



LEARNING TO LEARN – A METHOD IN ACTION

Practice Analysis report // Italy

"Form-azioni: Form-a(c)tions capable of informing the future"

2010

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Italian Practice Analysis Report by

- Pier Paolo Pasqualoni

Other Practice Analysis Reports by

- Pier Paolo Pasqualoni (Austria)
- Kathrin Polkehn (Germany)
- Laura Varžinskienė (Lithuania)
- Albert Mrgole (Slovenia)
- Catalina Guerrero Romera (Spain)
- Andreas Karsten (Unique)

Learning to Learn Project
<http://learning2learn.eu/>

European Network UNIQUE
<http://www.unique-network.org/>

Leading Project Partner – IKAB
Institute for Applied Communication
Research in Non-formal Education
<http://www.ikab.de/>

Research Coordination – UIBK
Research Centre Education – Generation – Lifecourse
Institute of Educational Science – University of Innsbruck
<http://www.uibk.ac.at/ezwi/forschungen/bgl/>

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1. Context

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.

Which educational approaches (in particular, teaching/training and learning methods and methodologies) are successful in fostering learning competence in non-formal adult education?

To address this research question, a workshop designed to prepare 25 young adults for their journey and stage abroad is analysed in the context of the *Learning to Learn* project. The workshop took place within the mobility and work placement project “*Form-azioni capaci di futuro / Form-a(c)tions capable of informing the future*”, funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme, which was held at the European Academy of Florence (*Accademia Europea di Firenze*).

In the attempt to give preliminary answers to our 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 trainers, which were complemented by online-surveys. In the reflection diaries, a sequence of confrontation among the participants on the role to be ascribed to culture and on some related terms (such as “tolerance”) was described as generating key experiences clearly related to the emergence of learning to learn competence. Key findings thus relate to the role and significance of confrontation, mimesis and reflection taking place in a rather homogeneous group – in terms of age, gender, educational attainments and common purposes. As a consequence, the very group setting appears as one of the most powerful tools for achieving and fostering key dimensions of learning to learn competence.

After analysing the results in detail, a further effort is made to formulate preliminary conclusions relating to the research topic 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

As a mobility and work placement project funded by the LLP-LDV programme, “*Form-azioni capaci di futuro / Form-a(c)tions capable of informing the future*” aimed to support 76 young – i.e. between 21 to 32 years old – adults who had completed their high school or university studies in Italy in the acquisition of further language, intercultural, professional and organizational skills and competences. This should be achieved by giving them the opportunity to spend three months abroad attending a work placement experience there, a preparatory workshop (3 days) before departure and an evaluation meeting (1 day) after their return home. The project started in March 2009 and will end by August 2010. The participants were carefully selected among a huge number of applicants. Throughout the experience, they should further develop a number of key competences. By spending three months in Bulgaria, France, Germany, Portugal or Spain where they could work in an institution operating in those fields in which they considered the option of starting their careers, those young adults were offered the opportunity to develop their employability by means of a language course and a work placement experience in a hosting organization abroad.

Participating in one of the preparatory workshops which were offered by the Academy of Firenze, the selected young adults were expected to

- learn about the European Union, its member states and programs;
- understand and appreciate the role and significance of lifelong learning;
- clarify their own professional competences, roles and ambitions;
- develop confidence with respect to their “mission” and sensitivity to intercultural issues.

During the whole period of 3 months spent abroad, participants should

- acquire or improve basic language skills in another European language (attending a language course and applying the language both on the job and in everyday life);
- further develop their intercultural skills in a previously unknown everyday life and work place environment;
- develop professional competences and organizational know-how;
- act effectively in another European country than their own and in a selected working environment and thus
- develop their employability.

After that period, the participants were invited to a final evaluation meeting, but were not necessarily expected to participate in it as the expenses for travelling and accommodation were not covered by the project budget and could thus not be refunded.

