

## BRIDGES FOR RECOGNITION

### RECOGNISING NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE YOUTH SECTOR

#### TERMINOLOGY CHEAT SHEET

**Potential** refers to all the cognitive, affective and practical capacities and achievements that a person could develop and that could be fostered by motivation and desire, by effort and application, by learning and life experience.

**Capacity** is similar to potential, but is typically used in a more specific way to refer to particular kinds of individual potential and also implies having some kind of related knowledge, skill or competence.

**Ability** refers to capacities that someone can already demonstrate that s/he possesses, such as having the ability to speak a certain language.

**Capability** refers to what someone can demonstrably or presumably do, and therefore it is similar to the terms skills and competence.

**Knowledge:** it is impossible to provide a satisfactory account of the conceptual background behind the term 'knowledge' in a few words. In the everyday world, the meaning of the term knowledge appears self-evident: it is what someone individually knows or the sum of what a given civilisation collectively knows. But what does it mean to know something? What is it that is known, how do we come to know it, why does it count as something worth knowing, and what do we do with it when we know it? In educational practice knowledge is what there is to learn, but it is not necessarily useful and worthwhile of its own accord. It has to be joined up with skills and competences (to become useful) on the one hand – and no less importantly, with principles and values (to become worthwhile) on the other hand.

**Skill** means having the knowledge and experience needed to perform a specific task or job – someone who has learned what to do (possesses the knowledge) and how to do it (can transfer the knowledge into real practice), which also means that someone else can observe the skill in action.

**Competence** is often used interchangeably with the term skill, but they do not really mean the same thing. Competence means the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a stable/recurring or changing situation. Two elements are crucial: applying what one knows and can do to a specific task or problem, and being able to transfer this ability between different situations.

**Documentation** refers to a (virtual or real) paper or visual record. Documents stand for evidence, either because of the information they actually contain (for example, the love letter), or because the content bears recognised witness to the truth and accuracy of what it claims (for example, the university degree certificate).

**Comparison** means to set one thing next to another (or several other things) in order to be able to see and perhaps measure the similarities and differences between them. Comparison only makes sense if the items to be compared either can be held to belong to the same category of phenomena or can all be set in relation to a quality external to themselves.

**Evaluation:** in English, evaluation only means to make a reasoned judgement about or to give a plausible account of something. It does not imply any specific purpose (such as grading individual performance), nor does it imply any particular method of evaluation (such as a written test), and nor does its outcomes automatically suggest that something is of greater value or importance than something else (such as Council of Europe activities in comparison with SALTO activities).

**Assessment** takes place when evaluation has a comparative dimension that involves setting individuals, activities or institutions into a ranking order of performance or achievement. The ranking may be set in relation to criteria that are specific to the context, process or outcomes that are being assessed (such as: who swam the river fastest, or which EVS agency has the highest success rate in attracting socially disadvantaged young people into the programme). Alternatively, relative performance may be assessed against an external standard (such as in the case of the PISA attainment tests for 15-year-olds in different countries).

**Formative evaluation or assessment** refers to a dynamic process over time, which tries to capture the developmental dimensions of learning, performance and achievement. It records the pathways and the changes between two points in time, with the primary accent on what lies between those points and how the journey has unfolded.

**Summative evaluation or assessment** refers to assembling a picture of the outcomes of an activity in relation to the aims and purposes with which it began and/or in relation to a set of performance criteria that apply to all comparable activities. This kind of evaluation or assessment places the primary accent on comparing the starting and ending points of a process, but is less concerned with what happened along the way.

**Standards and quality standards** are terms that can be used in several different ways. To say that an organisation uses standard methods of youth work might simply mean that it uses what the commentator judges to be the usual methods, that is, those used most commonly. The comment might well also convey the judgement that the methods in question are those generally recognised in the youth sector to be appropriate. This carries the suggestion that standard methods reflect professional norms, that is, they are seen to be good and valuable methods. At this point the term standards takes on a distinctive flavour, because it introduces the idea that some youth work methods are better than others (depending, of course, to some extent on the purpose and the participants). This raises the question of the bases for such quality judgements, which take the form of criteria, that is, attributes that should be present (or not present in some instances) if a particular youth work activity and its methods are to be seen as of good quality. The criteria that are applied are not necessarily the same for all cases, although some criteria may apply in all cases.

**Criterion referencing** means to assess the type and level of service, experience or outcomes of youth work/education on the basis of a set of criteria external to the event, activity or achievement in question.

**Normative referencing** means to assess the type and level of service, experience or outcomes of youth work/education on the basis of the performance of all participants relative to each other.

**Learning outcomes** are the results of a learning process, which may be expressed in a variety of ways. In fact, the outcomes that are recorded and measured at any one point in time are interim moments in a learning process, that is, a snapshot frame in a film (which could also run backwards).

**Learning achievement or attainment** is somewhat more narrowly defined than when using the term 'outcome'. These terms refer to the set of knowledge, skills and/or competences that an individual has acquired and is able to demonstrate at the end of a given learning process.

**Certification** refers to a standardised process of formally validating knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences acquired by an individual or represented through a learning/service provider.

**Certificates or diplomas** are the 'piece of paper' which record the outcome of the certification process. It most frequently has the status of an official document, but this is not an absolute prerequisite.

**Credential** can simply be a synonym for a certificate or diploma, but it can also carry a wider meaning. The word credential is associated with the term credibility, which means to be believable, or something in which one can have confidence.

