

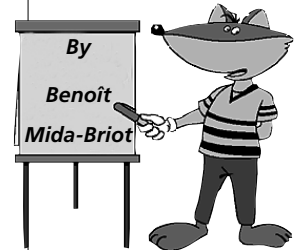
5. Non-formal education as a tool for the inclusion of all



T-Kit
on
Social Inclusion

Human beings never stop learning and developing. We all learn different things in different moments and different spheres of our lives. We learn a lot during our schooling, but we should not neglect all the learning opportunities outside of this academic learning environment. All learning experiences in life contribute to people's personal growth and lead to a better understanding of the environment in which they live, which in turn empowers people to fully participate in society.

The formal education system (schools, universities, vocational training) aims at providing young people a basic knowledge to be used for their social integration into society. Unfortunately in many cases, the formal education system fails to provide all young people with their learning needs due to various reasons. Therefore, other sources of personal development should be available. Non-formal education may be one of them, especially – but not solely – for young people with fewer opportunities. This chapter will explore the different ways of learning, compare them and consider why and how non-formal education could be a “second chance” for our target group.



5.1 Non-formal versus formal education and vocational training

In Europe, most of the people have gone through some form of schooling in their lives. This formal school education is commonly based on a “vertical” relationship between the pupil / student and the teacher: the holder of the knowledge (the teacher) and the receiver (the learner). The teacher mostly delivers knowledge to the student in the form of courses and curricula. At the end of the learning pathway a written document certifies the knowledge acquired by the learner according to official criteria. These certificates and diplomas are often necessary as keys to open doors into the labour market and society. Academic diplomas mostly refer to theoretical knowledge.

Vocational training brings more practical contents in addition to general knowledge. It gives the learner a practical qualification that can be used directly in the labour market. Usually, traineeships are part of vocational training. The trainees learn a trade at the lowest beginner level within the working reality with the support of a mentor. At the end of the learning process there is also a certification. Vocational training is often shorter than formal studies and targets a quick acquisition of operational working skills. The relationship between the teacher and the learner still remains vertical, with the teacher passing down skills to the learner.

Non-formal education, on the contrary, can be summarized as “learning by doing”. The learning methodology lies in the interaction between the learners and the concrete situations they are experiencing. There are usually no teachers or lecturers providing the knowledge ex-cathedra, but the learners and facilitators construct the knowledge and skills together, in a horizontal relationship. The educator or facilitator may be more or less active in the setting up of learning experiences for the benefit of the learner. This is what happens in youth work. It is possible to maximise non-formal education benefits for young people through the use of different methodologies such as peer education, project work, mobility projects, and more. The learners are at the centre of their own learning process and the youth workers support them in it. Unfortunately, at present there is not much certification of the competencies acquired by non-formal learners yet.

Sometimes there is confusion between non-formal and informal learning. We consider informal learning to be spontaneous, as it happens in everyday life; whereas non-formal learning is planned and thought through by a facilitator, trainer or youth worker who also provides support during the entire learning process.



	Formal Education : Academic Studies	Formal Education : Vocational Training	Non-Formal Education
Learning methods implemented	Courses where main vertical relationship takes place between the holder of the knowledge and the learners.	Vertical relationship as in academic studies. Courses may alternate with practices. Mentoring may be used during practices.	Interactive relationship between the learners and their environment "learning by doing". Peer education and mentoring are often used.
Contents	Mainly general. Defined by educational authorities.	Targeted to operational skills. Defined by educational authorities.	Chosen by the learner. No definition except concrete experience acquisition.
Certification	Usually provided at the end of the course and conditioned to success in evaluation of knowledge. Set up according to criteria defined by educational authorities.	Usually provided at the end of the training and conditioned to success in evaluation of knowledge and practice. Set up according to criteria defined by educational authorities.	No certification at this time, however it can be taken into account for university studies (e.g. Finland).
Length	Usually: from 6 to 18 years old : primary & secondary education; above 18 years old : up to 10 years of studies (university)	Usually short: starting in some countries at the age of 14 years old and during up to 4 years during secondary education; 2 or 3 years after university studies.	Life-long learning
Strong points	Obligatory for all (usually up to 16 years old) in order to provide a basic knowledge. Often almost free in the public sector. Certification through official academic diplomas.	Short and providing operational skills that can be used directly in the labour market. Certification through vocational training diplomas.	Accessible to all at any moment of life. "Second chance" for young people with fewer opportunities.
Weak points	Academic diplomas may remain general and further specific studies or trainings need to take place. Not adapted to all. No Europe-wide recognition (difficulties with transferring the value of the diplomas abroad).	Often not chosen by the young people but imposed by "default" during studies. Labour market needs may change making the qualification useless. No Europe-wide recognition (difficulties with transferring the value of the qualification abroad).	No formal recognition.



