

1. Training in Context



1.1 Training , training aims and non-formal education

Open your arms to change, but don't let go of your values.

Dalai Lama

1.1.1 What is training?

Training is present in nearly every field of our societies today, in business and politics, in our public roles and aspects of our private lives. This publication addresses training in the specific contexts of international or intercultural youth work and co-operation, and informal, or non-formal, education and learning.

No general definition for training in youth work exists. Rather, training can refer to a variety of processes and actions depending on the organisational and cultural context in which it takes place and on the aims and values of its organisers. Some general elements are however of relevance to any training in the field of intercultural and international youth work.

As a starting point, The Oxford Dictionary defines training as “bringing to desired standard of performance or behaviour by instruction and practice”. What the desired standard is, and how it is achieved can clearly vary. Youth workers, when asked to define, or draw a symbol of training during a training course, have come up with the following definitions:

“Training is about giving tools to others to enable them to achieve certain goals. It is about providing the skills and the ability to act.”

“Training is about involving and empowering people.”

Training is like “a tree that grows. It is a metaphor for people who develop themselves. The tree becomes a sun, which is the symbol of life.”

Training is like “two open hands. The first experience of meeting is shaking hands. It is a symbol of giving, receiving and supporting. You must keep your hands open to receive.”

“Training is like “two elements: experience and theory. Theory comes from experience. The further you go, the more you get. There are different experiences and exchange of experience.”

“Training is a never ending story. Once you have an answer, at least three times more questions appear.”

(Training for Trainers Final Report 2000, p.11)

Looking at these definitions, training encompasses involvement and exchange, and developing a relationship between experience and theory. It requires an openness to giving and receiving support, and aims to cultivate empowerment and growth. It means raising questions, but also bringing participants to a desired standard of practice.

1.1.2 Training aims of European youth worker training

Training multipliers is a long-drawn-out battle for which few resources are available, but the task is a noble one. The task is crystal clear. Sad to say, there are few trainers who dare quite explicitly to give priority to this task: problems of globalisation, the rise in racism and regionalism, the concept of intercultural identity.. (Laconte and Gillert in Coyote # 2, May 2000, p. 29)

Within the European youth programmes, training serves to support the youth programmes of the European institutions and the work carried out by youth organisations, groups and services at different levels. Specifically, “the training courses organised within the European youth programmes aim to enable those actively involved in youth questions to play a more active, efficient and informed role in international and intercultural youth work.” (*Council of Europe, 2000, p.2*). Training thus aims to increase knowledge, skills and competencies, raise awareness and change attitudes or behaviour, in order to increase the effectiveness and quality of the work of youth workers and youth leaders at international level, or at local or national level with an intercultural or European dimension.



Youth organisations and youth projects are places for political, social and cultural initiative and involvement. They are also places for non-formal education and learning. When asked by the European Youth Forum to specify what young people learned through participation in organised youth work, practitioners in the youth field focused on personal and social development. In personal terms they mentioned such effects as increased self-esteem, responsibility, creativity, tolerance and critical thinking, and in terms of social development the cultivation of active citizenship and participation, group and leadership skills, communication strategies and knowledge of social issues (1999, pp.24-25). If training aims to better equip youth workers and youth leaders for their work, then these are the factors that it needs to address. It needs to provide a space for personal and social development, and to empower for political, social and cultural participation.

Training in European youth work is value-based. There is no pretence at a neutral educational process; training should support the work of young people aiming at European societies based on fundamental values. According to the European Commission, these values include solidarity among young people throughout Europe and beyond, intercultural learning, mobility and a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. This means combating the marginalisation of young people in society, fighting for the respect of human rights and against racism, xenophobia and discrimination. It involves engaging with cultural diversity, our common heritage and shared fundamental values, promoting equality and introducing a European dimension to local youth work. (2001, pp. 3-4) These basic values are largely shared by the European institutions and by many youth organisations. (For more reflections on training and values, see 2.2.1-3).

