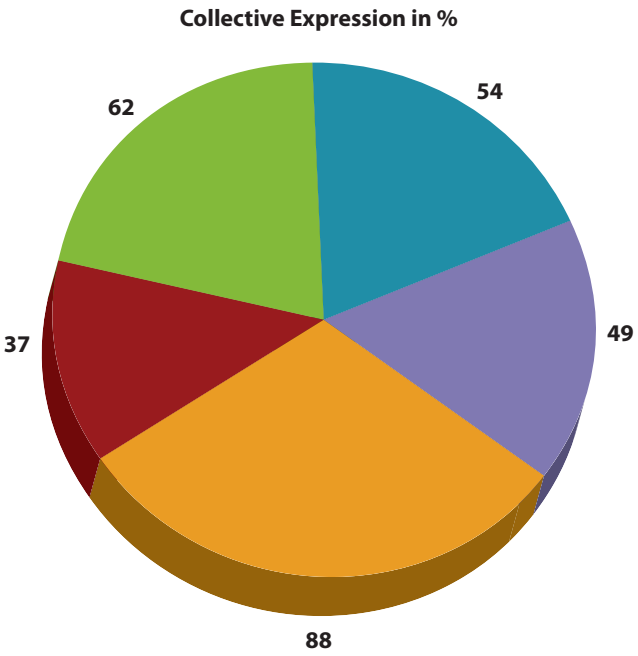


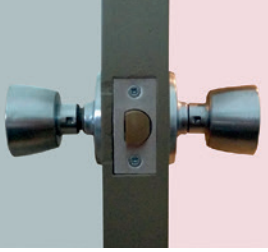
Chart 1: Young people's Collective Expression

- Access to Employment
- Continue Study
- Attitude Change
- Access to Employment
- Improve Social Relations

Word Cloud 5

provided the project partners with a powerful trajectory in terms of developing approaches (and attitudes) towards these young people.

Word Cloud 5 can be taken to indicate quite an optimistic/hopeful outlook on involvement. The opening of doors to 'new' experiences, the opportunity to make constructive relationships (friends) and learn all fit with the project partners' general terms of reference related to dealing with young people via youth work approaches, implicating humane and relational practices related to learning and personal change.



Evaluation of Outcomes

Levels of Involvement

After the first year of the project, based on the above data, a sample group young people were asked to score (1 to 10) each of their previous goals (the extent to which they were realised) using the key question 'what can you do now that you couldn't when you started?' This ignited discussion with youth workers and/or peers, exploring the extent to which they achieved the goal, how they did this and/or if the goal, in retrospect, might have been either under or over ambitious.

For analytical puposes scores were taken as indicative as follows in Table[1]:

Score	Goal achievement	Percentages
1-2	Goal not achieved	12
3-5	Goal partially achieved	15
6-7	Goal mostly achieved	55
8-10	Goal achieved	18

Table 1: Indicative scores for analysis purposes

This process provided quantifiable evidence, but more importantly for the young people, continued their development of skills in terms of reflection, self-analysis, evidence building and so judgement making, which can enhance one's view of oneself as an autonomous and responsible individual, who is able to consider their actions and act on the consequences of the same in a positive and forward looking way. These capacities are of course invaluable in adult life and the modern world. This being the case, one can understand the scoring is not the crucial, the general evedential achievement level is not the be-all-and-end-all either. It is the process of consideration, review, reflection in the context of relational practice that is pertinent.

Score	Goals ambition	Percentages
1-2	Goal too ambitious	16
3-5	Goal partially unreslistic	18
6-7	Goal realistic	51
8-10	Goal not ambitious enough	15

Table 2: Goals ambitions

However, that around 66% of goals were to some extent realised, is indicative of the effectiveness of practice, teaching and learning approaches. For all this, that 34% thought that goals were not totally realistic is a matter for reflection and likely review (see Table 2).

The majority of responses from young people to the evaluation process were those who had not previously been involved with project partners. They focused on the positives of involvement; the opportunity to make friends, being with other young people but also youth workers and teachers.

That said, the chance to take part in the activities was also seen positively and, perhaps predictably, the stipend young people received while taking part.

Overall, the programme was deemed a positive experience which allowed the young people to learn and become more confident/not be shy.

Young people who had some previous experience of working with the project saw their involvement as generally positive. They related to the 'nice people' involved and to the variety of opportunities and 'fun activities'.

This group was asked to respond to the following six questions on the sliding scale of 1 (poor) 2 (not very good) 3 (average) 4 (good) and 5 very good.

[1] These scores could have been grouped or labelled differently, for instance a score of 5 would be boardering between partially and mostly achieved. However, as explained above, this is not altogether pertinent in terms of relational practice.

1. How do you rate the service provided?
2. How do you rate the youth workers?
3. How do you rate the trainers?
4. How do you rate the activities?
5. How do you rate the life skills?
6. How do you rate the sports activities?

They were also asked to provide any other comments or suggestions they thought to be relevant/helpful.

Table 3 shows that almost half of the respondents rated the services and activities provided as good. Around half of the group rated the youth workers very good. Almost 40% of the participants thought the trainers were very good and 45% believed the sports activities were very good. However, almost 1 in 5 young people found these services, on average, no more than average. While the question was not answered, what these young people were comparing these services with, the striving for excellence cannot be achieved with 20% of the clientele seeing services and activities falling below that level.

As a comparator those involved in the work of the project partners the longest were asked to carry out a similar exercise to the one described above.

As can be seen from the results in Table 4, more than half of this group rated the service provided as very good; 57.1% gave the youth workers the same rating. Just under half rated the trainers as very good, again the highest percentage awarded in the survey. A total of 40% believed the life skills sessions to very good and just under 40% rated the sporting activities provided as very good. Question four related to the activities and received an average score of 37%. This was the only question which did not receive the highest rating (33.3%). This likely needs to be addressed when moving forward and planning for future practice.

The latter analysis focusing on stages of involvement indicate that programmes are well thought of by those taking part that young people likely look forward to being involved. Those responsible for their learning and development are seen favourably and with a positive outlook.

For all this, just short of 28% (the best part of 1 in 3 young people) saw the services and activities as no better than average. This shows a decrease in a positive response to services and activities over time and as such requires further investigation.

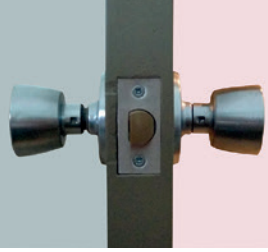
Focus group analysis

On the basis of the above findings a focus group of 15 young people from the first level of the programme was established, comprised of young people of relatively mixed abilities. It was planned that the group would meet for 45 minutes, however the process overran by more than half this length of time (due almost wholly to the enthusiasm for the exercise on the part of the young people involved).

The session started with the young people sharing feelings

Question/Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	Total number
1	2.7%	0	10.9%	47.8%	39.1%	46
2	2.3%	2.3%	4.6%	40.9%	50.0%	44
3	5.3%	5.3%	18.4%	31.6%	39.5%	38
4	1.9%	3.6%	13.5%	46.1%	35.6%	52
5	7.9%	0	7.9%	34.2%	50.0%	38
6	7.5%	2.5%	10.0%	35.5%	45.0%	40
Average	4.6%	2.3%	12.4	39%	43.2	43

Table 3: Young people's response to the programme without experiencing the partners of the project



Question/Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	Total number
1	0	3.4%	13.8%	27.6%	55.15	29
2	0	0	10.3%	32.1%	57.1%	28
3	0	2.5%	10%	15.0%	47.5%	40
4	3.7%	3.7%	37.0%	22.2%	33.3%	27
5	10%	3.3%	13.3%	33.3%	40.0%	30
6	0	13.8%	13.8%	34.5%	37.9%	29
Average	6.8	4.4	16.9	37.7	45.2	31

Table 4: Young people's response to the programme and experience of the partners

about their experience of the programme that took the shape of a general discussion. The session was conducted both Maltese and English.

The following is a summary of the statements made by the young people.

1. **General impressions of young people**
   Overall the programme was seen to be good, certainly in comparison to school experience. Young people appreciated the relative absence of bullying and feeling comparatively safe. Opportunities to learn in fun ways and youth work approaches were appreciated; young people felt supported and more able to make friends. A feeling of community was discussed

2. **What have you studied?**
   Young people commonly referred to looking at group and team work, leadership skills and valued the opportunities for work experience, and developing the skills related to same. They reflected on how they had been able to explore issues relating to the environment and work on their skill in relation to Maths, English and IT.

   A greater appreciation of personal wellbeing and relationships building was expressed.

3. **What have you learnt?**
   Significant value was placed on the understanding of how to be social (make friends), including via involvement in team work, but also more practical skills/understanding in craft, use of public transport, job seeking, research, data collection, and fitness pursuits was also highlighted.

4. **Best topics so far?**
   Young people highlighted learning about the environment, personal hygiene, home management (including independent living) and employment related skills. Visit and excursions (including taking part in the planning and preparation for the same) were enjoyed. IT sessions were particularly valued, as was learning about how to make, maintain and restore relationships, which incorporated preparation for a first date.

5. **Worst topic**
   A preference for 'hands on' learning experiences (rather than writing) was common. Money management and more generally 'number focused' skills were not popular. The approach to developing listening skills was criticised (young people being obliged to "write things down"), Some young people felt uncomfortable learning about sexual relationships.

6. **How can the programme be improved?**
   A number of young people agreed that the programme should use less paper and included more activities, games, IT and employment related skills but in particular excursions and outings. There was a feeling that action should be taken to prevent people talking over each other.

Some wanted more detailed and in-depth study.

7. **How are the sessions with the youth workers?**
   There was broad agreement that youth work responses were relevant and 'worked' at level 1. This was linked with the need for staff to be approachable and kind.

8. **Have they been able to apply what they have learnt so far in their own lives?**
   Improvement in social skills was the most significant answer to this question. Included in this response was being less shy, having more of an idea of how to speak to someone/ how to react to situations. The most common response was having a greater capacity to make friends.

   Also mentioned was ability to use public transport, apply leadership skills and work in teams.

9. **What do they do now they couldn't do before the programme?**
   Young people felt they had improved their ability to communicate with other people, which enabled them to make new friends, speak and work with other people.

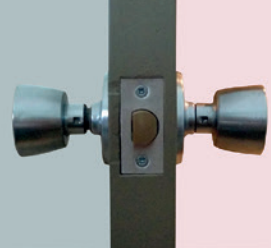
10. **Final Results**
    The group has developed together and the social aspect has been most beneficial to them all and the group is aware of that. They have also developed the ability to reflect.

The above reinforces the data relating to the achievement of goals and further indicates that the development of these young people has been premised on social and personal growth and as such broadly in line with their expectations and hopes.

This, alongside the ability to identify a high level of realisation of personal goals, principally demonstrates the positive impact of approaches set in a response set in youth work practice ('stepping back' and 'making room'). The focus on desired attitudinal change and the means to adapt and gain resilience in respect of personality can be seen to arise out of that actions and interactions of young people provided with the space to explore their environment and relationships.

The resulting word cloud 6 that includes all learner responses, indicates a strong similarity between expectations and hopes expressed via the baseline research.

Simplistically this could be understood as advancing these young people's readiness for the job market, but it does suggest a more 'global' enhancement of self, making the transition from the dependency of childhood to autonomous adulthood likely less fraught, more efficient, so providing benefits for the individuals concerned, their families, communities, while enhancing their capacity to find a useful role and place in wider society.



Creating a Learning Organisation

What is a Learning Organization?

There is no generally agreed definition of what learning organization might look like or how it might operate. For example:

- *Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding*. C. Marlene Fiol and Marjorie A. Lyles *Organizational Learning*, Academy of Management Review, October 1985.
- *An entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviors is changed*. George P. Huber, *Organizational Learning: The Contributing Processes and the Literatures*, Organization Science, February 1991.
- *Organizations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior*. Barbara Levitt and James G. March, "Organizational Learning," American Review of Sociology, Vol. 14, 1988.
- *Organizational learning is a process of detecting and correcting error*. Chris Argyris, *Double Loop Learning in Organizations*, Harvard Business Review, September–October 1977.
- *Organizational learning occurs through shared insights, knowledge, and mental models*…[and] *builds on past knowledge and experience - that is, on memory*. Ray *Stata, Organizational Learning - The Key to Management Innovation*. Sloan Management Review, Spring 1989.

However most theorists and writers understand organizational learning as a process that unfolds over time and connect it with knowledge acquisition, improved performance and more broadly organizational insight. It is also pretty widely agreed that behavioural change is required for learning, although some argue that new ways of thinking are sufficient. Information processing is also understood to be a mechanism that can facilitate learning, as is the sharing insights, organizational routines, memory and reflections of practice.

For all this, while many might feel they are part of a learning organization, it is hard to say or demonstrate that organizational learning is common. However, taking an overview of what a learning organization might be something like the following seems to cover most of the bases:

> *A learning organization is able to generate, acquire, and transfer knowledge and understanding, and as a result is skilful at modifying its behaviour accordingly to correct and/or improve its operation.*

The above starts out with simple logic: new ideas, views, perspectives are vital if learning is to take place (what you already know is not learning but the past result of the same).

New insights can of course be the result of flashes of insight or bolt from the blue creativity. They can also come from outside the organization or are passed informally and randomly on by well-informed insiders. However, new ideas can be purposely incubated by the organised presentation or expression of one person's or group perspective, encouraging and/or arranging matters so this can potentially be combined with, accommodated by or be merged with their the views, insights and standpoint of another individual or group. This might be understood as a straightforward dialectic (see Diagram 5).

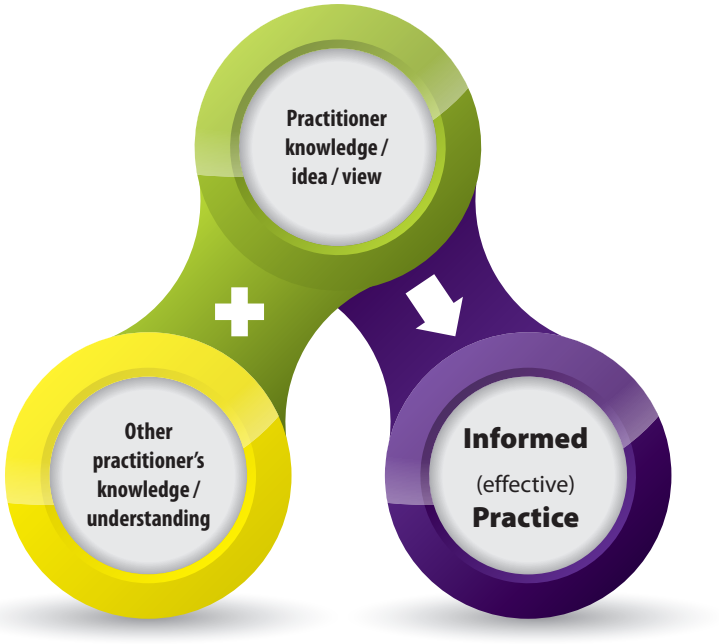


Diagram 5: Processes of a learning organisation

Whatever the source of the original ideas, they can ignite organizational improvement that is, make organizations better in terms of the achievement of goals and/or service delivery.

