

B1

How to support learning

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This chapter aims to help you get to grips with the term 'learning' in relation to concrete activities in the Youth in Action Programme. Different methods and tools are described to help young people and others take their learning into their own hands, plan their learning and reflect on and assess this learning.

In this publication you will read a lot about learning. Because Youthpass is about learning. But does that mean that we didn't learn previously in Youth Exchanges, Training and EVS-projects before Youthpass was introduced? Of course a lot was learnt. We all know that young people have learnt intensively from their experiences in these programmes.

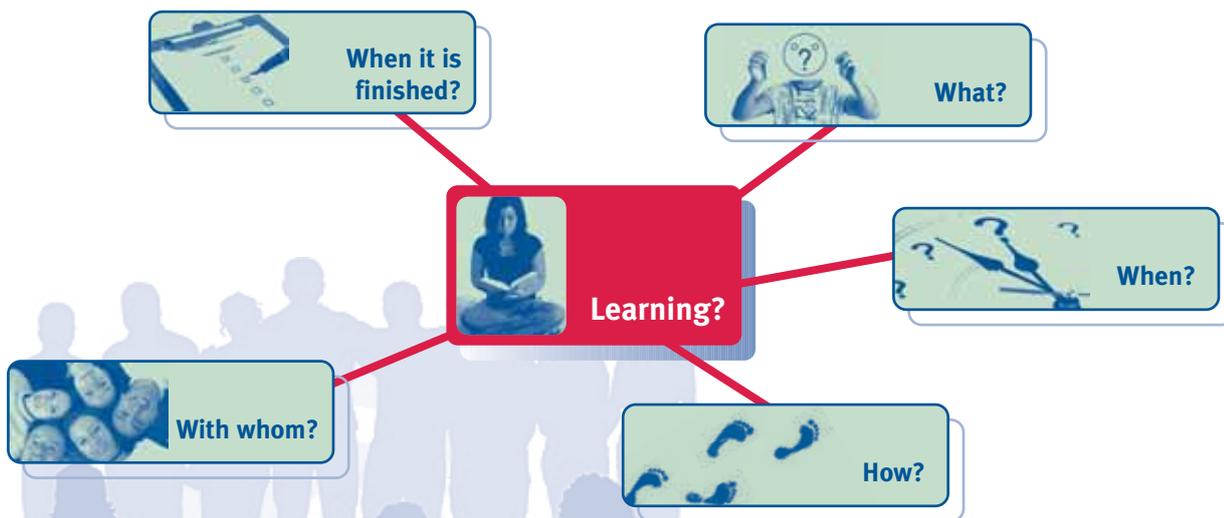
The Youthpass process wants to make that learning more explicit. By using Youthpass, young people will have to be more specific about what they have learnt and in what way

they have learnt. On the one hand this is to show others more clearly what has been learnt and, on the other, to make themselves more aware of their learning.

This is not something that happens just like that. It demands from the learner the ability to take a step back and look at his/her own learning.

This involves asking ourselves questions like:

- > *What do I want/need to learn?*
- > *How can I learn it?*
- > *When will I learn?*
- > *Who can help me learn it?*
- > *What, for me, is the best way to learn?*
- > *How do I know that I succeeded in learning?*



Such questions are quite new for many young people, but not only for them. In our 'school learning', others decide what we have to learn, how we should learn it and when we have finished that learning. Now you take that responsibility on your own shoulders, which probably makes learning much more interesting and exciting. But still, it's something new, something you have to learn: learning to learn.

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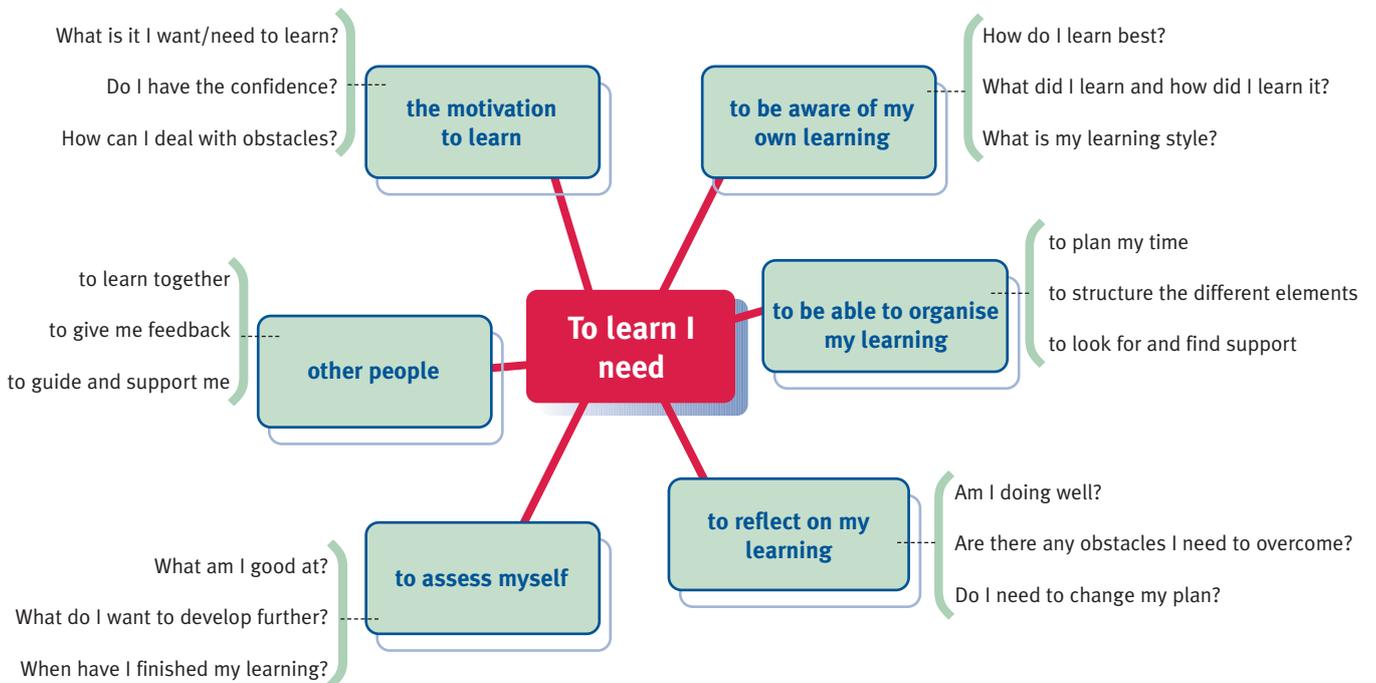
One of the most important consequences of the introduction of Youthpass is that young people will need to be assisted and guided in learning how to learn, in making their learning plans and in reflecting on and assessing their learning. Something which, in turn, has consequences for the preparation and running of projects, for the programme and for the role of the youth worker, youth leader, mentor, trainer ...