3.2. Setting, location and timing

Before departure, the participants were split into three smaller groups which attended a preparatory workshop scheduled for three days in September 2009 and held in Florence. In our research project, we observed one of these preparatory workshops which brought together 22 female and 3 male participants with two female trainers in Florence. It should be mentioned that both trainers were responsible for the project from its very beginning. The last day the colleague who had taken the logistic and organizational responsibility within their institution joined the preparatory meeting to clarify the modes of departure, flight schedules and accommodation issues.

The preparatory workshop was held in the rather small meeting room within the institution which was responsible for the project as a whole, with some time spent by doing outdoor activities in the courtyard of the huge “palazzo” (palace). Among the 25 participants, 10 participants were selected for Barcellona (Spain), 6 for Berlin (Germany) and 4 for Sofia (Bulgaria). While a number of key competences were included in the program from its very beginning, the participants should improve their linguistic skills (attending a language course), their professional and organizational know-how (through a work placement experience) during their stay abroad. On their return back home, a final evaluation meeting of about 8 hours was organized in Florence. As the travel costs were not covered by the project budget, the attendance to this final meeting had to occur on a voluntary basis. Thus, very few participants choose to travel to Florence and to join this final meeting. As the reflection diaries submitted by those participants did not make any reference to this event, no such diaries have been compiled by the trainers and also the direct observation has been omitted, the analysis of the evaluation meeting cannot be covered by this report.

3.3. Programme, structure and methods

The methodology of the trainers can be shortly characterized as a mixed-methods approach and included efforts to:

- develop self-awareness through personal experience and self-reflection;
- share and exchange expectation, experiences, and fears;
- acquire knowledge through work assignments given to small groups;
- engage in interactive exercises and energizing games;
- get involved in dialogue and
- allow for negotiation processes with trainers and direct confrontation among the participants, which took place in the plenary sessions.

The programme of the preparatory meeting, to which the following pages refer, is included in the appendix (section 7.1).

3.4. Profiles, trainers and participants

Both female trainers who had the main responsibility for the project as a whole and were attending the full duration of the workshop – as their colleague who joined the group the very last day taking over the role of the organizer – were working at the European Academy of Florence. They had experience and routine in the field of adult and youth education and deep expertise in conceptualizing and administrating related EU programs and funds.

At the preparation course we have been observing, 25 participants (21 women and 4 men) were present. Only four of the 13 women and 3 men who participated in the online pre-survey were 24 years old or younger, while the others were between 25 and 34 years old. The average age in the group ranged between 25 and 30 years.

11 participants had attained a post-secondary/tertiary level college and 5 a secondary school. While 6 participants were unemployed and 5 were engaged primarily not in paid work (i.e. they were students and/or engaged in volunteer work), just one reported to have a part-time employment. The remaining 4 participants to the survey made use of the category “other”.

At the time they participated in the pre-survey, 3 participants were participating in education or training other than the educational activity this report is referring to and 13 were not.

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 24 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 Italian practice project, all participants of the preparatory workshop were asked to submit their reflection diaries (i) soon after the preparatory meeting, i.e. before

their departure, and (ii) after the evaluation meeting. Those who did not attend this meeting, which was held in Florence after their return to Italy, on January 22nd, were asked to write their reflection on what they experienced and learned abroad. The 7 participants who attended this final meeting were asked to include these experiences as well. Those participants who submitted their reflection diaries on January and February 2010 make no reference to the evaluation meeting, but just report and reflect on the period they spent abroad.

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 room, was introduced by the trainers at the very beginning of the preparatory workshop 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 any objections, the educators started the session by introducing the topic, adding some remarks on the concept of learning to learn, and then asked the participants to introduce themselves.

5.1.2 The researchers role and behaviour

Except for one occasion when I was asked to take some pictures of the energizing games and exercises during the open air session and for the fact that – due to the small size of the room – I had to move my seat whenever somebody left or joined the plenary session, 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, while most participants were busy talking to each other. Whenever I was approached, I kept the conversation going beyond that, asking back on the background, interests etc. of my interlocutors. Thus, I tried to engage in regular conversation as a friendly outsider, but not to enforce it. In such conversations, I got the impression that the participants appreciated taking part in a research project.

