LEARNING TO LEARN – A METHOD IN ACTION

Practice Analysis report // Austria
"Intercultural Competences Course"

2010

This report has been produced in the framework of the two-year LEARNING TO LEARN project.

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1.   C o n t e x t

Between November 2008 and October 2010, a European network of seven organisations has joined its efforts to develop, implement and analyse innovative approaches in the field of non-formal adult education aimed at the development of the competence enabling the learners to plan, organise, implement and assess their own learning, in particular in view of self-directed learning.

The project considers *learning to learn* as the most crucial key competence for lifelong learning and, therefore, aims to support educational staff to acquire and develop competences and methodologies needed for implementing this concept of learning. It has benefited from financial support through the Grundtvig Action of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.

The project started out with a research phase, aiming to compile literature reviews on learning competence and how it is developed – *learning to learn* – in order to explore related concepts, theories and practices. During the research phase, six literature reviews – investigating learning competence and learning competence development in the English, German, Italian, Lithuanian, Slovenian and Spanish discourses – were produced and summarised in a synthesis report.

The reviews show that the conceptualisations of *learning to learn* suffer from confusion and seriously lack theoretical foundation: the notion remains slippery and contested and offers plenty of room for seminal theory development. The fuzziness of the concept notwithstanding, *learning to learn* is predominantly understood as a method-in-action: people have to engage in the activity itself to learn about it.

The research component of the *Learning to Learn* project will return to the conceptual challenges with a report outlining the main findings in response to its central research question: **"How is learning competence acquired in selected (non-formal) adult education settings?"**

This practice analysis report constitutes one element of the combined efforts to identify responses to this question. It summarises the main findings and questions stemming from the observation and analysis of educational practice in non-formal adult education.

This document is available on the project website at http://learning2learn.eu/ together with the six additional practice analysis reports. It will feed into the overall synthesis report of the research team, to be published in 2010.

2. Summary

In this report, two modules within the Austrian practice project (*Intercultural Competences Course*), which was carried out by the Intercultural Centre (*Interkulturelles Zentrum*) in Vienna, are analysed in the context of the *Learning to Learn* project. It addresses the following research question: ***Which educational approaches (in particular, teaching/training and learning methods and methodologies) are successful in fostering learning competence in non-formal adult education?***

In the attempt to give preliminary answers to this research question, a number of hypotheses have been developed. They relate to one further analysis question: ***On the basis of the material and data collected, what supports and what detracts from the development of learning competence in non-formal adult education?***

In approaching these questions, the report focuses on empirical evidence emerging from document analysis, onsite observation and reflection diaries written by participants and one trainer, which were complemented by online-surveys. Key findings relate to the role and significance of mimesis and of reflection taking place in this particular group setting, which in itself appears as one of the most powerful tools for achieving and fostering key dimensions of learning to learn competence. After analysing results in detail, a further effort is made to formulate preliminary conclusions which might be picked up, elaborated or revised in ongoing discussions within the project and feed into the synthesis report.

3. Framework

3.1. Aims, objectives and expected learning outcomes

The *Intercultural Competence Course* was developed and first carried out 1997 by the Intercultural Centre (*Interkulturelles Zentrum*) in Vienna, in cooperation with the *Renner-Institut* which continued to provide the basic infrastructure as well as accommodation for those trainers and participants living outside Vienna. Before starting each new course, the concept and curriculum were adapted by taking into account both the experiences of and with former trainers and participants and the expectations and needs of the new participants.

The course offers extra-occupational further education and training for participants working in multicultural settings in the fields of administration, business, community work, education, health care, youth work and all social policy fields dealing with integration issues. By addressing basic issues related to intercultural competence, such as migration, discrimination, living in a pluralist, multicultural society, questioning stereotypes, dealing with prejudices and managing diversity, it aims at providing a basis for further specialisation.

The educational activity is based on the premise that intercultural competence is essential to deal constructively with challenges emerging within a pluralist, multicultural society. In particular, it is aimed at persons who are concerned with people of diverse cultural backgrounds or are dealing with integration issues in their professional context on a regular basis. Thus, even if focussing on the service sector, it is intended to cover the full range of professions. Participants with a migration background were explicitly addressed and welcome, not least to increase the diversity within the group which then could be used as a resource for intercultural learning.

According to the course description and to the reflection diary of the course director (who took over the role of a trainer in all modules), the overall aim is addressed by adhering to the following objectives: Participants are expected to acquire basic (social, cultural, political, economical, psychological etc.) knowledge related to the multicultural environment in which they are operating and to develop personal, social and professional competences enabling them to
- endorse an empathic approach towards their clients;
- develop understanding for and sensitivity to their needs and believes;
- act effectively in multicultural settings;
- deal constructively with "intercultural" conflicts;
- develop confidence with respect to intercultural issues;
- clarify their own professional roles;

- reflect and exchange personal and professional experiences and routines through self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues and a mix of inter- and supervision of practice;
- carry out, reflect and further develop concrete projects in these fields.

The course comprised the following modules which were scheduled over a period of seven months:
1. Migration – living in a pluralist society (3 days, April 2009)
2. Conceptualizing culture: Diversity and foreignness (2 days, May 2009)
3. Racism and anti-discrimination (2 days, June 2009)
4. Intercultural conflict management (2 days, September 2009)
5. Integration and intercultural competence (3 days, October 2009)

<u>Intercultural dialogue and project work as supplementary activities</u>: At the very beginning of the course, participants have been asked to engage in dialogue with some people of diverse cultural backgrounds and to reflect the biographies, attitudes and believes of their interlocutors, relating them to their own experience. In order to complete the course, they were required to carry out and present a project work; by the end of the course, a written report had to be handed in.

