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Integration of Non-Formal Learning Approaches into the Formal Education by Peer Learning of Teachers and Youth Workers

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Abstract: This article aims to summarise long-term set of projects with common "Brand" InFormal. The described projects took place from 2015 to 2019 and were funded by Erasmus+: Youth both Key Action 1 and 2. This article is a summary rather than a description of the individual projects. The main focus of the projects was the integration of non-formal learning into the formal education, and the projects noted in the paper were sets of training courses where participants were educators and practitioners from both the formal (teachers, etc.) and the non-formal sphere (free time educators of extracurricular activities, youth workers etc.). This created a unique sharing environment and clash of ideas where participants themselves were often creators of the content (after receiving methodological background). In this article, we described what we understand as formal and non-formal learning and education and how it was used during the mentioned projects. Later in the results section comments on individual projects are shared. The discussion of results leads to the conclusion that the way of integrating formal and non-formal as outlined projects did is an excellent way to create mutual understanding for both teachers and the youth workers. It is also the way to gain most from both worlds and a way of giving the competence to educators to use the appropriate approach when necessary.

Keywords: *education; non-formal; formal; youth; adult.*

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1. Introduction

In the past two decades, there is a continually growing amount of projects aimed at promoting Non-formal education (Klockner, 2009) (NFE) and implemented by various organisations in various fields. Most of the progress is made in extracurricular and free time education (Danis et al., 2019; Kulich, 2019; Lipka, 2019) but not so much in Formal education (European_Commission, 2001). There are other projects of the European Commission that focus mostly on events using Non-Formal learning (NFL) approaches, promoting NFL, training people to use it, or both (Danis et al., 2019; Erich, 2018; Siurala, 2000). Terms such as Formal learning and Education and Non-formal learning and education will be explained in more detail in the methodology section. NFL can be used at various stages of education, but it is mostly implemented in NFE area (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003; Siurala, 2000). The specific issue is to integrate the NFL to Formal Education (FE). One particular long-term effort to do so was a set of projects under the flag name of InFormal. Although this brand name might sound a bit confusing, given its resemblance to the word informal, it is composed of two parts In and Formal. "In" stands for both "into" and "integration". This wordplay underlines the integration of non-formal approaches to the formal environment.

To further clarify the aforementioned terms in the frame of the mentioned literature, but also related to the reality of the InFormal project, the term Formal Education regards the school systems in most of the countries. In this context, Formal Education is planned and structured. It has clear aim and objectives, and in the end, there is a formal approval of gained education level; a diploma. Formal Education is usually not voluntary (at least on lower levels).

The programme of the Formal Education is typically set and defined by the higher authority, and as such, students have a limited influence on the process of teaching; on the contrary in the pure non-formal setting, the programme is based on the needs of participants, and is rather flexible and can be adjusted to the given feedback (Chisholm, 2000).

Formal learning approach mostly uses formal learning methods such as frontal presentations. The role of the educator is that of an expert who gives or imparts knowledge to the participants. This is mainly an approach used in traditional schools (Chisholm, 2000).

Non-Formal Education covers various courses, training, extracurricular activities, and other after-school activities and is voluntary. It

does not entail any degrees, although some certificate is usually issued (Erich, 2018).

The Non-Formal Learning approach uses non-formal methods. It is participative and mostly based on experiential learning and reflection. It is also structured and has aim and learning objectives (Chisholm, 2000). The learner experiences a particular situation and has the opportunity to reflect on what happened, what he or she learned, and how to use that in the future (Kolb, 2015). The role of an educator is usually more in facilitation and guiding of a group primarily extracting the knowledge from the group allowing people to connect their knowledge, skills, and attitude to new competencies, rarely assuming the role of an (Valek, 2019).

The idea to construct a training which would be suitable for educators from both NFE and FE, bringing them together and learning from each other appeared for the first time in 2011, and since then it took many turns and developed in the three-stage long-term training course (LTTC). From it, more spin-offs of more specialised "InFormals" arose. This article aims to summarise the history and progress of the core LTTC InFormal projects. We believe that it developed to a sustainable, influential, and very efficient training course and this success story might bring inspiration and base for educators who are struggling to achieve similar goals.