The one who acts is the learner; the one who is responsible is the learner. This does not mean that learners have to do it all by themselves. People who direct their own learning often have a strong need to work together with and be supported by others.

What do you need to be a learner who can take ownership of your own learning? What do you need to learn how to learn?

Learning to learn

Learning to learn is one of the eight Key competences in the framework of the Lifelong Learning initiative of the European Union. Being able to learn is a prerequisite when it comes to lifelong learning. Learning to learn is about a host of skills, such as: organising your own learning, managing your time, identifying opportunities, being able to deal with obstacles, looking for and using others for support.



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How do I learn ...?

Have you ever thought about this question? And the follow-up question: How do I learn best?

People learn in very different ways. The big advantage of organising your own learning is that you don't have to follow what others have planned for you – you can do it in your favourite way. But what is your favourite way?

If you want to take responsibility for your own learning, it's important to take a step back and look at the way you have learnt so far, what was easy for you, what was difficult, how you could do things differently.

Many young people will not immediately get that excited when they hear the word 'learning'. They might connect it to words like 'school', 'boring', 'difficult' or even 'failure'. A lot of them will see learning as something 'you have to do' because others tell you it's important. Just telling them that learning can also be fun and something you can do because you want to, is probably not enough to take away this kind of negative approach.

It might be good to spend some time on the topic of learning, to share and discuss experiences, to connect those experiences to those of others, to also recall those moments of learning which were good, pleasant or even fun, or were difficult but worthwhile in the end, to think about all the things they learnt outside school: talking, dancing, kissing, games ... To find out that a lot of learning is something you do because you want to, you need to and it is something you do for yourself and sometimes even for others. Something that might even be fun!

A session on learning

while preparing a Youth Exchange

A way to start 'discussing learning' might be to learn something together:

- > a dance
- > making portrait photos
- > juggling with three balls
- > a conjuring trick
- > anything else which is challenging, exciting and fun

Choose something where your participants can make some progress in a relatively short period of time. If it's

connected to the programme of the Youth Exchange you are preparing with the group, it's even better because you will be able to make use of it later.

After practising, give everybody the opportunity to show how far they got. Make sure that it does not end up as a competition.

Then start a talk with questions like:

- > *How did you start to learn? Did you make a plan or did you just start doing?*
- > *Are you satisfied with how far you got?*
- > *What were the difficult moments?*
- > *How did you try to overcome these moments?*
- > *Did you ask for help from others?*
- > *Did you look at the others? Did they have different strategies?*
- > *How do you think you can further improve? What would your next steps be?*

Learning styles

Learning styles is about trying to define the ways in which people prefer to learn. If you have a look at books or internet sites about learning, you will find many different ways to describe learning styles. Probably the two best known ones are the VARK and Kolb's Learning Style Inventory.

VARK

In this model, learning is related mainly to the senses:

- V**isual learners (learn through seeing)
- A**uditory learners (learn through listening)
- R**eading writing (learning by processing text)
- K**inesthetic learners (learning by doing)

Kolb's learning styles:

- > *converger (active experimentation – abstract conceptualisation)*
- > *accommodator (active experimentation – concrete experience)*
- > *assimilator (reflective observation – abstract conceptualisation)*
- > *diverger (reflective observation – concrete experience)*

(For more information about learning styles, you can start by having a look at the Wikipedia website entry which provides many links to go further:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_styles)

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Altogether, there are over eighty different learning style models. A series of tests has been developed from these models. By taking these tests – so the theory goes – you can find out more about your preferred learning style. Many youngsters like to do this kind of test and it can be another helpful way of starting to discuss and think about your learning.

Over the past few years, these models have been under discussion and have faced a lot of criticism, partly because of the ‘poor research’ they are based on and partly because of the effect they may have on people. Discovering your preferred learning style might be dangerous and you might put yourself “in a box”, thinking that you can only learn in a certain way. *“I’m an auditory learner so don’t give me a book!”*

Taking into account such criticism, when offering this kind of test to participants, make it clear that the results of such a test are only an indicator and should not be regarded as *the fixed way* you have to learn in the future. It gives some direction but be sure not to put people into boxes! The next time they do such a test, the result might differ. People can also change the way they learn.

Awareness of your own learning is not something you have at a certain moment and then it’s done. It’s an ongoing process in which you will continually find new things about the way you learn; you will change and develop. The important factor is to develop the ability to look at yourself when learning.