Our research focused on the two modules which completed and concluded the course track:

Module 4 – Intercultural conflict management aimed at
- reflect conflict behaviors, both of the participants themselves and of their counterparts;
- to extend the action repertoire of the participants in conflict situations;
- to enable them to transfer their competences to group contexts and to their concrete work;
- to allow them to experience themselves as being actively involved in conflicts;
- to identify and understand the intercultural dimension (and separate them from more general features) of conflicts;
- to acquire basic knowledge about conflict theories and mechanisms of de-escalation.

Modul 5 – Integration and intercultural competence, while trying to integrate and conclude the topics covered so far and to include some issues and expectations which have been articulated by the participants (language and language acquisition; islam; "Zivilcourage", i.e. to stand up for moral values and for one's beliefs), aimed at

- understanding basic elements of integration politics and work, including legal aspects and the role of language(s);
- increasing the sensitivity of participants within intercultural interaction;
- raising their awareness of personal, intercultural learning processes;
- conclude the whole course track.

3.2. Setting, location and timing

The course was organised in five modules (two to three days each) which were scheduled over a period of seven months. As all modules, the analysed seminars, scheduled for September (2 days) and October 2009 (3 days) respectively, were held in a comfortable and well-equipped seminar centre of the *Renner Institute* in Vienna.

The last evening before departure was devoted to the projects which had been elaborated and completed by the participants and to a party held in the office building of the *Intercultural Centre* in Vienna. Some participants were offered the opportunity to present and discuss their projects in a semi-public setting (as some guests, including family and friends, could be invited there), while others presented their work within the group, i.e. to the other participants and to the project director/trainer, on the last scheduled day.

The fee for the whole course track amounted to 1.200 €uro. For those participants who were not living in Vienna and thus had to travel, the fee covered the expenses for accommodation expenses in the hotel situated in the same building complex as the course centre. While some participants afforded to pay for the course, for some other participants those costs were covered by their work institution.

3.3. Programme, structure and methods

The modules were implemented by two or more trainers, one being full-time employed by the *Intercultural Centre* and involved in several of its past and present educational activities and projects. Her pedagogic approach was based on *Gestalt* Psychology (Fritz Perls) and Theme-centred Interaction (Ruth Cohn) and, more specifically, adhering to the following principles:
- The participants should be conceived as knowledgeable and learning at the same time. Educators should be able to understand their role in providing stimulus and guidance in the learning process.

- The different seminars should be building on each other and designed in a coherent way. Participants should commit themselves to participate in all seminars.
- A personal as well as political approach should be pursued and sustained throughout the course.

The methodology could be characterized as a mixed-methods approach and included efforts to:

- develop self-awareness through personal experience and self-reflection;
- share and exchange experiences;
- acquire knowledge through lectures and input by experts, to be followed by or combined with periods of reflection and discussion;
- engage in interactive exercises, role-plays and simulation games, as well as in Forum Theatre activities (according to Augusto Boal, e.g. staging conflict situations participants have experienced personally and trying to develop approaches for solving them), which all should be followed by an open and intense reflection period;
- get involved in intercultural dialogue with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and in intercultural project work (mostly in small teams), including to
- learn about and from good practices in the field;
- learn about group dynamics (in each module, some tasks were assigned to groups of different size randomly established at the beginning of the course track with the purpose to reflect the group processes at the very end).

For an illustration of the program flow within module 4 and 5, see the appendix (sections 7.1 and 7.2).

3.4. Profiles, trainers and participants

Generally, trainers were chosen either to introduce subject knowledge or to bring in their professional expertise within a field of practice. Even if those qualifications mixed to a certain degree in some single cases, the former were mostly recruited from universities and research institutions, while the latter could draw on practical experience from their work in highly specialized NGOs.

The more relevant distinction might be that between those trainers mostly relying on teacher-centred methods and those employing learner-centred methods, an approach which, in any case, was constantly introduced and maintained by the main

trainer, who, as already mentioned, was acting as a course director and attending nearly the full duration of the course.

The trainer who – as a member of the executive board of the *Intercultural Center* – took over the main responsibility for the course as a whole was holding a degree in cultural anthropology with a special focus on racism, intercultural education, diversity management and integration. For each seminar, additional stuff members were invited, either for (rather teacher-centred) lectures and discussions *or* for learner-centred training sessions on the respective priority themes. Consciously following a distinction between the domain of knowledge and the realms of attitudes and behaviour, some researchers (one on integration politics and one on legal issues in module 5) were invited as experts, while others, having practical experience in the field (as well), were acting as (co)trainers (one on "Zivilcourage" and one on multilingualism and language learning in module 5). The speakers/trainers in module 4, both a researcher/practitioner on intercultural conflict management and the program director herself, who both had experience and routine in the field of adult education and training, combined these roles.

Among the trainers/experts of the analysed modules, two had a migration background. In the observed module, all external trainers and experts were male. In fact, the program director and one more trainer in module 3 were the only female trainers involved in the whole course and all except one instructor, who was both part of a visible minority and living in Salzburg, were working in Vienna.

The course brought together 26 – 23 female and 3 male – participants. Whereas 4 participants were working at the *Intercultural Centre*, the others came from various educational fields, from the health care sector or from administration.

Among the 26 participants who started the course, 2 were not attending the first module we were observing (one of them, who had been working at the *Intercultural Centre* as an apprentice, had already returned to her home county during the summer). Still, as two participants of the previous course track (who were missing the same module the year before) joined the group just for those two days, 26 participants were present at module 4, while 24 participants attended module 5.