2. History and Background

The history of the InFormal goes as back as to 2011 when a project called "Volunteer Messenger" (VM) was organised. The project was funded by former "Youth in Action" programme of European Commission, the predecessor to Erasmus+. VM aimed to train leaders of short-term voluntary projects (usually 1-2 week long international projects) to be able to lead a short workshop about any topic of their interest for their participants. The training was successful and the idea that also full-time educators (in contrast to occasional voluntary leaders) might benefit from similar training emerged. In the period 2011 – 2015 the idea was maturing with the struggle to find funding to organise a first training which would involve both the formal and non-formal universes. In 2015 the first LTTC was finally supported by the Czech National Agency, officially Dům zahraniční spolupráce (DZS) under the project number 2015-1-CZ01-KA105-012748.

The concept of LTTC was composed of three stages out of which two were physical meetings - training courses. The participants attending the training courses were from several European countries. The first training

was a basic course where trainers and facilitators introduced participants to the background of the NFL through practical sessions. Following the introduction, participants were tasked, in small groups, to develop workshops for their peers (which can represent any target group) based on a given topic. After selecting the topic these groups conducted their workshops, which were followed by a general reflection and evaluation. A new input was given after the first round of workshops. With the reflection, feedback and new input in mind, participants were offered the possibility to improve their workshops or to create new ones. The training concluded with a final reflection and evaluation. The second phase of the project was the so-called "homework". The task of participants was to apply what they learned in their daily work life as educators, adapting some of the insights and learning gained during the first phase to their own reality. The third – and the last phase was aimed at a reflection of their "homework" performance, but also on further developing their NFL competencies. This was achieved through a new set of rounds of workshops, where participants worked with the topics they teach.

The InFormal concept changed and developed over time and, as the group of participants changed with each edition, the course was always adapted to the participants´ needs by trainers who were also willing to challenge themselves in trying and testing new approaches and methods. Nevertheless, the original structure of courses and idea stayed the same. The flexibility of the course was openly communicated to participants, so they understand the role of an educator not only as an errorless expert, but also a human being who listens to the those who are taught and tries to meet their learning needs. This openness of trainers underlined the spirt of the NFL. The flexibility of the project also meant that throughout the history of the project, there were no two courses precisely the same even though the concept stayed the same.

3. Methodology

This section will show two important points of view on methodology. At first, we are going to summarise the terms Non-Formal and Formal Education and Learning. We believe that there is a lack of clarity through all strata of education. We would like to point out that the following paragraphs - although rooted in literature - are our point of view on the issue and it is probably not the only one. Nevertheless, we believe it is necessary to have common ground before we progress further. The second part of the

methodology section explains the methodology we used throughout the InFormal projects.

3.1. Formal education or "education in schools"

In this part of the text, we will describe the concept of formal education. Generally, we can say that it is an education in schools. For a more in-depth understanding, it is essential to know more about the context and background of education.

The environment in which we live is made up of different subareas - nature, economy, political system, the society of people. These environments, these worlds are real; we can observe, explore, explain and influence them. One of these sub-worlds is the educational reality (the reality of education). It is any situation objectively occurring in human society in which specific educational processes take place and where concrete educational constructs work. Education represents for us all social activities in which a subject learns, and another matter or technical device mediates this learning, i.e. the teacher. Educational processes take place in various educational environments. These are created by a summary of conditions and situations of diverse nature (Brown, Dunlop, & Scally, 2020; Prucha, Mares, & Walterova, 1995). One of more important elements of education is the preservation and transfer of our cultural heritage (material and especially immaterial creations - knowledge, ideas, values, moral norms) from generation to generation (Prucha et al., 1995). An essential element of culture is education, and as this article suggests, there are many definitions of education. A formal education system has an established structure, regulated functioning and relationships with other systems of society.

