

## 7. Some particular approaches



T-Kit  
on  
Social Inclusion

### 7.1 Peer education

Everybody knows the story of the father who, on a nice day, after exchanging meaningful looks with his wife, asks his twelve-year-old son to accompany him for a walk and 'a little chat'. The father then awkwardly starts up an artificial conversation about girls that might be in the son's class and then changes his attitude and solemnly announces that it is time his son got to know the facts of life. At which the boy, genuinely bored, replies that he knows "everything 'bout f..... already" from his schoolmates, their magazines and the jokes and can he please go home and play football again.



In a way, the exchange of information about sexual education – whether it is completely realistic and truthful or not – between the boy and his schoolmates, is peer education. Kirstie Lilley (2001) distinguishes three kinds of peer education:

- Informal peer education, as mentioned in the story, when young people simply pass on information about subjects that matter to them, without being trained or told to do so;
- Formal peer education, in which young people are simply told to pass a certain message on without having much influence on the contents themselves;
- And a third type of peer education, which will be discussed here, in which the young people receive training to develop a programme themselves to pass on a certain message to their peers.

Peer education is beneficial for all parties involved. The peer educators gain self-confidence, self-esteem and a number of skills (see 6.4: *Exploring self-esteem*). Their peers receive valuable information in an enjoyable way from someone they know and trust, and they might get stimulated to become a peer educator themselves. For youth work and the youth worker, it presents a way of passing on knowledge to a bigger group of young people who can, in their turn, address a larger group again.

#### **Good practices – A concrete example**

*In Estonia, a group of 23 young people having met each other during high school days or during their 1st year of university, have implemented several peer education projects. Most of these projects concerned drug prevention, children's rights, social skills and education. In 2002, emphasis was shifted to social skills and children's rights development programmes. The main target groups were orphanage children and other children in need. Under the "Group Initiatives" (Action 3) of the YOUTH programme it was planned to organise social skills training for 20 orphanage children and youngsters between the ages of 9-17. The aim of the projects was to prevent drug abuse among children in orphanages, to develop their social skills and to teach and motivate them to carry out their own projects. First they compiled material (appropriate leaflets, CD-ROMs) for these trainings. In all their activities they always included the direct target group in the preparation work as they themselves felt comfortable in the main part of the projects, which increased effectiveness. Once all the preparation was completed the trainings then started in September 2002.*



### Peer education – why does it work ?

- Young people are more likely to accept information from other young people than from adults. In particular, young people who grew up with a disadvantaged background have often been disappointed by adults from their surroundings and could be suspicious to them.
- Young people are more likely to tell each other honestly what they feel or think than to an older person, since they are afraid of being judged on what they say.
- Often, it is easier to ask questions and discuss subjects with peers.
- Young people identify more with people from their own age and the information from peers might come across as more reliable.
- The peer educators know what language to use to address their peers.
- The peer educators can choose their own way of discussing the topics and decide upon which subjects to use, which will increase their sense of ownership.

Most of the time, it does not work to walk into a group of young people and ask them something like “Hey, you wanna be a peer educator?” It could, however, very well be the follow-up from an activity a group of young persons has been involved in. During the evaluation, a useful question to ask is what they would do differently themselves if they were to lead the workshop, project or activity. During the activity, the youth worker could already encourage the young people to think of solutions and take initiative, provided it remains within reach of the young people.

There are several manuals for starting up peer education projects, which you can find in the bibliography. However, since most peer education programmes focus on potential peer educators who are already familiar with youth work, and on young people who attend workshops by peer educators in a formal setting, it will be useful to look at some extra considerations when dealing with peer educators and peers with a disadvantaged background.

### ***Mentoring the process of peer education***

The mentoring of young people with fewer opportunities who would like to become peer educators should be done carefully as not to destroy the trust (see 6.3 : *Building trust*). Some of these young people may have more difficulty in planning and may be more inclined to give up when things don't work out. So, more than with young people who are bursting with self-confidence and self-esteem, you'll need to stimulate and motivate them time and time again (see also 6.4 : *Exploring self-esteem*). This also means being on time yourself and planning meetings with the young people. Unpredictability of the youth worker will, as Ascher (1988) remarks, “serve to destroy relationships and to harden mistrust”. Apart from the support, you will have to invest extra time as well in adapting the methodology in order to make it manageable for the young people. Even though they will be the ones who will primarily work on the contents of what they are going to teach to their peers, the information should first be made understandable for them as well. And if this involves too much reading, studying or school-like tasks, it is bound to make them feel uncomfortable and quit, thereby ruining your carefully built-up relationship. Also, if the information is not clear to the peer educators, it might be passed on incomplete or incorrect, which will of course get you in trouble again.

