

Informal Learning

The topic: Awareness-Reflection on the Informal Learning

Methods used: Presentations and interaction of participants, exchange and sharing of ideas, knowledge, skills and the analyses of participants. Peer group discussions and comments on the strength of non-formal and informal learning to enable young people to acquire essential competences that contribute to their personal and socio-educational development and foster their active participation in society and democracy, thereby improving their employment prospects. Field exercises focused on relevant questions.

Analytically:



Erasmus+ Programme and learning for youth

The Actions supported by the Erasmus+ Programme in the field of youth provide many opportunities for young people to acquire competences and grow as individuals, through non-formal and informal learning.

Non-formal learning refers to the learning, which takes place outside formal educational curriculum. It has a participative and learner-centred approach; it is carried out by learners on a voluntary basis and therefore is closely linked to young people's needs, aspirations and interests. By providing an additional source and new forms of learning, such activities are also important means to improve the attainment in formal education and training as well as to address young NEETs (i.e. young people not in employment, education or training) or young people with fewer opportunities and combat social exclusion.

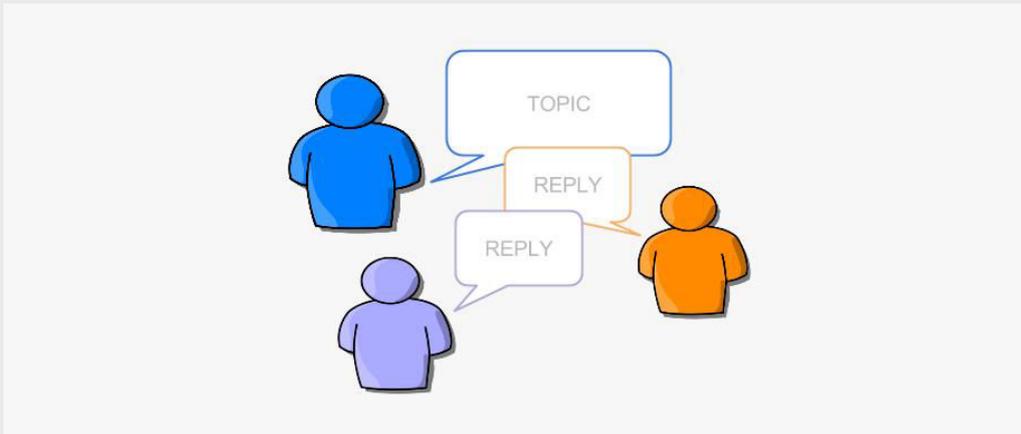
Informal learning refers to the learning in daily life activities, in work, with peers, etc. It is mainly learning by doing. In the youth sector, informal learning can take place in youth initiatives, in peer group

discussions, through voluntary activities and in a variety of other situations.

Both, **Non-formal and informal learning** enable young people to acquire essential competences that contribute to their personal and socio-educational development and foster their active participation in society, thereby improving their employment prospects.



Wikipedia teaches us: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Informal_learning
Informal learning is any learning that is not [formal learning](#) or [non-formal learning](#), such as self-directed learning or learning from experience. Informal learning is organized differently than formal and non-formal learning because it has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. For all learners this includes heuristic language building, socialization, enculturation, and play. Informal learning is a pervasive ongoing phenomenon of learning via participation or learning via knowledge creation, in contrast with the traditional view of teacher-centered learning via knowledge acquisition. The term is often conflated, however, with non-formal learning, and self-directed learning. It is widely used in the context of corporate training and education in relation to return on investment (ROI), or return on learning (ROL). It is also widely used when referring to science education, in relation to citizen science, or informal science education. The conflated meaning of informal and non-formal learning explicates mechanisms of learning that organically occur outside the realm of traditional instructor-led programs, e.g., reading self-selected books, participating in self-study programs, navigating performance support materials and systems, incidental skills practice, receptivity of coaching or mentoring, seeking advice from peers, or participation in communities of practice, to name a few. Informal learning is common in communities where individuals have opportunities to observe and participate in social activities.