The structure of the educational system consists of (Prucha et al., 1995):

1. The school system
2. Supplementary educational institutions - especially for adult (or leisure time) education
3. Cultural and educational institutions (libraries, museums, etc.)
4. In some cases, the influence of mass media with educational programs

Education is formed through an educational process, which we understood as (Prucha et al., 1995):

1. The educational process in terms of classroom teaching (teacher/pupil/curriculum interaction)

2. A more general concept of activities that take place in an educational environment and include guided learning of the subject.

The aims of education at national level follow the national curriculum (Prucha et al., 1995; Walterova, 1994). In many democratic countries, there are fundamental changes to its concept, which we can be termed as curriculum reforms. The main features of mentioned curricular reforms include preparing for life in the 21st century and putting emphasis on shaping the values, attitudes and competences of educated subjects (Prucha et al., 1995; Walterova, 1994). We understand curriculum as an educational program, project, plan; a course of study and its content; or as the content of any experience that students/learners gain in school and school-related activities, including planning and assessment. The curriculum provides a comprehensive solution to the objectives, content, strategies and methods and exists on three levels. These are: Intended planned, implemented in the school environment, and finally, adopted by students/learners. We distinguish between a formal curriculum, an informal curriculum, a hidden curriculum, a zero curriculum, and a metacuriculum (Prucha et al., 1995; Walterova, 1994).

To start with less traditional terms; the term hidden curriculum includes real-life experiences of a student/learner: ethos and school climate, teacher-pupil relationships, school-neighbourhood relationships, the impact of extracurricular educational resources, classroom relationships. The zero curriculum or missing curriculum represents, for example, a situation of censorship of the content of textbooks for political or commercial purposes. In the European context, it is the deliberate omission of West-related content in the socialist era, in the commercial context omission of socially unacceptable topics (e.g. for conservative religious families), examples of sex education (e.g. in Poland), evolutionary theory in biology or sciences, etc. (Kalhous & Obst, 2009). Furthermore, the meta-curriculum means inclusion in the content of information, how to learn the subject, and how to manage to learn.

At the more formal note, the term formal education used to refer to education and teaching aimed at acquiring form and developing ideas without taking sufficient account of the content as the material basis of education. It was based on the ideas of F. J. Herbart (Prucha et al., 1995). "Herbartism" is a pedagogical direction founded by successors of the German philosopher, psychologist and teacher J. F. Herbart (1776 - 1841). Herbart's theory of teaching is strongly formalistic, derived from Asocianist psychology and has had a significant impact on European and American

secondary education since the mid-19th century. (Prucha et al., 1995). Today, the term formal education refers to education that takes place in educational institutions (schools, universities) whose functions, objectives, content and means of assessment are legally established and defined. Formal education reflects the political, economic, social and cultural needs of society and the educational tradition. It takes place in a specified time and specified forms. It includes consecutive educational grades and types that are addressed to the whole population or specific groups of the population (Prucha et al., 1995). The aims, contents, means and organisation of education, its implementation in the education process, prescribed forms of control and evaluation of results are part of the formal curriculum (Brown et al., 2020; Kalhous & Obst, 2009; Malcolm et al., 2003; Prucha et al., 1995). The formal curriculum can be described as a comprehensive project of objectives, content and means and organisation of education, the implementation of the projected curriculum in the educational process (in the classroom) and the way of reviewing and evaluating/assessing the results of the educational process.

Education standards are associated with formal education. They represent specifically defined obligatory requirements that pupils at specific grades or levels of school must achieve. They are formulated as knowledge and skills in relation to the planned content of education and subjects (Prucha et al., 1995). Educational standards can have different aims. Target standards can be divided into general goals (to be included in all student/learner activities regardless of the organisation and structure of teaching) and specific target standards (focused on five areas - communication, personality, nature and technology, society and mathematics). The primary function of the standard should be primarily informative, diagnostic and motivational, resulting in a qualification. Target standards thus become the basis for the development of educational programs (Kalhous & Obst, 2009).

3.2. Non-formal education and learning

A comprehensive understanding of the educational reality and organisation process is not quite simple, and the concept in international comparison differs in some cases, translations and the assumptions and interpretations of pedagogical concepts do not make the situation easier. Understanding in this area at an international level sometimes makes it difficult to have a unified definition. To unify the international understanding of these dimensions of education, the European Commission describes its views on the understanding of educational reality. As an

example, The European Commission (European_Commission, 2001) defines three types of learning:

"Formal learning: learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Non-formal learning: learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Informal learning: learning resulting from daily-life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional, but in most cases, it is non-intentional (or 'incidental'/random)."