For lunch and dinner, the group split into smaller groups and I decided not to join any of them. In such occasions, I joined the conversation of the trainers and then picked up something to eat on my own, while they took up their regular work in the office.

5.1.3 Difficulties during the observation

Apart from the fact that my attention was sometimes distracted because, as already mentioned, the room was too small, it was quite difficult for me to generate sociograms due to the group size and the short period of observation.

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, to walk around between the groups trying to catch up some words, or to take a break. I decided to avoid giving some par-

ticipants the impression that I was directly observing their work and discussions and kept a certain distance to all of them, without leaving the room. Sometimes, I took some pictures of them working creatively in small groups which could be submitted to them towards the end of their educational activity.

5.2. Reflection diaries

16 participants submitted their reflection diary on the preparatory meeting, while only half of them choose to write one more reflection diary which referred to the period they spent abroad. There are two more reflection diaries written by the trainers on the preparatory meeting which could be included in the analysis.

I then analyzed the whole material and formulated preliminary hypotheses on the basis of both onsite observation and reflection diaries data. The 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 Italian 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: In this case study, the educators relied on this principle in view of the common challenges all participants were going to face in the period they would spend abroad and they balanced the group process by means of over-steering and under-steering sequences: “I am convinced that learning has to do with ‘studying,’ but even more with the concrete experience of what you are, think, do etc. [seen] through the eyes of others.”
- 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 observation that challenging the learning preferences of the participants in negotiating the sequence of topics to be covered during the workshop with them, a task which was accomplished by the trainers at the very beginning, was quite effective for overcoming mechanical hindrances which prevented participants from further developing their learning competence in the group context. Some reflection diaries strongly support the view – theorized by Vygotsky rather than by Piaget – that learning competence is acquired by tailoring a programme to the “zone of proximal development” of learners which is defined as the range of tasks they would hardly master without the guidance or assistance of – in our case – other participants and trainers as opposed to goals they are able to achieve on their own;
- transparency of learning objectives, planned methodology and anticipated learning process, as achieved through clear instructions in the observed workshop, the contracts signed by and information sheets provided to all participants;
- voluntarism of learners, meaning that the learners participate voluntarily in an educational/learning process – they engage in learning by choice;
- potentially reinforcing the latter, the fact of being selected in the context of a highly competitive application process, i.e. among the best or most lucky applicants who get the chance of participating to the educational activity. This very fact is likely to contribute to mutual respect among the participants and to a mutually rewarding partnership between educators and learners (see further hypotheses drawn below) as well;
- 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 – which is less likely to occur in a group in which the participants have no or very few common friends, as it was the case in this project, but still important as some of them were travelling to the same destination, with most of them sharing an apartment there;

- 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 some participants put it, “placing yourself into the game“ [‘mettersi in gioco’], as such a “potentially risky” intervention is expressed in Italian language: “It was a quite ‘fair’ group: This is the most beautiful thing I discovered. And the circumstances in which this seemed most evident to me were those of our confrontation, which was sometimes quite vivid [acceso, lit. ‘on fire’] and sometimes excessive, as when we discussed the use of the term ‘tolerance.’ I really appreciated that our different positions were articulated without fear, neither on one nor on the other side, about a negative judgment of one’s way of thinking.“

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 Italian 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, most participants described some controversies and debates (or, more literally, “confrontations”) which took place in the plenary setting during a storming phase, as the most rewarding experience they had in the group, with all kinds of positive effects beyond fostering reflection processes and their stronger involvement in the group and in every activity following that sequence, echoing the quote reported in the last section: “ everybody was bringing forward his /her own contribution in quite a harmony with that of the others. I realized that for me it is of fundamental importance to participate actively to the life of the group and to the learning process in order to deepen the understanding of my own contribution and, by these means, to make significant the process of learning for myself: Thus, I think that only exposing your point of view allows to grasp the deeper meaning of the contribution made by others; even if in this case I learned that by expressing myself, by trying to make a further effort to participate actively [to the debate] and by reflecting on the resulting dynamics.”