CoE and Formal, non-formal and informal learning

Council of Europe (CoE, www.coe.int), an international organisation whose stated aim is to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe, founded in 1949, teaches us:

Educational systems exist to promote *formal learning*, which follows a syllabus and is intentional in the sense that learning is the goal of all the activities learners engage in. Learning outcomes are measured by tests and other forms of assessment. Adult migrants engage in formal learning when they take a course in the language of their host community. If the course is based on an analysis of their needs, it will follow a syllabus that specifies the communicative repertoire to be achieved by successful learners. The nature and scope of that repertoire should be reflected in whatever forms of assessment accompany the course.

Non-formal learning takes place outside formal learning environments but within some kind of organisational framework. It arises from the learner's conscious decision to master a particular activity, skill or area of knowledge and is thus the result of intentional effort. Nevertheless, it need not follow a formal syllabus or be governed by external accreditation and assessment. Non-formal learning typically takes place in community settings: swimming classes for small children, sports clubs of various kinds for all ages, reading groups, debating societies, amateur choirs and orchestras, and so on. Some non-formal learning arrangements become increasingly formal as learners become more proficient; one thinks, for example, of graded exams in music and other performing arts. Adult migrants engage in non-formal language learning when they participate in organised activities that combine the learning and use of their target language with the acquisition of a particular skill or complex of knowledge.

Informal learning takes place outside schools and colleges and arises from the learner's involvement in activities that are not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind. Informal learning is involuntary and an

inescapable part of daily life; for that reason, it is sometimes called *experiential learning*. Learning that is formal or non-formal is intentional and partly incidental: when we consciously pursue any learning target we cannot help learning things that are not part of that target. Informal learning, however, is exclusively incidental.

These **definitions and distinctions** help us to understand the complexity of successful language learning. When children acquire their first language they do so not because they are taught. Their learning is an incidental result of their participation in family life, and the linguistic skills they develop and the concepts they master reflect the social practices of their immediate environment. Similarly, adults are said to learn a second or subsequent language "naturalistically" when they do so by living among speakers of the language and interacting with them on a daily basis. Their emerging communicative repertoire is shaped not by a conscious learning agenda but by their attempts to satisfy their social and material needs. These are both examples of informal learning. In either case informal learning may be supported by non-formal learning: intentional learning that is prompted, for example, by the explanations parents give to their children and adult learners receive from those with whom they interact.

When children learn to read and write in their first language, they generally do so as part of their formal education and as a result of conscious effort; and when adult migrants attend a course in the language of their host community, they are aiming to achieve a prescribed level of proficiency. In both cases, however, intentional learning is usually accompanied by incidental learning; and the effects of incidental learning in formal educational contexts are reinforced by informal and non-formal learning in the world outside. The literacy of young children benefits from their out-of-school engagement in the reading they undertake for pleasure or in pursuit of a special interest, and the proficiency of adult migrants in the language of the host community is likely to be enhanced when they have opportunities to interact informally with other speakers of the language.

These considerations prompt the following questions.

First, how can those responsible for organising language courses for adult migrants ensure that their learners have opportunities to use the language outside the classroom and thus benefit from informal/non-formal learning? One obvious answer is to arrange cultural visits and social activities that bring the learners into informal contact with members of the host community. Another is to encourage learners to

participate in social activities, or to arrange such activities specifically for their benefit. Secondly, if adult migrants who have learnt the language of their host community “naturalistically” are required to demonstrate proficiency in that language in order to secure a residence permit or citizenship, can their informal/non-formal learning be recognised without requiring them to take a test? Any attempt to answer this question must consider alternative forms of assessment (the OECD has explored the recognition of non-formal and informal learning by adults in a three-year project).

At a time when many Council of Europe member states are receiving large numbers of adult refugees, the distinctions between formal, non-formal and informal learning help us to formulate radical and cost-effective responses to questions that have previously been answered in traditional ways. Instead of organising formal language courses, for example, in the short term it makes much better sense, and is certainly more affordable, to involve volunteers in the organisation of social activities that promote non-formal and informal language learning. If appropriately designed and efficiently implemented, such activities can provide migrant learners with a sound basis for participating in formal language courses at a later stage if that is judged to be desirable or necessary.



Let's enjoy short video about informal learning for:

- a greater understanding of interconnections between formal and non-formal education, vocational training and the labour market respectively
- a better recognition of competences gained through these learning periods abroad
- an increased motivation for taking part in future (formal/non-formal/informal) education or training after this mobility period abroad - Greece:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpejADtsIFI> - 4, 13'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hn-5OFcwpkM> - 16,53'