The number of theories built around the concept of learning and their diverse perspectives proves its complexity and the variety of angles used to analyse it. Through our lives, we learn in different situations, in different ways and for various reasons, depending on the environment we are in and whether we are alone or in a group. Sometimes learning is intended and conscious, meaning we plan it and focus or study hard for it – such as when we need to pass an exam or apply for a training course – but it can also happen unconsciously, or without being aware of it.

Learning is therefore not exclusive to a particular environment or institution – kindergartens, schools, universities and the simple fact is, learning begins from birth, and we evolve through learning on a daily basis. All these forms of learning – interacting with others, studying, attending training courses, volunteering – fall under what is generically called lifelong learning.

UNESCO introduced the term lifelong learning through the Edgar Faure report in 1972, known as the Faure Report, which, among others, proposed shaping educational systems around this concept (UNESCO, 2006). The present life pattern, in which we are educated during our youth and work until retirement, is changing. The rapid technological change, the continuously changing environment and the increasing amount of information available to us require a process of ongoing learning for us to keep adapting and updating our skills, abilities and dispositions for advancement. Given the importance of education and its role during our youth, those who miss out on primary education suffer exclusion. Lifelong

learning, however, enables everyone to take advantage of any situation that may bring new learning and thus provide opportunities to gain new competencies.

Another differentiation we can find in Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978). The different types of learning that fall under lifelong learning can be distinguished as formal, informal learning and non-formal education (Vygotsky, 1978).

In non-formal education, the learning process takes place on two levels:

1. Visible/tangible: As the participant is an individual and his/her needs are addressed during the educational process. Also, participants are a group and the learning for the group as an entity is ensured. The last one is that the topic undertaken relates to planned competencies a participant should gain.

2. Invisible/intangible: A particular importance is placed on the individual's learning at the emotional, physical and rational level. This approach is not exclusive to non-formal education; however, it is essential to emphasise the fact that when preparing any non-formal education activity, a systemic approach should be kept (Skyttner, 2005).

Often the systemic approach can be named as holistic. Nevertheless, it is reflected in the planning of the non-formal education activities, incorporating a balanced mix of exercises that include participants' emotional state, critical thinking and physical experience. This approach of combining all three states of the mind, body and soul, ensures a right balance and enables participants to be open to the learning process.

Non-formal education activities should include theoretical inputs, concrete exercises, group conclusions and individual experience to address the learning needs of the individuals and the group. Unlike formal educational settings, where the state of mind among individuals is in many cases are competitive, in the non-formal education context, co-operation replaces competition. As such, the learning process of one individual is vital not only for that person but also a group, the care and support of each individual becomes an objective (Klockner, 2009).

Experiential learning is the most well-known learning theory among non-formal education practitioners and is considered to be the foundation of non-formal education. It is based on the theory developed by David A. Kolb and defined as "The process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" and that "Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Healey & Jenkins,

2000; Chiu & Lee, 2019; Kolb, 2015; Sheng et al., 2018). This description is somewhat insufficient and limited in scope because as explained earlier, non-formal education goes beyond the limits of knowledge and touches upon skills and attitudes. To bring it to reality and the paper focus, we were not focusing only on experience, but on gaining competencies as a whole. Nevertheless, the Kolb´s experiential learning theory has its merit in both Non-formal and Formal areas and should be shortly explained further.

