

“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten”

B. F. Skinner

The most appropriate way of involving participants and structuring an educational process depends to a large extent upon the setting in which an educator is working. You may have more or less freedom regarding content, timing and form of activity depending on whether you are operating within a formal, informal or non-formal educational context. The activities presented in this manual have been designed to be flexible enough for use in all such contexts: within youth clubs, schools, summer camps, informal meetings, and so on.

Informal education refers to the lifelong process, whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (family, neighbours, marketplace, library, mass-media, work, play, etc.).

Formal education refers to the structured education system that runs from primary school to university, and includes specialised programmes for technical and professional training. Non-formal education refers to any planned programme of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competencies, outside the formal educational curriculum.

Non-formal education as practised by many youth organisations and groups is:

- Voluntary;
- Accessible to everyone (ideally);
- An organised process with educational objectives;
- Participatory and learner-centred;
- About learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship;
- Based on involving both individual and group learning with a collective approach;
- Holistic and process-oriented;
- Based on experience and action, and starts from the needs of the participants.

Formal, non-formal and informal educations are complementary and mutually reinforcing elements of a lifelong learning process. This manual has not been designed as a ‘course’ in HRE and the individual activities can usefully be applied in very different contexts, in formal or less formal settings, and on a regular or irregular basis.

In Europe, most of the people have gone through some form of schooling in their lives. This formal school education is commonly based on a “vertical” relationship between the pupil / student and the teacher: the holder of the knowledge (the teacher) and the receiver (the learner). The teacher mostly delivers knowledge to the student in the form of courses and curricula. At the end of the learning pathway a written document certifies the knowledge acquired by the learner according to official criteria. These certificates and diplomas are often necessary as keys to open doors into the labour market and society. Academic diplomas mostly refer to theoretical knowledge. Vocational training brings more practical contents in addition to general knowledge. It gives the learner a practical qualification that can be used directly in the labour market. Usually, traineeships are part of vocational training. The trainees learn a trade at the lowest beginner level within the working reality with the support of a mentor. At the end of the learning process there is also a certification. Vocational training is often shorter than formal studies and targets a quick acquisition of operational working skills. The relationship between the teacher and the learner still remains vertical, with the teacher passing down skills to the learner.

Non-formal education, on the contrary, can be summarized as “learning by doing”. The learning methodology lies in the interaction between the learners and the concrete situations they are experiencing. There are usually no teachers or lecturers providing the knowledge ex-cathedra, but the learners and facilitators construct the knowledge and skills together, in a

horizontal relationship. The educator or facilitator may be more or less active in the setting up of learning experiences for the benefit of the learner. This is what happens in youth work. It is possible to maximise non-formal education benefits for young people through the use of different methodologies such as peer education, project work, mobility projects, and more. The learners are at the centre of their own learning process and the youth workers support them in it. Unfortunately, at present there is not much certification of the competencies acquired by non-formal learners yet. Sometimes there is confusion between non-formal and informal learning. We consider informal learning to be spontaneous, as it happens in everyday life; whereas non-formal learning is planned and thought through by a facilitator, trainer or youth worker who also provides support during the entire learning process.

“learning [is]...a process that is not only related to the function of school or other organised educational settings. This conception of learning is based upon the idea and observation that a considerable number of our meaningful learning experiences happen outside the formal education system: in workplaces, families, different organisations and libraries...”

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in Building Bridges for Learning
The Recognition and Value of Non-Formal Education in Youth Activity*