Turning *water* into

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or turning sessions plans into modules – and other

▶ *Issues of relevance to every trainer and/or training organiser in youth training in Europe today.*

Situation 1 : How many times in your training career has a participant asked for the slides you have just used for your presentation? And then you have caught yourself thinking "Ok. I am in favour of having an "open source" policy, I don't mind that I spent the entire night working on this presentation and now have to hand over the file, as long as the source is quoted. But, how can I be sure that the presentation will not be misused? This presentation is part of a session with an overall objective, preceded by a particular exercise and followed by directed discussions in small groups". You know that the presentation would be less effective if taken out of this context. *What do you do?*

Situation 2 : You have just finished an international course and are very satisfied with the outcome. You feel that, if supported by the organisers, most of the participants in the course could disseminate the contents and methodology on a national, regional and local level immediately after the course. The big question you face now is how to help the participants, knowing that you have neither the financial resources nor the time for extensive follow-up work directly with them.
What do you do?

Situation 3 : I recall a conversation, some years ago, with a friend of mine who worked as a trainer and consultant in the business sector. When I told her about the length of the training courses we organise and the number of hours on the daily programme, her eyes widened and the pitch of her voice dropped as she muttered "Pure luxury!". A few minutes later she explained her reaction: "You could never, ever imagine the same courses in my work – It would be too long and too expensive". Today, when I see that most international donors are cutting down on training courses under the EU Youth Programme, limiting most courses to 5 working days, I realise that she had a good point some years ago. Not that I agree, but it is also becoming standard practice in youth work. More but shorter activities for more people, with less money and time spent on follow-up, but with more expected of the participants nevertheless. So, how can one organise shorter courses and still get the best out of them, especially when it comes to participants' follow up? *What do you do?*

Situation 4 : October 2004, three big folders with 580 application forms for the Training for Trainers in Human Rights Education course lay on my desk. After days of reading, pre-selection, selection and a team meeting, we had cut the number down to 42 participants to be invited to the course. And there were easily 70-80 applicants with very positive evaluations from the assessor, with the right profile and fully eligible to attend the course. But, there are no resources to accommodate such a large number. How could we help the rest of the applicants (who will not make it to the course) in their work? How could we bring the training closer to them? (given that solutions like e-learning possibilities are still expensive for some course organisers). *What do you do?*

Writing an extensive report describing everything that happened and everything that was said during a training activity has for a long time been one of the answers to the challenge of documenting courses and ensuring that there is a good basis for follow-up. But when did you last read a full report, from page 0 to page 173?

Another method, often used by trainers, is to document something that by common agreement we call a "Tool Box" and usually contains all the descriptions of the exercises used during the activity and/or a collection of project proposals / examples of good practice presented or developed during the activity.

Not writing anything after a training activity is also an alternative for some ☺.

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reflections on documenting training activities

In the remainder of this text, I will humbly suggest that you consider another alternative for documenting your activities, that is to create modules.

So, what are modules as defined here, and how can they help trainers to resolve the issues raised above?

The use of the word "*module*" and the examples given in addition to this text are taken from the work done before, during and after the training courses: Training trainers in Human Rights Education with Young People, held in the Budapest European Youth Centre in 2003 and 2004*. The teams in charge of these training courses started by using "session plans" to plan the courses but soon discovered that this template was insufficient for both processes: planning before the courses and for proper documentation after the courses.

The team running the first course, therefore, decided to develop educational units called "modules". Each module covered a part of the course programme that had an overall educational aim and was a self-functioning "entity". The length of the sessions "covered by a module" varied from 1.5 hours to a full day's programme. The modules contained not only the aims, programme outline, different steps for facilitation (as in regular session plans), but maybe even more importantly the background information, methods and methodology used, the outcome and evaluation of the session and its use in the training course. Each module was completed with all handouts, a summary of presentations/ speeches and presentation slides used during the sessions of the module and a summary of participants discussions (if they were considered useful and necessary).

What is in a module ?

Written before the sessions

Title
The name or title given by the Trainers' team to the module or session

Background
Why the module is necessary, the context in which it is intended to be used (number and profile of participants, what happens before and what comes after…); elements to be taken into account (group development stage, atmosphere in the group), relation to the needs of the target group or sub-groups…

Aims
The general purpose of the module in the training.

Objectives
The concrete objectives or goals that the module seeks to achieve. As far as possible, it should also address the learning or educational objectives on the basis of : Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes.