A prepared and learning team

It is not only the young people in the Youth Exchange or the participants of the Training Course, who are lifelong learners. Why not turn your team of youth workers or trainers into a learning team? It might help you a lot in dealing with the topic in the group *and* in becoming an excellent team. Activities you offer to participants can also be used in your team.

Some ideas to put into practice:

- > *a one hour exchange session where you share the most important thing you learnt over the past two years and how you learnt it*
- > *Every team member makes their own learning plans for the duration of the project and shares this with the others*
- > *in a Training Course, trainers work in pairs and give each other feedback after each session*
- > *a feedback session in the team*

This kind of activity can help the team to:

- > *discuss the topic of ‘learning’*
- > *find different ways of working with ‘learning’ in the programme*
- > *come to a common understanding and approach*
- > *further develop professional competences*

Planning to learn

When the learner is the one to act, the learner is also the one to plan, deciding what to learn and seeing how and when to do it. How can we assist young people in stepping into that process?

Learning is about change, about acquiring something new: new skills, new attitudes, new knowledge. To be motivated to learn, you need to have a vision of where you want to go, a future perspective. When you have certain ideas about what you want for your future, you feel the need to learn.

It’s not something young people think about every day. It’s even said that ‘young people these days have only a very short-term future perspective’. They want it now! But of course young people have wishes and expectations for their future, both in the short term as well as the long term. But they might need some assistance to articulate those wishes and make their expectations more concrete. Sometimes it

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can help to ask a young person where she/he wants to be in five years. A free fantasy about this is often easier than thinking about “What am I going to do next week?”. From that picture of the young person in five years’ time, you can extract wishes and needs for planning within a shorter perspective.

When planning a Youth Exchange with your group, you are talking about the future. It will be about wishes, expectations and probably also fears concerning that event. When you have a conversation with a future EVS volunteer about what he/she wants to learn during the project, you might well also talk about future expectations concerning study, work and other plans for the more long-term future.

Two examples:

Example 1

‘Living in a village’ – Youth Exchange related

Tomek is working with a group of five young Polish people, preparing them for a Youth Exchange that will take place in three months’ time in Belgium. The theme of the Youth Exchange is ‘Living in a village’ and there will be groups from four countries: Ireland, France, Belgium and Poland, who all come from small villages. Although they are still working on a detailed programme for the exchange, it has already been decided that they will make a video in which young people are interviewed about what it is like to live in a small village. There will also be a group working on a journal, they will prepare national dishes for each other and there will be workshops on ‘making the village a stage’, meaning all kinds of street performances. The working language will be English.

Tonight the Polish group will talk about their learning objectives. The aim for the evening is that – by the end of the evening – all five will have written down a list of what they want to learn in the preparation stage and during the exchange.

For the first half hour, Tomek gives them two options:

- > make a sketch
- > make a collage

that shows how you want to see yourself after the Youth Exchange.

Three of them choose to work on a collage and sit down with magazines, papers, pencils, markers, paste and scissors. The other two leave for another room to prepare their sketches. After a little bit more than the planned 30 minutes, they come back to show the results of their work and talk about what their collages and sketches mean.

While the group talks, Tomek writes down the different words and sentences that come up:

- > *I can speak better English.*
- > *I can do a clown-act.*
- > *I know some Belgian words.*
- > *I published my first article.*
- > *I know how to handle a camera.*
- > *I have friends from three other countries.*
- > *I will be in contact with the other groups.*
- > *I can juggle with three balls.*
- > *We can perform an act in the village square.*
- > *I have a Belgian girlfriend.*
- > *I’m not afraid of flying anymore.*
- > *I’m in a video, being interviewed.*
- > *I have carried out my first interview.*

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examples

Then Tomek gives them all five red and five green Post-its and asks them to write down individually on the green ones, what they are most looking forward to, and on the red ones, what they fear. He asks them to write down at least two things on the red and two on the green. He gives them 15 minutes, but after ten they are already finished and put the Post-its on the wall.

Red:

- > *They will not understand me.*
- > *The Belgians and French will stick together, speaking French.*
- > *Everything will be very expensive for us.*
- > *I don't know how to make contact with the others.*
- > *Maybe they will do things in very different ways.*
- > *They might see us Polish people as stupid.*
- > *They will hate our food.*
- > *Most things will be done by the Irish because they speak better English.*
- > *Flying*
- > *They have very different rules from us.*
- > *We won't manage to talk with the others.*
- > *What if I don't like the food?*
- > *What if they explain all the technical things for the video work in English?*
- > *I don't know what to talk about with youngsters from other countries.*

Green:

- > *the journey to Belgium*
- > *street theatre workshops*
- > *seeing Brussels*
- > *partying with the others*
- > *making a really good Polish dinner*
- > *presenting the video*
- > *tasting Belgian beer*
- > *being away from home for ten days*
- > *arriving at the place where we will stay*
- > *working together with people from other countries, in English*
- > *eating a French dinner with French wine*
- > *singing Irish songs*
- > *learning to be a clown*
- > *making a video out of everything that has been recorded*

The group then talks for more than an hour about their fears and the things they are looking forward to. Tomek asks questions like:

- > Do you understand the other Post-its?
- > Do you see things you hadn't thought about?
- > Are there others who have the same fear?
- > What can you do to overcome that fear?
- > Are there things that you can learn before we go?
- > How can we help each other?
- >

For the last half hour, Tomek invites them to write down on a piece of paper what they think they can learn from the Youth Exchange, both from the preparations as well as from the event itself. He tells them that this might not be that easy but asks them to just write down what comes into their heads now and keep the piece of paper for themselves. Next week they will go on with their planning and he promises to explain about Youthpass and what all this has to do with it.