3.3. David Kolb's Learning Cycle and process of debriefing

According to Kolb's experiential learning theory, the learning process undergoes four stages. The first stage, the concrete experience, is characterised by an active behaviour (creating a pyramid of playing cards, reading a book, etc.) and is followed by the reflective observation, analysing or reviewing the experience. The abstract conceptualisation, the third stage is, meant to give the conclusions of the activity, pointing out the learning outcomes. The last stage is meant to practice the learning outcomes actively, and this can happen either through planning or another concrete experience (Healey & Jenkins, 2000; Chiu & Lee, 2019; Kolb, 2015; Sheng et al., 2018). With this in mind, it is essential to note that Kolb's cycle can also be regarded as a spiral, as the fourth stage of one activity may be considered the first stage of a new activity (Healey & Jenkins, 2000; Kolb, 2015). This way of looking at learning is empowering because it gives a feeling of continuous learning and if these cycles take place in new settings with new people, it is also enriching, as our learning will be as diverse as the factors that contribute to it.

Underlined literature is a key to use of experiential learning in education. Especially the last mentioned Kolb´s experiential learning cycle. We might argue that we can find these elements also in knowledge management field in theory of learning and knowledge creating organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Takeuchi & Nonaka, 2004) and also in creation of so-called communities of practice, that are based strongly on experiential learning (Lehaney, 2004; Valek, 2015; Valek & Bures, 2018). Especially SECI model of Ikujiro Nonaka is similar in its essence. Where Kolb speaks about Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Experimentation (Kolb, 2015), Nonaka outlines: Socialization, Externalization, Combination, Internalization (Nonaka, 1991). Meaning that we always need to get close to the problem, extract and understand the knowledge which the experience brings, combine it with the knowledge we have and integrate that into our next action. As this approach can be seen under a slightly different angle in works of various authors, we

feel that experiential learning has its validity not only in learning but in gaining specific competencies for the learner.

4. Results

In this section, the main events organised in the framework of the InFormal projects are outlined. We provide a timeline and executive description of projects. The section aims to show the progression, changes and development of Informal projects through the years.

The general flow of InFormal projects was described in the background section. In the following part, separate projects would be underlined with their specifics, international reach and results. The countries and partner organisations selected for projects were composed of the core of those which developed the project (KURO Hradec Kralove – Czech Republic, Academy of Innovation – Russian Federation and TEIS – Hungary). Other partners were offered participation based on their involvement in previous non-formal education projects of the core partners. The composition of the partner base was slightly modified as time progressed to give a chance to new partner organisations to participate. The number of participants was 27 at all trainings, out of which 5 to 7 were staff, including trainers. While the initial edition included 23 partner organisations, the final one included only 8. All InFormal projects described here were funded by Erasmus+: Youth, either Key Action 1 which are mobilities of individuals (KA1) or Key Action 2 which are long-term strategic projects (KA2).

4.1. The first InFormal

LTTC: InFormal – integration of non-formal education approach to the formal education system for youth empowerment at the local level with number 2015-1-CZ01-KA105-012748 was the first in the series of InFormal projects.

Participants came from 23 countries: Belarus, Portugal, France, Russian Federation, Italy, Armenia, Poland, Greece, Portugal, Italy, Moldova, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Azerbaijan, Northern Macedonia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Turkey, Spain, Austria, Bulgaria and Latvia) and approximately half were youth workers and half teachers from formal sphere. In total, there were 27 participants on the 1st phase and 5 members of staff including trainers and 27 participants on the 3rd phase and 7 members of staff including trainers. The idea was to keep the same participants through all three phases, but due to various reasons, from

personal to occupational, this was not 100% possible and there were 5 changes in participants from the phase 1 to the phase 3 which makes change rate of 18,5%. The idea was to create a variable and culturally diverse group, that was the reason to involve so many countries. However, it has proven to be logistically unsustainable for a small team of hosting organisations, and the number of partner organisations was reduced to a more manageable level in following projects.

Three trainers with more than 10 years of experience in the field of experiential learning were responsible for running all the three phases of the project. They were joined by an external expert during the third phase 3.