Skills
The main skills, which should be practised during the given session.

Methodology and methods
The methodology includes the approach for ensuring that the above-mentioned objectives are achieved. This is a simple outline of the methods – not a description of the methods themselves. (The source of the method is referenced here; if a new method is developed, its description is included in the Appendix to the Module).

Programme
Timetable of the actual programme implemented.

Background documents, handouts and further reading
Supporting material used during the session(s), distributed to participants or documents created by participants. It also refers to documents participants might wish to read to further their learning.

● **Training Methodologies**

* This text is indebted to all members of those teams who have invested an enormous amount of time, effort and creativity in the creation and preparation of the modules

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Outcome

What was actually achieved through the module? This part includes issues that arose or were raised by participants in the plenary or groups.

Evaluation

Both from the module sessions (whenever there was feedback) and from other evaluation and feedback opportunities, such as the Reflection Groups held at the end of the daily programme. These feedback notes focus on the format of the module and its sustainability – not on all possible aspects on which participants may give feedback.

Notes for further use

This is a sort of conclusion from those in charge of the module (or the module team). It addresses issues similar to the tips for facilitators or the Variations, used in the Compass – The Manual on Human Rights Education for Young People (*http://www.coe.int/compass*).

The word "module" may seem pretentious and even misleading for many trainers and educators in both formal and non-formal education. In all modesty, for the teams of trainers who initiated the process for the TfT HRE course in 2003, 'module' was the term that most clearly expressed the intention of providing a practical set of documents to help the trainers/multipliers/users in their own work, mainly on national and regional training courses on human rights education for young people.

Two key criteria were used in developing the modules for the HRE courses:

• The modules should provide enough comprehensive information so that trainers/ educators can make well-informed decisions.

• Every module was designed so as to be easily adapted to a specific context and target group, but still remind future users that successful use of the module on the TfT HRE course in Budapest does not guarantee success in their own training activities.

The modules had been used as preparatory documentation before the courses, and the trainers in charge of their development completed them after the sessions.

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Now let us take another look at the questions and situations at the beginning of this article. How can this way of documenting the course help in those situations?

Situation 1 : Preparing and handing out a Module to participants instead of giving out only the presentation slides reduces the risk that the presentation will be "misused" or used in the wrong context. At least it leaves trainers with the feeling that they have provided the entire set of materials that contextualise the presentation and have done their best to prevent "misuse". In addition, every "non-formal education literate" trainer could make use of the given material.

Situation 2 : Organising structured and comprehensive documentation from a short course can provide a solid basis for any follow-up in future. This is an especially useful approach when training trainers and multipliers. It does not replace any follow-up work, especially not the follow-up directly with participants. However, it provides the complete material ready for use. If the organisers of the training course could afford to establish a structure for "receiving feedback" from everyone who has tried the Modules in a local or national context, they could gather new ideas and resources to assist more participants (not only those attending the course).

Situation 3 : Short training courses. *Uhhh*. This is a tough one. A long-term training course with an in-depth approach to the subject cannot be replaced by anything else.

Furthermore, one should not use the Modules as Lego cubes combining them freely in any combination (of programme and participants). But who could prevent participants and trainers from doing so?

Nevertheless, having sections in the modules such as background information, outcome and evaluation of the session, helps participants and trainers who will use the materials from the course for their own work. This is useful especially to pre-assess the importance of certain modules and decide which modules they could use or emphasise in their own activities and which ones they can drop for shorter courses.

Situation 4 : The modules are not a substitute for attending a training activity. Nothing can replace the interactive nature of attending a course. Yet, if the number of applicants is high – as in the case of TfT HRE – sending a document as a Compendium of Modules from the course could bring two-fold benefits:

• provide all interested people with a useful and comprehensive resource relevant to their work (given that they have applied to attend a course on the same subject)

• acknowledge the applicants' efforts and to a certain extent keep them informed and involved in the area of work concerned.

Finally, to make it clear, this approach is only one of many possible approaches. It is far from being a recipe for documenting every single training activity. Organising the course documentation in modules is just an attempt not to write "super-long" reports, but still gather the course documentation including the results in an effective manner.

An excellent example of this type of documentation can be found in The Training Trainers on Human Rights Education with Young People courses in 2002 and 2003 at: *http://eycb.coe.int/eycbwwwroot/hre/index.asp*