- related to the latter, structures and relations which allow the participants to get personally involved in some issues or debates, including group sizes and settings allowing all participants to intervene without getting the feeling of stealing the time of the other or being blamed for his/her intervention: “The dialogue and confrontation [taking place in the preparation course] led me to open myself without feeling judged or observed. [...] I discovered that working in a group generates better results and that it also takes less time to achieve them.”
- 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, keeping the role of trainer and organizer separate in order to avoid role collusions, a task which was accomplished by reserving the last scheduled day for organizational matters and delegating this part to a colleague;
- 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: As one participant observed, there was “great motivation to travel, to ‘put ourselves into the game,’ to change. [...] There was a strong tendency to confrontation and exchange, which is very, very important.” She reported to have noticed this by “observing, listening, participating to all the proposed activities, ‘putting myself into the game’ and into discussion if necessary. And respecting the ideas of others.”
- clarity and mutual understanding about the ownership of the learning outcomes – in the reported case, these aspects could be included in the contract.

Educational context and content

The development of learning competence is supported by

- clearly specifying the contexts in which educational activities are embedded – this was an element explicitly taken into account both in the workshop and in the contract;

- 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 – for those points, I would like to draw your attention on the effects of “confrontation” reported above;
- 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, concerns or aspirations of the participants);
- 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 homogeneity within the group and its perceived benefits for developing quite similar interests, even if this was described as an illusion in some reflection diaries which referred to the experiences with other group members abroad. Thus, “the group” was described in its potential beneficial and negative aspects (social closure or bonding social capital, preventing openness to and relations within a new environment), especially in some reflection diaries reporting on the journey abroad.
- providing informal settings (in our case: enough coffee breaks, extended lunch breaks and no evening sessions) which allow people to reflect and talk to each other without being guided at all, but still to keep in touch if they wish.

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 which was mostly attributed to its homogeneity, the fact all participants had a common goal and were selected among many applicants, and thus – as we could conclude – somehow part of an elite in their country;
- 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, see my reference to the importance of “confrontation” for most participants;
- 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 learning, 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. In the observed case, where the evaluation meeting which could more directly point to reflection was not observed, there was no reference to such activities in their reflection diaries, which of course contained a lot of individual reflections which refer to what was happening in the group or in small group activities. Still, reflection could be observed taking place in the informal parts (e.g. lunch time, coffee breaks, free evenings more or less far from home) of the courses. i.e. outside the training setting itself, when being asked by the trainers to set individual goals for their journey abroad or discussing about their expectations and resources in small groups.
- 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;
- 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 indeed 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 (both in the plenary sessions, in small group activities and in informal and work settings);
- 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.

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 (see my remarks on negotiation above) and generally binding (e.g., when signing the contract);
- 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 preparation course we were observing, 25 participants (21 women and 4 men further characterized in section 3.4) were present. Only four of the 13 women and 3 men who participated in the online pre-survey were 24 years old or younger, while the others were between 25 and 34 years old. The average in the whole group ranged between 25 and 30 years.

11 participants had attained a post-secondary/tertiary level college and 5 a secondary school. While six participants were unemployed and five were engaged primarily not in paid work (i.e. they were students and/or engaged in volunteer work), just one reported to have a part-time employment. The remaining four participants made use of the category “other”.

At the time they participated in the pre-survey, three participants were participating in education or training other than the educational activity this report is referring to and 13 were not.

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 her answers to whatever different set of questions at all. Therefore, this part of the analysis is omitted.

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.