Paramount is that the young people devise, develop and deliver the programme themselves. However, a clear structure should be provided for by the youth worker, which can be filled in by the peer educators. It can help to keep the meetings, both the preparation ones as well as the workshops, as rounded-off chunks. Each part should cover one subject that is matched with the young people's capacities but at the same time challenging enough not to become boring and the aims not set too high. When organising the preparation meetings and the peer education workshops themselves, keep the barriers young persons might be facing in mind as well (see 3.1 : *Obstacles*).

With the right preparation and support, peer education can definitely yield results which standard youth work would be unable to reach. Also, exchanging information on peer education and the support of peer educators with other youth workers can be very useful (see 4.2 : *Setting up partnerships*). In this case young peer educators from different organisations and backgrounds can meet and tell each other about their experiences, helping educate each other.



### Good practices – A concrete example

The Care 2 Share (Brighton, UK) peer education programme offers a range of learning outcomes for young people aged 16 to 25 of mixed abilities. It brings together tutors – most of whom are interested in going into youth work or teaching – with 'tutees' – young people who have become disengaged from formal education for various reasons.

Peer tutors take part in a peer education-training programme, including a residential. They support one or more tutees in working towards agreed learning goals in the areas of basic literacy, numeracy and key skills. The project encourages all young people to identify their own progression routes and supports them in moving on to more formal learning or employment. In 2002-03 the project aims to support half of its learners to achieve accreditation. Paid staff monitor the portfolio development of both tutors and tutees.

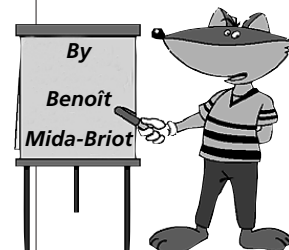
Both tutors and tutees run a snack bar at the youth centre where C2S is based, learning project management, budgetary and money-handling skills, shopping, customer service and catering skills. The young people take a high level of responsibility for the project – they designed the snack bar refurbishment and the centre's ICT suite, are responsible for their own budgeting and accounting, and hold regular team meetings to assess the project's development.

## 7.2 The contractual approach

The contractual approach is an additional methodology that youth workers may use for working with young people with fewer opportunities. The youth worker and the young person set objectives for positive change (behaviour at school or in the youth club, reducing drugs use, job search, etc.) and together develop concrete steps and guidelines of how to achieve these goals. This set of good intentions is agreed upon and adhered to, as if it were a contract (it could be even signed by both parties). The contract is constantly monitored and evaluated at regular intervals (or when breached) by both the young person and the youth worker.

This contractual approach is based on an increased commitment between the youth worker and the young person, and on mutual trust. Both are equal partners in the development of the contract and take responsibility towards the tasks to be achieved with related rights and duties. It can be used in the frame of a specific project or in daily life, in a one-to-one setting or with groups.

The following describes this so-called contract pedagogy in a one-to-one setting, in which the youth worker has already known the young person in question for some time.



### The contractual approach is a tool based on:

- A trustful relationship between the youth worker and the young person;
- Targeting the gradual acquisition of experiences based on successes and not failures;
- An agreement for the implementation of a project tailored to the young person's needs, expectations, capacities;
- A commitment of the partners to fulfil the common objectives to reach;
- Precise roles, tasks, rights and duties for each partner;
- Considering the young person as a responsible interlocutor able to make choices, conclude a partnership, respect an agreement and act consistently.

**The contractual approach is a tool and not an objective in itself.**



### ***When to use the contractual approach?***

The right moment for implementing this tool depends on the young people you are working with and on the situation they are in. It is up to the youth workers to judge if a young person is ready for such a challenge. The young people should have shown interest in a specific project or in changing certain things in their lives: they should be in the position to commit themselves for a while. When presenting the challenge of a contract to the young persons, it should not sound too formal or too patronising. A contract actually provides a safe framework with a clear division of responsibilities (both for the youth worker as for the young person) for achieving set goals.