Out of 15 participants (13 women and 2 men) who participated in the online pre-survey, five were between 25 and 34 and six between 35 and 44 years old. Four participants were over 45 years old (two were younger and two older than 55 years). The average in the whole group ranged between 35 and 40 years.

Their highest educational attainment, with 6 participants holding a university degree, 8 who either completed an upper vocational school or a post-

secondary/tertiary level college, and just one with secondary school, ranged at the upper end of the scale and was clearly above the average within the Austrian population.

While 7 participants had a full-time and 5 a part-time employment, 3 were self-employed. At the time of the first survey, 6 participants were participating in education or training other than the educational activity this report is referring to.

4.   Approach

The following design of the research element of the *Learning to Learn* project is the result of a process which was initiated with a draft design by the research team of the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck. This draft was discussed and further developed by all researchers involved in the project at the *Research Design and Coordination Meeting* from 1 to 4 April 2009 in Innsbruck/Austria. The research design was finalised and agreed as a follow-up to that meeting.

4.1. Research questions

General research question:
  - How is learning competence acquired in selected (non-formal) adult education settings?

Practice analysis questions:
  - Which educational approaches (in particular, teaching/training and learning methods and methodologies) are successful in fostering learning competence in such settings?
  - How does learning competence emerge and manifest itself in such settings?

Synthesis questions:
  - On the basis of the material and data collected, what supports and what detracts from the development of learning competence in non-formal adult education?
  - How do the findings of the research component contribute to theory development on the topic of learning to learn?
  - How do the findings illuminate and extend the existing perspectives on learning to learn uncovered by the literature review?
  - How could the findings contribute to practice development?

4.2. Research instruments

I.   Overview

The project employed four main research instruments for the project analysis:
- Structured **documentation** of the adult education practices
- Semi-structured non-participatory on-site **observation**
- Semi-structured **reflection diaries** for trainees and trainers
- Anonymous **online surveys** with trainees and trainers

II.   Structured documentation

The documentation of the practice project includes the aims, objectives and learning outcomes; information regarding the setting, location and timing; an overview of programme, structure and methods; and the profiles of trainers and participants.

III.   On-site observation

The on-site observations focused primarily on the process and the social context of the educational activity in view of methods in their capacity to foster learning to learn. In particular, the on-site observation has looked at the group process including aspects such as communication and interaction, participation and any explicit and implicit references to learning.

Due to the length of the practice project, the on-site observation covered selected elements of the activity, ensuring a minimum of 30 contact hours.

IV.   Reflection Diaries

The reflection diaries were introduced as a voluntary contribution to the research by each actor in the practice projects (trainers and trainees). While trainees and trainers were strongly encouraged to complete the reflection diaries, this has not been enforced.

Trainees and trainers were asked to write semi-structured reflection diaries individually after each of the observed modules. The specific timing and frequency for completing the reflection diaries was coordinated between the researcher and the educational team to allow for meaningful integration into the flow of the programme with respect to learning to learn.

In the Austrian practice project, all participants who were attending (even just one of) the last two modules were asked to submit their reflection diaries to me soon after their return home.

V. Online Surveys

All trainees were invited to complete two online questionnaires: the first one approximately two weeks *before* the beginning of the activity, and the second one approximately two weeks *after the end* of the activity. Additionally, all trainers were asked to complete an online questionnaire around three weeks after the end of the activity.

In our case, as just one of the trainers who have been asked to participate to the online survey responded, his/her responses will not be included in the analysis but still will feed into the synthesis report, where they can be analysed together with the responses of other trainers and compared with the participant's responses.

4.3. Research indicators

I. Core aspects related to learning knowledge (awareness and understanding)

On knowledge: We think that knowledge means being aware of something and/or (being able) to fully understand something. So understanding cannot develop without awareness. We make no distinction between theoretical and practical awareness (including self-awareness) or understanding of a particular area.

1. Awareness and understanding of one's learning preferences, including styles, approaches, methods and environments
2. Awareness and understanding of one's learning competences and needs, including own skills and qualifications
3. Awareness and understanding of available learning opportunities, including education, training, guidance and counselling
4. Awareness of one's attitudes related to learning, including own perceptions, beliefs, values, aspirations and motivations (and how these are shaped)
5. Awareness of the capacity of collective modes of learning, including peer groups and communities of practice
6. Awareness of the impact of the socio-cultural, political and institutional environment on learning (including social, cultural, political and economical aspects)
7. Awareness of the potential and impact of learning, including individual, collective and societal aspects

II.   Core aspects related to learning attitudes (views and dispositions)

Starting from a necessary basic commitment to and appreciation of learning, this set of aspects covering personal dispositions contends that a) learning is always give and take: you need to be willing to learn, but also be ready to contribute to the learning of others; b) learning is never about skills only: you need to be willing to improve yourself, but also be ready to have your way of thinking challenged; and c) learning is more than just natural curiosity: you need to be willing to sustain your motivation, and also be willing to take risks on the way.

1.   Commitment to and positive appreciation of learning as an ongoing practice
2.   Willingness to engage in one's own learning, both individually and collectively
3.   Readiness to contribute to the learning of others, both individually and collectively
4.   Willingness to change and further develop and improve one's knowledge, skills and competences
5.   Readiness to challenge and change one's attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and values
6.   Willingness to sustain one's curiosity and motivation for learning
7.   Readiness to take risks and make mistakes while learning (including to consider obstacles and difficulties as potential learning opportunities)

III.   Core aspects related to learning skills (capacities and abilities)

Capacity is often considered to be a skill that can be learned, whereas an ability is commonly thought as innate and something that requires hard training until it is learnt (if at all). Consequently, most skills in this area use the term capacity, and only two abilities are introduced that are considered to be essential and that could, in some ways, probably be seen as preconditions.