So we can do more than to just hope that chance events and actions might create learning organization. Situations and circumstances can be created to facilitate the same. At the same time changes in the way that work gets done requires commitment to action or else only the potential for improvement exists. Thus, what is required, not only for organizations to foster and present learning, they also need a means for interpreting learning into action, is a definite, clear and disciplined process. Many organizations are effective at generating or acquiring new knowledge but it is relatively rare for organizations to successfully apply the same within their operations.

Becoming adept at translating new knowledge into new ways of behaving requires that the learning process is managed to ensure that:

1. New knowledge/original thinking is generated by design rather than by chance;
2. Innovative thinking, understanding and new knowledge is translated into action.

Learning organizations tend to be good at:

- systematic problem solving;
- experimentation with new approaches;
- learning from experience and past history;
- learning from the experiences and best practices of others;
- transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization.

Many organizations practice the above to some degree, but few are constantly successful because they rely largely on happenstance and isolated examples. By creating a means and/or a process that support these activities and integrates them into the fabric of daily operations, organizations can manage their learning more effectively.

Accuracy is essential for learning, so employees need therefore to become more disciplined in their thinking and more attentive to details, continually asking (or being asked), "How do we know that's true?". This pulls us into thinking beyond obvious symptoms to assess underlying causes, often collecting evidence when conventional wisdom seemingly have it that it is unnecessary.

The above prevents the organization becoming or remaining a prisoner of "gut feelings" and/or sloppy reasoning, whereby learning will be stifled (we will learn how to do things less than well).

Within youth work and related practice (social work, counselling etc.) supervision has been a tool widely used to effect personal and organizational management, support but perhaps, in the best of circumstances, learning.

Supervision – a tool to promote organizational learning

Supervision is a professional and formal conversation between practice colleagues. It is not appraisal in the sense that one person is straightforwardly evaluating the performance of another, although it has strong elements of self-assessment and, when required, guidance. It is not a debate, although it is an exploration. It is not an argument however it is enquiring, questioning and even probing. At the same time supervision can't be counselling. It isn't a form of therapy, so it obviously is not a forum for the amateur psychoanalyst to roam the voids and hinterlands of their own or other people's unconscious. Neither (perhaps at the other extreme) is it causal chatting, the airing of streams of consciousness, free-ranging speculation, chin wagging stabs in the dark about the nature of reality. It is not aimless gossip.

Within this very brief but general definition of what supervision is (and is not) the practice can be refined in different ways according to aims and contexts, but essentially the work of supervision is focused on the interrogation of practice, which can take place no matter how much or how little experience one might have. It is not limited to those in training or structured education.

When all is said and done, supervision concentrates on the development and perfecting of practice, the activity of the practitioner. To this extent it is pragmatic, which does not preclude aims to support, but this is not starting from a deficit assumption about the supervisee; what is being supported is a postulation of asset – that the supervisee has it in them to maintain, refine, progress and/or better their practice delivery with appropriate supervision and the insights, understanding and knowledge that can be found or articulated in that arena; it is as such a learning experience.

In short, the major outcome of supervision is the development of professional judgement as a foundation of innovation, sharpening, enhancing and improving the functioning of the supervisee and so the offer, capacity and operation of their organization.

This said, more generally supervision can promote learning,

considered action and, within realistic boundaries, facilitate reflective practice, as distinct from stoking the imagination into fantasy, acceptance of bias, or overly subjective analysis of experience. This process is aimed at underpinning client safety, well-being and care, which allows for, forwards and confirms the effective and efficient achieving and/or realising of agency aims, professional objectives conduct and attitudes, desired outcomes, goals and purposes. Supervision grounds, consolidates and advances policy, while emphasizing ethical and moral service delivery.

What follows considers the role of supervisors in youth work contexts, working with young people, trainees and colleagues. It will touch on some of the pragmatic ways of approaching supervision, promoting curiosity - what might be thought of as the seed of learning and the foundation of education.

Supervision is a practice, but it is also a place for learning about, reflection on and the review of practice. As you will see, to an appreciable, extent, supervision is a situation, like youth work, that involves 'stepping back' and 'making room'. Often practitioners are far too close to their practice to objectively examine and question its purpose and direction – the means to gain perspective ('stepping back') needs to be found. We require time and a space (room) for this process.

The use of supervision

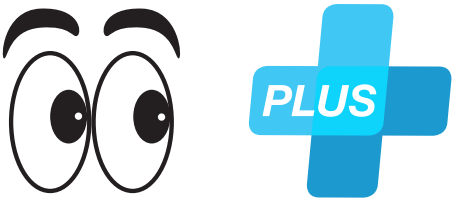
While supervision gives the task to the supervisee to develop their own conclusions and solutions, the supervisor has a number of functions, especially in terms of the supervisee's learning about their organization, it's operation, aims, methodologies and practices but principally, with regard to youth work, client safety.

Usually supervision encompasses three provinces:

- Particular incidents, issues or cases;
- Situations or contexts (physical workplace and networks, including frustrations with and emotional responses to the same);
- Career considerations.

The latter can encompass such areas as further training, conditions of work, career prospects and career aspirations, retirement, perceptions about how to manage and delegate work.

Sometimes two or all three of these provinces might be touched on in one supervision session. When supervision has an educational emphasis the direction of the encounter is (relatively) more clearly defined in relation to the above areas.



Super-vision

'Vision' is the means to gaze on or look at. Logically, by predicating 'vision' with the word 'super' implies a sort of 'extra-looking' or 'looking plus'.

However, the word 'supervision' tends to be used to refer to one person overseeing another, as a means of checking their performance. But this would be a bit of a dead-end occupation if this scrutinizing was not also a means of performance getting better (rather than just a way of maintaining a standard).

Both checking and improving performance are, more or less, encompassed in the supervision process. The extent to which either happens over a number of sessions depending on the context. But supervision is developmental (connected to continuous learning about the management and delivery of practice) and linked to performance (maintaining and improving standards).

There are different ways and contexts in which supervision takes place; peer supervision, education and training and in groups. It can also be more inclined towards support or management.

Diagram 6 depicts how a supervisory encounter might be placed. For instance, if a supervisionsessions is overtly

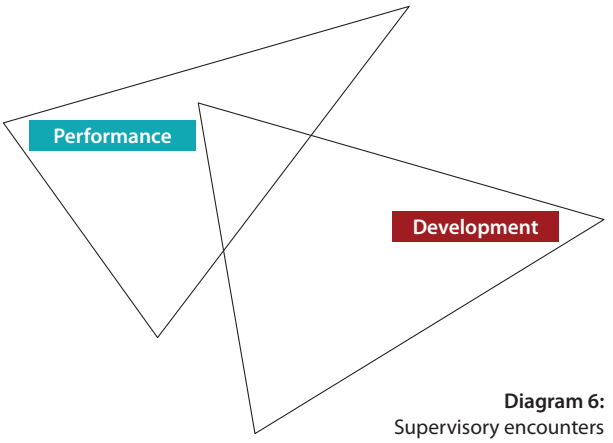


Diagram 6:
Supervisory encounters

managerial, more of an appraisal perhaps, you might place your experience at the extreme right hand point of the upper triangle. But if what you experience feels more like a counselling session, you may feel inclined towards the bottom right hand point.

Although there are commonalities across supervision contexts, youth work has specific concerns and issues arising out of the nature of practice. The welfare/well-being, education/learning mix is unique, but it also changes from situation to situation. Sometimes we are involved in igniting, making room for or generating relatively tangential learning experiences. In other spheres and/or points in time, youth workers can be implicated in clearly formalised and directive education, overt guidance, training and instruction - even, given the need - comparatively didactical forms of teaching.

However, one of the primary concerns of supervision is the supervisee's learning and development as a practitioner. This is second only to personal and client safety, although in an employment situation where there is necessarily also a major focus on performance and effective delivery, priorities can alter from time to time and from person to person. While the well-being safety clients are constant considerations in the day-to-day operations of an organization, it might often be, given the need, with funding in mind, to assure intended outcomes are achieved, that any given supervision session might be focus almost wholly on the latter (although in youth work client welfare will be embedded in most organizational practices and objectives).

The role of the supervisor in terms of organizational learning might be thought of as pretty clear, although it is complex. The supervision has a role in supporting their 'learning journey' of the supervisee. Each supervisee's path on this journey, although having commonalities with others, will be unique to that person. As such the supervisor needs to get to know the strengths, areas for improvement/development and aspirations of their supervisee in order to provide effective and timely supervision. At the same time the supervisee is called up on to strive to communicate the same information to the supervisor; this cannot be a 'one-way street'.

You might be able to see how aims, contexts and job specifics might require the supervision encounter to be set in particular areas of the above image. But one could also add other triangles, maybe for 'support' or 'guidance', among others.

The Environment

As outlined above, organizational learning can be best affected by a disciplined approach. This means providing a structure in terms of time, location and content. The following might be understood as a start on developing the basic set-up of supervision. This is pretty primary and generic guidance, which does not depart to any great extent from how the supervision environment would be established in fields other than youth work.

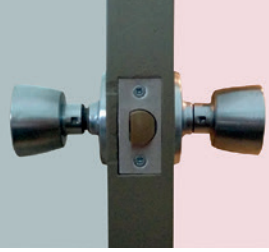
- Establish the need for supervision clearly – style, requirements, timings, involvement (who, what, why, where and how)
- Related to the above, ring-fence the time and space where/when supervision will take place (ensuring no interruptions and appropriate confidentiality).
- Establish the limits of confidentiality; this will include considerations like how to manage potential discussion about identifiable clients (although supervision to be supervision needs to be focused on the practitioner).
- Consider the setting; the arrangement of chairs/tables/desks, where does the supervisee sit in relation to the supervisor? What kind of chairs are needed ('sink-in' sofas or bean bags might not be appropriate)?
- Clarify the character of supervision; is it mainly developmental or performance related for instance.

Being responsive to contexts

The fundamental necessity of supervision is that a supervisor makes themself available to a supervisee to jointly scrutinize the supervisee's practice. As detailed above, supervision involves developmental and inquiring conversations; these act as a form regular feedback but also a means of rapid response to issues and concerns, questions and quandaries.

While it might be argued that not everyone needs supervision, the nature of youth work practice dictates, ethically, morally and professionally, that all practitioners should take supervision. The level of supervision might need to be matched to relative competence, confidence, experience and the role of the supervisee. For example, I was recently involved with a group of young volunteer youth workers from all over Europe, from 15 nations, speaking 13 different languages (although most had at least some command of English). They were all working in a particular faith context, although this was interpreted in a number of ways. They came from many different circumstances, with a wide range of personal, physical and psychological demands. However most were relatively new to youth work, many having no idea what supervision is or what it is for; they were not be using their first language while involved in the training.

This being the case, I organised this training to be



supportive. The supervision practice focused on the encouragement and the growth of the practitioner. While it was also concerned with the maintenance and development of skill, awareness, insight and the welfare of the client, the training inclined towards the motivation and guidance of the practitioner, confirming and promoting their interest in the work, while supporting them as workers emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. The training, as such, was tailored to who these people were (and are), what they were doing, their context and needs.

Quality assurance

It has been argued that supervision is an aspect of lifelong learning - a scary notion if associated with lifelong homework! However, as a long term supervisor I can say that it does have potential short, medium and long term benefits for both supervisor and supervisee, sometimes over a number of aspects of life, but it needs to be grasped that supervision exists principally as a means of quality assurance. Supervision to be supervision is related to professional standards of practice, national and organisational policy and how these related to organizational aims and tasks. This, if you like, is the sphere of learning that is essentially promoted by supervision.

This being the case, the learning that takes place vis supervision will, in the main, relate to organizational practice and professional standards and policies. However, the latter will also (has by necessity to include) the individual learning about themselves in relation to the latter.

At this point it is probably worth saying that while some people might find supervision therapeutic (they feel 'better' or use their supervisor to 'sound off' or 'unload') relatively few of us are trained or supported as counsellors or psychotherapists, and that the latter disciplines are related to the individual in the broadest sense, not strictly centred on work related issues. If someone is thought to need therapeutic support such as counselling, a referral to an experienced and appropriately qualified person or organization may be what is required (safe/necessary).

In other professional realms supervision has been described broadly as enabling the enhancement of professional skills via interaction between professionals (Butterworth, 2001). This outlook on supervision is ubiquitous; there is a broad agreement theoretically that supervision is inextricably a means of improving practice via personal development, related to the honing of professional skills and awareness. Now this might make us 'better people' but supervision exists to make us better practitioners, more useful to our organisations in terms of forwarding corporate missions, delivering services to our clients as effectively (which will include humanly and safely) as possible. The latter are the foundation and structure or organizational learning.

Educational Supervision

Supervision can be deployed to address various facets of education and practice. This will include matters relating to performance, but will have an emphasis on the supervisee's learning, which will implicate forms of teaching, instruction, guidance, policy exploration etc. The relatively 'mute' supervisor, who lives by the credo of 'never giving advice', preferring to look sagely at the 'thousand mile horizon', while restricting themselves to asking questions like 'What do you think?', 'Is that what really happened?' or 'How do you feel about that?' while potentially hitching themselves to malpractice (failing to correct or point out mistakes and misunderstandings) present, as a consequence, a less than safe environment for the supervisee.

Educational supervision can be understood as, whilst extending safe and appropriate care, providing guidance and responses relating to professional issues, with a particular emphasis on the educational development and facilitating the learning of the supervisee in the context of their practice experience.