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Example 2

'Isabel goes EVS' – European Voluntary Service – related

Isabel will start her EVS project in Italy in 6 weeks. Today she is taking the train from Porto to Lisbon where she will talk with Magda from the sending organisation. She has met Magda once already and she helped Isabel a lot in making contacts and finding the organisation in Tivoli near Rome. But today their talk will be about something different. It will be quite long. Magda has scheduled three hours for it, and the topic will be: 'What do I want to get out of my EVS?'

Isabel has been thinking a lot about this question over the past few days but has not found it easy. For her, the most important reason for going to Italy for a year is to have time to think about what she wants to happen afterwards. She wants to take some distance from the life she has lived till now. Things got out of hand last year. She left school, found a job, got sacked and was caught by the police stealing a wallet out of a car. When she ended up in a police station, she decided that this all had to stop. Her parents tell her it's all because of bad friends, which might be partly true, but Isabel has the feeling that she needs some time for herself. EVS seems to be a great opportunity.

But still, that doesn't answer the question: 'What do I want to get out of my EVS?'

So, she is a bit nervous when she arrives at Magda's organisation. But she is set at ease immediately by Magda who tells her that they will have the whole afternoon together to find the answer to that question.

Magda asks her a lot of questions. Isabel tells her everything about her disastrous year and the need to 'take some distance'. Magda compliments Isabel on her ability to talk about her life in a very clear and understandable way. Then she starts to ask questions about what 'taking some distance' will mean in practice. Difficult questions to answer, but they help Magda understand things better and to put 'taking some distance' into practice.

They talk about the tasks that Isabel will carry out as a volunteer in Tivoli. What are the things she feels she can do easily and what are the things that might be more difficult? They talk about Isabel's expectations of her Italian mentor, the way she thinks she will make friends there, how she will manage to cook for herself, if she has any plans for free-time activities, the language course she will take and many, many more things. Magda mainly asks questions which help Isabel identify exactly what she wants, what steps she has to take to reach those goals and who might be the people who can help her.

Then Magda puts a kind of form on the table which she describes as a 'learning plan'. She suggests that Isabel makes a learning plan for the first 6 weeks of her stay in Italy, writing down what she wants to learn in that period, how she wants to do it, who she wants help from and when she wants to have it done by.

examples



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Learning Plan Name: Isabel			
<i>What</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>With whom</i>	<i>When</i>
Learning to be able to survive in Italian; speak 'basic Italian' allowing me to express myself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - language course which will start in my second week - speaking Italian in the organisation - speaking Italian (not English) at home with my two housemates (also on EVS from Estonia and the Netherlands) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the other course participants and teacher - asking colleagues to be patient - trying to make an agreement with housemates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - start second week and will last 8 weeks - in the first few days of my stay - during our first 'house-meeting' - after six weeks, I want to feel able to express myself in simple situations
To stay myself when meeting people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to be honest about how I feel - to express my opinion - to write about it every day in my diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I want my mentor to help me in this - maybe also my housemates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - starting immediately from the first day - weekly talk about my experiences with mentor - every day diary
Taking good care of myself, meaning food!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a healthy meal every day - buying a cook book - finding others to eat and cook with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I will check with my housemates - have to see who I will meet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - should start cooking from the beginning - after two weeks I can check out my housemates - after six weeks I want to have a new food plan
Knowing and understanding my tasks in the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - asking for documents about the organisation and the projects to read - having talks with those who are responsible for the projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - making a plan with my mentor - colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - plan with mentor in the second week - reading documents and having talks in weeks 3 and 4

Before Isabel goes home, she gets some documents from Magda with information about the Youthpass. Magda asks her to also have a look at the Key competences and to see how she can link these to her own learning objectives - and she encourages Isabel to also look at a more long-term perspective.

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Setting and planning learning objectives

When you help young people set and plan their learning objectives, the following points might be worth considering:

Set objectives which connect to the young person's wishes and needs.

It's important that the young person feels ownership of their learning plan. The risk is that you, with the best intentions, suggest objectives that you feel might serve the youngster. In the end the youngster will work for you, not for him/herself.

Describe objectives as concretely as possible in terms of tangible and observable behaviour.

'Learning to communicate' is quite vague, 'learning to express my own opinion' is already more concrete, 'giving my opinion in the meeting with the group next Saturday' is very concrete and is something which can be easily evaluated afterwards.

Make sure the objectives can be evaluated, so that progress becomes visible.

Seeing progress is motivating, ticking a box as 'done' gives a good feeling. So make sure that objectives are described that way.

Set realistic and achievable objectives.

Sometimes young people have the tendency to get over-enthusiastic and set themselves huge objectives or objectives which might be not very realistic at that moment. Try, together with the young person, to break those objectives down into smaller steps which are achievable.

Try to set objectives which can be reached within a short-term period.

It's nice and motivating to experience success. Long-term goals require a lot of patience. Also here, the principle applies: try to break down the long-term goals into smaller steps.

Describe the objectives as much as possible in positive terms.

'I want to stop acting stupidly when I meet a new person' focuses on the negative and doesn't give much assistance in trying out new behaviour. Statements in terms of competence enhancement are positive and motivating: 'When I meet a new person, I will start to ask questions to see what we have in common'.

Opt for objectives which match the young person's strengths.

Often it's better to further develop competences you already have than to start learning something completely new. When it's about something new it is important that it fits into, or links to, strengths you already have.

Objectives which can be achieved quickly should be in balance with objectives that require some effort from the young person.