1.   Capacity to reflect on the object, purpose and impact of learning, both as a concept and practice
2.   Capacity to reflect, analyse and evaluate one's learning, including strategies, plans, processes and outcomes
3.   Capacity to autonomously manage one's learning, including planning, organisation, regulation and sustainment (including the capacity to identify and make adequate use of education, training, counselling and guidance opportunities)
4.   Capacity to acquire, amend, restructure (de- and re-construct) and routinize knowledge as well as modes of action (including the capacity to apply new knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts; Including the capacity to identify and process information)

5. Capacity to engage in and relate to different ways of communication as part of collective learning processes

6. Ability to evaluate and review one's perceptions and beliefs, in particular those directly or indirectly affecting one's learning

7. Ability to construct and manage one's learning in relation to prior learning and life experiences

5. Results

5.1. On-site observation

5.1.1 How the researcher got introduced

The researcher, who had taken a seat in the circle, was introduced by the program director at the very beginning of Module 4 and was given the opportunity to shortly present the project to the participants, to explain his role and his aims at the two final modules and to ask whether there were any questions or objections regarding his presence in the group. As there were no further questions or objections, the program director started the session by introducing the topic and by asking the second trainer of the module to introduce himself.

5.1.2 The researchers role and behaviour

The participants did not directly address me during the sessions. Instead, some of them approached me during the coffee breaks and asked some questions on which I readily answered. I kept the conversation going beyond that, asking back on their own background and interests. Sometimes, I joined some participants for lunch, always engaging in regular conversation, but never enforcing it.

On our last lunch table, some participants asked me how I saw the group and confessed that they regarded me as having become part of the group already. They argued that this was one more sign of their group being very open, a group that was indeed generating an absorbing potential in their view. I confessed that for me it had been difficult to keep the distance at one single occasion, when all participants with selected attributes were asked to stand up. I nearly stood up from my seat at the first very question, but fortunately managed to remind myself of my self-ascribed role. Except for that occasion, it was not difficult for me to keep the balance of approaching some group members in the informal setting and staying apart in the training sessions, even if sitting in the cycle with the (other) participants and trainers, and to embody the role model of a friendly outsider.

5.1.3 Difficulties during the observation

Apart from the problem of keeping the balance between actively observing and getting directly involved, I noticed that the size of the group and the fact that the participants already knew themselves and had arranged with each other at the previous three modules made it very difficult both to observe individual behaviour and to generate socio-grams.

When the whole group was split up into small ones for a certain period, I had to decide whether to continue observing one of them, walk around between the groups and try to catch up some words, or to take a break. I decided to avoid giving some participants the impression that I was directly observing their work and discussions and kept a certain distance to all of them, without leaving the room, even if there were some groups which left it to accomplish their work elsewhere.

5.2. Reflection diaries

15 participants submitted their reflection on module 4 and 7 more reflection diaries referred to the very last module. Just 4 participants handed in their reflections on both modules, with one who limited herself to give identical answers to all questions.

Thus, the following analysis comprises 21 reflection diaries written by 18 participants (just 3 of them referred to each module in a different way) and one written by the trainer/program director who, in her answers, reflected her training strategies and experience within both modules.

The whole material was analyzed and preliminary hypotheses were formulated on the basis of both onsite observation and reflection diaries. Those hypotheses were submitted to the *Learning to Learn* research team and then revised by including some more hypotheses formulated by the researchers doing the analysis of the other practice projects which either were supported or had to be revised or even contradicted on the basis of observation or empirical data collected in the Austrian practice project.

Most hypotheses relate to the following *specific research question:*
- "Which educational approaches (in particular, teaching/training and learning methods and methodologies) are successful in fostering learning competence in non-formal adult education?"

More specifically, they relate to the following *analysis question*

▪ "On the basis of the material and data collected, what supports and what detracts from the development of learning competence in non-formal adult education?"

The working hypotheses formulated by the researchers with respect to these questions are structured according to the following categories:
▪ educational principles and foundations
▪ educational structures and relations
▪ educational context and content
▪ educational approaches and methodologies
▪ educational environments and settings

Educational principles and foundations

The development of learning competence is supported by
▪ learner-centeredness / orientation, in particular in view of the needs and interests of the learners: Very much in line with this hypothesis, one participant described her expectations towards and experience with the educational activity she was involved with the following formula: it "catched my interest, raised my awareness and motivation." In her view, this does by no way imply that teacher-centred elements should not be adopted at all, as these might be more effective not only to achieve specific objectives (as knowledge transfer, meeting expectations articulated by some participants), but also for other purposes: The Austrian case study illustrates that, in order to develop learning competence in a group context, educators should be able to balance (group) learning processes both by means of over-steering and under-steering sequences and by acknowledging different learning styles. This allows the participants to compare their own learning preferences with other and quite different learning styles, and thus to gain consciousness about their own approaches (not least by means of direct confrontation and negotiation), reflect them and experience or even experiment with quite different approaches if they wish. Still, this view remained controversial within the group: While one participant, for instance, reported that – by experiencing the mix of instruction methods adopted throughout the course – she discovered once again "what [she] already knew: that a teacher-centred setting ('Frontalunterricht') has a paralyzing effect on me and that it prevents knowledge. However, an activating training method makes me not only assimilate theoretical knowledge, but it also has a lasting influence on me," other participants took a quite different stance. Here is one of the quotes written from the point of view of those expecting theoretical input, and thus defending teacher-centeredness: „ existing knowledge / experience were amplified, as I like to listen to well structured and technical competent lessons. Especially if