Supervision is being increasingly deployed in professional contexts. See Rowson and Lindley (2012) however, educational supervision is a form of teaching but also personal learning. It can be about competence and/or specific skills, but also it is the cultivation of insight, awareness and hopefully (eventually) wisdom. Because youth workers have a relatively high degree of autonomy in terms of their practice, educational supervision also needs to cultivate the means of personal autonomy (self-reliance); learning is an internal, psychological event and as such represents an activation of the self. However, this is related to constant knowledge attainment, skill development and maintenance, but also self-confidence, critical analysis of evidence and independent thought. All the latter of course are the building blocks of professional judgement, which might be thought of as a product of learning. A learning organization is made up of employees that can do more than just following instructions; they are able to make judgements that enhance the performance of the organization.

Educational supervision will almost invariably include some form assessment; how else might learning needs and direction be established? It therefore involves making judgements (a judgement being an opinion based on evidence).

While educational supervision will include technical, policy

and knowledge content, it will also embrace a variety of issues relating to general and specific practice and practitioner quandaries, predicaments, questions and concerns.

Appraisal, mentoring and coaching

Some argue that mentoring, coaching and appraisal can be implicated into supervision practice, but they are, like counselling, separate and distinct disciplines. While such encounters might involve similar interpersonal skills to, and from a distance, look like supervision, in the main they do not have the same level of concern for the development of practitioner autonomy and the concomitant honing of professional judgement. While these other approaches/ disciplines may also cultivate practice wisdom and poise, their emphasis is not as flexible or broad as supervision. This does not depreciate forms of appraisal, mentoring or coaching; it is merely clarifying the more extensive and perhaps long-term character and purpose of supervision.

Broadly speaking, coaching concentrates on looking to maximise individual potential to advance personal performance (Whitmore, 1996). Mentoring is usually taken to be pretty much focused on guidance and support provided by a more experienced/skilled person (often a colleague or work-place superior). But co-mentoring, involving the mutual support of both job equals and managers (maybe in 'action learning sets') is becoming more common.

Appraisal is often confused with supervision, especially in the manager/managed association. A lot of what is called 'managerial supervision' on examination pans out to be appraisal. However the field of appraisal is principally the potential and actual performance of the managed person, their career development and changes in work role or job. In this respect it is more instrumental, practical and mechanistic than supervision

Mentoring, appraisal and coaching skills or direction are of course sometimes encompassed within supervision, but to say that any one or all of these types of encounters are forms supervision (or that supervision is a form of them) is to invite a lack of direction and clarity (even role confusion). One might as a supervisee in supervision identify a need for mentoring, but for supervision to remain supervision it cannot transform into mentoring, just as to turn it into a counselling session or an opportunity for gossip is clearly an inappropriate use of supervision resources.

Just as an ophthalmologist is not an optometrist and neither is an optician, a mentoring or coaching session is not supervision (else it would be called 'supervision').

While one might rarely find a person who is qualified ophthalmologist, optometrist and optician, it will be likely that this 'super-eyeball' wizard will treat your ocular concerns from the perspective of the specialism most suitable to that condition. Likewise you don't need a podiatric surgeon to treat your athlete's foot; indeed that might do you more harm than good.

Past, present and future

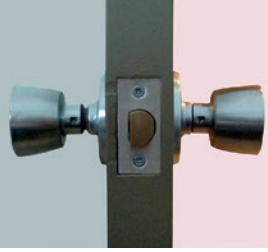
Through the process of supervision the supervisee is given the opportunity to reconstruct their view of particular issues, events or difficulties, look at other possible perspectives and learn from this process. This is assisted by the supervisor listening and asking questions. Traditionally this is said to be done in order to help the supervisee see things from different points of view and/or transfer experience and learning between and to different contexts. However, there is also a clarification element to this; getting a handle on what might have happened, how the supervisee saw events. This process has a greater end than 'seeing things differently'; it is also related to looking at where professional judgements might have been made and considering where they could be made, given that more clarity about situations can be had via supervision.

Here you can see the supervision relating to the past (what happened) and the present (the clarification in the 'now'). However supervision also has a role in terms of future practice because the understanding and honing of professional judgement only has a point in terms of developing better professional judgement to be applied in situations that haven't happened yet.

Supervision works?

There is some evidence that supervision improves job satisfaction, lowers the risk of stress (preventing 'burnout') and improves morale (for instance, in the nursing context Cutliffe, Butterworth and Proctor. 2001, Begat, Severinsson, and Berggren, 1997; Butterworth, Bishop and Carson, 1996). It is probably counter-intuitive that failing to provide a chance to think about practice and look at potential and actual outcomes critically and analytically will produce anything other than relatively poor practice. However, there is not much in the way significant and convincing confirmation to support claims that supervision in youth work 'works'.

However, as stated above, supervision is, in the last analysis, a form of quality assurance; it is a contribution to organizational learning that is more than the sum of its parts (although the learning might be thought of as the combined effect of employees learning in relation to their practice).



In the best of all possible worlds supervision will be beneficial to the practitioner, the client, the organisation and wider community and social contexts. But at base supervision is a means to make sure the client is safe and well served by an agency or organisation. The total capacity of an organization to achieve this is reliant on the aptitude of the organization to learn from the combined insights and exploration of its employees.

This translates to the effective and efficient operation of that agency as a learning (rather than relatively ignorant) organization. Yes, supervision encourages reflective practice, but that is not an end in itself; one does not give or get supervision just in the hope of creating more introspective people. Supervision promotes accountability (in the training/educational setting this is provided by assessments of learning). It has the intention to engender professional development, primarily to facilitate service delivery, all part of organizational learning.

So, while it might be hoped that supervision 'works, the point of supervision is its moral imperative. From a societal standpoint is not supervision something we ethically should do? How can we morally avoid the need to continually seek to maintain the best of what we do and look to better the services we offer? Do we not, from an ethical perspective, do well to check-out our performance, keep it open to inspection, correction and/or promote/share/celebrate good practice? Are organizations that devote themselves to the education and welfare of young people not obliged, as part of their aims, to be learning organizations; learning from employees, volunteers who in turn might be equipped by the organization to learn from their clients and colleagues?

Both good and bad practice tend to be endemic (we only need to look at the history of health and social services to have this confirmed). Bad practice becomes rife as far as it remains hidden; good practice prevails via our capacity to make our work practices transparent and open to perusal and question.

The organization and the practitioner who can question themselves by way of remaining open to questioning of colleagues and peers (logically speaking) is relatively the most moral operator potentially in comparison with the practitioner who privatises their practice (who works from the basis of secrecy and as a by-product, albeit unintentional, deceit). This is because the latter is left to cultivate their personal/subjective assumptions, bias and limited understanding. If they learn at all it is by their own mistakes, which sounds ok until we grasp that in youth work this mistake is likely to involve the well-being of your, my or someone's else's child. That said, while the maxim 'we learn by out mistakes' might have its attractions, most of us, in the course of our lives, tend to make the same mistakes time and time again. We often only recognise this repetition after the most recent mistake has been made.

Unfortunately old adages are all too often just wrong, but human beings can use them to continue the propensity we have of convincing ourselves that our errors are not in fact a erroneous (what the philosophers and psychologists call 'confirmation bias'). In any case, the youth worker who learns by making mistakes is one dangerous operative.

A programme for promoting a learning organization - Creating a culture of supervision in Malta

While supervision attended to the on-going development of staff, including the provision of a supportive and learning oriented process, essentially the practice addressed quality assurance of delivery of services to young people and staff accountability as part of a publicly funded entity, entrusted with the care and the promotion of learning of, sometimes vulnerable, young people.

The initial and straightforward objective of the programme was to establish an organizational 'tree' of supervision. It was envisaged that this would be sustained within the two project parties.

The aim to promote the concept and realisation of developing learning organizations encompassed a consistent commitment to the intention of promoting practitioner supervision.

Training for the structure - Setting the structure

The development of engendering a supervision culture to facilitate organizational learning included YMCA the provision of 6 supervision sessions involving practice senior workers (PSW). Each practice senior worker received 6 sessions of supervision each year of the programme. Practice senior workers (supervisors) delivered supervision to between 3 and 5 practitioners (P). Each practitioner (supervisee) received supervision approximately once every 3 weeks. The Senior Supervisor (YMCA George Williams College) undertook six supervision visits during each year of the project (see Diagram 7).

This was a 6 month programme that involved;

a) The nomination of between 8 and 12 candidates for training;
b) Three full-day workshops;

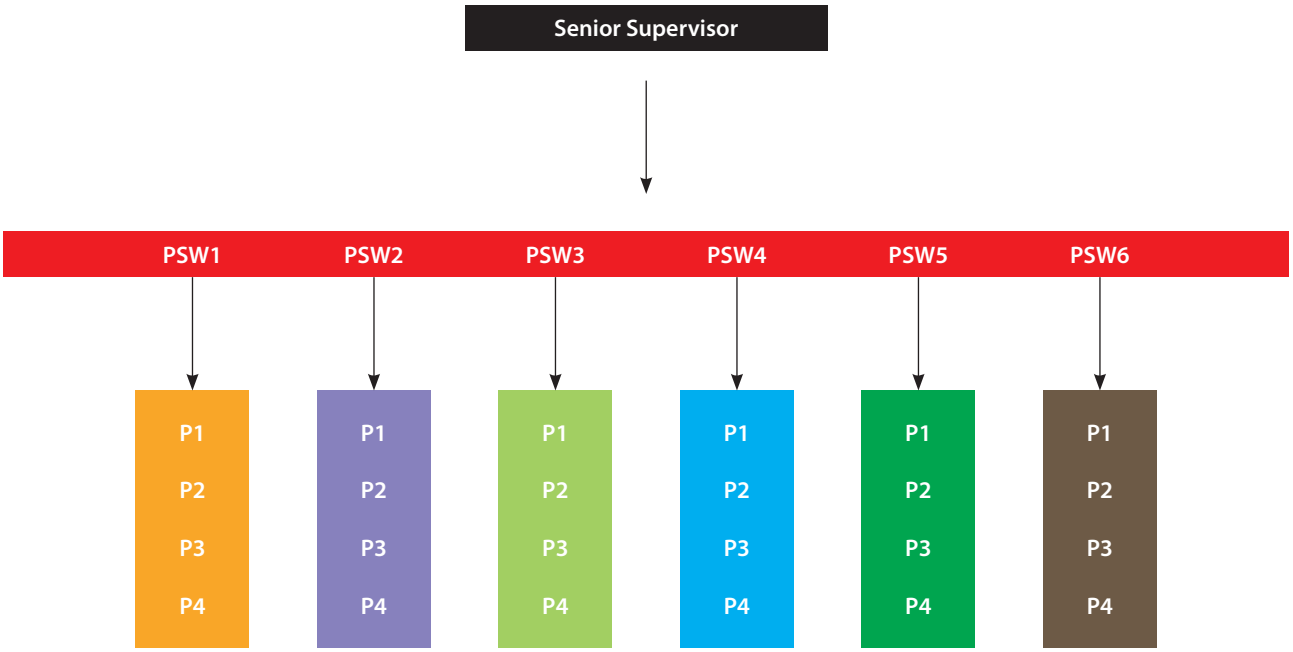


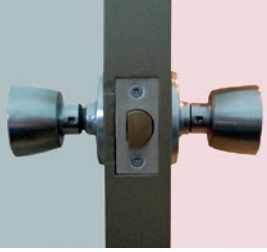
Diagram 7. The supervision structure

c) Workshops focused on participant learning via the sharing of practice and the study materials;
d) All participants were supplied with study materials electronically;
e) All participants were asked to undertake 5 sessions of supervision as supervisees;
f) All participants were asked to undertake 5 sessions of supervision as supervisors;
g) Supervision sessions were focused on the supervisee
h) All participants, as supervisees, were given the opportunity provide a self-assessment of their learning;
i) All participants, as supervisors were given the opportunity provide am assessment of their supervisee's learning.

Participants were encouraged to keep in regular contact with the tutor via email and skype. Electronic and face-to-face tutorials were made available.

At the end of each year of the project PSW generated a report and these, alongside the Senior Supervisor's report, acted as the foundation for the on-going review of the progamme.

As part of this, 12 youth workers took part in a training programme of studies in supervision.



Stepping back, making room – How is Youth Work understood?

In the European context youth work is understood to encompass three crucial characteristics:

- Young people participate in youth work on a voluntary basis;
- Youth work is practiced and delivered where the young people are;
- Practitioners recognise that together with young people they can constitute a partnership in a process of learning.

The project partners saw these central features as premised on the capacity of practitioners to 'step back' and 'make room' for young people to make use of the 'learning environments' youth workers build.

More broadly youth work incorporates a wide variety of activities, including social and cultural pursuits, educational responses and contexts, as well as sporting activities and political participation. The means and process of youth work practice is advanced by and for young people, via non-formal responses and informal learning approaches.

At the same time youth work looks to engage with and for young people in order that they, with the 'accompaniment' of youth workers, might find the best means for them, as individuals and groups, to realise their potential as they make the transition from young personhood to finding roles and forming their ambitions in adult society.

As such, youth work exists for young people, to use for their personal growth, their development of individual autonomy that includes the capacities to be initiative and participate in society. This is by definition an 'asset' approach to young people that is effected, straightforwardly, by way of the skill and sensibility of youth workers to 'step back' and 'make room' for young people to explore their world and express themselves socially, physically and politically. This requires young people and youth workers in the joint endeavour of creating exciting, interesting and challenging learning environments in order to provoke, and encourage curiosity, discovery, realising the joy and fulfilment that can be found in the nurturing the understanding of self and others, and so the fostering personal, interpersonal and global consciousness/awareness.

Although youth workers can and are employed within school settings, in Europe youth work is mainly concerned with 'out-of-school' learning, which can include leisure activities, managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and/or youth leaders. Youth work is organised in various contexts and diverse agencies, for example in youth-led and voluntary organisations, informal groups or local authority youth services.

Youth work can be generally described as a practice undertaken by those working with young people in a range of settings. Youth workers can be found working in clubs and detached (street based) settings, within social/welfare services, sports/leisure provision, schools and, over the last decade or so in museums, arts facilities, libraries, hospitals, leisure and sports centres, children's homes and young offenders' institutions. In some context youth workers are practicing directly for governments or local government, often involved in community development and community learning situations, capacity building, providing forms of accredited and non-accredited learning, using non-formal, informal and formal methods of engagement. However, more and more, they are deployed by voluntary organisations (although via a range of funding arrangements, including direct and indirect state resources) in issue-related work (drugs, sexual health, homelessness, parenting etc.). Many such organisations, particularly faith based groups, will be more focused on less directive and informal practice.