1st Phase: InFormal Basic which took place 8th - 16th of September 2015 in Rostov the Great, Russian Federation

The very first InFormal was structured in two main sections tackling first theory and then practice. During the first section, participants received theoretical input (delivered through non-formal methods) while the second section consisted of so-called „labs", during which participants experimented with own session/workshop creation, used other participants in the role of their students, or other youth target group, and got feedback from the group and the trainers. During this training, the small groups of participants were designated by trainers, simulating real-life experience when a person often does not have control over the selection of his/her team members. The practice section had two parts, an initial lab to get a first hang of using NFL and a second opportunity meant for participants to either upgrade the first lab or choose an entirely new topic for it. Most of the participants chose to upgrade their initial labs, they learned from their mistakes and they corrected key lab elements. Throughout the training, participants used a tool for self-assessment, called "Learning Diary", for recording their progress as educators. Trainers provided them with the learning diary template. To reflect more efficiently, participants worked in couples with so-called "Learning Partner(s)". Learning partners had an hour to meet and reflect together at the end of each working day. Trainers also tested the use of a learning badge system, similar to the badges gained for specific competencies within the Scouts movement. The badge system was based on stickers they could stick in their learning diaries following self-assessment and conclusion that they earned the badges. Badges were created with the help of website badgecraft.eu.

The first phase had eight working days, and the daily schedule included training session from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. followed by the reflection in "learning partners" for another hour. One free afternoon was foreseen in

the middle of the programme. Most participants worked on their sessions and learning related issues also in the evenings and some cases during night hours.

2nd Phase: The homework phase was between September - December 2015 in the home environment of participants. They could test what they learned by direct application on their subjects (students, pupils, other youth groups, etc.) or topics (e.g. mathematics, etc.). An e-learning programme was put in place by the trainers in order to provide the support and consultation required by the tasks foreseen for this phase. Nevertheless, the e-learning system did not function as foreseen due to several technical issues, however, it provided a sound basis for the participants' homework, and it was evaluated later on during the third phase of the project.

Participants' homework consisted of going back home and including a non-formal approach in their regular teaching or training activities. During this phase, they had the support of trainers both through e-learning as well as through direct coaching. During this first InFormal, the e-learning resembled an online content library. Nevertheless, it provided a kind of support during this independent phase and proven to be a potent support tool.

3rd Phase: InFormal Quality Assessment took place on 6th - 12th of December 2015 in Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic

During the 3rd part of the first InFormal participants evaluated their attempts to include non-formal elements into their own practice. They also received new tools related to topics such as active listening, mentoring and facilitation. This time they proposed topics they teach and would like to work on and the lab groups were formed voluntarily around the topics. Two rounds of labs were made available in order to test and then improve their workshops. Compared to the first phase, this training was only seven working days.

4.2. The second InFormal

LTTC: In Formal - Integration of non-formal education approach to the formal education system for youth empowerment at the local level Long-term training course with number 2016-1-CZ01-KA105-023505 was the second of InFormal projects. Participants were from the following 13 countries: Czech Republic, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Germany, Armenia, Poland, Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Portugal, Greece, Northern Macedonia

and France. Both the first and the third phases had 27 participants and 8 members of staff, including trainers. Here the dropout and change rate was much higher, 55%, as 15 of the initial participants did not finalise the project and were replaced after the first phase.

As in the first edition, three trainers with more than 10 years of experience in the field of experiential learning were responsible for running all the three phases of the project.

1st Phase: InFormal Basic which took place 24th of July - 1st of August 2016 in Rostov the Great, Russian Federation

In its essence, the second edition of InFormal LTCC was very similar to the first one. The main difference was a more manageable amount of partner organisations and a slightly changed programme. Instead of having theoretical parts and labs first, it was decided to distribute topics already the second day of the training and having labs on day 3. This was more consistent with the experiential learning cycle and offered participants the possibility of having a concrete experience (Klockner, 2009; Kolb, 2015; Sheng et al., 2018) to reflect on during the next steps of the training. After this experience participants had a better understanding of what is ahead of them and were able to utilise the following parts of the content more efficiently. The successful learning diaries and learning partner concept were used again. The badge system was moved to the e-learning. As in the first project, there were eight working days, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. with an hour for exchanges and reflections with the learning partner. The programme also included one free afternoon in the middle of the week.

2nd Phase: The homework phase between August and December 2016. The homework phase was very similar, although with an upgraded e-learning component. The technical difficulties were less frequent and the support to participants was more efficient.