they include practical examples, funny anecdots, personal experiences etc. those lessons seem 'effective' and also easier to remember for me. On the other hand, not every work in group or practical exercise leads automatically to much more knowledge than [such] a lesson". It should be highlighted that the same participant declared that she learned this by experiencing "the combination of both elements." The importance of „combining presentations, discussions, exercises and the exchange of experiences for the learning process" was highlighted by many participants, one of them was even argued that "this [combination] addresses different dimensions which are part of myself – the rational and the emotional. I think that both are important for me and my learning process, because in my opinion both dimensions contribute to a better understanding and cannot be separated from each other. Emotions are very important for the process of learning, in the past I didn't perceive it this way – [I was able to learn this] especially due to the own emotional consternation during the exercises and in interchange with colleagues". One more participant made the same point, though arguing it quite differently: „Every single person has a different way of learning. Everyone puts in another background of experience, and in my opinion this supports the exchange and the process of learning". To conclude, most participants shared the view that it was quite „essential that the trainer is paying due attention to [keep] the equilibrium between theory-inputs, explanations, exercises and discussions," an argument which was echoed in the reflection diary of the trainer/program director.

- a programme design and implementation that meets the learning needs of the learners, though not necessarily their learning preferences: This claim is empirically supported by the Austrian case study, even if – maybe due to the group being relatively over-sized and its participants having less in common than those participating in some other practice projects (e.g., in terms of age or common objectives) – it was more difficult to discover there, both by the research tools of observation and within the self-reports of the participants. Still, challenging the learning preferences of the participants might be important for helping them to remove or even overcome mechanical hindrances which prevent them from further developing their learning competence;
- transparency of learning objectives, planned methodology and anticipated learning process, as achieved through clear instructions in the observed trainings and the written material provided to all participants;
- voluntarism of learners, meaning that the learners participate voluntarily in an educational/learning process – they engage in learning by choice;
- reinforcing the latter, the selective effect generated by the necessity to invest time (and gain value for) money as indirect variables which might have a further impact on learning motivation;

- confidentiality, meaning that the learners can trust that whatever happens in the educational/learning activity is confidential and is not communicated to anyone who is not directly part of the respective process – even if, as one participant pointed out, some experiences and insights might well be reflected by the participants with their family and friends;
- linked to the latter, learning without fear, e.g. that the learner has the possibility of learning through "trial and error" without taking the risk of "making a fool of her-/himself" – or, as one participant put it, "to try to change more often the point of view and to be more self-aware (set of criterions, wishes / needs) and more conscious → also to analyze myself. At the same time to be brave and also to experiment different roles".

Educational structures and relations

The development of learning competence is supported by sets of relationships between educators and learners as well as between learners themselves that are characterised by

- reciprocity: Learning occurs by means of comparison, reflective and interactive positioning. It implies a comparative approach and a setting, which allows to compare, to confront with and to relate to a broad range of behaviors. Applying strict norms and however subtle sanctions are not very useful for sustaining this important context variable and for achieving an intended effect. In the Austrian case, discussing, sharing/comparing experiences and reflecting activities were taking place (a) in the plenary (including instructors and participants), (b) in small groups of different size and with changing participants on the one hand, and (c) within one permanent peer group on the other hand, and (d) in the informal setting (during coffee breaks and lunch time). In their reflection diaries, some participants also compared some instructor styles within and outside the course track – one participant even compared the whole educational activity with those she had previously attended.
- a group size allowing all participants to intervene without getting the feeling of stealing the time of the other or being blamed for his/her intervention: With reference to the group size (26 participants), some participants reported that they consciously decided not to participate in the discussion just because they did not want to contribute to time-consuming, endless discussions, for which some were even blaming single participants. In turn, one of them reported that he learned that it was difficult for him to „keep myself in the background, even if I was convinced it would irritate the whole group".
- trust, respect and appreciation between and among educators and learners;
- a mutually rewarding partnership between educators and learners;

- clearly defined roles of educators and learners, in particular a supportive role of educators, and, in the observed case, clearly defined roles of invited speakers as opposed to trainers and of one's role as an organizer and as an educator (several measures had to be taken to avoid role collusions);
- the educators being competent learners and, thus, serving as models for the learners. On the basis of my observations, I would even add some further claims on the critical role of modelling for learning to learn – by modelling, observation, and identification: In a group context, learning to learn can occur by observing other participants *and* trainers in the process of learning (and identifying with them). This points to the critical, although mostly neglected, role of modelling (i.e. observational or identificatory learning) in non-formal adult education;
- transparency about roles, functions, hierarchies and power relations;
- openness about and appreciation for questioning and changing roles, functions, hierarchies and power relations;
- the development of a sense of ownership in relation to the learning process;
- clarity and mutual understanding about the ownership of the learning outcomes;
- structures and relations aiming at allowing the participants to get personally involved in some issues or debates: „One exercise made me upset because of my own history and my personal experience, I was emotionally involved. Thus, I became aware of how important one's own experience background is: especially emotional experiences in communication situations, and, even more, in conflict situations in which you were involved." One participant even points out that this effect can also be achieved by just listening to some touching experiences told by others: "For me it has to be really personally. That means, I feel something is moving / touching someone or it touches my personal circle of life. This stimulates processes of thinking. Then I think: Aha, that's it! And then I start to apply the acquired comprehension to other sectors of both life and knowledge".