The project partners looked to address the majority of these focus points in the process of the project.

Youth work/social work

There are some similarities and differences between youth work, social work other forms of intervention into the experience of youth. As such, it seems positive to provide a clear statement about the character of youth work (although not a definitive root and branch explanation, as this would preclude as much youth work as it might encompass).

This said, too often the attempt to demarcate barriers between what is and what is not youth work is less than constructive, because as is necessary, youth work changes

over time and place, according to the changing needs of and laws pertaining to young people. Youth workers also need to serve organisational requirements, and be aware of policy and managerial limitations, as well as take into consideration the wants and needs of individual young people. This being the case the project partners sought to draw out some of the distinctive elements that might distinguish any particular incarnation or profile of youth work practice and include some brief indications of how this might develop and evolve. The metaphor this evoked was 'stepping back, making room'.

Youth work has commonalities with social work and teaching but it also has distinctive elements. Broadly speaking youth work has developed within local, regional, national and international contexts and has evolved alongside advancing welfare systems. It operates within and across the gaps between:

1. The everyday trials and pitfalls, joys and discovery of childhood and the responsibilities and duties of adulthood.
2. Preventative activity in terms of child protection and forms of crucial personal and social intervention/care and custody.
3. Personal development and risk of harm.

Above, 2 and 3 can be understood to mark out the boundaries between youth work and social work.

The practice implicates a range of learning methodologies, imparted to individuals and by way of group work techniques. It follows a range of care procedures and legal obligations.

All of these functions, shifting and merging approaches, change over time. There are also variations from place to place, in terms of organisational demands and the pressures and traditions of social contexts. At the same time practitioners deployed in diverse social, economic and political climates will interpret their role differently. The situation of young people in any particular or general circumstance will also demand, want or need not one but a range of approaches, responses and services. Thus, in practice, youth work is something, but it is no one thing, even within a single national area, but even more so when one takes a global perspective. It is in fact naive to believe the case to be otherwise.

Care

So, transnationally, youth work is a very diverse profession in terms of social tasks and employment situations. In recent years, with transnational economic and political changes, what youth workers do worldwide is in a constant state of flux. The demise of the national youth services internationally, alongside cuts in State funding of welfare and capacity building services has seen a growth in the role of commercial (commissioned) services, voluntary and faith organisations in youth work. If anything this is likely to cause an ever growing and shifting diversity of practice.

For all this, the main focus of youth work is on:

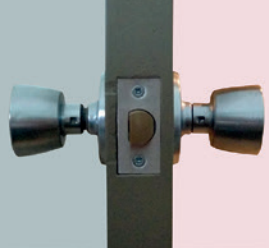
1. The social education of young people.
   This is not usually simply forms of instruction, but includes a range of approaches, mostly developing learning opportunities out of everyday experience, including leisure and social pursuits, but also calling on more formal methods when appropriate.
2. The well-being of young people, including prevention aims and strategies.

This includes attention to and working with young people, their parents, guardians and carers to understand, relate to and make use of their rights, promoting and having concern for young people's welfare, while extending appropriate professional care via various incarnations of legal, ethical and moral expectation of a duty of care.

The overall aim of the diverse practice of youth work is to enhance the life experience of young people and their contribution to society as active, involved, useful and valued members of society.

For the purpose of the project, youth work was understood to involve relating to and taking a level of responsibility for other people's children and the life direction of young people. Therefore practice can be seen as fundamentally concerned and primarily focused on care. However, this care needs to be expressed in a suitably professional manner, which includes an appropriate level of detachment; youth workers are not 'big brothers/sisters' neither are they 'friends' (although they might be 'friendly'), nor is the youth work role a parenting one. So a professional detachment needs to be developed in terms of care.

Care means professional care, not automatically 'helping' (unlike social workers, who might be commonly understood in some contexts to be primarily concerned with extending or facilitating help). Youth workers might support but they are not just 'supporters' or 'saviours'. Our role has more to do with working with young people the help, support and save themselves and each other. In short, we 'step back' and 'make room' for this to happen, looking to young people to find ways of building their resilience, capacity and agency.



Social and political education

Given the cultural and national differences in legal requirements, age groupings and social expectations connected with the care of young people across countries and cultures, this care is often set within a framework of Universal Rights which can complement and underpin existing national legislation, practice, ethical and care standards/requirements. This means that youth workers not only need a working knowledge of child and human rights, but also the ability to interpret this knowledge and the associated principles into practice.

Youth work includes creating opportunities for young people to develop their individual and inter-relational capacities for personal and social benefit. This process serves to foster the self-awareness of young people, but at the same to learn to make themselves understood by others and become a valuable resource in terms of the life of their society and the betterment of wider global society. This, being achieved within a framework of equality and democratic principles, requires the professional youth worker to be a 'social and political educator'.

Worldwide, youth work has traditionally been seen as a sort of secondary or 'para-profession' in relation to occupations like teaching and social work; it has been understood as something of a luxury rather than a necessity. While youth work does have distinct skill sets and is informed by a range of theory and practice, claiming guiding principles and values, alongside the delivery of services, these change over time, context and sometimes, even from person to person. Writers, academics and practitioners have reasoned this is because youth work encompasses a combination of roles. However, others, looking to give the practice a greater level of integrity, purpose and perhaps status, have looked to provide youth work with a more definite grounding. This has, in some places, led to attempts to rename youth workers as 'youth support workers', 'youth development workers' or 'informal' and/or 'community' educators. However, this practice has only led to making the work less distinguished and dimensional.

Formal/Informal?

A colleague in higher professional education had it:

> *The formal/informal split is such a red herring. So many students talk about enabling informal learning when really they are nothing of the sort and in today's field it is a completely irrelevant distinction.*

According to Prof. Richard Mitchell (in *The Underground Grammarian*)

> *There is only one Education, and it has only one goal: the freedom of the mind. Anything that needs an adjective, be it civics education, or socialist education, or Christian education [or informal education], or whatever-you-like education, is not education, and it has some different goal. The very existence of modified "educations" is testimony to the fact that their proponents cannot bring about what they want in a mind that is free. An "education" that cannot do its work in a free mind, and so must "teach" by homily and precept in the service of these feelings and attitudes and beliefs rather than those, is pure and unmistakable tyranny.*

The perspective of this section might be understood as a formal versus informal argument. Indeed, the attitudes and approaches that exemplify anything informal or non-formal education could be taken to epitomize an ultimate incarnation of differentiated teaching and learning. This being the case, the previous analysis, in that it commends differentiated approaches in formal settings, at least serves to blur the supposed formal/informal dichotomy (if such a border might be said to exist).

However, amongst the most reoccurring themes in youth work is the equation that more or less overtly states:

Non formal education and informal learning = good

Formal education = bad

This is probably a result of a combination of two influences in particular. Much of the literature and professional discourse concerning itself with non-formal education and informal learning, more or less overtly, uses this simplistic equation to champion the techniques that propose non formal education as a distinct approach. This combines with widespread negative experiences of school (often identified among youth workers) institutions seen by more strident propagators of non-formal education as fortresses of the prescriptive, inflexible, impersonal, didactic formal education.

Not only does this universally condemn teachers over time and place, it ignores the fact that most good teachers (those achieving outcomes while maintaining appropriate relationships with learners) use differentiated and informal methods (amongst the plethora of evidence of this see Rogers 2005, Ekwunife 1987, Merttens et.al. 2000, Green 2008).

A youth worker commented:

> *I am quite satisfied with the now much maligned 'chalk and talk' pedagogical style if the person talking floats my boat. I know Freire would dispute this*

> *willingness in me to be an 'empty vessel', and I don't just want to be filled up with stuff all the time, but it can be very exciting when someone sets off a spark of enlightenment or a crushing realisation.*

This demonstrates how differentiated learning can be mediated into formal settings and styles. However, anyone involved in teaching might ask how modern forms of so called 'formal education' might be possible without devoting a good deal of their teaching time of 'informal practice'.

At the same time, youth workers, who by their own declaration, deliver 'non formal education' undertake this by using more or less sizeable elements of what any disinterested observer would call 'formal practice' (instruction, advice and information giving, teaching etc.).

The person quoted at the outset of this section portrayed the possible consequences of supporting the formal/informal separation eloquently;

> *We all do both and anyone who doesn't is quite ineffective. All good teachers teach formally and informally (as well as learn from their students). By continuing to effectively generate maintain a dichotomy between formal and non-formal education, we are, I think inadvertently creating a situation where teachers and youth workers are on a collision course because neither understands (or wants to understand) the other.*

A mixture of formal/informal methodology might be understood to be necessary in terms of diversity and facilitating differentiated practice.

Perhaps we are not being as insightful or as honest as we might be. A youth worker provided an intriguing response

> *Do people in positions of authority really manage their subject with the consent of those they teach? Is the control implicit, implied and hidden so as to appear consensual? Isn't the fear of consequences the instrument by which control is exerted, however esoteric, subtle and amorphous those consequences are?*
>
> *Non/Informal = Bad*
>
> *Formal = Worse*
>
> *Ha Ha!*

These are valid and potentially devastating questions.

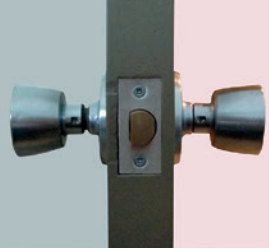
Perhaps we need to stop pretending that the dichotomy between formal and informal is in any way concrete? Being at best an arbitrary and abstract demarcation that does little more than create confusion and a kind of prejudicial and therefore antagonistic oppositionalism, how long can we justify it as currency in educational debate?

Although the above is not centrally an argument for informal over the formal, one of the questions it begs is how one might differentiate the 'event horizon' of 'informal' and 'formal', given that the argument for formal outcomes might best be achieved via interplay between informal attitudes, strategies and responses together with references to formal procedures and tactics (this might probably be consistent with best practice examples in schools and youth agencies for example). At the same time, forms of formalised teaching and learning have their place in the pursuit of differentiated teaching and learning.

Non-formal education is not a profession in its own right. In the main, non-formal education is made up of a set of notional approaches, values and techniques applied in a number of settings, including schools and colleges, by a range of professionals. The definition of these terms is anything but fixed. Youth workers often describe themselves as non-formal or informal educators, having picked up the label by way professional training, and some writers have referred to 'professional informal educators', a title that means very little outside the academy walls as it does not really relate too readily to the role of the youth worker in law in many contexts, the social and public expectations of the profession nor often job descriptions.

Taking a national and international perspective non/informal education are a fairly vague terms and probably, with regard to being the raison d'etre of youth work, something of a fading paradigm as the split between informal and formal education becomes much more blurred than it was in the 1960s when the term was first used in any broad sense. Now youth workers use formal, non-formal, semi-formal and informal techniques and approaches interchangeably; indeed that might be thought of part of the skill set of youth workers.

Overall, such titles have proved to be transitory and provide no clearer indication of the professional role. In fact they seem to give rise to evermore vague time, place and culture specific definitions of and justifications for practice. Hence the adoption of the theme of this report, which is perhaps clearer in terms of practical understanding; 'step back, make room'.



Youth Work is teaching!

As can be concluded from Chapter 5, youth work has traditionally shied away from an association with teaching. This likely arises from an apparent (and odd) misunderstanding that anyone who teachers someone else something risks being classified as teacher by profession. Just as a teacher who practices basic first-aid on a child is not a nurse, so a nurse that advises a child about their health is not a teacher, while a youth worker who helps a young person with their school homework does not automatically become a maths teacher (no matter how formally they may extend this help).

As such, broad definitions of youth work have avoided understanding the practice as a teaching approach, although learning and education are depicted as central facets of youth work practice. This makes the explanation of what youth work seeks to do both confusing and contradictory.

With this in mind, in the first instance the partners identified educational approaches that youth workers often deploy and encompass, wholly or in part, into their practice (more or less consciously and purposefully however). However, at the outset of this chapter the reader might not we are relating to teaching that has, at its core, '***stepping back'*** and ***'making room'*** for learning.

The curriculum

The ambition of the partnership from the outset of the project was to create an innovative, youth work (non-formal) oriented curriculum that could offer young people a place and response that would function to facilitate their development of the type of personal and interpersonal (group) skills needed to gain, undertake, maintain and advance in employment, but also facilitate their development of the capacities required to take broad and active roles in their communities and wider society.

This was motivated by the partners' experience of working with young people who, for various reasons, were unamenable to traditional forms of formal education and/or finding the transition from school to further education or work challenging, or in some cases, close to impossible, both because of a lack of appropriate/useful qualifications and difficulties acclimatizing to the responsibilities and structures associated with working and adult life.

The partners had found that the adoption of the open, non-formal, relational approaches associated with youth work practice were beneficial with regard to facilitating the learning of the particular targeted clientele. This included focused forms of personal and interpersonal management. We found that this strategy proved more successful than more customary didactic techniques, largely premised on more straightforward forms of classroom control.

However, while the partners were each familiar with and/or had applied forms of assessment showing progress of young people in such non-formal learning situations, they saw the need for the generation of a more robust and longitudinal means to evidence the relative effectiveness (or otherwise) of relational strategies in the building of the life-skills necessary for the transition from youth to adult life.

The partners' combined a new awareness arising out of the process of active teaching and learning, underpinned by appropriate data collection and research, within the context of learning organisations. This constituted the core of the shared learning and joint understanding of innovative practice the project looked to nurture.

The partners found aspects of all the following teaching and learning strategies (methods) effective in creating non-formal learning environments:

- Relational practice
- Open space learning
- The open classroom
- Differentiated teaching and learning

Given youth work is an educational response, or at least focused on fostering young people's learning, it is logically a form of teaching, albeit a very collaborative arrangement, wherein roles can effectively be interchangeable: youth workers rely on young people to teach them about their learning needs/wants and look to young people to be active participants in their own learning (a level of autodidactic learning is facilitated - stepping back and making room).

Relational practice in youth work (RPYW)

Relational practice has a number of manifestations (in nursing and social work for example). However, generally it

can be thought of as an approach and a method of practice. It has developed over many years out of theoretical analysis, field experience and empirical research.

The major values of relational practice arise out of ideas related to anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory principles. The concept of well-being and the addressing of the issues associated with social life that can arise from coping networks' reflexivity and action rather than individuals.

