

# **The Tutor Participant's Handbook**

## **The role of the tutor participant in an EYC Language Course**

**by Sónia Breda**

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### **Summary:**

Thirty years of EYC language courses for youth leaders in Europe have seen the adoption of the tutor participant as a valuable element to the learning process.

While being a participant in the language course, and studying the language, the tutor participant also holds responsibility for the group dynamics and organising free-time activities. Moreover it plays the intermediary between the course team and the participants, offering the unique position to strengthen the bridges between the two.

This handbook for the first time aims to define how to fulfil this role in terms of task description, desired profile and necessary competences. It includes examples of activities that can be run by the tutor participant and attempts to place the role of the tutor participant in the framework of the European Youth Centre.

## Preface

### Why this Handbook?

When selected as a tutor participant, in 2003, I felt that I lacked a guideline, a description to help me visualise my role on the Language Course. I felt unclear as to what extent I was a tutor and to what extent I was a participant.

This handbook aims to compile both the information available on the tutor participant's role as well as my own experience as a tutor participant in order to identify the activities the tutor participant might develop and the obstacles he/she might face.

Admittedly, there will be bias within this analysis, firstly because it reflects my personal opinion, secondly because my experience as a tutor participant was restricted to a single language course, a single course team, a particular target-language and a given learning frame. Nevertheless, my aim is to underline the global elements that I believe are useful for the tutor participant in any course team on any language course.

This handbook arrives at the time of reintroduction of the Language Courses on the EYC agenda. This reintroduction presents us with a fresh wave of motivation to contribute to the development of quality criteria on the EYC Language Courses. Presently many of its features are being re-evaluated and re-designed, including the role of tutor participant.

Please note that I have opted to name the position as tutor-participant and not participant-tutor. This is predominantly due to the larger role of actively facilitating the group in comparison to passive participation.

Although this handbook is directed primarily to the tutor participant, I advise its reading to the Course Director and the Course Team in general, in the hope that it will encourage the team to find a common agreement on the role of their own tutor participant.

In summary, this handbook aims to facilitate the job of the tutor participant, clarify the tutor participant role to the whole team and provide additional criteria for the re-designing of the role.

I wish you an enjoyable reading,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Breda.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

[Sónia Breda]

**Dear Tutor Participant,**

**Welcome to this EYC Language Course!**

## **Brief Introduction to EYC Language Courses**

To gain an overview of our EYC Language Course, let us first have a quick look at its history.

Based on the belief that language teaching is quintessential for reinforcing cultural, social, economic and political cooperation between nations and between individuals, the Language Courses of the Directorate of Youth of the Council of Europe (EYC Language Courses) started in 1966 and since then have been multiplied and developed.

The EYC Language Courses already established are:

- English (commenced in 1966)
- French (1967)
- German (1968)
- Italian (1981)
- Spanish (1986)
- Portuguese (1990) and
- Russian (1993).

The EYC aspires to language diversity in its annual calendar. Nevertheless, the annual calendar of the EYC Language Courses partially depends on the financial support of each national government associated to each target language. Usually - and ideally – courses on all six languages are held annually.

The EYC Language Courses are targeted at the European youth workers' field and aim to enhance international co-operation and intercultural understanding, while promoting the principles of democracy, active citizenship and non-formal education.

The EYC Language Courses take place in a participatory environment that fosters autonomous learning. The development of the language is encouraged by discovering the social, political, economic and cultural environment of the country, region and neighbourhood in which the course is held.