Educational context and content

The development of learning competence is supported by
- clearly specifying the contexts in which educational activities are embedded;
- the choice of a tangible aspect, question or dilemma to be explored and addressed;
- the effort to explore an aspect, question or dilemma from several perspectives: „My viewpoint on these problems has changed and was amplified during this course, my attitude was getting opener and more interested";
- the perceived/understood closeness of the educational activity to real life concerns (i.e. contents that are evasive and transferrable in the sense that they

transcend the purpose of being relevant for the course itself and are applicable in or explicitly directed to everyday life contexts and concerns of the participants): "More motivation to interact directly with people in my everyday life and professional routine, because I see more sense in it" was described as a learning outcome by one participant, while others mentioned that they told their family and friends about the highlights of the course discussed some related issues on a regular basis;

▪ allowing for several different, even divergent, points of departure to be(come) relevant for and benefit from an educational activity: the reflection diaries of the participants included many references to the perceived heterogeneity within the group. As it was contributing in many ways to the learning process and outcome, those different perspectives and experiences present in that particular group context were seen as one of the main advantages allowing all kinds of learning to occur. More importantly, affirmation was seen as an experience which allows both to gain security and self-confidence (and thus reinforcement) and further develop one's openness for quite different points of view. While one participant, for instance, saw her "(until then amateurish) evaluation of many things confirmed, conflicts and problems in communication concerned, I could imagine to do more in this direction", another added a further direct effect of what she experienced as affirmation: "The experience has grown that there is place for different opinions side by side without any competition." Some of these effects of affirmation ('Bestätigung') were pointed out by nearly all participants.

▪ providing informal settings (enough coffee breaks and extended lunch breaks) which allow people to reflect and talk to each other without being guided at all, but still to keep in touch if they wish. In the Austrian case, as nobody was tempted to go home for lunch, the seminar building, even if situated in the city of Vienna, was chosen quite well.

Educational approaches and methodologies

The development of learning competence is supported by
▪ combining individual learning and learning in groups (in particular in small groups) – many participants refer to the relevance of the group and some to an even more significant impact of small groups;
▪ learning in groups with a balance between commonalities and differences – meaning a balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity (providing for a feeling of security as well as the opportunity of learning from differences): in this regard, I will consider the importance of confirmation for both the trainer and participants later on (still in this section);
▪ reflection (individually and in groups) of what has been learned and, more importantly, how it has been learned, and of what has contributed to the learn-

ing, e.g. with respect to motivation, learning preferences etc.: the most explicit and directly relevant activity was the reflection diary and, for obvious reasons, the participants made no explicit reference to this activity when writing the reflection diary. Still, reflection could be observed taking place in the informal parts (e.g. lunch time, coffee breaks) of the courses, i.e. outside the training setting itself, and while discussing in small groups. On the other hand, reflection on the topics and issues which were discussed, including self-reflection, were regarded as "one of the most important tools of intercultural education" by the trainer, a view she shared with most participants. One participant regarded „the meaning of the self-reflection or the discovery of how different perceptions of people con be" as her main insight.

- building an experiential sequence of educational activities that take learning from implicit and accidental to tacit and deliberate;
- building on and/or relating to previous learning experiences – including allowing time and space to unlearn previously acquired ways of doing specific things; in the observed case, many participants point to the fact that they had been confirmed in what they had experienced or learned already (as already mentioned, "Bestätigung" was mentioned several times in the reflection diaries of the participants and by the trainer)
- a rhythm of learning that can adapt to learning and group processes;
- a flow of learning across activities that is seen as smooth and natural/logical/legitimate, which was highlighted by some participants;
- experiential learning – including an appropriate balance between action and reflection;
- related to the latter, providing activities in which feedback can be both given and received on a regular basis, thus recognising the key role and significance of a variety of perceptions and perspectives: One participant reported quite directly that she was learning "through feedback in the formal and informal setting and also through experimenting and through allowing things to happen."
- providing opportunities in which learning preferences and strategies can be tested, i.e. either confirmed in their value or revised, by the participants;
- a diversity of methods such as:
  - interactive, communication-based and activity-based methods;
  - methods contributing to self-awareness, in particular with respect to one's learning preferences, one's strengths and weaknesses;
  - methods providing for observing or guiding others in their learning and, in turn, trying out their approaches and methods;
  - methods encouraging to learn with and from peers;
  - methods encouraging to try out new learning approaches and strategies.

To illustrate this point, I might again quote a participant who highlighted the virtues of the „varied structure of the program, to stay in the background, but at the

same time to be present and able to interact, with many explanations and summaries and also reflecting the single experiences on the meta-level."

Educational environments and settings

The development of learning competence is supported by
- a learning environment that reflects a positive attitude towards learning and, more generally, towards change;
- a learning environment that mirrors the promise of and demand for safety;
- a learning environment in which group norms are both negotiable in the group and generally binding;
- a learning environment in which learners can turn to others for guidance and support;
- a learning environment that can flexibly respond to changes on short notice;
- a time-planning and management that leaves sufficient time for all phases and balances the time requirements of working-(sub)groups;
- a clear agreement on how to manage communication beyond the activity itself, such as work-related emails or personal social networking activities (Facebook, Twitter etc.);
- a collegial, trustful, open and empowering learning atmosphere.

5.3. Online surveys

At the two modules we were observing, 25 – 22 female and 3 male – participants were present. 15 participants (13 women and 2 men further characterized in section 3.4) followed our first invitation to participate to the online pre-survey. Whereas three participants were working at the Intercultural Centre, the others came either from various educational fields, from the health care sector or from administration.

Five participants to the online pre-survey were between 25 and 34 and six 6 between 35 and 44 years old. Four participants were over 45 years old (two were younger and two older than 55 years). The highest educational attainment, with 6 participants holding a university degree, 8 who either completed an upper vocational school or a post-secondary/tertiary level college, and just 1 with secondary school, ranged at the end of the scale and was above the average within the Austrian population.