Youth workers, working relationally, might be understood 'accompaniers' of young people as they negotiate relational networks, having a role premised on a principle of reciprocity (see Belton 2009: 88-109).

A central principle of RPYW refers to social agency that is intentional free action. This is premised on the proposal that social issues often might have solutions, but they can never be resolved. While people constantly change they cannot ever be changed (Prochaska, Di Clemente & Norcross, 1992).

The ethics of youth work are contrary to any intention to manipulate young people so that they conform with what the practitioner might desire them to be (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2006; Folgheraiter, 2004). However, at the same time, although this kind of intervention proves to invariably be unsuccessful, in that it contravenes the self-determination of young people it conflicts with a range of fundamental human rights.

No practitioner is in a position to unilaterally remove problems from the lives of others just because s/he believes they know what is required to be done.

Within youth work it is understood that effective of practice is reliant on the quality of the relationship (or association) between young people and practitioners who while maintaining a distinct identity (a boundary that is not a barrier) generates a particular humane energy (more than the sum of the energies of the two) that slowly, and unpredictably, modifies the situation, producing the shared value or 'relational good' (Donati, 2000; Donati & Solci, 2011).

Thus an association entered into with the aim of engendering the bettering of someone, or with the intention to make a young person conform to an idea of what they are or 'should' be like (Lévinas, 1982), places the youth worker in a position of isolation (outside of the association) as a 'solver' while turning the young person into the problem to be solved.

Apart from the clear moral and ethical considerations, this role can't be maintained; no one can save the world. The most likely result is practitioner stress and burnout, not only as a consequence of exhaustion but dealing the cognitive dissonance arising from inauthentic relations. While the young person might be thought of as the 'object' of youth work, they are a subject; not just a 'youth' but a person in their own right.

Reciprocity

A principle RPYW is to engender well-being a situation where in there is room for those involved to suspend (not give up necessarily) designated roles (for instance the practitioner, user or client) to assume the function of facilitator of learning or the co-creator of learning environments.

While often in welfare situations the young person is persuaded to consider themself as essentially a victim assisted by saviours, all be they well-meaning, those saviours are as Illich (Illich et al., 1977) had it, conceited or self-interested. The victim will never be able to 'feel well.'

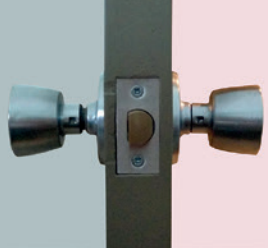
Thus reciprocity (or parity or mutuality) is the kernel of RPYW. This means that young people should receive authentic responses from practitioners and this is only possible if those practitioners are ready to be educated by those from who they seek to promote learning with (Belton, 2009 & 2010, Freeberg, 2007, Petterson & Hem, 2011).

Youth workers can promote learning only if they know how to ask to be educated primarily by those seen in need of education; the supposed 'ignorant' clients. Literally, 'learning relations' means that the learning arises from an association: that is, from a synergy between two or more agents engaged with equal commitment and dignity in achieving shared development (Folgheraiter, 2004).

This assertion echoes the European Commission's 'Supporting youth actions in Europe statement on empowerment that has it that the empowerment of young people means; "….encouraging them to take charge of their own lives." We, the partners, understand this as 'stepping back, making room'.

In this statement the Commission recognised that "… young people across Europe are facing diverse challenges and youth work in all its forms can serve as a catalyst for empowerment."

The idea of relational empowerment in youth work might be understood as a re-balancing of inappropriate almost wholly therapeutic and manipulative power in which the group with most authority/official or social legitimacy



(the practitioner). RPYW works with and for young people to realise and/or accesses, via their means to influence society and their course of their own lives, authority. This is the conduit to growing personal and group autonomy, becoming active in their own destiny and the development of their communities.

This is process wherein people assume control over their own lives and not zero-sum transfer of authority or power. Authority is not 'given' in some kind of colonial manner. As a progressive form of relational practice it can produce a 'social income' from practice.

The increasing realisation of personal and group autonomy will include the capacity to deal with the consequences of one's actions that is, the taking of responsibility. A mark of adulthood is one becomes a responsible person, able to see one's part in social relations and conditions. With this comes understanding about the action that can be taken to 'self-help' and how helping others can be helpful to the self. This realisation of 'reciprocal reliance' of persons has been called 'mutual help', which can be thought of as the means to generate 'social capital' (Folgheraiter & Pasini, 2009).

Networks

RPYW understands that well-being and the addressing of issues in social life arises not from individuals, but from coping networks' reflexivity and action.

A coping network is a system of relationships between people interested a shared objective. The RPYW approach takes it that when one acts with others, this shared action generates relational patterns and dialogical groups that are 'coping networks' (Folgheraiter, 2011). It is only these groups that can produce dialectical outcomes; consensual and innovative action.

This chimes with the European Commission's position 'connection', that looks to "Encourage young people's engagement in solidarity, promoting support schemes and seek complementarity and synergies". This involves actively engaging with young people.

Those involved in coping networks are able to express themselves and have their voice heard in the reflexive coping in which they are engaged.

Creativity and freedom

Comparative nativity or the initial lack precise knowledge, which is usually understood as a constrain to future action is, ironically, freedom. Owning comparative ignorance is the starting gun to seeking relevant knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge, awareness and understanding is of course a life skill in itself. The mere passing on of information can thus be seen as potentially cultivating reliance (not promoting autonomy).

Professionals are unfortunately expected to know stuff and this can lead to both conscious and unconscious bluffing (so as not to look unprofessional). Acknowledging a lack of knowledge like Socrates, is the necessary premise for activating the search of a truth or a particular good. This is the moral and ethical basis of RPYW.

The notion of coping indicates the determination to resist maliciousness. RPYW sees part of this as acting with an open mind, with network's members looking to learn together in the process (Folgheraiter, 2011).

Youth workers as relational guides

In RPYW the practitioner seeks to produce as yet unknown solutions by associating the people motivated to seek them. S/he looks to foster or reinforce trusting relations that are sufficiently robust to help her or him in the effort to promote human well-being by engendering and supporting associated and cooperative action among everyone involved (Folgheraiter & Raineri, 2012).

RPYW realizes the resource of social interaction. Contrary to clinical traditions of social work, RPYW does not look to technically repair people, communities or situations. It acts to tap into the meaningful potential that evolves out of a social context. In short the work facilitates or enhances human relations, while not directly providing 'help' (Folgheraiter, 2004).

Overall RPYW produces an increase in social capital, which consists of the intelligence and sensitivity of social relations in micro social contexts. As such, the RPYW practitioner is a 'relational guide'. The intention is to increase the resilience and capacity for action of the social relations. As a relational guide, youth worker's action is second hand, so to speak: s/he does not act directly, but instead facilitates the action of others. By acting in this way, the RPYW does not look back to identify the causes of issues. They look forward to an open future guiding and stimulating people to motivate each other to do likewise.

RPYW practitioners do not seek to modify people's basic behaviour, according to standards set by remote agencies. S/he acts as a mirror so that relations already directed towards an issue are able to be seen more clearly. This allows people to understand what they are doing, how and why they are

doing it. S/he acts responsively to what the network has shown that it wants to choose or do. But this does not imply that his/her professional presence is not also proactive. S/he respects people's decisions, while they remain within the broad direction of the general aim and are not destructive or harmful to the social interactions within the network. His/her role as facilitator entails that s/he must foster any creativity that leads forward, and block or ignore everything that leads backwards, or causes the process to stall.

As a relational guide (or a facilitator), the RPYW practitioner gathers people together and, on an equal footing, encourages them to interact and take decisions. To 'facilitate' is not to lead, coordinate, or command. The relational guide accompanies the action of these people and supports them in the ways that they want or are able to address an issue. They should be able to support action in directions that they might never have envisaged.

The RPYW practitioner sometimes sees the emergence of decisions or opinions that s/he thinks are wrong or ethically debatable. But s/he does not directly dispute those decisions or opinions. Rather, they stimulate further discussion on the matter. The RPYW practitioner does not provide answers and gives advice sparingly (mostly only to protect individuals and groups from harm or in terms of the law) - not even when requested to do so - but supplies reflexive feedback by referring to the network everything that s/he sees happening to it.

RPYW asks the practitioner adopt an asset-based approach to practice. Individuals needing support or experiencing difficulties are seen as holding the capacities and capabilities within their social network to achieve change. Historically youth work is rooted in a deficit model that assumes that individuals and their network require assessment of weaknesses and remedial interventions. RPYW suggests instead that the emphasis is placed on capacities to achieve change and harnessing social networks to promote and support change. It steps back and makes room.

Open learning

Open learning as a teaching method is founded on the work of Célestin Freinet in France and Maria Montessori in Italy, among others. The term refers commonly to activities that either augment learning opportunities within education systems, or widen learning opportunities beyond formal education systems (D'Antoni, 2009).

Open learning encompasses, but is not limited to, classroom teaching methods, approaches to interactive learning, formats in work-related education and training, the cultures and ecologies of learning communities, and the development and use of open educational resources.

While there is no agreed-upon, comprehensive definition of open learning, dominant focus is usually placed on the "needs of the learner as perceived by the learner."(Coffey, 1988).

Case studies (ibid and Dodds, 2001) suggest that open learning, is a positive and innovative approach within and across academic disciplines, professions, social sectors and national boundaries, in business, industry, higher education institutions, collaborative initiatives between institutions, and schooling for young learners.

Open learning is premised on self-determined learners; they are encouraged to be independent and interest-guided learners (the practitioner involved steps back and makes room). The approach addresses three challenges to learning:

- the potentially huge differences in experiences, interests, and competencies between young people of the same age;
- the constructivist nature of learning demanding active problem-solving by the learner him/herself;
- the legal requirement of learner participation in decisions stipulated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). of 1989.

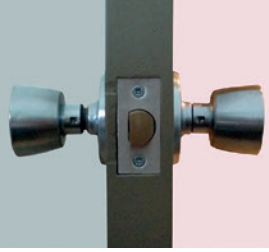
The open classroom

The notion of the open classroom is premised that a large group of learners with of a range of levels of capacities and skill can be addressed in a one context or situation.

The concept was derived from the 'one-room' schoolhouse, but the concept has probably been most commonly found in primary schools and pre-school education and care.

It has been proposed that the open classroom could include perhaps hundreds of multi-aged, multi-grade learners. However, regardless of numbers, learners are characteristically divided into different groups for each subject according to their ability in that subject. The learners thus learn in small groups to achieve a given objective. The facilitator can react to learners in a range of ways as teacher, coach or instructor for example.

If planned badly or laid out thoughtlessly, open classrooms can be problematic in that they pose management or control issues not found in more formal learning environments. As such the open classroom (or 'schools without walls') is an uncommon experience in education.



Step Back & Make Room

The idea of the open-space school was introduced into the USA in the mid-1960s. The concept whereby by teachers moved across classroom learning areas that allow learning to take place in various in ways that are suited to the individual differences of learners. As can be understood, the open classroom is a natural response to differentiate teaching and learning strategies. It encourages facilitators to step back and make room.

At their best open classrooms are said to facilitate teaching and learning approaches that allow teachers to work collaboratively with each other and the learning groups within the single classroom. This environment is in contrast to the traditional classroom with desks laid out in rows, which can work hinder collaborative/group learning.

Bunting argues for a model of a generic space for learners to be 'co-located' with teachers. These spaces can be decorated by the learners to giving them ownership the environment (Bunting A., 2004: 11–12).

Klein found in a 1975 study that third graders with low levels of anxiety were more creative in open schools than in traditional school. Learners in open-spaced schools scored higher on preference for novelty and change (Elias and Elias, 1976).

What the partners saw the open classroom as most relevant to the project was that unlike traditional classrooms the concept is not teacher-centred but learner-centred. The learner is free to choose what and to a large extent how they learn and are encouraged to engage in discovery and research activities.

Typically, subject areas are integrated across the curriculum and learners can work as individuals or in small groups and are free to move around the classroom.

At the same time teachers have a different role in open classrooms. They ***stand back*** from simply telling learners what they need to know. Their focus is on facilitating and guiding learners. The ethos de-emphasizes grades and standardized tests, although assessment can still be part of the process (as it was over the duration of the project).

While research carried out on open classrooms suggests that factors such self-image, creativity, and attitude toward learning are improved. The process has very little in the way of negative effects on academic achievement.

The partners principally used some principles of open classrooms to facilitate relational practice and differentiated teaching and learning approaches. The following characteristics being the most useful in respect of this objective:

- freedom of choice in what subjects learners engage with
- ability to move freely around the classroom
- access to wide variety of learning materials
- emphasis on individual and small group instruction
- relationship with the teacher as a facilitator rather than a lecturer
- evaluation about academic achievement that is meaningful to the student

Differentiated teaching and learning

Differentiated teaching and learning, as the partners believe it underpins each of the other three strategies and youth work more generally as a 'learner centred' strategy.

The implementation of differentiated strategies in education generally is considered good practice across the field. Teaching that is deliberately non-differentiated is often ineffective in terms of what it is trying to achieve with diverse groups of learners; it does not actively promote the chances of appropriate differentiated learning experiences.

This said, a learner's experience of training often seems to be marked out by prescribed and rigid styles and content. Too often today the way that teachers are taught to 'teach' by institutions usually concentrates on effective ways of getting students to pass exams. Those who try their best to teach from the heart can feel that their creativity is crushed by the imposition of the demands of the likes of SEC (in the Maltese context).

All too often in youth work too much of the focus has also been placed on how many accredited outcomes can be achieved by the young people. Some might argue that this way of looking at the educational horizon has become endemic now.

Differentiated teaching and learning begins with and is informed by the initial assessment of learner skills, knowledge and abilities and enables teachers to plan for, often alongside learners, and provide suitable support that will effectively enable learners to achieve learning outcomes. Such approaches are equally applicable to all learners while they provide teachers with the means to clearly identify potential extension or learning support activities.

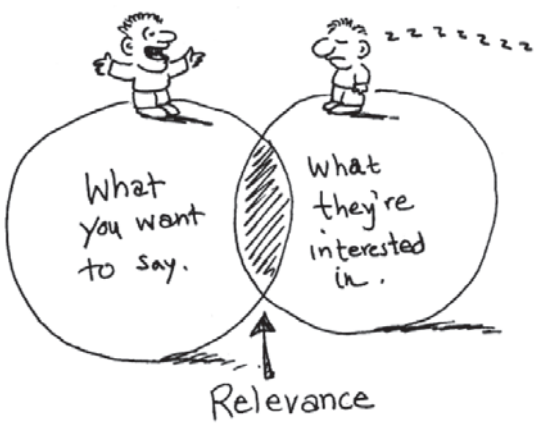
Likely an honest, open, relatively transparent approach to teaching and learning is helpful in that it sets a stage for argument and so analysis. A youth worker commented.