5.3.1 Pre-survey results

In rating themselves, the 16 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=4,75)
- Learning is important for my personal development (M=4,63)
- For me, spending time and money on learning is well worth it (M=4,5)

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

- I can easily describe my own competences and qualifications (M=3)
- 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=3,19)
- I know how to find training or learning opportunities (M=3,38)

With a mean value ranging from 3,4 to 3,7, the following items can still be regarded as rated relatively low:

- I intend to engage in further learning activities on a regular basis (M=3,44)
- I know how I can learn best (M=3,44)
- I am aware of some of my weaknesses as far as learning is concerned (M=3,44)
- I know how to get advice which supports my learning (M= 3,44)
- I know which settings and methods are best suited for fostering my learning (M=3,56)
- I am used to defining learning goals for myself (M= 3,63)
- I persist with my learning goals, even if it is difficult to combine with daily workloads and routines (M=3,63)
- I am able to judge the quality of my learning processes and outcomes (M=3,69)

5.3.2 Post-survey results

The 11 participants who took part in the posttest assigned the highest rates of approval to the following statements (with an average value at about 4,5):

- Learning is important for the development of a society (M=4,64)
- Significant learning processes also take place in group contexts (M=4,45)
- Learning is important for my personal development (M=4,45)
- Learning is an important part of my life (M=4,45)

We might conclude that (i) learning became an even more important part of the respondent's lives and that (ii) they might have learned that sometimes group contexts are likely to foster significant learning processes. The participants' ratings of the following item appear rather high as well, when compared to the mean of the whole sample of the post-survey (189 participants):

- I reflect on what I have learned on a regular basis (M=3,64, as opposed to M=3,5 for the whole sample)

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

- I can easily describe my own competences and qualifications (M=2,8)
- I am used to defining learning goals for myself (M=2,80)
- I am open to question my personal views, values and beliefs when taking part in a learning activity (M=3,18)
- 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=3,18)
- When taking part in a learning or educational activity, I ensure that it is suitable for my needs (M=3,27)

With mean values around 3,5 (i.e., between approximately 3,4 and 3,6), the following items are still rated comparably low:

- I intend to engage in further learning activities on a regular basis (M=3,36)
- I know how to find training or learning opportunities (M=3,36)
- When planning my learning I build on former learning experiences (M=3,36)
- I reflect on what supported or blocked my learning in a specific context (M=3,36)
- I am generally able to adapt to learning demands that come up in quite different contexts (M=3,36)

- I am aware of some of my weaknesses as far as learning is concerned (M=3,45)
- I am able to plan and organise my learning on my own (M=3,45)
- I know how I can learn best (M= 3,55)
- I know how to get advice which supports my learning (M=3,55)
- I persist with my learning goals, even if it is difficult to combine with daily workloads and routines (M=3,55)
- I know what motivates or discourages me to learn (M=3,64)

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 independent
- *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 ac-

ording 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. Defining the *zone of proximal development* as the distance between what an individual can achieve without and what he/she can achieve with the assistance/guidance of others who are more experienced in a certain domain, Vygotskij already pointed to the decisive role diverse groups and reflective communities play for initiating, inspiring and sustaining learning processes. 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 “confrontation”, i.e. getting engaged in or even just assisting to controversial debates, is echoed within the reflection diaries: “There are some people who try to impose their views on others [...] and keep on trying to defend their own position and there are others who, instead, accept the information rather passively, who are seeking a pacific discussion or the confrontation (a debate). More or less, everybody is learning new things through confrontation with others, even if some are resisting it a little bit more and stick to their own, previous knowledge, but most people question a lot of things, including themselves, ask questions, accept with interest new information and correct themselves if they were wrong. Dealing with others forces to confront oneself with his/her own way of thinking, reacting and learning.”

As, contrary to the whole sample including some more practice and satellite projects, the post-survey – with some even more significant exceptions – shows rather lower ratings, we can exclude the explanatory value of the Hawthorne effect² to account for these results.³ Still, I would like to suggest that the very activity of (i) writing a reflective diary, at least in some cases, might have had an effect on the participant’s ratings in some items at least.⁴ Due to (ii) the intensity of the educational activity, which

² Our preliminary hypotheses to account for a significant increase in most items in the whole sample of the survey was highlighting the possibility that these improvements could simply be interpreted as a response to the fact that the respondents are being studied and observed, a phenomenon observed in industrial workplaces and reported by Elton Mayo (1933), Fritz Roethlisberger and William Dickson (1939), to which Henry Landsberger (1958) referred to by coining the term “Hawthorne effect”.