When you have your learning plan, it's good to have some objectives you can reach quickly and others which require more effort.

Make sure the objectives are varied.

Learning objectives can be very different in their nature. They can be about knowledge, about skills and about attitudes. Because learning is about these three different elements, all of them should be present in the learning plan.

Celebration time

Encourage the young person to think about how she/he will celebrate when objectives are achieved. It's something to be proud of!

Check the learning objectives

<i>Are they based on the learners' needs?</i>	✓
<i>Are they concrete and tangible?</i>	✓
<i>Can they be evaluated?</i>	✓
<i>Are they realistic and achievable?</i>	✓
<i>Can they be reached in a short amount of time?</i>	✓
<i>Are they described in positive terms?</i>	✓
<i>Do they match the learner's strengths?</i>	✓
<i>Is there a balance between short-term and long-term objectives?</i>	✓
<i>Are the objectives varied?</i>	✓
<i>How can you celebrate?</i>	✓

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‘So, now I have my group motivated to work on all kinds of different things. They choose to learn, they are enthusiastic about it and now I have to tell them about these Key competences. What do you want me to tell them? That the European Commission thinks it’s much more important to learn this very pompous stuff? Do you think that will motivate them?’

When you read out the eight Key competences to a group of young people, you will probably not manage to get them very excited about it. But when you explain that the Key competences are meant to

- > *help put all the things they’ve learnt into a framework*
- > *and this framework will also help other people see and recognise what they have learnt ...*

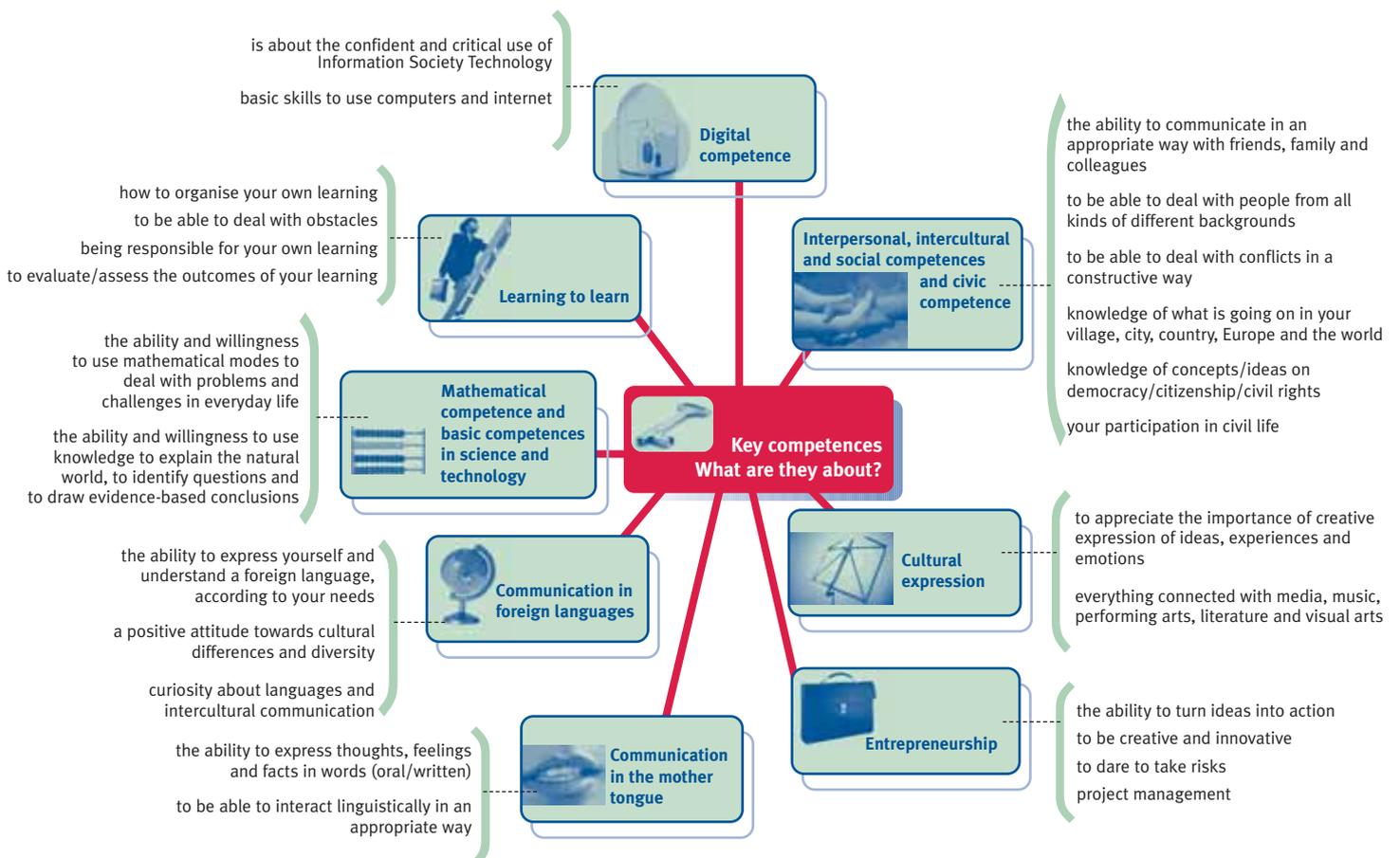
THEN they might start to like the idea!

In many situations, you will probably only introduce the Key competences after you have worked on learning objectives with your group, although in some situations, for example in

Training Courses for youth workers (Action 4.3), the Key competences can help participants to think about their learning objectives. But in general, it might be a better idea to see how the learning objectives of young people can fit into the Key competences.