> *I have been on the most crap training courses where the teacher says they are flexible but refuses to teach at all, just wanting everyone to 'share their experiences' in some fluffy, non-judgemental way that doesn't add meaning to anything; the kind of person who sits and nods, and answers every question with another question but who is hardly ever willing to contribute. I can't be doing with that! What does that kind of teacher think s/he actually adds that we cannot do?*

The youth worker's experience has been something like 'we are all right in our different ways'. Apart this leaving little to question (the basic building block of the educational process – all there that righteously exits is opinion) in this situation the teacher by definition has nothing to add that is more pertinent than the most inexperienced, naïve or uninformed person in the group.

We instinctively know this deifying of neutrality, be it in the realm of research or teaching, to be a sort of anti-knowledge approach.

In youth work however it is not unusual that neutrality is presented as a taken. In such circumstances, without any real knowledge of those seeking to be taught, there is an assumption that we are all as smart, imaginative and socially articulate as one another (but in mysteriously 'different ways') about everything to be discussed and everything said is, just because it has been said, relevant. But if this were the case we could also just reverse the supposition and claim that everyone involved was equally ignorant and whatever was said by anyone was uniformly irrelevant. Both perspectives are equally valid as each set of presumptions are unsupported by any discernible effort to establish the relative intellectual, social etc. capacities of the individuals taking part in the teaching process or their practical grasp of pertinent issues.



Plures sentential, plures mores (many thoughts, many ways).

It has become something of a cliché in youth work that each person involved has a contribution to make. This is perhaps true, but that 'something' is always going to be relatively positive or negative, helpful or obstructive. People come to potential learning situations with all sorts of motivations and ambitions, which they are more or less aware of. The contribution of some might be to make no contribution; people can be (often quite justifiably) defensive, protective, cautious or obstinate as much as they can be open, expressive, honest and engaged. An aspect of group life in general is that no one enters any collective entirely neutral, disengaged from their values, beliefs, fears, ambitions, hopes, resentments, passions, desires, prejudices and enthusiasms. It is these considerations that make being with groups interesting and enlightening.

As such, objectively, the best one might draw from the neutral perspective is that it is a view of those involved as doing not much more than pooling anecdotes in trade for the palliative comfort of the clear fiction that this constitutes, of itself, understanding and/or knowledge. It is the combining of our bias and our collective predispositions that provide the potential for dialectical discourse, the bringing of new ideas into the world.

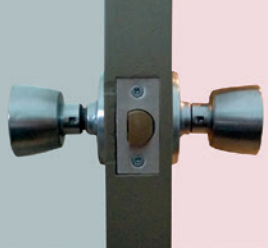
Freire (1998) makes it clear that so-called neutral education is in actuality the antithesis of dispassion, in fact suggesting the claim for impartiality is in practice propaganda as it,

> …uses the classroom to inculcate in the students political attitudes and practices, as if it were possible to exist as a human being in the world and at the same time be neutral (p. 90).

As such, those of us involved in the pursuit of learning perhaps need to advocate (although of a questioning variety of the same) differentiated practice, a deal of the motivation for which arose from the ideas of Pestalozzi and Fröbel. However the literature on differentiated approaches is vast, some more recent and intriguing examples include Decourcy, Fairchild and Follet (2007), Tomlinson, Brimijoin, and Narvaez (2008),and Dodge (2006).

> *A teacher's purpose is not to create students in their own image, but to develop students who can create their own image. Teaching should be full of ideas instead of stuffed with facts. – Unknown*

> *I dislike the way vocational courses for young people are being touted to 'non-academic' kids. It's disallowing them from learning for the sake of learning knowledge*



for knowledge sake. It all just 'Let's get them a job'. – Youth Worker

Over the last few years in most educational contexts, there has been a growing insistence on following a standard range of teaching conventions, together with a growing resistance to looking at alternative pedagogic vocabulary and teaching techniques. At the same time, the partners have been surprised, but also often relieved and enlivened, when they discover that young people can take opportunities to find, what are for them, new ways of sharing and developing learning.

Over the duration of the project young people were encouraged to try to and think about ways of presenting their learning differently to what had become for them the usual, quite formalised, approach. For example, taking turns to present examples of their learning.

Youth workers looked at this together and the associated aims and offered advice on the organisation of the presentation. This could also include discussion and group debate as to how they might continue to adhere to prescribed processes, but allow for a more organic approach. This didn't need a schedule and could follow an open, ad hoc agenda for presentation.

Such a response can mean that each learning session can come up with innovative forms of presentation, for instance 'blending-in' their presentations with others, responding as and when motivated by another's presentation. Assurance that learners participate to a level congruent with required learning outcomes can be fitted into such an organisational approach. This type of process can be far more energised and in terms of group engagement, enthusiastic than other groups.

Curiosity

An Olympic Gold Medalist Bobsleigher of 1964, Vic Emery once had it that

"The difference between a winner and a loser is curiosity…but someone or something has to arouse your curiosity and one good way to do that is to present someone with the unexpected...something that for whatever reason draws them in."

This perspective flys in the face of predictable patterns of teaching, which can dull the spark of learning and of an underlying principle of education.

It is arguable if original thinking/ideas hardly ever arise out of an environment that lacks the fire of the kind of dissatisfaction that rouses curiosity.

However, at the same time, learners need to feel their investment in their learning is credible and as such we need to be curious about them in the context of their learning activities.

The need to put the learner at the centre of educational practice was reiterated by youth workers over the duration of the project. Once more, this was epitomised by the idea of 'steeping back' and 'making room'.

Innovation

A learning group evaluating their time together referred to their enjoyment and linked their learning to this feeling. But the conversation became more involved when we began to ask where the enjoyment might have come from. There were (as might be expected) a number of conclusions; 'We felt more in control', 'I felt more free to take things along another path so you could learn more' etc. However, all agreed the excitement and the pleasure evoked came from personal and group innovation. They had spent a lot of their time in conventional education working in what they regarded as a very formalised and predictable way. As such, what they saw as 'their way' had given them not only a feeling of personal ownership of the learning situation and process; it had engendered the sense of responsibility and freedom that would logically accompany such an ethos. The experience of developing differentiated learning and teaching had taken them out of what they had identified as a sort of 'tram-line' of learning and provided them (or they had provided themselves) with the possibility to enhance their experience via their own innovative action.

Connected to this, a youth worker reflected:

Some kids just start doing what they have always done. But groups have usually produced positive responses to the learning experience - they have played a part in creating the context of their learning, although there ahve been aspects of the facilitator's response that have needed reviewing. Like at times at moments when groups have got stuck in an issue or one person to just takes over, sometimes being accused of dominating.

Uniform (non-differentiated) teaching and learning methods often take the form of a set of prescribed instruments implemented through a premeditated didactic attitude. These largely non-differentiated strategies are frequently applied within institutionally defined styles and approaches. They might be quite dogmatic or premised on a suite of

fairly generic guidelines that are, nevertheless, suggestive of a prescriptive routine.

A uniform method is applied from 'above' and implies that learners must 'reach up' to it. Chart 2 shows the thick black line dissecting the graph horizontally is the uniform method that students are required to reach up to.

Uniform methods are useful when variables such as where the learner 'is at', their ability and favoured learning styles are unknown (such information is normally gained via interview, assessment etc.). Such methods and attitudes might also have a place in delivery to groups who are at approximately the same place intellectually, socially and in terms of readiness for learning. They may also be instrumentally practical if teaching staff are inexperienced, lack time, skill or confidence, although learner resistance to uniformity and/or the disorientation of groups of learners with relatively heterogeneous learning preferences, experiences of education or capability might undermine the confidence of less experienced/skilled teachers.

The extent to which uniform methods are:

a) uninformed by knowledge of the learner and
b) delivered largely unmediated by the learner (the learner merely reacts to the institutional model put in place by the teacher)

dictate the level to which the uniform method is contrary to the custom and practice of equal opportunity. This is because the scope for equal access to learning is being dictated by the level at which learning is pitched rather than consideration of learner's needs, capacity, potential, ability, background, learning history, culture or strengths.
The uniform method is not effective in terms of equality or consistency of outcome as it is limited in its function to respond to individual learner needs because in its hardest incarnation it is a 'one size fits all model' - it has been designed to be followed rather than be tailored to a particular group and unique personal learning requirements/tastes/needs. In that respect, according to the level that standardised teaching responses might be said to be 'prejudging' their background and disposition as learners, neglecting sensitivity to their individual and collective experience, their actual and potential needs, it is based on a simplistic form of prejudice and is undemocratic.

Reforming the formulated

Flexible (differentiated) methods are essentially responsive in character. They can be applied in a range of learning situations and deployed to achieve required learning outcomes by way of responding to diversity of needs/requirements.

Flexible methods should enhance institutional aims and approaches (if they depart from the same, they might be thought to have degenerated into confusion and in loss of direction).

Gravitating more towards innovative interpretation of curriculum rather than predictable routine, flexible methods take into consideration where the learner 'is at'; their ability, history and favoured learning styles (understood via dialogue and continuous assessment).

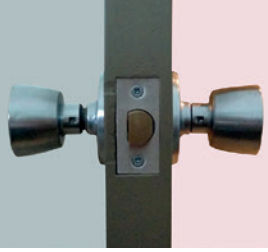
In Chart 3 the thick line representing receptive teaching meanders across the page, addresses and responds to the situation of each learner; teaching method reaches towards learner requirements in response to where they are in terms of their learning development and trajectory.

Flexible methods of teaching and learning are well suited to learners from diverse intellectual and social backgrounds, varied experience of education and readiness for learning. As one long term professional pointed out however, many are voting with their feet (or fingers) for more 'chaotic' forms of interactive learning:

The delivery of flexible methods usually demand a relatively high level of facilitator engagement and adaptability. Unpredictability is a consequence of flexible methodology and as such facilitators need to constantly maintain and generate focus, imagination, skill and confidence while being able to harness, motivate and propagate the same in the learners with whom they engender differentiated teaching and learning practice.

Flexible methodology relies on movement towards learners and their inclusion/participation in developing practice and achieving outcomes. This involves 'reaching out' to learners that in response motivates learners reaching out to teach teachers about themselves and their world, invaluable information through which differentiated methods might evolve into a pattern of delivery and content most useful to the learners concerned.

Malleable methods are informed and shaped by knowledge of the learner and are delivered largely in collaboration with the learner (the learner is proactive in their own learning, creating their own path towards required outcomes). This does not preclude the facilitator in any way not does it detract from their responsibility to teach. It does not render what it taught neutral or unhelpfully subjective as the inclusion and consideration of learners does not set the



teaching agenda or what is to be taught. It informs how learning is delivered, enrichening, animating and enlivening the means and context of education.

As such, flexible methods are in harmony with the custom and practice of equal opportunity. At the same time they can be effective in terms of equality and/or consistency of outcome as flexible methods respond to individual learner needs within the framework of required outcomes; they are developed with consideration for a particular group and brings unique personal learning requirements/tastes/needs/biographies to the fore.

Overall, flexible methodology assumes that learners have the potential to play a part in identifying their own learning needs, developing their learning repertoire and distinguishing their own learning routes towards the achievement of required outcomes.

Loss of trajectory

Something of an occupational hazard of developing the boundaries of method is departure from or loss of trajectory towards the designated purpose and/or required programme outcomes. If this happens facilitating learning might be understood to have defeated something of its own purpose in terms of institutional contracts with learners.

The lesson or learning sessions as appear in Appendix 1 might be understood as a balloon that can be expanded by the learning/teaching methods used in it. As it inflates the balloon takes up more space (in consciousness say) making it a more notable (distinguishable) on the horizon of experience.

However, pushing the boundaries too far can result in deflection from purpose and losing sight of outcomes. Metaphorically this 'poor boundary maintenance' causes the teaching/learning balloon to burst; the point of the lesson or session is lost as learning objectives dissipate into a chaotic flux.

This can be an unpleasant experience for the youth worker and that can demotivate learners as they fail to maintain their learning orientation. As such, in the aftermath of a collapse of the type depicted above it is not unusual for facilitators and perhaps learners to look to retreat to more inflexible methodological regimen.

Indeed, it maybe that the fear a youth worker might have of this scenario (a potential of innovative methods resulting in a loss of what they might understand as 'control'), inhibits many from looking to develop and experiment with received methods. However, it doesn't need to 'all end in tears'.

We all need models and the feeling of 'allowance' to go where previously we may not have ventured. We might fall, but as long as the feeling exists that we can get up, the journey seems possible.

Control

This said, some individuals, including some teachers, do have or can develop associations with power/self-regard that might not be altogether facilitative of differentiated practice (Mark Mercer on 'weak/strong psychological egoism' is interesting in this respect 5). In some cases any sharing of decision making is seen as a direct assault on position. This tendency can be mediated by self-awareness and the sharing of practice but might sometimes be associated with a lack of personal esteem, which will need both understanding and perhaps other forms of personal development, training or in some cases individual counselling/therapy.

For all this, as can be understood from studying the results of the stern regulation of methods, the less teaching and learning are differentiated the more it is likely that learning groups will experience a greater level of incomprehension of purpose and subject, the progeny of which is relatively erratic and unsatisfactory achievement of outcomes and so dissatisfaction.

It may be quite freeing to acknowledge that teachers do not control learning groups, just as prison officers do not control prisons and officers do not control armies. Prison, armies, schools, colleges and teaching/learning situations all function because of cooperation (between prisoners and prison officers, 'other rank' soldiers and officers and so on).

While a teacher has a role in guiding learners through course aims towards learning outcomes, unless learners collaborate in this enterprise, experience and history demonstrate that the time teachers and learners spend together will descend into a mutually destructive experience.

This being the case, boundary maintenance is not a control exercise it is more of a project that teachers and learners work on together. Using flexible methods, facilities like course aims and intended learning outcomes can act as compasses and maps, but the group, with the 'good offices' and counsel of the teacher, decides on the route to the designated destination. At any given instant anyone can make enquiry about trajectory, cadence or orientation. There is no time at which anyone may not ask questions like

'are we on the right route?' or declare 'I think we have got a bit lost'. In fact such statements are to be welcomed and taken seriously.'