The features of the EYC Language Courses vary in regards to the hosting country and the Course organising team but some traits remain common, such as:

**The structure**, composed of

- The **EYC Tutor** (who is responsible for coordinating all the EYC Language Courses and who is a permanent tutor of the European Youth Centre of Strasbourg; a EYC representative - usually the EYC Tutor itself - pays a visit to every course during three or four days and is also responsible for running a session on the Youth Structures of the Council of Europe)
- A **Course Director** (one of the teachers who coordinates the team and the programme of the Course and produces the Course's evaluation report)
- The **Teachers** (who are responsible for the overall teaching of the target-language; there is one teacher per level of language proficiency; usually there are three levels, namely the Beginners Level, the Intermediate Level and the Advanced Level; levels and number of teachers can be restricted to two depending on the number of participants)
- The **Venue Assistant** (a staff member from the hosting organisation who is responsible for the Course's logistics and for organising the programmed social activities; only the French Course of the EYC-Strasbourg has no Venue Assistant, as the EYC Tutor's office is based on the venue)
- The **Tutor Participant** (who is in charge of making the bridge between the Team and the Participants and who is usually a previous participant of the given EYC Language Course)
- The **Participants** (twenty to thirty youth workers coming from different European countries and from varied cultural and language backgrounds)

**The time-span**

- Three to four weeks long

**The methodology**

- Non-formal
- "Learning to Learn" oriented
- Promotes immersion into the host culture

- Depicts international youth work reality
- Intercultural Learning oriented
- Interactive
- Diverse

## Profile of the tutor participant

### The tutor participant

- shares the values of the Council of Europe
- is actively involved in the youth work field
- is a previous participant in an EYC-LC
- speaks the target language of the Course at an advanced level
- is capable of handling logistical demands
- has previous experience in Non-formal Education
- is dynamic
- has the Spirit of Initiative
- has the Taste for Autonomy

Reports of the many previous EYC Language Courses exist that can offer information about the role. Enquiring about them would help in your preparation.

Below you will find the role description as it is formulated on the Council of Europe's publication *Learning a Language Differently- 30 years of EYC experience*, edited in 1998, pages 41-42.

“A participant-tutor is a young person taking part in an EYC language course who is considered as a learner of the course target language at a relatively advanced level of proficiency. He/she is not a student in the educational sense of the term but is considered as a motivated learner ready to work in a group and to take initiatives. He/she plays an active role in the elaboration of course content and is responsible for his/her learning process. He/she is not a passive consumer but someone who takes responsibility for him/herself.”

“A special feature of EYC language courses is the presence of a participant-tutor, who, by virtue of their good interpersonal skills, has been invited to take up this role on the following year’s course. This will be a person who has both a positive attitude and plenty of energy! They are given specific tasks, form part of the educational team and may be considered as the group’s “internal antenna”, acting as a barometer to the mood of participants.

Participant-tutors must tailor their role to the requirements of the course they are attending.”

“The three main “official tasks are:

1. promoting group dynamics and group cohesion among participants
2. helping the educational team to organise the social life of the course
3. providing information about the role of youth organisations and existing European umbrella organisations (Youth Forum)

Stemming from these formal tasks, the role of the participant-tutor consists of:

- getting to know all the participants on the course, ensuring that nobody feels excluded
- inspiring the natural leaders of the group, taking as few initiatives on behalf of the group as possible
- being a resource person rather than a “dictator”, i.e. allowing participants to organise activities/events pertinent to themselves while being available for assistance when required, rather than imposing activities on students
- being an intermediary between the teaching team and students
- spending as much time as possible with participants
- helping all participants to find their own role within the group, so that the group functions well together and to its best advantage.”

[CEJ/Langue (95) 6 - Report of the Consultative Meeting on EYC Language Courses, 1995]

## Activities

There are different possible spheres in which you can have a relevant role. Negotiate with the Course Team which best suits you both.

### Sphere A: Logistics Resource Person/ Organiser

- Check with the Course Director if there is a budget for the group's self-organised activities
- Collect information on local offers for free-time activities, such as pubs, concerts, theatre shows, museums, libraries, bowling centres, jogging tracks, biking tracks, skating areas, sightseeing places, historical places, best neighbouring villages/towns, etc... and share it with participants
- Organise group outings
- Organise/rent/buy telephone cards, public transport tickets, cinema tickets, concert tickets, videos, bikes, etc... for free-time activities
- Provide necessary material and areas in the venue for participants' free-time activities
- Provide information where to buy drinks and snacks for participants' self-organised parties
- Provide the kitchen with the list of vegetarian participants and ensure they get their meal
- Etc....