3rd Phase: InFormal Quality Assessment that took place 4th to 12th of December 2016, Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic

During this phase, trainers provided additional theoretical background, and allowed participants even more freedom to follow their topics. It has proven crucial that they try to include a non-formal learning approach into the specific subjects they teach, in case of teachers, and more expert-based content in their non-formal sessions, in case of youth workers.

4.3. The third long-term strategic partnership InFormal

InFormal Strategic InFormal - Integration of non-formal education approach to the formal education system for youth empowerment at local level 2017-2-CZ01-KA205-035815 was a result of the previous two projects and was developed as a strategic partnership project (under Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+). The main difference from the previous two projects was that this project had three trainings with homework phases in between and that the e-learning was upgraded to a professional level as funding allowed it. An additional outcome of the project was a publication called „InFormal: A manual of integration of Non-Formal Education Approach to The Formal Education System" (Chardymova et al., 2019). The publication contains testimonies of participants, used methods, description of the project etc. It is recommended to anyone who found this article inspiring, as it contains much more information in its 127 pages and can be found and downloaded from the Erasmus+ beneficiary platform. One significant change concerning the previous project was the inclusion of a very culturally different country which was South Korea. Participants came from 8 countries: Czech Republic, South Korea, Hungary, Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Poland. There was a stable number of participants on each of trainings (27), and there were always 7 members of staff. Here staff worked also on the publication in addition to the e-learning and other administrative tasks. The team of trainers consisted of 4 trainers, 2 of the 3 trainers that run the first two editions of InFormal and an additional 2 trainers. The dropout rate during this project was lower, 18.5%, with only 5 participants being replaced. Several participants did not manage to be present at the second training course however, they followed the e-learning and participated in the last training course. The group was very cohesive, and newcomers or returnees were quickly adopted and put (back) into the picture.

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1st Phase: InFormal Basic which took place 14th - 21st of January 2018 in Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic

The strategic partnership long-term project started similarly to the previous trainings described above. As a proven concept there was not much to change, and as participants were all new to the topic, it was necessary to find common ground. The eight working days format was used again as well as all the successful concepts from previous projects and the learning partner and diaries practices. Having an Asian partner (South Korea) proved to be a right call from the beginning as Korean participants have shown a completely different point of view on both non-formal

learning, non-formal education and youth work and challenged the concept of non-formal education beyond the usual. The terminology was shown to be even more of an issue than before as discussions were stuck around the comparison of non-formal education and extracurricular activities. The Korean perspective and very formal point of view on formal education and very non-formal on non-formal, it opened new discussions and doors for peer learning than ever before.

2nd Phase of the homework between January and July 2018. The homework phase used a riche e-learning platform and trainers were available to provide online support and consultations.

3rd Phase: InFormal Quality Assessment which happened 1st - 9th of August 2018 in Luxembourg.

Contrary to previous projects, where participants worked on including a non-formal dimension in their own teaching or youth work projects, trainers proposed a different approach this time. Based on Heron's (1989) model of facilitation, trainers allowed participants the autonomy to create and plan the entire training by themselves. As such participants had to agree on flow and content (key sessions were still kept in the hands of trainers), plan the sessions and execute them. This approach surprised them greatly and had a strong positive impact on their confidence as facilitators. During the evaluation, trainers underlined together with participants the downside of such an approach, including the surprise effect and the lack of time to prepare coherent content.

4th Phase: Second round of upgraded homework session was a year between August 2018 and August 2019

5th Phase: InFormal Evaluation which took place 8th – 19th of August 2019 in Seoul, South Korea.

The last phase lasted 6 working days and it consisted of an intense evaluation of the previous phases and gathering of experiences for the publication. There were two notable events during this period both provided by the Korean partner organisation Better World in cooperation with Faculty of Social Science of the Myongji University. The first was a possibility for participants of InFormal to hold a final test of their competences during a set of lessons in a local secondary school with Korean students. It gave participants an opportunity to test purely non-formal sessions in a formal environment which was culturally different. The second

event was a conference with the name "Non-Formal Education and its Practices and Perspectives" organised on the premises of Myongji University. Korean partners invited over 200 teachers, youth workers and youth policymakers. Speakers at this conference were 4 youth workers and 4 teachers from the participants of the project. They shared their learning journeys within InFormal. After each presentation, there was a Q&A session and the whole conference was concluded by a plenary session which also involved Korean youth policymakers. The conference was not only a strong dissemination event but also it provided contact with reality and it showed that there is a demand for this cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration between formal and non-formal worlds.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