Infantilizing tyranny

Overly orchestrated learning is not only inherently undemocratic, in that at its most severe it responds to a form of bureaucratic tyranny6, it effectively 'infantilizes'7 learners while positioning the teacher in the role of parent. This invites justifiable forms of resistance as resentment is provoked, which can at points transmute into rejection of intransigent teaching regimes (sometimes called 'rebellion').

Instruction might sometimes be a precursor to education but it is no replacement for it. As far as we can tell orders and dictation (what one youth worker saw exemplified by the government's apparent obsession with targets, league tables and the prediction of goals) erode rather than quicken enlightenment.

Improvisation alongside the practice of shared decision making in a context able to tolerate inventiveness engendered by flexible thinking create a means and environment to hone and develop professional judgement. This makes sense if you ask yourself how simply following set teaching routines/instructions (the outcome of someone else's judgment) might enhance the independence of thought and empirical evidence gathering that the making of professional judgement is dependent upon.

After discussing this area with a particular youth worker she told me:

> *…improvisation in anything is undermined by those who value banal outcomes... those who think it's preferable to have predictable mundane results, rather than uneven results which chop and change and are sometimes inspiring, maybe even exciting/mind blowing or perhaps sometimes disappointing but that's life.*
>
> *I had two main teachers on my youth work diploma, one excellent, reliable, who always fulfilled the learning outcomes, but was mainly very structured, and I really liked and respected this teacher but it always boiled down to:*
>
> *- teacher introduces subject*
> *- handout*
> *- exercise or discussion in small groups*
> *- feedback to large group*
> *- debate*
>
> *Although it wasn't always in the same order, I for one often drifted off.*
>
> *I was interested when I started reading youth work method books, called things like 'how to do fun activities about self esteem'. These books all followed the same method of discussion, small groups, blah blah as if small groups equals democratic and participatory learning.*
>
> *- Freire distilled and made impotent. What person in their free time would follow this for long without getting up and walking out? I have always been amazed these books keep getting published.*
>
> *Anyway the other teacher at different times*
>
> - *pissed me off*
> - *criticised*
> - *laughed*
> - *went right off the point*
>
> *Yes there was a danger of losing the focus on the learning objective and sometimes the session was a bit rubbish, but mostly it was amazing. I remember many of those sessions now, ten years later. All the best learning I have been involved with has been like this. I've been lucky to have a couple of great teachers who were flexible and varied what they did and were ready to fly off - but they were also rigorous, critical, not just nodding and going 'yeah, yeah, very interesting' which I think is lazy teaching.*

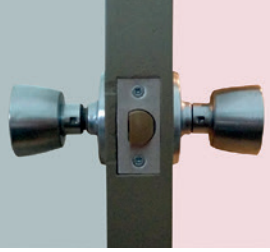
Charismatic rather than bureaucratic

'Molten' teaching methodologies and the kind of accommodating learning strategies that arise out of the same, are pertinent and appropriate. Uniformity of teaching practice, while not wholly inappropriate or straightforwardly signifying ineptitude cannot be seen as inherently apposite with respect to;

- equality of opportunity
- the development of professional judgement
- maximising the achievement of learning outcomes
- democratic learning environments
- expansion of learning horizons

Indeed, in the field of youth work the place of inflexible pedagogic approaches might be limited in terms of their effects and applicability. As one long term practitioner argued;

> *Perhaps non-differentiated teaching is not only the professional norm but the dominant style. Maybe this*



is because contemporary education is delivered for the benefit of everyone apart from the learner; the systems are for the organisations and agencies not for the clients. This is one of the reasons that I find it hard to value NVQs8; they seem to be about getting to an end of a course rather than exploring ones view of the world. I have always been suspicious of youth workers who carry around a repertoire of responses to certain situations or behaviours. Surely our 'art' is to react appropriately and constructively in the moment, to the person, not to compute that 'they've said X so I'll say Y', 'A has happened, I'll do B.'

Sharing practice

Awareness of differentiated practice is vital to its development but also to short-circuit misinformation and misapprehension it is imperative that teaching experiences and practice direction are shared between colleagues. If one group of learners are energised and engaged in their learning with a particular teacher indulging in differentiated practice this can create jealousy and even anger in other groups, maybe frustrated by what they see as their more staid and/or routine experience. At the same time infantilized groups may generate activity according to how they have been treated and replicate social stereo-types of 'immature' behaviour. Gossip and anecdote mix rumour with fact; the 'other' group are just having a good time or are getting away with something that their peers are obliged to tolerate or suffer.

As the environment becomes more and more strewn with allegory, hearsay and competitive envy, so teacher colleagues immersed in their learning group's life can undergo a type of transference, colluding with their learners in the production of fables about the 'other' group, who laugh and debate loudly while their group stick dutifully and stoically to preset agenda and habitual, scheduled routine, heroically facing repetitious predictability and the accompanying tedium while maybe dealing with resistance given strength by the 'illicit' goings on in the 'other group'.

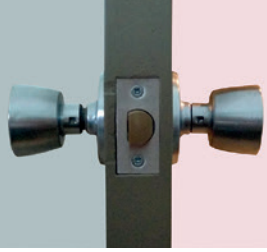
Of course enthusiasm and envy are bait to construction of laudable sagas of 'our group' and the generation of condemnatory prejudice of the 'other group' (that can become the 'rival camp'). Enquiry about the 'other group' with its teacher, or even listening to what the 'offending teacher' brings to both formal and informal conversations about the direction a group is taking, threatens to break the cosy spell of resentment, prejudice and discrimination that Adorno et.al. (1994) demonstrated to be so assiduously protected by those once convinced by the seductively simplistic explanations of bigotry.

As such, no authentic exploration of practice occurs and as tension becomes inherent in the communal structure it evolves into a cultural norm. Official action, the recourse to law (or the nearest equivalent) appears to be the quickest and most acceptable muscle to stop the outrage. Scapegoats are created via expedient justification based on what tyranny of the majority view. The dictatorship of the many over the few, the conforming over the minority of the different, is camouflaged as a democratic perspective, while covert bullying is passed off the prevalence of justice.

Such situations can be to a great extent (if never wholly) avoided by way of a continuous curiosity about alternative forms of practice. This can be built into institutional training agenda, which can provide systematic forums for the sharing of practice or by routine classroom teaching inspection/scrutiny. But while the former feels useful and the former heavy handed and labour intensive outside the largest institutions, sharing practice and teaching experience might be better affected as a consistent element of institutional life by the promulgation of an informal and cultural ethos consistent with a 'learning community' (universitas magistrorum et scholarium9– 'community of masters and scholars').

Summary

In this chapter we have tried to outline the methods the partners identified to develop a (broadly speaking) non-formal curriculum. We have dissected youth work practice into recognised constituent teaching practices (the means youth work uses to develop learning environments). Our position is thus presented that youth work is a form of teaching that crucially involves the central skills and attitudes needed to 'step back' and 'make room' for the learner in the development of their own educational context.



Conclusion

Looking to sum up this final chapter will further discuss the nature of youth work and make a case for the expansion of practice using the work of the project as a basis for the same.

Youth work cannot stay the same if we wish to develop it. Reiterating what it is on the foundation of what it has been is one thing, but to insist that the same foundation is all youth work is or might be is clearly not progressive, broadly making the case that society and the demands on youth work should evolve around a definitional stasis. This project might be thought of as part of the beginning to address this clearly illogical and stunting way of thinking about youth work.

Any educational practice or learning approach needs to adapt to the needs and requirements of those taking part and the exigencies of wider society. This does not disallow for the dame practices to influence and help shape society, but they will not be in a place to do this if they are irrelevant, unmeasurable and indeterminate in their impact or effect.

Criticality

There is very little critical literature relating to youth work. Most of what is written promotes and rationalizes models of practice which are, in the main, based on heresy and stories, romantic and/or unconventional political views, guesses and assumptions. Such material often results in workers preaching homespun morality. This echoes the colonial/missionary era, which was underpinned by forms of instruction and domination. Over recent years there has been a growing awareness within youth work of the need to move away from this situation by avoiding simplistically telling new and trainee practitioners how to operate "on" young people. It is becoming clear that if youth workers are to be of service to young people they are going to need to understand themselves more as servers (servants) than authority figures; youth workers exist professionally to work with young people to develop their influence and authority rather than merely to look to extend our authority over them.

At the same time, young people are portrayed as a group (as the colonial 'native' was) to be personally or socially lacking (in deficit); deficient in terms of education, morality or even the civilising effects that can only be accessed with the aid of the 'informal educator' or 'youth development worker'. Youth, as a population group, are commonly depicted by way of assumptions, developed out of social fears, often inflamed by the media, about declining personal standards and/or moral degeneracy. The whole age group is frequently portrayed as in need of 'support', 'help', being beset by vaguely described psychological problems such as 'lacking self-esteem' and 'attention deficit'. As such young people are contradictorily represent, sometimes at the same time, as both a threatening 'enemy within', the seed of moral and social degeneracy, and as relatively incapable or infirmed group, in need of extensive adult and professional patronage.

This is a deficit model, which relies on convincing youth workers and young people that they (young people) have innate insufficiencies, that there is something inherently impaired in the condition of youth. This perspective is covertly oppressive, having its basis in what Franz Fanon, a psychiatrist, philosopher, activist and writer, working in the North African context, saw as the propagation of a 'colonial mentality'; that some population groups have 'inborn' inadequacies that need to be treated or compensated for by way of forms of social discipline or reformation. South African anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko saw that convincing people that this lack was real was a means of the continuance of coercive domination. As he remarked; The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Echoing this is Bob Marley's plea, repeating Marcus Garvey's counsel to; Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery recognising that none but ourselves can free our minds.

Youth work, then, is based on a distinctly anti-colonial philosophy but the profession is held back from developing as a profession because it is unable to clearly and succinctly articulate exactly what it aims to do and how it intends to do it. This does not mean youth work is intrinsically complex, but it does indicate that following contemporary western models of practice is problematical. There are many reasons for this. On the one hand, western states have looked to youth work to respond in pragmatic ways to demands driven by socio-economic necessity, developing a comparatively cheap, relatively flexible, relatively skilled work force. On the other hand, historically and culturally, youth work has been shaped by moral, spiritual and political motivations, aimed at producing a more ethical and/or questioning population. This is what Indian scholar and author Shehzad Ahmed has

described as 'Education versus Idealism'[10]. In this situation the State looks to youth work to respond to regional, national and/or global conditions (largely economic), however at the same time youth workers focus on aims, primarily driven by personal values/feelings/points of view and/or often poorly informed political objectives. As such, youth workers have sometimes found themselves in conflict with management, organisational and State policy.

Youth care

Youth work, in common with social work, is subject to an expectation of care, by parents, wider society and in law (in terms of international rights and national and international law). As such it involves the management of care. This is a concern for the welfare and well-being of others, but it is tempered by appropriate objectivity and thoughtfully sensitive detachment. This is not disinterest, but neither is it presumptuous. This is what youth workers need to do in their work.

Youth work is characteristically 'associative'; youth workers have a professional and/or practice association with their clients (young people). Unlike lawyers or politicians, they do not 'represent' their clients; youth workers work with their clients in order that they might represent themselves better (as individuals and as a group).

- Youth workers are not nurses, doctors, psychiatrists or psychologists so they are not looking to 'cure' or 'treat' people. Youth workers are not teachers, so they are not centrally concerned with forms of instruction, although the work might, from time to time encompass mentoring, coaching and leading or guiding, and youth workers will work with young people to become more knowledgeable and aware.
- Youth workers are not counsellors, therapists or social workers, but this does not preclude them from making referrals to such professionals if it is judged that this might be suitable or necessary (not to do so might be understood as being unprofessional).
- Youth workers are not police officers, however we should be aware enough to know at what point we need to involve the police in our work. An understanding of all this is encompassed in having the ability to extend appropriate care.

Social and political education

The approaches outlined above might be translated via an understanding of social education. This is the intellectual and personal means to interact and develop in the social context or according to Davies and Gibson[11], *any individual's increased consciousness of themselves, their values, aptitudes and untapped resources and of the relevance of these to others*. Social education *enhances the individual's understanding of how to form mutually satisfying relationships*. This involves a search for the means to discover *how to contribute to, as well as take from* associations with others[12]. It is a means to promote the interdependence of individuals, groups and communities for the benefit and well-being of all.

This approach shapes the activity of the youth worker, working with groups of people, creating situations that can enhance collective consciousness, working for social change collaboratively to advance positive development at local and national levels. As part of this, a sense of personal responsibility can be generated and the motivation for betterment of the self, but also an understanding of how this will contribute to the positive development of society.

Social education facilitates fundamental political education (democracy, representation, advocacy etc.).

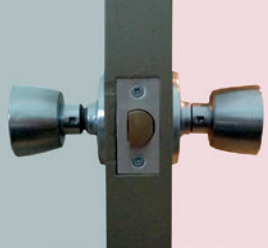
Expectations

Youth work, framed within a professional context of social and political education and Human Rights, is anchored to a raft of expectations of both practitioner and client. The expectation of the youth worker is that they will have the ability to make professional judgments aligned to the aims, objectives and desired outcomes of their practice. However, we need to have expectations of young people in order that they might detect interest in/care about their well-being and that they might develop the motivation to have expectations of themselves.

In the global north, much youth work has failed because of expectations being seen as a burden on young people; that they should be largely left to 'find their own feet' without 'pressure' (as if pressure might be expunged from life). This ***laissez-faire*** attitude has effectively abandoned many young people in terms of their wider socialization; largely being left to their own devices, although supported by youth workers to take advantage of rights/entitlements/welfare benefits. However, because of the lack of expectations, many young people, having no real sense of duty (other than to themselves) and have been drawn into pockets of social selfishness, an 'all against all' attitude, which is ideal for the development of cultures of crime and disaffection (that is in some cases generations long).

Professional judgement

The nature of professional judgement starts with the understanding that youth workers, as practitioners, are not



neutral; they are obliged to make judgements. A judgement is different to an assumption or an opinion; a judgement is an opinion based on evidence, the more evidence one has, the more secure one's judgement might be said to be. The more an opinion is made without evidence, the more likely it is that it will be prejudiced (a 'pre-judgement') or discriminatory.

