L2L
LEARNING TO LEARN

LEARNING TO LEARN – A METHOD IN ACTION

Recommendations

July 2010

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Learning to Learn Project
http://learning2learn.eu/

European Network UNIQUE
http://www.unique-network.org/

Coordinating Project Partner – IKAB
Institute for Applied Communication
Research in Non-formal Education
http://www.ikab.de/

L2L Project Research Team at the University of Innsbruck
Lynne Chisholm, Helmut Fennes, Wolfgang Hagleitner, Andreas Karsten, Pier-Paolo Pasqualoni, Klaus Reich
Research Centre Education – Generation – Lifecourse
Institute of Educational Science – University of Innsbruck (UIBK)
http://www.uibk.ac.at/ezwi/forschungen/bgl/

Researchers responsible for the practice analyses in other partner countries
- Kathrin Polkehn (Germany)
- Laura Varžinskienė (Lithuania)
- Albert Mrgole (Slovenia)
- Catalina Guerrero Romera (Spain)

Contents

Introduction

Between November 2008 and October 2010, a European network of seven organisations joined efforts to develop, implement and analyse innovative approaches in the field of non-formal adult education aimed at the development of the competence enabling learners to plan, organise, implement and assess their own learning, in particular in view of self-directed learning.

The project considers *learning to learn* as the most crucial key competence for lifelong learning and, therefore, aims to support educational staff to acquire and develop competences and methodologies needed for implementing this kind of learning. It has benefited from financial support through the Grundtvig Action of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.

The project began with an analytical compilation of literature on learning competence and how it is developed – *learning to learn* – in order to explore related concepts, theories and practices. During this phase, six literature reviews investigating discourses on learning competence and learning competence development in different language domains were produced and summarised in a synthesis report. The reviews show that – the fuzziness of the concept notwithstanding – *learning to learn* is predominantly understood as a method-in-action: people have to engage in the activity itself – learning – to learn about it (Chisholm et al. 2010).

Informed by the literature review, educational approaches were developed aiming to provide learners with the skills and knowledge needed to enable them to plan, organise and assess their own learning process. These educational approaches were tested in 24 projects, exploring and examining *learning to learn* as a method-in-action in the field of adult non-formal education.

Seeking to identify which educational approaches are successful in fostering *learning to learn*, all projects made use of online pre- and post-activity questionnaires for trainees and trainers. Seven of the 24 projects were analysed in more detail through structured documentation and non-participatory on-site observation.

These recommendations – which refer to aspects that support the development of learning competence and foster *learning to learn* – were developed on the basis of the analysis of the 24 adult education projects organised as part "Learning to Learn" Project. They are primarily based on the qualitative analysis of all practice projects and were further developed at the evaluation seminar of the "Learning to Learn" Project. They comprise a set of (1) educational principles and foundations, (2) educational structures and relations, (3) educational context and content, (4)

educational approaches and methodologies and (5) educational environments and settings. Some of the aspects outlined in this document are considered to foster suitable learning environments as a basis for exploring *learning to learn*, while others are considered to be specifically relevant for fostering *learning to learn* and are indicated as such.

L2L Project Research Team
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An educational framework for learning to learn

I.   Educational principles and foundations

The development of learning competence is supported by

- a diverse group of learners,
- learner-orientation, in particular in view of the needs and interests of the learners;
- a programme design and implementation that meets learning needs;
- transparency of learning objectives, planned methodology and learning process;
- voluntarism of learners, meaning that learners participate voluntarily and by choice;
- confidentiality, meaning that learners can trust in particular the confidentiality;
- safe learning spaces allowing for trial and error and learning without fear.

Learning to learn is particularly fostered by

- a programme design and flow in consideration of diverse learning preferences;
- empowering learning spaces allowing to question one's own previous learning.

II.   Educational structures and relations

The development of learning competence is supported by

- trust, respect and appreciation between and among educators and learners;
- clarity and mutual understanding about the ownership of the learning outcomes;
- the development of a sense of ownership in relation to the learning process;
- educators pro-actively accepting, while not abusing, their function as rolemodels;
- a mutually rewarding reciprocal partnership between educators and learners;
- clearly defined roles of educators and learners;
- a supportive and empowering role of educators;
- group norms that are openly negotiable, but also binding once negotiated.
- structures and relations allowing educators and learners to intervene and engage without feeling restrained by time pressure, group size or programme setting.

Learning to learn is particularly fostered by

- educators being competent learners and, thus, serving as models for learners, in particular about and in relation to _learning to learn_;
- transparency about roles, functions, hierarchies and power relations, and
- openness about and appreciation for questioning and changing roles, functions, hierarchies and power relations, allowing for and facilitating responsibility shifts.

III. Educational context and content

The development of learning competence is supported by

- clearly specifying the contexts in which educational activities are embedded;
- the choice of a tangible aspect, question or dilemma;
- the perceived closeness of the educational activity to real life concerns;
- the perceived sense of a need for change and the potential for change;
- the effort to explore an aspect, question or dilemma from several perspectives;
- allowing for several different, even divergent, points of departure to be(come) relevant for and benefit from an educational activity.

Learning to learn is particularly fostered by

- complementing individual perspectives on learning with a collective dimension.

IV. Educational approaches and methodologies

The development of learning competence is supported by

- combining and balancing individual learning and learning in groups (in particular in small groups);
- learning in groups with a balance between commonalities and differences – meaning a balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity (providing for a feeling of security as well as the opportunity of learning from differences);
- providing opportunities to test and revise different learning strategies;
- providing activities in which feedback can be given and received regularly;
- a rhythm of learning that can adapt to learning and group processes;
- a flow of learning across activities that is seen as smooth and natural;
- an approach that allows for over-steering as well as understeering different programme elements and sequences;
- a diversity of methods, including:
  - interactive, communication-based and activity-based methods;
  - methods encouraging to learn with and from peers.

Learning to learn is particularly fostered by

- building on and/or relating to previous learning experiences – particularly allowing time and space to unlearn previously acquired ways of doing specific things;
- reflection (individually and in groups) of what has been learned and, more importantly, how it has been learned, and of what has contributed to the learning, e.g. with respect to motivation, learning preferences etc.;
- exploring and questioning assumptions about learning directly and pro-actively;

- choices of methods that do not exclusively reinforce learners' perceptions about their own and other people's learning;
- avoiding generalisations about learning approaches and styles while acknowledging their relevance as well as contextuality;
- building an experiential sequence of educational activities that take learning from implicit and accidental to tacit and deliberate – including an appropriate balance between action and reflection;
- a diversity of methods, including:
  - methods contributing to self-awareness, in particular with respect to one's learning preferences, one's strengths and weaknesses;
  - methods providing for observing others in their learning and trying out their approaches and methods;
  - methods daring to confront established learning patterns;
  - methods encouraging to try out new learning approaches and strategies.

V.   Educational environments and settings

The development of learning competence is supported by

- a collegial, trustful, open and empowering learning atmosphere;
- a learning environment that reflects a positive attitude towards learning;
- a learning environment that mirrors the promise of and demand for safety;
- a learning environment in which learners can turn to others for guidance;
- a learning environment in which learners can turn to others for support;
- a learning environment that can flexibly respond to changes on short notice;
- a time-planning and management that leaves sufficient time for all phases;
- providing informal spaces, settings and times beyond the planned programme;
- a clear agreement on how to manage communication beyond the activity itself, such as work-related emails or personal social networking activities.

***Learning to learn* is particularly fostered by**

- a learning environment inviting learners to explore, experiment with and reflect on diverse learning strategies, instruments, approaches and preferences.

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