Within this framework, training can take various forms. Some youth organisations, services or centres have set up training strategies that continuously train within the spirit and aims of their organisation, which ensures a certain level of competence in the continuous turnover between the 'generations' of youth workers and leaders. Other organisations offer training on a more sporadic basis, based on upcoming or perceived needs and interests. Depending on the objectives of particular activities, training might prioritise results or processes, focus on developing specific skills, facilitate personal development, or plan a specific action being undertaken by the organisation. Training can also be issue-based. For instance, the Council of Europe organised a variety of training courses to empower minority youth leaders within the framework of its Campaign against Racism, Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and Intolerance in 1995 and is conducting a series of training events on issues of human rights education throughout 2001–2003. (See resources developed during the RAXI Campaign in the list of references)

Ideally, the training activities offered by the different actors in the European youth field and at the varying levels of activity should be complementary and subsidiary to each other. This can be visualised by the training pyramid below, which – without attempting to give a complete overview of all training offers in European youth work – focuses on the links between the training offered by the European institutions and youth organisations.

The upper level should offer only what cannot be offered at lower levels, and each training offer should be specific; in terms of training aims and contents, and with regard to its target group and geographical, organisational and cultural context.



1. These courses are being implemented by the SALTO-YOUTH training centres of the National Agencies (Bonn, German office "YOUTH for Europe"; Brussels, JINT; London, YEC; Paris, INJEP), which started operating in September 2000. SALTO is an acronym for "Support for Advanced Learning & Training Opportunities".



Suggestions for reflection

1. What is your definition of training?
2. What is the place of training in your organisation?
3. Why does your organisation organise training?
4. For whom do you organise training?
5. What is the content of the training courses?
6. Where and when do you organise training courses? Which resources do you have available?

(Adapted from: WAGGS, 1997, p.22)

1.1.3 Putting training on the agenda

Training for youth leaders, youth workers and multipliers at European level has only emerged as a priority in European youth work during the last decade. Practitioners active at local level have increasingly become involved in organising international youth activities, which has led to an enlarged demand for training in skills and competencies needed for youth work in international and intercultural contexts. This development has been encouraged by the growth of the European youth programmes.

At the same time, personal development has gained a new importance in the context of increasingly competitive European labour markets, where every personal and professional experience may count for something. Young people are increasingly aware that limiting themselves to the formal education sector limits their preparation for life in today's society.

Informal learning contexts beyond the school are crucial in cultivating the competencies demanded by our increasingly complex environments. The often rapid pace of technological and social change has led to a contemporary emphasis on *life-long learning*. For example, the Youth programme of the European Commission situates itself within this context. This programme aims to contribute to

“.. a ‘Europe of knowledge’ and to create a European sphere for co-operation on the development of youth policy, based on informal education. It valorises life-long learning and the development of skills and competencies in favour of active citizenship.» (2001, p.3).

An interesting result of this concentration on life-long learning and informal education is the re-valorisation of volunteering. Working as a volunteer in a youth organisation or on a project can constitute an important experience, rightly regarded as complementary to school education and professional work. Youth organisations are recognising their role in the continual learning process of their members, through the options they provide and the priorities they lobby for. In recent years the European institutions have joined forces in their efforts to provide more resources for international youth work, and to attain a stronger recognition of the value of non-formal education provided by the youth sector.

1.1.4 Informal and non-formal education

Putting the educational value of youth work on the political agenda has an influence on the aims and structure of training. In the current political debate, the term *informal* is increasingly replaced by *non-formal* when referring to the educational value of youth work. The terms are however not clearly defined, and often need to be understood in the context of usage. Formal



education is consistently used to refer to the education system that runs from primary to tertiary institutions, the main actors being schools and the range of institutes of higher education. Non-formal and informal education, on a basic level, define themselves as something other than the formal sector, which all young people participate in to varying levels.

Non-formal education has emerged as a term since the 1970s with the aim of achieving a better recognition of education and learning taking place outside of schools, universities and evaluative systems. The adoption of the term stressed that new educational contexts needed to be recognised, and valued for their different contributions. This is the sense in which the term is used by the European Youth Forum, which defines non-formal education as organised and semi-organised educational activities operating outside the structure and routines of the formal education system. (? Introduction)

Informal education has been defined in many ways, generally as education that happens outside the formal education system. Clearly this can take many forms, and you may see the term applied to describe a variety of activities. Some see it as learning that goes on in daily life; the multiple ways we learn to function and interact in our societies. In this sense of the term informal education describes socialisation, as we can see in the European Youth Forum's definition of it as the non-organised and incidental learning that goes on in daily life (ibid). This is by no means the only common usage of the term, and other definitions employ it to denote more active and engaged forms of learning. Some use it in relation to the 'learning projects' that we take up ourselves in our free time, be it hobbies or new skills. In this context, it is often applied to the learning that comes as a result of being involved in youth and community work. Despite these divergent usages, informal education can be seen as a process where learning takes place (see reference for discussions of learning), and as activities which help people to learn (See Smith, Mark K. 2000). To avoid confusion, we will use non-formal education to describe the world of youth training, while acknowledging that there are still debates to be had on the terminology.

