ACTIVE LEARNING TOOLKIT & METHODOLOGY

Active learning toolkit

Active learning is a student centered approach in which the responsibility for learning is placed upon the student, often working in collaboration with classmates. In active learning environments and formats, teachers are facilitators rather than one way providers of information. Active Learning is a branch of informal learning, which is a pervasive approach in which there is no set objectives in term of learning outcomes and the knowledge is built via participation or creation, in contrast with the traditional view of teacher-centered learning via knowledge acquisition.
The presentation of facts, instead of being introduced through straight lecture, is deemphasized in favor of class discussion, problem solving, cooperative learning, and writing exercises. Other examples of active learning techniques include role-playing, case studies, group projects, think-pair-share, peer learning, debates, Just-in-Time Teaching, and short demonstrations followed by class discussion.
The whole Breaking the Circle Toolkit is made by several formats included the Pass-On Game, in which many Active Learning formats are experienced by participants through one general gameplay set.

Methodology

The Breaking the Circle Active-Learning Toolkit has been designed by the whole project team and produced using the main results of the Participatory Research Process. It has been tested at a local level with groups of youngsters in school and non-formal educational contexts, in order to be re-elaborated and re-organized following their feedbacks.
The main goals of this Toolkit are:

- To share and discuss participants' points of view, pointing out topics and issues of their everyday life related to their rights as persons and as minors;

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- To inform them that a set of Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice exists and it contains a lot of principles that can be useful if them or their friends will ever experience a Judicial Proceeding but also thinking about their everyday life;
- To open the discussion inside the group (class, informal group…) about rights, duties, respect, legality, ecc.
- To improve the knowledge of the professionals leading the process, producing a set of Guidelines, Vademecum, and documents useful to answer youths' questions.

The Methodology that stands besides this Active-Learning Toolkit can be resumed on these main points of attention:

- The Active-Learning Toolkit Process is participated and co-responsible. The valorization of the knowledge and of the experiences of the participants is the way to balance the powers and authorities that plays a role in a training setting. The Trainer, in this sense, has to become an activator and a facilitator of experience participation processes. The participants have to become active and aware actors.
- The Active-Learning Toolkit Process is generative. It helps to produce changings, to put inside the class or the group innovation and experimentation challenges, following a circular inner working that activates both the trainer and the group of participants.
- The Active-Learning Toolkit Process is open. It does not have topics barriers, it has to be receptive to the signal of changes, but also not be too linked to what the group wants, and always be challenging;
- The Active-Learning Toolkit Process is reflexive. The Active-Learning Toolkit, as a living experience, has a value not in the moment it is lived, but in the moment we're put in the condition to think and reflect about it. For this motivation, theActive-Learning Toolkit includes sessions dedicated to accompany the surfacing of individual and group reflexivity. It occurs to listen to experiences to welcome and accompany the transformative potential.

As said before, this Active-Learning Toolkit has been tested in our local contexts, and the Project is carrying out over than 80 Raising Awareness Campaigns in all our Countries (Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Spain). We are collecting some tips that you can make yours, feel free to add your owns! If you feel like, you can send us your tips and suggestions, we'll try to add them to the list.

1. Think globally, act locally. You're working in a global framework that concerns macro dynamics, long-term processes, a variety of players and a complex system of causes and effects. You should properly know this framework and direct your actions strategically, but anything has to be adapted to the specific characteristics of your local context and its functioning.

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2. Diversity works good. While working with a large and heterogeneous group, you should consider diversity as a main asset. Different experiences, points of view, attitudes and skills can truly enrich the process. However, you have to prepare and take care of an environment that promotes the sharing and interaction between diversities, trying to shorten the distances between the participants, and between you and the participants.
3. Tailor your approach. Methods and activities should be designed considering the people involved in the group, inside and outside school context. Anyone has his own characteristics and sensitivity, you should notice that and adapt your plan to the group. Nobody should feel forced to do anything.
4. Consider the language. Explore and experiment different languages in order to find the one more suitable to the group. Language issues include technicalities and slang, body and words, verbal and nonverbal. When looking for the best way to communicate in the group, try to focus actions and behaviors, not persons and identities.
5. Mind resources. A complex process needs care, time and people, and all these things concern money. Before starting, make it clear which are the resources you can count on and set coherent goals in terms of extension, duration and depth of the work you are starting.
6. Evaluate. Step by step, involve participants in a reflective process aimed at considering the strengths and weakness of your proposal and aimed at redirecting the activities. Create a safe environment, allow participants to express their opinion without any concern or worry. Take in consideration their feedback and try to demonstrate these are effective in the short period, by re-designing your work plan. Please, feel free to send us the feedback you recollect!
7. Appreciate and restart. Keep full account of everything the participants will say and do, and underline properly its most valuable aspects. Consider every word and every opinion as a gift, and take care of it. You have the responsibility of enhancing and pursuing the instances of participants, helping them to claim their rights and improve the system. At the end of the cycle, remember to mainstream the results and to communicate the impact of your activity to your colleagues, to your institution, to us!, in order to create new trust in the process and positive relationships in the system. By doing so, you will strengthen your bridging function between people, organizations and institutions.

More practically:

8. Keep a flexible approach (number of meetings, length of meetings, type of proposal, languages to be used…), consistent with the specific groups and contexts you'll be working in. We suggest you to organize three meetings, but you can choose other solutions.

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9. Before the first meeting, remember to do some preparatory activities, like learning the history of the Guidelines, reading some of the principles you can find in there, watching some movies related, writing some essays on the topic, and so on...
10. Don't hesitate to add more experimental approaches (games, movement, images, music, stories, creative languages...). If possible, you can involve professionals with previous experiences and specific skills related to consultation groups.
11. During the entire process, fully comply with the recommendations of the Guidelines on Child Rights. Be very careful in involving in group activities young people with particularly traumatic experiences. If you feel that the situation is not enough comfortable, then avoid group dynamics and organize individual consultation meetings.

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