**Qualification** can also simply be a synonym for a certificate or diploma. In the world of formal education and training in Europe it is usually an official record or document testifying to the fact that a person has successfully completed a given course or reached a given standard of achievement for a specified field, skill or competence.

**Accreditation:** formally or socially recognised authorities or instances accredit courses, activities and their outcomes. This means they testify that organisations and individuals meet standards to which all have agreed to conform. They vouch for the credibility of the certificates and diplomas that are issued, and hence for the reliability and validity of the monitoring, evaluation and assessment of the individuals and the organisations whose judgements are given the stamp of approval.

**Accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL)** refers to the application of some kind of formal recognition to the knowledge, skills or competences that individuals have acquired in non-formal and informal ways during the course of their lives.

**Validation of non-formal/informal learning:** APEL is one way of validating non-formal and informal learning, that is, evaluating (possibly assessing) and recognising learning progress and outcomes. In the world of research methodology, the adjective 'valid' means that there is an accurate link between a theoretical concept (an idea) and its empirical indicator (a measurable observation). More simply, this means we assume, in good faith and with reasonable confidence, that something we can observe (and perhaps measure) in real life does genuinely reflect an idea in our heads.

**Valuing learning:** to value learning may simply mean that one thinks that learning as such is a good thing. More precisely, it refers to the process of encouraging participation in learning of all kinds and making its outcomes visible, so that (more) people and society as a whole become more aware that learning is an intrinsically worthwhile activity and thus to enhance the rewards that learning brings.

**Social recognition** points to the status and esteem ('feel good factor') that individuals, organisations or sectors receive as a consequence of displaying certain characteristics, reaching certain achievements or engaging in certain activities – such as learning. It might also extend to material rewards, such as higher incomes for those with higher level qualifications.

**Codified recognition:** for education and training purposes, regardless of sector and level, this term specifies a formal and often official (including legal) recognition of learning participation or outcomes, such as a certificate or a diploma.

**Learning providers** are organisations or a set of institutionalised arrangements that deliver learning, that is, that manage and monitor the provision of courses of some kind, whether formal or non-formal. Learning providers may also design and/or execute the courses they offer, and they may operate in either the public or the private sector. They may or may not be subject to some form of state or professional regulation to assure quality and standards.

**Learning facilitator** is a new term that aims to establish an inclusive word for all those who shape, guide and accompany the learning process, regardless of the sector in which they work and the kind of learning involved.

**Trainer** is the word traditionally used to refer to those who shape, guide and accompany learning processes in the initial and continuing vocational education and training sectors. They most typically work in vocational schools and colleges, both public and private, in company-run training units or at the workplace itself. They may also staff vocational tracks or subjects in general education institutions, and they could work in 'second chance'-type projects that aim to integrate disadvantaged or unemployed young people or (older) adults into the labour market.

**Teacher** is the word traditionally used to refer to those who shape, guide and accompany learning processes in schools, colleges and – to some extent – higher education. They may teach vocational subjects, but it is not common to use the word 'teacher' for those who work in company-based contexts.

**Tutor** is a term that is sometimes used as a synonym for teacher, but generally it connotes someone whose pastoral role (looking after someone's overall personal well-being) is at least as important as a purely teaching/training role.

**Mentoring** is a structured process for providing personal guidance and support to someone who is younger, less experienced or new to the game – whatever the context may be, but most commonly in education, training and employment contexts. Mentors act as critical but non-judgemental friends, provide a role model and a source of useful information and advice, and can take on a coaching task (helping to improve performance). They may be freely chosen, but may also be allocated using a set of matching criteria. Formal mentoring programmes are likely to specify a given time-period for the mentoring relationship.

**Youth trainers** are people who train others to work with young people, using non-formal methods, focusing on personal and social development and with an emphasis on fostering intercultural competence.

**Youth workers** are people who work with young people in a wide variety of non-formal and informal contexts, typically focusing on personal and social development through one-to-one relationships and in group-based activities. Being learning facilitators may be their main task, but it is at least as likely that youth workers take a social pedagogic or directly social work based approach. In many cases, these roles and functions are combined with each other.

**Formal learning** is purposive learning that takes place in a distinct and institutionalised environment specifically designed for teaching/training and learning, which is staffed by learning facilitators who are specifically qualified for the sector, level and subject concerned and which usually serves a specified category of learners (defined by age, level and specialism). Learning aims are almost always externally set, learning progress is usually monitored and assessed, and learning outcomes are usually recognised by certificates or diplomas. Much formal learning provision is compulsory (school education).

**Non-formal learning** is purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways.

**Informal learning:** from the learner's standpoint at least, this is non-purposive learning which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community. It does have outcomes, but these are seldom recorded, virtually never certified and are typically neither immediately visible for the learner nor do they count in themselves for education, training or employment purposes. APEL systems are one way in which the outcomes of such learning can be made more visible and hence open to greater recognition.

**Open and distance learning (ODL)** combines two distinct categories of learning provision and participation which frequently occur together. Open learning is purposive learning that takes place where, when and how the learner chooses. It may also be self-directed learning, that is, the learner also voluntarily chooses what and why to learn. Open learning may be formal or non-formal in character. Distance learning covers the spectrum from correspondence learning ('by post') to eLearning (IT supported learning, whether as content, pedagogy or medium). It may or may not be designed as open learning, and can include highly formalised and closely assessed types of learning processes and outcomes.

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