What we believe this article can bring to a reader is the summary and description of the practical application of integration of non-formal approach into formal education sphere. It should serve as an example of one of the possible ways of this integration, and it can also pose as a starting point for those who would decide to embark on a similar journey. In that case, the mentioned publication can be of great use as it contains much more detailed information and also testimonies of participants; information for which there is no space in this article.

The success of the InFormal series of trainings was confirmed by participants who acquired new or sharpened their competences. Several spin-offs of the main InFormal training courses were also created and, building on the main approach described above, focused on specific topics such as creativity, communication or visual facilitation. The results of the InFormal projects are freely available on the Erasmus + dedicated online pages.

Inspired by the first three editions, a new edition was initiated in 2020, InFormal Evolution (reference nr. 608709-EPP-1-2019-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBY-ACPALA). It will include more partners from outside Europe; in addition to the South Korean NGO, the new partnership includes NGOs from Taiwan and Indonesia as well as a university from the Philippines.

With every training course, the programmes of the following training courses were enriched due to the lessons learned. Developing and upgrading content and methodology based on previous lessons not only adheres to basic requirements of successful project management (Valek, 2016) but also moves the project forward by innovating constantly.

The combination of youth workers and teachers brought unique points of view together and allowed a cross-sectoral exchange to take place. Teachers usually strongly resisted or were reticent to non-formal methodology in the beginning and youth workers deemed traditional schooling boring and useless for real life. Throughout the training courses, both groups found their way to each other beginning to understand that there is a place for both formal and non-formal learning in learning settings and that it is only a question about selecting a suitable tool for an appropriate situation and content. Through all InFormals a recurrent issue was the discussion around the definition of non-formal and its borders. Partially this was answered in the publication mentioned above, which was a result of InFormal Strategic and joint effort of the staff and participants. One of the critical issues for teachers was time-limit to a teaching hour(s) which are strictly defined usually to 45 minutes (Kulich, 2019). It is a barrier which hinders many tries to implement non-formal into formal same as strictly set curricula (which on the other hand should be a guarantee of a certain quality of the formal education) (Danis et al., 2019).

The flow of the InFormal projects, that included two training courses and a homework phase in between, gave trainers and organisers a great opportunity to evaluate success and the impact of the project. It also allowed deeper self-assessment of participants. Moreover, at this point, we can say based on evaluation forms of participants, that for most of them InFormal was a life-changing experience which opened new ways and understanding of roles of both formal and non-formal learning (Chardymova et al., 2019). In addition, it taught participants how to recognise a situation, to select an appropriate tool and use it for the benefit of learners.

In conclusion, we would like to say that, even though the journey of the InFormal family of projects was adventurous for organisers and participants alike, it developed into a valid training for educators which offers mostly a mirror onto own educational activities, intense peer learning and professional trainer input, in order to merge formal and non-formal education spheres. Thanks to the effort of the staff assigned to the projects, it was possible to reach a point in which the changes in the composition of the group of participants were minor. Another of the significant challenges were cultural and regional points of view on education, but that made the peer learning very dynamic. One of the significant challenges for participants was the intensity of training courses as they required a deep and continuous immersion in the topic. Such an extreme situation creates a potent learning environment; it accelerates learning and group dynamics. Creators of

InFormal were always proud on the fact that the project created the premises for educators to step out of their comfort zone similarly as they do with their students and other target groups with whom they work.

The success of the idea is underlined by many spin-off projects which are underway or planned even as this article is being written. We believe that non-formal learning has a place in formal education, and vice versa, that formal methods should be considered in non-formal learning where appropriate. As teachers often focus strongly on content and knowledge rather than on delivery, and educators in non-formal education often create many activities losing coherent focus on learning objectives and content. Both areas should keep competences and benefit of the learner as a top priority.

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