Make sure participants understand that they don’t have to use all the eight Key competences in one activity. In many Youth Exchanges and Training Courses, it may well be better to concentrate on only two or three of them. Try to connect what the young people want to learn with what is described in the Key competences and, in this way, you will be ‘translating’ them into a language which will be understood by your youngsters and is related to their world.

Don’t make the Key competences sound complex and difficult. They have been developed as a tool to help people in structuring their learning outcomes and to help make these outcomes more widely recognised.



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Reflection and Assessment

As we pointed out before, the Youthpass process is designed to make the learning in projects more explicit. It means that the learner has to be aware of what he/she is learning and try to put into words what has been learnt. This is not something you only do at the end of a project. During the whole process, the learner needs time and space to see what has been learnt, what new questions have come up, what barriers have been discovered, whether he/she is still on track and if the plan has to be adjusted. And at a certain point it has to be decided whether you have managed to learn what you wanted to learn. You have to assess your learning. Reflection and assessment go hand in hand.

Reflecting on learning

Learning is not something that goes on in a continuous one-line process. There are good days and bad days. Sometimes you make a lot of progress, sometimes you have the feeling not much is happening.

The Swedish EVS volunteer who has the feeling that she will never be able to speak French. She has learnt all the words and all the grammar, but having a conversation is so difficult. Then one day she reads an article in a French newspaper and she understands it all! That same day, by coincidence, she meets a French guy in a café and she talks with him for one hour ... in French! What a day!

Or the young man who, (during a Youth Exchange) for the first time in his life manages to have a forty-minute talk with another guy about a fight they had the day before. It worked out, they resolved the conflict!

Or the participant in a Training Course on intercultural learning who, at some point in the evaluation of a simulation exercise, gets the exciting feeling that now 'she got it', she suddenly understands what kind of mechanisms play such an important role in intercultural communication.

These are good and inspiring moments. To turn them into conscious learning moments, it's important to reflect on them:

- > *which elements/factors made this learning successful?*
- > *how did I bring myself to this point?*
- > *how can I benefit from this in my further learning?*
- > *should I adjust my learning plan?*

By reflecting, the learner becomes more aware of the learning, of what has been learnt and how. Perceptions of this will probably change from time to time.

This not only applies to successful moments. During the process of learning many things can change:

- > *you might learn something which was not planned at all but that now you see as very important and valid*
- > *you find yourself behind your schedule*
- > *you find yourself going faster than you planned*
- > *in the process of learning, you find out that other questions come up and you want to add to your learning plan*
- > *there are unforeseen obstacles that you have to overcome*
- > *.....*

Constant reflection can help you to keep track, to adjust, to be aware of your success and to be motivated to go on.

Assessing my learning

Youth workers, mentors and trainers don't give marks to their participants. In non-formal education we don't usually work with tests and examinations to assess the results of learning. Since the learner is responsible for what, how and when he/she wants to learn, it seems logical that the learner should also decide when 'the job is done'. In other words: self-assessment.

When using 'part 2' of the Youthpass in Training Courses and EVS projects, self-assessment is the basic principle. The learner writes down what has been learnt.

Again, this is something very new for many people. Often, we are used to others deciding for us if we have succeeded or not. When these other people think you were successful, they give you a nice piece of paper and you're done. If they think you weren't, you have to try again.

But now you have to do this yourself. You are the boss! It is a challenging responsibility which, in many cases, needs help, assistance and support. To assess yourself, it's essential that, aside from individual reflection, you discuss things with colleagues, peers, mentors, youth workers, trainers, friends. ...

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Individual reflection

In a Youth Exchange, a Training Course or during an EVS project, many people feel a strong need to have some time for themselves, to be alone, not surrounded by all the others, a chance to deal with the many impressions they are confronted with. In a way it is a very natural need for reflection. As it's not always simple to plan and have that time for yourself, it can be good to offer space and tools in the programme to encourage participants to take individual reflection time.

Diary or Learning Journal

A diary or learning journal can be a simple and effective tool for giving participants the opportunity to reflect on the process they are going through and to note down the experiences of the day. It can be a good method to use, for example, in EVS-projects to help the volunteer reflect on the large number of experiences that she/he has to deal with. During Training Courses and Youth Exchanges this can also be a valuable tool. A diary is something for yourself, so people can use it in their own way: writing in their own language, doing it daily or once a week, having it with them all the time or at home under their pillow.

Just giving an empty notebook is one way, but it might help if you provide some structure by posing some leading questions like:

- > Describe what happened today in your own words
- > Were there any memorable moments?
- > Are there things or questions still buzzing around in your head?
- > Is there anything 'new' you learnt today?
- > Is there anything you want to pay further attention to?

Example

*Youth Exchange
'Message in a bottle'
Italy June 2008*

My Diary

Name:

What happened today?

Any special moments?

Still thinking about ...

You know what I learnt today!?

Something to keep in mind!

Tools for self-assessment

In 'educational' shops and on the internet you will find more and more tools that can help people assess themselves.

Hundreds of different tests on different sets of competences have been developed. You will find tests on 'leadership skills', 'communication skills', 'language skills' etc. Be aware that the quality of these tests is very variable. When you offer tests to participants, tell them that the outcome is not the 'whole truth'. It can help you to see some characteristics about yourself and to make you reflect on them.