### ***What should be the contents of a contract?***

The contents should be identified and agreed upon together with the young person. Mostly the contract is built up around a concrete project that is limited in time. The contract could impart certain new responsibilities to the young person and specify the support the youth worker promises to give. It is important to remain realistic of what can be achieved. The contract should be tailor-made to each young person and based on individual work with him or her. Do not let the setting-up of the contract turn into an obstacle for the young person.

#### **Dos and don'ts**

- The young person must participate in defining the contract: realistic goals should be targeted.
- The overall goals should be broken down into smaller intermediate objectives to enable regular small successes on the road to the main goal.
- Encourage the young person to be as concrete and as pragmatic as possible when defining aims and different intermediate stages.
- Define clear aims, stages, roles and tasks, partners' rights and duties, but avoid getting bogged down in too many details.
- Do not forget to agree on a precise timetable including formal and/or informal evaluation periods.
- Bear in mind that the contract will be the on-going reference point during the implementation of the young person's project.
- Amend or change the contract when necessary but avoid changing the contents too frequently: the contract's reliability would be affected.
- Include an item on what should happen in case a partner does not fulfil or breaches the contract.
- Try not to be too formal when choosing the form of the contract (document).

### ***The youth worker's role when following up the contract implementation***

Youth workers have a specific role beyond a simple contract partner. They should strengthen the communication flow with the young person to detect as early as possible any problems. It may occur that the young people do not dare or want to admit that they face difficulties. The youth worker should be present to encourage and help, to support and empower people solving a problem or facing a difficult situation. This is in line with educational work that is based on successes rather than on failures.

### ***How to face a breach of contract***

Youth workers must be prepared to face unexpected developments when using the contractual approach with the target group. If the young person wishes to abandon the contract, the youth worker should first of all try to analyse the reasons why the young person wants to drop out of the project, and see if anything can be done to address these reasons. One option could be to suspend the contract for a period. If the young person still feels uncomfortable with the situation, a change of contract can be proposed. It is only as a last resort that the contract should be cancelled. In all cases, the interest of the young person should be central.



### When breaching the contract:

- React immediately and tell the young person that you have noticed a breach.
- Take time to discuss the matter with the young person.
- Do not close your eyes to breaches to avoid confrontation. This may jeopardise the value of the contract and your role with the young person.
- When discussing the breach of contract be careful not to judge or place blame, but take the constructive road of communication.
- Try to leave doors open for further work to take place: extend a deadline, give a second chance, offer more support, etc.
- If you decide to continue the work with the same young person with a new contract, for example, ensure that you will be able to manage it (in some cases it may not be possible and it is better to recognize it).
- Avoid sanctions, but foresee procedures of what to do in case of breaches of contract.

### *The final evaluation of the contract and what comes after*

At the end of the contract period the final evaluation should make an inventory of the achievements realised and those not fulfilled in the contract. This moment should not become too formal, but should show some kind of recognition of the young person's achievements (for example certificates, a gift, new responsibilities or privileges, etc.) This will strengthen their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The work is not finished after the contract has ended. Before the end of the project, it is also important to think about the further stages after the contract. These are aimed at continuing the young person's self-development. The ideal outcome of the contractual approach would be to not need contracts anymore, but that the young persons find their own way in life without the help of a youth worker. But this will not happen over night. The youth worker should gradually decrease their involvement with the young person after the project has been realised in order to avoid creating dependency-based relations (as mentioned in 6.1: *Ethos*).

## 7.3 Conflict management

Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict.  
*William Ellery Channing*

"Conflict: a battle, contest of opposing forces, discord, antagonism existing between primitive desires and instincts and moral, religious, or ethical ideals." *Webster's Dictionary*

The characters that make up the word conflict in Chinese are danger and opportunity. If conflict is an inescapable part of life, then young people, whatever their background, need to be given the chance to discover and develop ways to find the opportunity as well as the dangers in the conflicts in their lives. In any conflict, there is the potential for growth and positive change. Yet for many people, the experience or understanding of conflict is only negative, associated with violence and destruction.



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Conflict is not necessarily destructive if handled properly. It can become a valuable tool in building up skills and personal strengths: when acknowledged and explored in a safe environment, it can provide powerful coping and management techniques, building on the premise that everyone – and their feelings – deserve respect. Viewed in this light, the management of conflict can be seen as inextricably bound up in the earlier topics covered: self-esteem and trust.