### Sphere B: Trainer/Animator

- Help to design the Welcome evening (Icebreaking activities such as Name Games, Portrait Drawing, Treasure Hunt on the Venue, etc...)
- Help to design International Youth Work topic-related workshops (such as Intercultural Learning, Human Rights Education, Education for Active Citizenship, Project Management, etc...)
- Organise Relaxation Sessions, such as Massage Session, Sauna Session
- Propose activities for the free-weekend and/or free-day of the programme
- Etc....



### **Sphere C: Running the Evaluation**

- The daily evaluation (e.g. Reflection Groups) or on-going evaluation (e.g. The Islands' Wall Map)
- The mid-term evaluation (e.g. Questionnaires and Mid-Term General Assembly)
- The final evaluation (e.g. Final General Assembly, Final Questionnaire, Final Evaluation Session, etc)
- The post-course evaluation (i.e. the Tutor Participant Course Report for the EYC Tutor)
- Etc....

### **Sphere D: Participant in the Language programme activities**

- Participate according to your personal interests and the team's interests

### **Sphere E: "Link" Resource Person**

- Create the link between the participants and the Course Director, the Course Team, the Venue's Assistant, the Administrative Staff, the Kitchen Staff, the Cleaning Staff, etc...

## **To Avoid**

You should refrain from

- Organising activities individually without trying to involve at least a small group of participants
- Advancing your own money for the group activities
- Taking decisions without reporting it to the Course Director.

## Foreseen Obstacles

### Defining your role

Inspiring the natural leaders to take initiative without actually taking the initiative yourself might be tricky. The group might negatively perceive it and openly question your role: Why don't you propose any activity in particular? Why don't you run a Workshop? Why don't you organise the party?

**Suggestion:** Make sure the Course Director accurately defines your role in front of the group, at the very beginning of the course.

### 24 Hour Job!

Being approachable whenever needed during four weeks, from morning till evening, might be a tough job.

**Suggestion:** Actively take time for yourself.

### Group Dynamics

Maintaining healthy group dynamics throughout the four residential weeks might be hard; and feeling responsible for it might be even harder.

Be aware of the fact that the dynamics of a four-week long course are distinct from those of a one-week long course.

As in the majority of international residential courses, participants in the first week will probably feel fully motivated and energetic and demonstrate the best of their personality traits; they will almost certainly relate equally with everyone in the group and will most likely feel eager to run many activities. However as time goes by the group energy will possibly drain out, people may split into minor groups and can even be highly critical with each other.

**Suggestion:** Interact with the groups and be aware of any possible tensions between individuals. Strive to integrate the participants' experiences in the learning process, constantly emphasising the double objective of their participation in the course:

- learning the language, but also
- embracing the challenge of an intercultural environment.

## The Future

In terms of the future of the tutor participant, I believe that more focus should be placed towards the role of the tutor and away from the role of the participant.

Despite this transitional phase, the relevancy of this handbook is by no means diminished, as most of the recommendations and comments remain pertinent to a tutor, as well as to the other members of the team.

### About the Author

Sónia Breda is a thirty-one year old experienced free-lance trainer living in Lisbon, Portugal. She has given training extensively in the areas of Communication Skills, Group Dynamics, Team Building, Conflict Management, Intercultural Learning, International Youth Work, International Youth Exchanges, Project Management and Education for Active Citizenship. Her academic background is in Clinical Psychology. Sónia participated in the two-year long pilot training ATTE-Advanced Training for Trainers in Europe, and within its frame chose to be a tutor participant in the EYC French Language Course, in August 2003. This Handbook is a product of Sónia's ATTE practice and attempts to combine two of her personal passionate interests: language learning and training.

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