It is important that youth workers are able to evidence professional judgement by demonstrating how and why they choose to do one thing rather than another. The worker, using a range of evidence drawn from their experience of practice, makes her professional judgement; it is a 'professional' judgement because it is based on practice experience rather than personal bias. Her judgement might have been good, not so good or even poor (depending, at least partly, on the outcome) but she had nevertheless used judgement because she had drawn on evidence; her action was not based wholly on supposition, feelings and what is sometimes vaguely called 'instinct', but on judgement built on evidence. This enabled her to make what might be considered to be an 'ethical choice' to take one course of action rather than another/others. This is something more than reflection, although reflection and consideration might be part of the process.

Youth workers, as social and political educators, working within a Rights framework, need not only to be able to make professional judgements, but work with young people in order that they might make effective judgements (ones that can be acted on) for the development and betterment of society.

Young people's participation

Central to the social educative response is the acknowledgement of the need for the professional to be able to be taught about the wants and needs of young people by young people. This is led by an understanding that the motivations, desires and passions of young people will likely be the richest seams of their future accomplishments and social contribution. In this approach, young people take the lead in learning within social education. It is the job of the youth worker to respond to this in an appropriate and adequate manner. This stance allows the young person to enable and empower themselves. Such an approach proceeds from the presumption that young people have, in the form of their integrity as human beings, potential, ability, influence, authority and power and as such is counter to colonial assumptions of deficit. Conversely, the professional who sets out to empower or enable others relies on inherently colonial attitudes, as this attitude assumes a lack of power and ability on the part of young people.

A practical definition for youth work

The aims of youth work practice need to be measurable and achievable. Vague and indeterminate terms need to be avoided. Our project has been informed by looking at our practice and other European practices to enable us understand, a broader, more flexible definition of youth work. The following definition of the key purpose of youth work seems to express much of global practice and the foundation of the approach that has evolved during our practice and research over the duration of the project:

> *Youth workers engage with young people that they (young people) might cultivate their innate abilities to develop their personal and human potential, in a holistic manner. Working alongside young people, youth workers facilitate personal, social and educational advancement. This encompasses the political education of young people, developing their own voice and capacity to influence, and so take authority/responsibility, within society.*

We do not put this forward as something set in stone. Indeed, we have concluded that youth work needs to be constantly ready to evolve and respond to the social and educational needs of young people and the wider society which they will inherit. This is not only related to adaptation but also as a social and educational phenomenon that can play it's part in transforming the lives of individuals, groups and as such, ultimately, society itself.

For all this, the above is very broadly the way we have seen youth work being and developing as a teaching response during this project. We believe we have rationalised and adapted practice, showing youth work to be a uniquely flexible response to the learning needs of young people; a response that can add to its repertoire of practice without losing its core principles and methodology. It surely can inform processes such as the European Youth Pass which is the recognition for Erasmus + project to progress in its development. It is our hope that this project will play a part, albeit a modest one, in reinvigorating practice, at the very least by questioning the accepted paradigm. This surely is a key function and value of education and those who carry the mantle of rational thought that teaching and learning requires.

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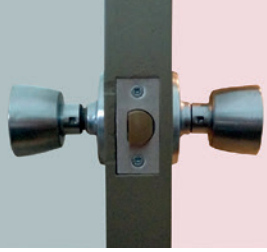

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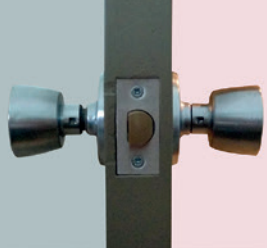


Level 1

Learning Activity 1: Planning a Trip

Day	Topic/s	Learning Outcomes	Modules covered in Level 1	Hours covered
Day 1	• Introduction to the learning activity • The importance of recreational time as part of our wellbeing • Time management	1.1 - C1, C2, C3, C4, K1, K2, K3, K4, S1, S2 and S3. 1.3 - C1, C2, C4, K1, S1 and S2. 2.1 - C1, C4, K1 and S1.	Module 1 - Skills for Learning & Communicating (U1.1, U1.2, U1.3 & U1.4) Module 2 - Skills for Independent Living (U2.1, U2.2, U2.3 & U2.4) Module 3 - Skills for working life (U3.1, U3.2 & U3.3)	U1.1 - 2.5 hrs. U1.3 - 6.5 hrs. U2.1 -1.5 hrs. U2.3 - 4.5 hrs.
Day 2	• Possible Trip Venues • Means of Transport • Value of Time • Health and safety	1.3 K1, K5, S3		
Day 3	• Creating a program for the trip, with special focus on time. • Transport, different options possible, coming to a decision on the most ideal and include in the program.	1.1K2 2.3 k1, k4, k12		
Day 4	• Budgeting	1.3 c1, c2, k2, k3, k7, s1, s6, s12		
Day 5	• Actual Trip • Processing	2.3 c2, c4, k2, s1, s5		

LEARNING ACTIVITY 1: ORGANISING A TRIP

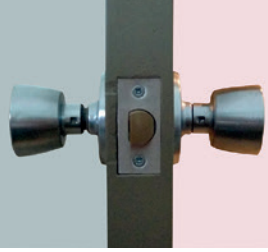
Session Plan 1: Who is going on the trip? What is a trip? Why are we going on a trip?

Session	Topic/s	Learning Outcomes
Day 1	• Introduction to the learning activity • The importance of recreational time as part of our wellbeing • Time management	Unit 1.1 (English) - C1, C2, C3, C4, K1,K2, K3, K4, S1, S2 and S3. Unit 1.3 (Practical Maths) - C1, C2, C4, K1, S1 and S2. Unit 2.1 (Personal Care & Well Being) - C1, C4, K1 and S1.

Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to:
- participate and contribute in a group discussion
- follow instructions
- observe different scenarios
- be aware of possible recreational activities

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
15 min	Facilitate the group discussion about their current feelings and their weekend. Collect signed attendance sheet. Facilitate the introductory game.	Share their weekend or feeling narratives. Sign the attendance sheet. Participate in the introductory game.	Attendance Sheet Game
10 min	Brief the group about the day.	Understand the week's target and outline.	Outcomes Visible in the Room
5 min	Divide the group into two groups (A&B) and put each group in different rooms.	Follow instructions.	
15 min	Present 5 different scenarios about different people going on different trips. Facilitate the discussion.	Participate and contribute in the discussion.	Scenarios of different people using different means of transport and budget
35 min	Present the upcoming task and support the groups to complete.	Working in groups of 5, plan a trip for one of the profiles they were presented.	Profiles Worksheet to be used as form of assessment-W/S1
10 min	Conclude the session by highlighting the main points of this session (recap).	Identify the aspect they liked the most and least in this session.	
Break			



Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be: - aware of the value of recreational time, time management and wellbeing

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
10 min	Recap the learning outcomes of this session on the board. Facilitate the introductory game.	Refocus on the day's learning outcomes. Participate in the introductory game.	Game
35 min	Using the Human Figure and flash cards, facilitate a discussion about the term *Wellbeing* and the value of recreational time.	Using the flash cards, explore the question: What do we need to be well in life? Discuss the terms: spiritual, emotional, physical and mental wellbeing; the importance of balance in life and highlighting the relevance of free time and the consequences of not dedicating proper time to recreation.	Human Figure Flashcards with Images
35 min	Support the young people to create a daily schedule. Facilitate the sharing of the schedules. Lead discussion on time management.	Observe the sample daily schedule and create their own. Share it with the rest of the group. Brainstorm ways on how we can manage our time better.	Sample Worksheet Projected Worksheet W/S 2
10 min	Recap the session, writing on the board.	Identify the aspects they liked the most and least in this session through the form.	LTR

LEARNING ACTIVITY 1: ORGANISING A TRIP

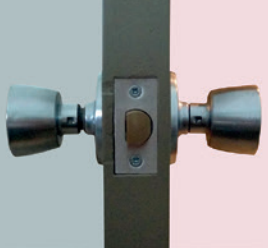
Session Plan 2: Venue, Time and Transport

Session	Topic/s	Learning Outcomes
Day 2	• Possible Trip Venues • Means of Transport • Value of Time • Health and safety	1.3 K1, k5, s3

Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to: - Tell the time
- Subtract and add time

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
15 min	Facilitate the group discussion about their feelings at the moment. Collect signed attendance sheet. Facilitate the introductory game.	Share feelings. Sign the attendance sheet. Participate in the introductory game.	Attendance Sheet Game
60 min	Take young people through the quiz questions (Assessment)	Work in small teams to complete the quiz on trips, venues, time, health and safety.	Quiz - Assessment
10 min	Conclude the session by highlighting the main points of this session (recap).	Identify the aspect they liked the most and least in this session.	
Break			



Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to:
- understand a transport schedule
- link time to distance
- use the public transport journey planner
- use the computer and internet to complete the task

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
15 min	Recap the learning outcomes of this session on the board. Facilitate the introductory game.	Refocus on today's learning outcomes. Participate in the introductory game.	Game
60 min	Support the group to complete the worksheet *Plan your Journey.*	Working in pairs. complete the worksheet.	Worksheet – MTA 1 Computer to be used as form of assessment
15 min	Conclude the session by highlighting the main points of this session (recap).	Using the form provided, identify the aspect liked the most and least in this session.	

LEARNING ACTIVITY 1: ORGANISING A TRIP

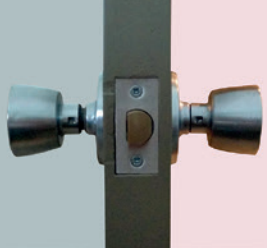
Session Plan 3: Creation of the Program

Session	Topic/s	Learning Outcomes
Day 3	• Creating a program for the trip, with special focus on time. • Transport, different options possible, coming to a decision on the most ideal and include in the program.	1.1k2 2.3 k1, k4, k12

Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to:
- participate and contribute in a group discussion
- follow instructions
- come up with ideas and share them
- present their proposals

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
15 min	Facilitate the group discussion on their current feelings and their weekend. Collect signed attendance sheet. Facilitate the introductory game.	Share about weekend or feeling narratives. Sign the attendance sheet. Participate in the introductory game.	Attendance Sheet Game
10 min	Divide into groups of 3 - 4. Explain and facilitate the brainstorming process in small groups.	Brainstorm and record the ideas.	
10 min	Merge the groups (6-8), then share ideas and complete the handout.	Share ideas and developed one idea on the handout further.	Handout with specific questions w/s 1 day 3 on page 9.
10 min	Facilitate the development of the proposal and its presentation. Provide examples and suggestions.	In the same groups, prepare a 3 minute proposal for their idea which will be shared with the other groups.	
15 min	Observe the presentations and facilitate the Q&A process.	Present ideas to the larger group and answer clarifying questions.	
20 min	Facilitate group discussion and guide the group to a consensus.	Participate in the group discussion and decision making that will benefit all.	
10 min	Conclude the session by highlighting the main points of this session (recap).	Identify the aspect they liked the most and least in this session.	
Break			



Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to: - take decisions with the group
- create a timed program for an event

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
10 min	Recap the learning outcomes of this session on the board.	Refocus on today's learning outcomes.	
70 min	Deliver the: Trip to Gozo session plan maths 1-Assessment	Participate in the *Trip to Gozo* session plan maths 1.	Maths Session to be used as form of assessment
10 min	Complete preparations and program for the upcoming trip, including time, description event and so on.	Break the proposed trip down according to time, descriptions, resources needed and so on.	
10 min	Guide them to compile the LTR-Assessment	LTR	LTR-Assessment

LEARNING ACTIVITY 1: ORGANISING A TRIP

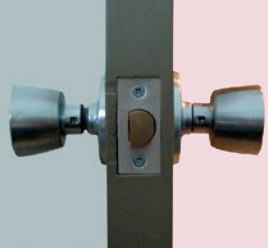
Session Plan 4: Budgeting

Session	Topic/s	Learning Outcomes
Day 4	• Budgeting	1.3 c1, c2, k2, k3, k7, s1, s6, s12

Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to:
- use addition and subtraction to calculate total amounts.
- use percentages to work VAT using a calculator.
- use fractions to work discounts with/without a calculator.

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
20 min	Facilitate group discussion about current feelings Collect signed attendance sheet. Facilitate the introductory game.	Share their feeling or narratives. Sign the attendance sheet. Participate in the introductory game.	Attendance Sheet Game
60 min	Deliver *Trip to Gozo session plan* maths 2.	Participate in *Trip to Gozo session plan* maths 2.	Maths Session to be used as form of assessment Video on Gozo to set the scene: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xgSc166u9U
10 min	Conclude the session by highlighting the main points of this session (recap).	Identify the aspect they liked the most and least in this session.	
Break			



Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to:
- budgeting
- discuss
- plan

Time 90 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
10 min	Recap the learning outcomes of this session using the board.	Refocus on today's learning outcomes.	
20 min	Divide into smaller groups. Explain the task and facilitate the completion of the handout.	Complete budgeting exercise for trip using the program from the previous day. Compare results with each other at the end of the task.	Handout Workbook page 18
20 min	Present the different profiles and guide the discussion.	Engage in a discussion and budgeting exercise on how much money they should spend on leisure activities. Discuss 3 profiles of other young people presented to them.	Profiles on power point in the resource folder.
30 min	Facilitate the discussion and present some possible alternatives.	Share from personal experience and come up/search online for new ideas on free alternative recreational and leisure activities.	
10 min	Conclude the session by highlighting the main points of this session (recap).	Identify the aspect they liked the most and least in this session.	

LEARNING ACTIVITY 1: ORGANISING A TRIP

Session Plan 5: The Trip

Session	Topic/s	Learning Outcomes
Day 5	• Actual Trip • Processing	2.3 c2, c4, k2, s1, s5

Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to: - follow a plan
- spend time together

Time 255 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
15 min	Facilitate the group discussion on their current feelings Collect signed attendance sheet. Facilitate the briefing of the day.	Share their feeling or narratives. Sign the attendance sheet. Recap from the previous day the outline of the day.	Attendance
240 min	Accompany the young people on the trip.	Follow the plan they developed together.	First Aid Any other resources needed according to the trip.
Break			

Learning Objectives (LO) of this Session:

Young People will be able to: - process an event

Time 40 min	Youth Worker	Young People	Resources
20 min	Lead the reflection and evaluation on the trip using a chart split into 2 sections: strengths and weaknesses of the trip.	Reflect and evaluate the events of the day.	Chart
20 min	Facilitate the compilation of the pictorial assessment sheet.	Complete assessment sheet.	Assessment w/Sheet 1

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