A wide variety of card games is on the market, which aim to help people look at their competences. You will find sets of cards with a wide assortment of skills written on them. Using them, you can pick out the cards that describe your competences or the ones you want to develop. There are also card games that have a more creative approach and offer all kinds of images to help you to think about your strengths and weaknesses. And

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of course there are many other creative tools to help people reflect, based on images, drawings, collages, using objects, metaphors and different forms of non-verbal expression. These can be relevant here because they help get around language barriers and allow more freedom of expression on different issues and matters related to learning.

An individual talk

Regular individual talks with the young person can help her/him to keep on track, to discuss challenges and to look at the learning process with the help of another pair of eyes. In an EVS project, this kind of talk between volunteer and mentor is often already common practice. In the preparation, running and evaluation of a Youth Exchange or in a Training Course, this kind of talk can also be of great value.

Some tips for individual talks:

- > **Let the other person talk.** Ask open questions – they start with phrases like: “How much do you ...?” or “When will you ...?”. By asking open questions and letting the youngster speak freely, you offer them the chance to think aloud about what he/she is going through.
- > **Listen with empathy.** This means that you imagine the other’s situation and experiences. Ask for facts as well as feelings.
- > Try to help put some **order into the information** you get from the young person. Every so often, young people can lose themselves in too many and sometimes irrelevant details. Ordering and summarising helps them to think in a structured way and to focus on the core issues.
- > **Give positive feedback** on the results that have already been achieved by the young person, make change explicit. Many people have the tendency to focus on things that don’t go well. To show the young person her/his own success works as a strong motivating factor.
- > **Stimulate and support** the young person’s sense of self-responsibility. There is always the risk in talks like this that you (the mentor, youth worker, counsellor) come up with solutions. Let the young person find his/her own way.

Learning with others

One of the main characteristics of non-formal education is that you learn together and from each other. Youth workers, youth leaders and trainers are there, not to teach, so much as to facilitate the learning process. Facilitation means, amongst other things, creating an atmosphere where people can learn, encouraging people and offering tools and methods for working together.

Group dynamics

Bringing a group of people together does not automatically produce a good learning environment. Certain kinds of group dynamics stimulate learning more than others. You could even say that when certain conditions are not there in a group, learning becomes almost impossible. Although groups develop in all kinds of different ways and you cannot dictate what is going to happen, it can be helpful to distinguish the kind of group dynamics which help people learn. For the facilitator, the task is to help the group develop in that direction.

Positive signs for a ‘learning group’:

- > Participants are allowed to be themselves. There is no group pressure to act and behave in one certain way. Different forms of expression are respected and valued.
- > Participants are allowed to make mistakes. Learning often means making mistakes. That can make you vulnerable. You don’t want to be ridiculed.
- > The group takes care of its own process. Participants are able to talk about the development of the group and take care of the wellbeing of individual members.
- > Different forms of expression are used. Participants express themselves not only in words but also by other creative means such as movement, music and drawing/painting.
- > Critical questions are appreciated. Participants can deal with and appreciate it when others ask critical questions. It’s not seen as a threat but as inspiring.
- > An interactive working atmosphere. Participants share tasks, work in different combinations, give feedback and support each other.

Group Reflection

In a Youth Exchange or Training Course, a common evaluation and reflection on the experiences at the end of the day can help individual participants a lot in structuring their own thoughts or clearing up their confusion. By hearing the thoughts and opinions of others, you might gain new

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ideas yourself or you might gain confirmation or find recognition of your own feelings and experiences. There are all kinds of different methods of group evaluation and reflection. You can find many of them in:

- > *the SALTO CD ROM on Evaluation, downloadable from www.salto-youth.net/Evaluation*
- > *and in the T-Kit on Evaluation (nr.10) downloadable from www.youth-partnership.net*

Big groups are at a disadvantage when it comes to having an open and safe space for sharing thoughts. One method often used in Training Courses and Youth Exchanges is the Reflection Group. At the end of every day, participants come together in the same small groups (4 -7 participants) to reflect on that day. The advantage of the fixed group is that it allows the members to create their own atmosphere during successive days. As well as this, the small group offers, in general, a safer environment.

Reflection Groups are used for different kinds of purposes. They allow participants to blow off steam, they give youth workers or trainers the opportunity to keep track of what is going on in the group, they allow participants to express their wishes and ideas for the programme and they are an opportunity to share experiences. Another aim can be to give participants space to support each other's learning by:

- > *sharing what they have learnt*
- > *giving feedback*
- > *supporting each other*

The same topics described above as guiding questions for the diary could help structure such a conversation in a Reflection Group.

Peer pairs and groups

One way of organising mutual support in, for example, a Training Course can be to make peer pairs. Every participant is connected to one of his/her peers and during the course they meet regularly to talk about their learning achievements and challenges. They know each other's learning objectives and reflect together on the process, exchange their experiences and support each other. Often it's much easier for participants to search for support from a peer than ask a trainer.

In some situations, it might be better to have small groups of three or four people in a peer group. The disadvantage of a pair might be that people just have one other person to deal with.

It might be good to spend some time on topics such as 'active listening', 'asking good questions' or 'feedback' to prepare people to use their peer groups effectively.

Feedback

One way of benefiting from others around you is to ask them for feedback. Of course you know yourself best. But still, the image that you have of yourself is limited. It can be very helpful to get impressions from others of how they experience you and what competences they think you have.

Feedback is meant to be helpful for the person who receives it. In other words: if you are totally fed up with someone and you finally have the guts to tell him or her everything you think he/she does completely wrong ... you might feel very relieved but it is not very helpful for the person you are addressing. So: no feedback.

To be helpful, feedback to somebody must be given in such a way that the other person:

- > *understands the information*
- > *is able to accept the information*
- > *is able to do something with the information*

When you want to use feedback in a group it's important to explain what feedback is about.