Non-formal education is usually defined against formal education, and this is an important connotation to consider. Many practitioners underline the potential of youth organisations or other institutions to provide alternative means of education, beyond the range and capabilities of schools. However those who emphasise the potential value of a complementary approach between educational sectors (see also 4.2.2) contest this. A complementary approach can involve non-formal education developing and augmenting subjects dealt with in schools, or emphasising a participative approach to learning. It can also involve replicating some of the features of the formal sector in the non-formal, with the aim of accrediting training or similar work. The current approach of the European institutions and the European Youth Forum is to set up quality standards and means of certification for non-formal education at European level, in particular for training. Yet recognising the value of non-formal education is only one side of the debate, as some people involved in youth work fear that youth work and training might lose some of its inherent characteristics in this process. Openness to all young people, voluntary involvement without the fear of assessment of personal achievements, flexibility in structure and planning, learning based upon participants' needs and interests, and the possibility of working at different speeds and in different ways may be diluted by the demands of structures and curricula.



Training: a look at some terms

You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him to learn

Galileo Galilei

Looking at these debates on terminology reminds us that the language used in international youth work is not self-evident or stable. It is not just that the contents and processes they are used to describe may actually differ, but that when used in different languages and cultural contexts they often carry different connotations, indicative of divergent educational styles and values. Bearing this in mind, it might be of interest to take a closer look at the terms we use in training, and repeatedly in this T-Kit.

Education and learning: Usually, when referring to education, we refer to planned educational activities; that is activities which provide a framework and process for learning to take place. Learning stresses the participants, their needs and interests – it refers to the cognitive process internal to the person undergoing the learning. Learning can occur incidentally and within planned educational activities. People learn in different ways. This recognition, and the ability to plan for it, is of particular importance for training in multicultural settings. (see 4.2.1 -3 for a detailed discussion of learning)

Training, animation, and facilitation: There is certainly room for confusion in relation to these terms. Take the word 'training' itself. In French, for instance, 'former' literally means "to mould or fashion by discipline or education", but can also refer to a process of 'character-forming'. In English 'training' carries a more skills and competencies oriented connotation, as for example with football training, or vocational training. Other terms of interest here might be 'animation' and 'facilitation', which we may hear used almost interchangeably in a training context. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'to facilitate' as "make easy or less difficult; make action or result more easily achieved", while 'to animate' literally means "to breathe life into something". While dictionary definitions do not prescribe the usage of words, it is easy to imagine situations where a range of terms may be used to describe an educational process, or where a range of processes may be covered by a single term. For a multicultural training team, discussing what these terms mean for individual trainers can be a useful and illuminating exercise. For example, how do you use these words? As a trainer, do you animate or facilitate a working group? What do you think is at stake in these debates about terminology? (definitions taken from Smith, Mark K. 2000)

1.1.5 Summing up: some key elements of youth work training with an international or intercultural dimension

To conclude this section, we can suggest some central characteristics for training carried out in our context. It is based on;

- The belief that young people should be empowered to participate fully in their communities and societies in a spirit of respect for the dignity and equality of all. This includes a commitment to the multicultural societies that exist in Europe today.
- Voluntary participation.
- A learner-centred ethos – it takes into consideration the participants' needs and interests.
- Participants' experience and its relation to their situation.
- An action-oriented process, with a specific focus on multipliers.
- The learning of skills, competencies and knowledge and should lead to changes of awareness, attitudes or behaviour.
- Using experience or practice, emotional involvement and intellect (hand, heart, and head).
- A non-vocational ethos. Nevertheless, qualities gained in youth work training can be of value for future personal and professional development. Personal and social development are important elements of the learning process.
- Not usually determining personal achievements by assessment.
- The need to take into account the specific values and perceptions of the responsible organisation, environment and target group.