³ It is important to note that, as 5 participants participated only in the pre-survey, our analysis limits itself to highlight the ratings of 16 participants to the pre- and of 11 participants to the post-survey.

⁴ This does not necessarily imply that the results should show higher ratings. The opposite effect might be interpreted as a no less significant learning outcome and, in some cases, point to a significant improvement in terms of self-awareness: One participant reported that, before attending the preparatory workshop, she was quite sure to have been inclined “to understanding others maybe above the average, but [I] understood that this sensibility can improve, grow and express itself even more by simply exposing oneself and by having the courage to articulate hypotheses and judgements.” Partici-

– at least in its significant extension to three months which were spent abroad by each participant – goes far beyond what I was able to report on here, and (iii) the selective way in which the participants necessarily had to report on their experiences in their reflection diaries, it remains difficult to attribute the clear effects emerging from the data to a single setting or method, but it is rather unlikely that the activity as a whole had no effect on the participant’s learning to learn competence at all.

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): “To conclude, I really think that my way of learning is living my experiences, sensations, emotions, giving to all I am living through a personal meaning. Of course, I discovered that by observing myself, by engaging in the discussion, and by not taken for granted that what and how I felt was the only way how it could be done. Thus, opening myself to other ways of seeing things.” In fact, the ability to question everything (the main characteristic Jacques Derrida ascribes to the university), including oneself, and 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. In the research I was reporting, this became even more obvious as the whole project was quite involving for the participants and allowed for – or even invited to – the exceptional rather than mere routines of everyday life and work.

pating to the workshop, she realized that “I had never really engaged in confrontation before nor have I really given people the chance to express themselves openly with me. This openness is the invitation to do things that usually are quite ‘risky’ from an emotional point of view if you do not know each other quite well, [things] as analyzing and coaching each other.”

7. References

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8. Appendices

8.1 Preparatory workshop: Programme flow

	Day 1 September 14 th , 2009	Day 2 September 15 th , 2009	Day 3 September 16 th , 2009
	<i>09.00 – 13:00</i>	<i>09.30 – 13:00</i>	<i>09.30 – 14:00</i>
Morning session	<p>Introduction: Getting to know each other</p> <p>Presentation of the L2L project, the educational activity and of related EU programs and funds</p> <p>Negotiation between participants and trainers on different options and priorities: Should logistic information (flight schedules and tickets, accommodation and stage circumstances) be provided to the participants the first or the last scheduled day?</p>	<p>Intercultural learning: Various group activities aimed at raising the participant's consciousness and understanding of relevant dimensions</p> <p>Open discussion and controversy on key terms as "culture", "tolerance"</p>	<p>Information on journeys and stages of the participants: Signing the contracts, providing logistic information, clarifying open questions</p>
	<i>14.00 – 18.30</i>	<i>14.00 – 18.00</i>	
Afternoon session	<p>Open questions on requirements within the educational activity: Clarifying expectations of participants and matters intriguing them</p> <p>Open air session with various warm up and energizing games, exercise to get acquainted with each other</p>	<p>Professional orientation: Evaluating one's own competences and (professional) values, relating them to one's stage experience and professional goals</p>	

8.2 Reflection Diary: Questions answered by trainers

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

8.3 Reflection Diary: Questions answered by participants

<p>What did I learn in terms of practical skills, knowledge and/or understanding?</p>	<p>... and how did I learn it?</p>
<p>How did my attitudes (e.g. my curiosity, interests, motivation and/or commitment) change?</p>	<p>... and what triggered it? How did it happen?</p>
<p>What did I discover about myself as a learner and, more specifically, about my individual ways of learning?</p>	<p>... and how did I find out?</p>
<p>What did I learn about our group and about (me) learning in a group?</p>	<p>... and how did I learn about it?</p>
<p>Space for further comments or observations: Is there anything I would like to add?</p>	