

# LEARNING TO LEARN

## A key competence for all adults?!

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## A key competence for all adults?!

### >> A / Intro

LEARNING TO LEARN is important and increasingly vital for people trying to deal with a rapidly changing world!

Or, in the words of the European Union, LEARNING TO LEARN is one of the 8 “key competences that citizens require for their personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability in our knowledge-based society.”<sup>1</sup>

UNIQUE, a European network of educational practitioners and researchers<sup>2</sup>, decided to explore this particular key-competence LEARNING TO LEARN. We therefore designed an action-research project<sup>3</sup> with the main aim to understand better how education can support adult learners developing this key competence.

We started off in November 2008 with a literature review on LEARNING TO LEARN in our countries. The review clearly showed how the term is understood very differently across Europe – from measures to become more efficient in learning all the way through to an all-encompassing competence for life!

We consider LEARNING TO LEARN an empowering competence which can give people the “motivation, autonomy and responsibility to control their own lives beyond the social circumstances in which they find themselves.”<sup>4</sup> In this way uncertainties, changes and risks can be seen more as learning opportunities – for individuals as well as their communities.

Now our project sets out to identify educational approaches, methods and concepts which support the development of the competence LEARNING TO LEARN – with the aim to contribute to the already existing respective pool of knowledge. Having this in mind we highly appreciate any contribution to our exploration process. Connected to the website of the project (see footnote on this page) is an interactive platform containing discussions about learning to learn – please feel free to join us!

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<sup>1</sup> Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework, annex of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 30 December 2006.

<sup>2</sup> see [www.unique-network.org](http://www.unique-network.org) for details

<sup>3</sup> Funded through the GRUNDTVIG programme of the European Union. For details on the project see: [www.learning2learn.eu](http://www.learning2learn.eu).

<sup>4</sup> Hoskins Bryony and Crick Ruth D., Learning to Learn and Civic Competences: different currencies or two sides of the same coin?, Report of the CRELL network of the European Commission, Torino, 2008, p.12.

## >> B / LEARNING TO LEARN – a paradigm shift in adult education?

We clearly say YES to this question – having in mind that:

- >> Learning to learn places the main emphasis on the learner – rather than on the educator.
- >> It asks for “What do participants need to learn and how can educators support them in this” – rather than “What can participants learn from this or that educational activity and the educators involved?”
- >> The main responsibility for the learning outcomes lies with the learner – rather than the educator.
- >> Educational activities have to be seen in the life-long learning perspective of participants – rather than an isolated learning opportunity of equal relevance to all participants.
- >> The focus on learning to learn becomes an integral focus of all educational activities – rather than dealt with in specific training courses only.

## >> C / LEARNING TO LEARN – What are we talking about?

In our understanding any view of this competence has to start with an understanding of learning and to go on with including a mixture of individual and social factors! We view LEARNING TO LEARN as a “method-in-action” where people have to engage in the method itself – “the what” of the learning is “the how”!

LEARNING TO LEARN is a competence area where apart from understanding and skills it is about attitudes, values and beliefs “that allow people to become more effective, flexible and self-organized learners in a variety of contexts”.<sup>5</sup> We consider it to be a “meta-competence” since it impacts on the selection, acquisition and application of other competences.

LEARNING TO LEARN is a competence development process at the centre of which is the awareness about yourself as a learner in the widest context (not only in relation to education) – your motivation for learning, your learning goals, preferred ways of learning, strategies for learning, cooperation with other learners, etc. Throughout your life, in particular during your childhood and adolescence you develop – mostly unconsciously - a concept of yourself as a learner. Based on this you develop strategies on how to learn. Learning to learn means becoming aware of these concepts as well as being able to adjust them if they appear limiting for further development.

Learning to learn involves entering into the deep meaning structures of material to be learnt and, in its most advanced forms, may lead to critical awareness of assumptions, rules, conventions, and social expectations that influence how people perceive knowledge and how they think, feel and act when learning. (Candy, p.31)

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<sup>5</sup> Candy Philip C., in Smith 1990, How People Learn to Learn, p. 30-63.

## >> D / What is the – new – role of learners?

LEARNING TO LEARN requires learners who feel responsible for what and how they want to learn. Most adults in Europe have experienced a fairly directive educational approach throughout childhood and youth. Consequently they might have developed a rather “consuming” attitude to education and training which is in conflict with an educational approach based on LEARNING TO LEARN.

LEARNING TO LEARN is a competence involving self-management, creativity, search for meaning, being collaborative, imagining, taking initiative and being responsible.

What do adult learners need to head in this – new – direction? First of all they need the following necessary attitudes:

- >> Self-motivation and endurance in learning, don't give up when you hit a problem.
- >> Inner willingness for personal development and to change the present situation.
- >> Positive attitude towards learning.
- >> Willingness to support and motivate others in their learning.

A more precise list of competences adult learners would need to be able to learn to learn will be developed throughout this project.

### **Potential benefits of being competent in LEARNING TO LEARN**

You become clearer about your aims and how to reach them – in life in general (vision, life goals) as well as in specific learning areas.

You connect better to your potentials and can make use of them in various situations.

You are more capable to learn from challenge and crisis situations.

You develop your capacity of critical thinking.

You increase your capacities to participate as an active citizen in your communities.

You become a more effective, flexible and self-directed learner in a variety of contexts.

## >> E / What is the impact on adult education – the educators involved and the methodology applied?

Educators become foremost facilitators of learning – sounds simple but it is not; because it means letting go of control. Facilitators of learning need therefore to develop specifically their competences to support the learning process of participants.

Essential to these competences are the necessary *attitudes* which, like an internal compass, can help to navigate and explore the field of learning to learn:

- >> Authentic willingness to support the learners on their way
- >> Genuine trust that a learners knows best their own needs
- >> Empathy in transparent relationships with learners.
- >> Awareness of the life-long learning context in which the learning activity takes place.

Furthermore it has to be considered that facilitators are also learners who are aware of their own learning based on reflected practice of both intentional and unconscious LEARNING TO LEARN processes. Therefore facilitators should have an understanding about the concept of learning to learn as well as a set of the operational competences which could help putting their facilitation into practice.

Independent from their actual theme educational programmes need to make space in one way or the other for dealing with "learning" – as a topic in itself and as a process supporting participants to "tune" their learning needs and goals with the opportunities offered by the course, the facilitators and their peers. Of course this is far more challenging for activities with a short duration than long-term courses.

In case such an approach is new to participants clearly there should be space in the programme to explain and explore learning in general and themselves as learners. Furthermore methodologies should foresee opportunities to reflect – individually as well as with peers – about learning needs, the process and achievements.

Throughout the project these assumptions will be tested and further developed. At the end we will produce a hand-book describing the educational approaches, methods and concepts apt to support the development of the learning to learn competence.

## >> E / Literature references

- >> Candy Philip C., in Smith 1990, How People Learn to Learn, p. 30-63.
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This is the third draft of a key document for us, dated 05.05.2009. We expect to re-examine our ideas during the life of the L2L project and make further conclusions.