While 7 participants had a full-time and 5 a part-time employment, 3 were self-employed. At the time of the first survey, six participants were participating in education or training other than the educational activity this report is referring to.

Before reporting the most significant results emerging from the answers given by those 15 participants and from the answers given by 10 of them to the questions included in the post-survey, I should note that this disparity in the return rate poses clear limits to any further analysis.[1] This is even more true for the analysis of the online-surveys for trainers: As we received just one single response from one single trainer, there is no way to compare his or her answers to whatever different set of questions at all. Therefore, this part of the analysis is omitted.

5.3.1 Pre-survey results

In rating themselves, the 15 participants who participated in the pretest in average (M=mean) assigned the highest degrees of approval to the following statements:
- Learning is important for the development of a society (M=4,8)
- Significant learning processes also take place in group contexts (M=4,73)
- Learning is important for my personal development (M=4,67)

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[1] In fact, this left me with the option of including just the 10 cases who participated both in the pre- and the posttest and to renounce to 5 more respondents to the pre-survey. With a higher number of respondents this would certainly be the best solution. As I decided not to expel any participant's response, the mean values of single items covered by both the pre- and the post-test can't be directly compared.

- I try to apply new knowledge and skills in my private, social and/or professional life (M=4,6)
- Learning is affected by the socio-cultural and political environment (M=4,6)

If compared to the mean of the whole sample of the pre-survey (340 participants), the participants' rating of the following item appears rather high:

- I am used to defining learning goals for myself (M=4,07, as opposed to M=3,4 for the whole sample)

The lowest rates of approval were given to the following items:

- In learning activities, I consciously choose between different modes of expression and communication (e.g. verbal, non-verbal, written, digital media, etc.) depending on the specific situation (M=3,07)
- I persist with my learning goals, even if it is difficult to combine with daily workloads and routines (M=3,2)
- I can easily describe my own competences and qualifications (M=3,4)
- I know how to get advice which supports my learning (M=3,4)
- I reflect on what I have learned on a regular basis (M=3,47)
- I reflect on what supported or blocked my learning in a specific context (M=3,53)
- I am ready to take risks to discover new kinds and ways of learning (M=3,6)
- One's educational path has an important impact on one's professional career (3,73)

5.3.2 Post-survey results

The 10 participants who took part in the posttest assigned the highest rates of approval to the following statements in average:

- Learning is important for my personal development (M=4,9)
- Learning is important for the development of a society (M=4,9)
- I try to apply new knowledge and skills in my private, social and/or professional life (M=4,8)
- Learning is affected by the socio-cultural and political environment (M=4,7)
- Groups and social networks can stimulate my learning (M=4,7)

The mean values of the responses to the to the following items still range between 4,6 and 4,5:

- Significant learning processes also take place in group contexts (M=4,6)
- I am open to question my personal views, values and beliefs when taking part in a learning activity (M=4,6)
- When learning something new, I am usually able to connect it with prior experience, knowledge and skills (M=4,6)
- When planning my learning I build on former learning experiences (M=4,6)
- Learning is an important part of my life (M=4,5)
- I intend to engage in further learning activities on a regular basis (M=4,5)

If compared to the means both of the pre-survey (which includes 5 more participants) and of the whole post-survey sample (189 participants), the participants' rating of the following items appear rather high:

- I reflect on what I have learned on a regular basis (M=4, as opposed to M=3,5 for the whole sample)
- I am used to defining learning goals for myself (M=3,9, as opposed to M=3,5 for the whole sample)

The lowest rates of approval were given to the following items:

- I know how to get advice which supports my learning (M=3,56)
- I can well judge the quality of learning material (M= 3,6)
- In learning activities, I consciously choose between different modes of expression and communication (e.g. verbal, non-verbal, written, digital media, etc.) depending on the specific situation (M=3,6)
- I reflect on what supported or blocked my learning in a specific context (M=3,6)
- I can easily describe my own competences and qualifications (M=3,7)

- One's educational path has an important impact on one's professional career (M=3,7)
- Even when I encounter difficulties, I motivate myself to carry on learning (M=3,7)
- I persist with my learning goals, even if it is difficult to combine with daily workloads and routines (M=3,8)

6. Insights

If learning is commonly defined as a relatively permanent, persisting or enduring change taking place in the realms of one's behaviour, knowledge, skills or attitudes, a change which is basically achieved or accomplished through experience, learning to learn might be defined as a relatively enduring attitude towards this change: Basically, it implies letting one's attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours be questioned and challenged by various changes taking place in one's environment, and consistently trying to accomplish this task. In our research, this is well illustrated by the prominent role ascribed to the very environment in which the educational activity was taking place, to which both the participants and the trainer who were directly involved referred in their reflection diaries: the group context in which non-formal learning is commonly situated. Actually, this is also the case for formal learning, but the reported results suggest that learning to learn in such a context takes a quite different shape.

In both formal and youth education, reflection is commonly less valued or elicited quite differently and feedback is mostly given a quite different role. There is at least empirical evidence that, for the participants as for the trainers (who, as I should note, all were quite experienced), social and contextual influences are regarded as core aspects having an impact on learning processes and outcomes. It is not least seen in its potential for reflection to take place, which again might be seen as a key factor for learning. This is not to say that content did not matter to our respondents, but it mostly happened to them in a particular way: Tough content mattered to the participants in quite different ways or even to different degrees, the more a particular content was perceived as being directly related to issues relevant to the social environment with which they were confronted on a daily basis, the more it was valued and reflected in their reflection diaries.