You might often hear discussions about giving positive as well as negative feedback. When it's about learning, feedback is always positive, meaning constructive, because it aims to bring positive change and development.

Just telling somebody what you see as very positive aspects about that person can be very helpful. Often we are not used to telling someone what we see as their good qualities. That information might be very new and helpful to that person; it gives him or her a more complete picture of themselves. As well as this, you might have tips for someone on how to improve certain aspects about themselves.

'I like your creative and enthusiastic new ideas in our group. They often give me new energy and motivate me. For me, it would be even better if you took some more time to introduce your ideas.'

In simple words: feedback is about making the other person more aware of her/his qualities and giving them suggestions on how to improve.

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Feedback can be used amongst peers, in small groups or teams and in individual talks, for instance between a youth worker and youngster.

Some tips you might give to your group when introducing feedback:

When you give feedback:

- > Try to tell the other person about **concrete**, specific behaviour you see and what effect that behaviour has on you ('your ideas motivate me', 'the enthusiastic way you speak sometimes makes me confused').
- > Don't start sentences with 'you are' or 'you always'. You can only **tell the effect** that the other's behaviour has on you.
- > Be **action-oriented**, give concrete tips ('sometimes you make me confused and I think that if you took more time to explain your ideas, it would help me').
- > Be aware that a certain **tension** is involved in feedback.
- > When your feedback produces **emotional and defensive reactions**, it is best to stop and try and find out what the reasons for such reactions are.
- > Feedback works better when it's given **shortly after an activity** where you have seen the other in action.
- > Feedback should be given after it has been **asked for**.
- > Feedback should be based on empathy and respect.
- > Be sure you have **enough time**.

When you receive feedback:

- > Listen carefully and actively.
- > Ask questions for clarification.
- > Try to repeat in your own words what you've heard to check you understand things correctly.
- > It's good to get feedback from more people and/or to check with others about what you've heard.
- > Don't overreact to feedback but decide for yourself what is useful for you.

Self-assessment using the Key competences

At the end of the EVS project and on the last day of the Training Course, the moment is there to note down your learning achievements in your Youthpass. Youthpass offers the framework of the eight Key competences. The challenge

will be how to put your learning outcomes into that framework. It's important to point out that not all the Key competences have to be used. In most cases, somebody will not have learnt all the eight Key competences during an EVS project or during a Training Course.

In a Training Course, it might be helpful for participants if trainers - while introducing the programme - link the different programme elements to the Key competences. In many Training Courses only two or three of the Key competences will be specifically addressed in the programme. Of course, it might be that participants also learn outside the programme. 'Communication in a foreign language' might not be an element in the course but a participant in an international Training Course might still make great progress in language skills and want to state this in their Youthpass.

Starting from the Key competences when assessing yourself might be difficult. Therefore, it might be better to only address them in the last step of the process.

Start collecting the learning achievements by using:

- > the initial learning objectives that were set at the beginning of the project
- > the notes made at the end of the day in, for example, the Diary
- > the results of a feedback session
- > an extra talk with your peer
- > an individual talk with the mentor or trainer
- > an overview of the Training Course programme or all the activities undertaken in the EVS project



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In an EVS project, it is recommended that you set aside an appropriate amount of time for the self-assessment. Filling in the self-assessment part of the Youthpass should be done together with the mentor who will have an important role to play, assisting the volunteer by asking the ‘right’ questions and offering tools that help structure all the experiences. Don’t just start this on the last day in between saying goodbye and packing. It involves looking back over a long process in which many things happened. Try to plan different sessions with the volunteer involving:

- > *mapping the different stages and activities*
- > *looking at and assessing the initial learning objectives*
- > *looking at unplanned learning outcomes (it happens a lot that you learn things you didn’t plan)*
- > *looking at problems and challenges and how the volunteer managed to deal with them*
- > *trying to formulate the learning outcomes*

Time is limited in a Training Course. The final self-assessment will probably take place on the last afternoon and the trainers will not have time to speak with all the participants individually. That’s why clear instructions and tips are necessary to get participants to work on the Key competences:

- > *point out (again) what the main Key competences addressed in the Training Course are*
- > *recommend that they ask each other for support*
- > *give some examples of how to write down the learning achievements*
- > *give some ideas of how to start a sentence to describe learning outcomes*
- > *remind them that somebody else who reads it should be able to understand it*
- > *tell them there are many right ways to do this; the trick is to find the one that fits you best*

Some ideas for starting a sentence to describe your learning:

- > *I feel more comfortable now ...*
- > *I found out ...*
- > *I learnt ...*
- > *I feel confident ...*
- > *I made progress ...*
- > *I’m able to ...*
- > *I now know how ...*
- > *I developed ...*
- > *I have a clear view now ...*
- > *I want to explore further ...*

Facilitator of learning

As we said at the beginning of this chapter: young people also learnt a lot in Youth Exchanges, EVS projects, Training Courses and Youth Initiatives before the introduction of Youthpass. What Youthpass aims to add is an increased awareness for the learner of what she/he has learnt and the recognition of that learning by others. An important pre-condition for this is that the youth workers/leaders, mentors, and trainers who implement these projects are aware of the learning possibilities that the projects offer and are ready to take on their role as the facilitator of that learning process. How ‘new’ that role is will differ a lot from person to person depending on the background, country or field where he/she comes from.

In general, we can say that ‘making learning explicit’ is something new and challenging in the field of non-formal education. We are at the beginning of a process which could be exciting!

A process where there is still much to explore and new ideas, approaches, methods and tools are welcome and necessary.

The website of Youthpass will allow practitioners to share their experiences and ideas – let’s use it!