5.2 Youth work with young people with fewer opportunities

Good practices – A concrete example

Djilali grew up in a “difficult” district of Toulouse, South of France, around young people with fewer opportunities. Discrimination, violence, drug-addiction, school failure, relational problems with parents, the police force and with the community, these are all common problems well known and experienced by the young people of the city. Djilali wished to be invested in community life and to develop an interesting activity. In the framework of “Youth Initiatives”, he created a “Sports and Leisure” association which allowed the young people of the city to carry out a project. He then mobilised 7 young people to create a theatre play called “Les ombres de la cité”, which would concern the problems experienced by youngsters living in disadvantaged areas. From conception to realisation, in order for the team manages to run this ambitious project, ten theatre performances in the schools, colleges and other reception facilities were implemented around France. This project, carried through to a successful end thanks to Djilali and his team and it has aroused public interest and started vocational trainings. The most assiduous actors follow training sessions to become teachers, today, all are implied in community life.

Even though formal education institutions in Europe have made efforts to improve the balance between theory and practice at school since the second half of the twentieth century, the differences outlined above still remain largely intact. Some initiatives were taken to tailor the ways of teaching to the learner’s needs and expectations, like Philippe Meirieu’s concept of “differentiated learning approaches”, but they remain limited. Hence, many young people leave the formal education system without having finished their studies or having acquired a qualification.

Young people who have left school early or who are in precarious situations in society could benefit from non-formal education as a second chance that could have a strong impact in their lives. This educational approach needs to be thought through, prepared and implemented with the active participation of the young people themselves. Moreover, its use must be coherent within the young people’s lives; their prior history has to be taken into account, and afterwards the results should lead to a further step on their ways to social inclusion.

Non-formal education could empower young people with fewer opportunities to set-up their own projects, step by step (as we will see in 6.2: *Step-by-step approach*), where they are at the centre of educational activity, feel concerned, have personal interests, find strong motivation, get self-confidence and as a result develop their capacities and skills by doing. However, non-formal education only works if correctly implemented and monitored. It does not happen overnight but requires time to get to know each other, to build up a trust-based relationship (see 6.3: *Building trust*), using tailor-made methods. It might even be useful to network with people who know or have worked with the young person before (see 4.1: *Young people in their communities* and 4.2: *Setting up partnerships*).

Another interesting aspect of the use of non-formal education with the target group is that the beneficiaries may be multipliers afterwards, becoming “more experienced peers” towards their friends, and hence motivate and support them in a horizontal way. This is the so-called peer education, which values young people sharing their experiences and providing support to others in similar experiences (see 7.1: *Peer education*).

Non-formal education could be a tool for the inclusion of all, especially those who did not find their luck in the formal education system. But youth workers or social workers should be aware that their action is to be implemented as a stage of a holistic pathway and should not therefore be an objective in itself. It also supposes that the beneficiaries have their basic needs fulfilled. It is difficult to start working with young people on their personal development if at the same time they do not have a roof over their head or anything to eat.



Tailor-make your approach to your target group using the step-by-step approach (see 6.2: *Step-by-step approach*) and plan concrete and positive results (even very small) at every step, in order to generate a dynamic of motivation. A feeling of achievement also stimulates self-confidence and self-esteem.

When you mix all these ingredients and start your intervention at the right moment of the young people pathways, it will then become a strong educational tool for the young person's personal development. This alternative education may be a real second chance for young people with fewer opportunities to find their way back into society.

Good practices – A concrete example

M., 24 years old, was unemployed. He dropped out of school when 16. He came from a broken family and was in regular contact with the police for drugs offences. A social work association picked him off the streets and suggested he apply for a short-term European Voluntary Service, which he did. The project was approved and M went abroad for 4 months working on alternative tourist trips with adolescents. In the project, M. learned many new things, not only to do with the practical management of the trips, but also how to communicate in a different language, spend time and work with sometimes difficult adolescents, etc. After his four months he decided to start vocational training to work in the tourist sector.

In this case M. used a specific programme of non-formal education to get back on track in his life. With the support of social workers (in both countries) M managed to take up responsibilities again and to feel useful in society. The practical skills he learnt (setting up tents, cooking etc) are however not the main outcomes. The big plus for M going on an EVS project was to relate to people and try out new experiences, which in the end led to a new vocation in his life, the tourism sector. The interesting thing is that the positive experience in a non-formal setting gave him the appetite and motivation to go back to the formal education system to get a qualification. So there is plenty of hope and work for youth workers.