Unfairness, injustice and lack of basic resources tend to provoke violence, particularly where bitter experience has suggested no alternative. But violence creates legacies of hurt, bitterness, vengefulness and destruction – it diminishes the violent as well as the victim.

Conflict occurs when two or more people oppose one another because their needs, wants, goals or values are different. Conflict is almost always accompanied by feelings of anger, frustration, hurt, anxiety, or fear. It is caused by a wide range of factors: a clash of values, ideologies or goals; an inability to appreciate another's perspective; a struggle over limited resources; in retaliation for another's action. Glasser (1984) identifies as common to all human beings the physiological need to survive, along with four psychological needs: for belonging, for power, for freedom and for fun. It is the way in which we seek to fulfil those needs that can lead to conflict, especially where one party believes its psychological (and in extreme cases, its physiological) needs are being threatened by another. Of course, much of our behaviour is a consequence of the reinforcement of earlier experiences: we see what works. If the person who shouts loudly and pushes to the front of the queue instantly gets attention, why bother with a more tempered approach?

Conflict can be managed by developing and using skills such as effective communicating, problem solving, and negotiating with a focus on interests. When we negotiate with a focus on our interests – the things needed or desired by all individuals involved in the dispute – rather than our positions, where we focus on blame, fault, and liability for what happened in the past, we have a better chance of working with, rather than against, each other to discuss and resolve issues.

The aim of exploring how to manage conflict is to understand the sources of conflict and allow powerful emotions to flourish into a sense of empowerment, more positive human relationships and an enhanced sense of personal worth. Once the fear of personal danger and the unknown is removed, people can start to see that, appropriately handled, conflict can be constructive. As a volunteer on a conflict management course observed: "I've realised something about conflict I never thought of before ... I'd hate to live in a world with no conflict. Nothing would ever happen! I like conflict. It means people are alive. I used to hate it and be scared of it, but now I'm not. It's a funny thing to realise you don't want to live in a perfect world."

The youth workers' role in this journey of discovery is to be open, non-judgemental, accepting and positive, and careful trustees of young people's growing vulnerability and openness. They should help the participants to recognise that confronting conflict is daring, exciting and challenging. It takes great courage to be a mediator: conflicts release overwhelming personal energies and it takes guts to step in when the situation is ablaze.

What skilful youth workers can offer those with whom they work is the opportunity to rehearse, mainly through the exploration of communication and co-operation, alternative approaches to provocative situations. It is hard to attack someone for whom you have respect and with whom you have been through many experiences where mutual co-operation and trust have been the keys to success. As was discussed in the earlier sections, learning to value yourself is also about valuing others.

What must also be remembered is that the youth worker not only explores conflict management as a tool for young people, but also as a learning opportunity to ensure their own personal safety. They, like the young people with whom they work, need to understand when flight is more appropriate than fight – that is, when a situation is about to escalate, despite their best endeavours, into a conflagration.



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### ***When tackling conflict management:***

- Create boundaries for the work by setting time limits for the work. It is not wrong for participants to leave a session with unresolved feelings. But it is important to respect how they feel and allow them the time to reflect on what has occurred within a structured environment. Time for winding-down is important. Creating boundaries is about developing a sense and environment of safety, where everyone understands and agrees to the rules or guidelines.
- Expect the unexpected and be aware that there will be a range of responses to any work you undertake.
- Use active listening (listening for content, meaning, and feelings to aid understanding of the problem), and then summarize or paraphrase what you believe you heard, for example, “What I think I heard you say was... Is that right?”, reframing the issue by reinterpreting a statement or comment into a problem-solving frame.
- Do not blame yourself if a participant becomes angry or upset. The way in which each participant engages with the activity is certainly your responsibility as facilitator, but it is also the responsibility of the young person.
- Do not take things personally. Verbal abuse or dismissal can be an expression of how the young person is feeling about themselves and the work, not necessarily about you. Bear in mind that this may be the first time that the young person has been allowed to express anger in such a way, without sanctions or censure. Where possible, try to get participants to focus on problems, not people.
- Do not offer solutions; offer the space for participants to reach their own.
- And finally, know your limits. Never put yourself and those you work with in personal danger. If things start to get out of hand, take a break or even stop the session. If necessary, seek help.