Learning competence, as it was observed in the practice project analysed in this report, can be said to refer to all dimensions of the Aristotelian triad:

- *episteme*: abstract knowledge, preferably generalized and context in-dependent

- *techné*: skills, ability to fulfil practical tasks

- *phronesis*: wisdom, referring to and combining practical and social domains, the art, to take the context and situation into account and act accordingly (i.e., appropriately)

Even if those dimensions are interconnected, it became clear analyzing the reflection diaries that *phronesis* plays the most prominent role. This is not surprising at all, in fact, it is clearly illustrated by the Dreyfus & Dreyfus model which presupposes the following stages for acquiring expertise (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986, quotes taken from Flyvbjerg 2001: 20-21):

(1) *Novice*: "Novices act on the basis of context-independent elements and rules."

(2) *Advanced beginner*: "Advanced beginners also use situational elements, which they have learned to identify and interpret on the basis of their own experience from similar situations."

(3) *Competent performer*: "Competent performers are characterized by the involved choice of goals and plans as a basis for their actions. Goals and plans are used to structure and store masses of both context-dependent and context-independent information."

(4) *Proficient performer*: "Proficient performers identify problems, goals and plans intuitively checked by analytical evaluation prior to action."

(5) *Expert*: "experts' behavior is intuitive, holistic, and synchronic, understood in the way that a given situation releases a picture of problem, goal, plan, decision, and action in one instant and with no division into phases. This is the level of true human experience. Experts are characterized by a flowing, effortless performance, unhindered by analytical deliberations."

From a phenomenological perspective, learning relates to a subject, but more importantly, it refers to an object („always already", as some poststructuralist thinkers might add), the object being in our case:

1) what some participants and trainers were observed to (or reported to have) learn(ed)
2) how other participants or trainers differ from that

3) how other settings (e.g. comparable educational activities) differ

Those dimensions are related both to the ways in which this might apply to and adopted by oneself as a learner. Seen from this perspective, the what (=object) includes content and process, and in fact happens to be the how, when etc. (see Chisholm 2006: 1). Contrary to learning something else (then learning) or acquiring expertise (see the Dreyfus & Dreyfus model above), learning to learn seems to imply a significant degree of being aware of one's learning. This could be traced back to the self-referential nature of the concept, in which the subject is affected and, again according to conventional definitions of learning, needs to be changed by the object in order for any *learning* to occur.

One distinctive feature that emerges both from observation data and reflection diaries is that learning involves, at least in this particular group context, a mimetic process which should be regarded as one of the most powerful tools for learning in general. Social comparison and mimesis, in this view, reveal to be even more significant for learning to learn than for learning something else. This is further illustrated by the frequency in which getting reinforced in an attitude or approach formerly acquired or adopted is echoed within the reflection diaries.

To conclude, learning to learn competence involves two basic, relatively stable elements:
1) a perspective
2) an attitude

It is important to note that both ingredients have one thing in common: They imply adopting both the perspective *and* the attitude of a reflective practitioner, with *reflection-in-action* and *double-loop-learning* playing a key role (Schön 1983, Argyris & Schön 1974). In fact, the ability to reframe one's strategies along with their consequences might be conceived as a professional *habitus* relating to a certain *field* in Bourdieu's terms, one which still requires significant transformations in order to adapt within and, even more, to move to a different field or switch between several fields of action. Thus, in order to learn to learn, participants need to challenge the tendency of their own *habitus* to reproduce the *status quo*.

For informal education, we still might conclude that, in order to achieve this goal, the field characteristics – and thus particular group settings and arrangements – are no less important than personal characteristics, as they create fields of tension which make learning to learn likely to take place.

7.   References

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8. Appendices

8.1 Reflection Diary: Questions answered by the trainer

Which kind of knowledge or understanding did the participants acquire, deepen or extend?	… **and how** did they learn (about) it?
Which practical skills did they acquire, develop or improve?	… **and how** did they learn them?
Did I observe **any changes in their attitudes** (e.g. their curiosity, interests, motivation, commitment etc.)? If yes, in which way?	… and what triggered them? **How** did it happen?
What is my perception that the trainees discovered **about themselves** and, more specifically, about their **individual ways of learning**?	… **and how** did they discover it?
What did they learn **about their group** and about (themselves) **learning in a group**?	… **and how** did they learn about it?
Space for further **comments or observations**: Is there **anything** I would like **to add**?	

8.2 Reflection Diary: Questions answered by participants

What did I learn in terms of practical skills, knowledge and/or understanding? *Welche **praktischen Fähigkeiten**, welches **Wissen** und/oder **Verständnis** habe ich mir **angeeignet**?*	… **and how** did I learn it? *… **und wie** habe ich diese erworben?*
How did my attitudes (e.g. my curiosity, interests, motivation and/or commitment) **change**? ***Wie hat sich meine Einstellung** (z.B. meine Neugierde, Interessen, Motivation und/oder Engagement) **verändert**?*	… and what triggered it? **How** did it happen? *… und was hat diese Änderung herbeigeführt? **Wie** ist es dazu gekommen?*
What did I discover about myself as a learner and, more specifically, about my **individual ways of learning**? ***Was habe ich über mich selbst** als Lernende/r, speziell über meine **individuelle Art und Weise, zu lernen, entdeckt**?*	… **and how** did I find out? *… **und wodurch** habe ich dies entdeckt?*
What did I learn **about our group** and about (me) learning in a group? ***Was** habe ich **über unsere Gruppe** und über das (mein) Lernen in Gruppen **erfahren**?*	… **and how** did I learn about it? *… **und wie** habe ich es erfahren?*
Space for further **comments or observations**: Is there **anything** I would like **to add**?	

Platz für weitere **Kommentare oder Beobachtungen**: **Dies** *möchte ich noch* **hinzufügen**…