

3.3.2. Methods and methodology

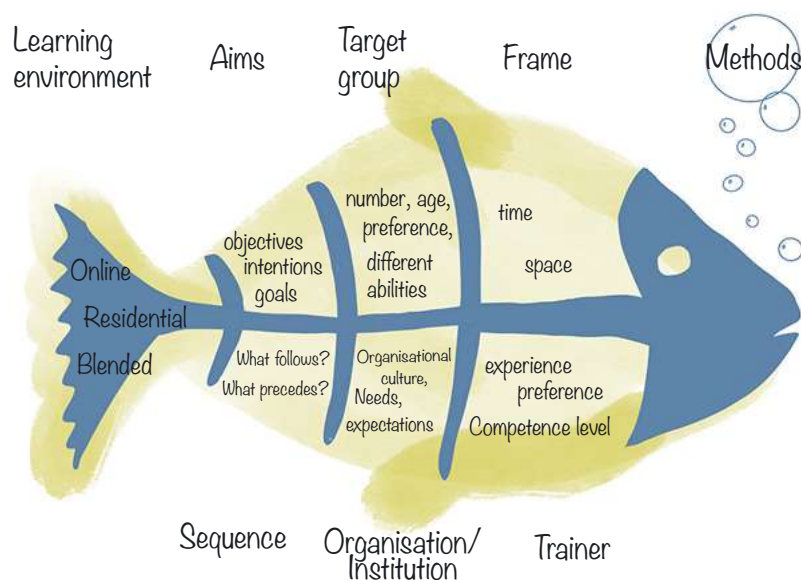
Question – what is the plural of method? Answer – methods, not methodology. This is the first point that needs clarification in this section. A method is an activity and it gives a framework to a certain part of the programme. It could be an icebreaker, a simulation game, an input. Methodology, on the other hand, is the educational logic of the methods chosen. The role-playing game “Take a step forward”;¹⁰⁵ for example, is a method, and role-playing is a methodology based on a philosophy of experiential learning. Therefore, the chosen methodology is closely related to the training strategy; it is the rubric by which the individual methods are chosen. It is an overview of the methods in the programme, looking at the balance of types, how they relate to learning preferences, individual/group activity, and so on. What this also suggests is that choosing a method is not a simple question of finding activities which will fill the time frame available. This section addresses the range of questions which should be considered before a method is decided upon.

A method is the point at which all of the training planning is presented to the participants. As such, it is responsible for communicating a lot about this prior process. A five-hour input on participation and citizenship without questions or toilet breaks may seem a little odd. The method chosen and the relations between the axes of the triangle which it represents would not seem to fit with the values being espoused by the content or the training. As a result, at a fundamental level, the method must relate to the vision and purpose of the training – in other words, the underlying values, overall aims, as well as the specific objectives. The method chosen must fulfil a specific objective and also represent a system of values central to the whole enterprise. If we begin to collate a checklist of questions which can be referred to when choosing methods, then the initial ones would be:

- ▶ Is the chosen method in line with the values that are transmitted in the content and with the aims of the training?
- ▶ Can the method deliver the objectives specified for this stage of the training strategy? (Complete this sentence: at the end of this session I would like to see that participants...)

These questions are also useful for teams to take stock of their shared understanding. Clearly, if team members are answering these questions differently, a review of the process may have to be undertaken.

To begin relating the methods to an overview of factors, see the fish below:



The bubbles the fish breathes represent the methods that have been generated by passing through the entire body. By looking along the ribs, we can check the factors which have influenced this. We can also relate these to the elements in the globe. The following are relevant questions to consider in relation to the group.

- ▶ How does the methodology reflect the reality of the group, in other words, are different methods used in the overall programme which respond to different learning preferences, needs and speeds?
- ▶ What kind of communication does the method encourage in the group?

105. “Take a step forward” is a very popular activity from the *Compass: manual for human rights education with young people*, available at www.coe.int/en/web/compass, accessed 21 August 2020.

- ▶ Does the method contribute to the process of group building, or is that an issue at this point?
- ▶ What levels of trust and familiarity does the method presume in the group?
- ▶ Did the method respond to the level of comfort/challenge of the group?
- ▶ How does the method correspond to your understanding of the group dynamics at this point?
- ▶ How does the method address the group needs and responsibilities at this point in the training strategy?
- ▶ Is the method gender-sensitive and inclusive to different abilities?

Within these group considerations, we can add a further set of questions concerning the individual and address that axis of the triangular relationship.

- ▶ Does the method consider any individual biographical information that may be relevant? (age, education, language, sociocultural background, previous experience, relevant competence level)
- ▶ Does the method allow active participation of the learner?
- ▶ Does the method engage more than verbal-intellectual skills?
- ▶ Does it give time and opportunity for the learner to get in contact with their feelings, interests and thoughts?
- ▶ Will the learner realise that they are responsible for their learning and personal development?
- ▶ Are questions raised that motivate further investigation, training, exchange or study?
- ▶ Does the method raise reactions and emotions that can be dealt with in the context? Is the method challenging enough and yet not too challenging?
- ▶ Does the method presume certain physical capacities on the part of the participant? Is the method accessible and gender inclusive?

The method has an obvious relationship to the topic; it is chosen to advance the exploration of the topic at a particular moment. Thinking back to the training strategy, the method needs to be related to the objectives of the content and the relationship of the trainer and group to the content at that moment.

- ▶ What prior level of knowledge does the method assume? (intellectual, emotional, etc.)
- ▶ How does the method relate to what has gone before and what will come after?
- ▶ How does the method value and incorporate the contributions of the group?
- ▶ What information is provided by the trainer, and what is left to the participants to supply or find themselves?
- ▶ Which elements of the topic are prioritised by the method at this point, and why?

And finally, the globe also suggests a range of factors which have to be taken into account.

- ▶ Is the method feasible?
- ▶ Is the method secure physically and safe psychologically?
- ▶ Are the necessary materials available and budgeted for?
- ▶ How does the physical environment impact the choice of method?
- ▶ Is there enough time, allowing for small delays, to complete the activity and fulfil the objectives?
- ▶ Is it possible to adapt the method to the changing circumstances in the process and in the group?

Note: many of the questions above were suggested by or adapted from a handout “Considerations for the design of training programmes and the choice of methods”, by Antje Rothmund, for “Training for Trainers”, European Youth Centre Budapest, 1998 (itself adapted from Gerl H. (1985), “Methoden der Erwachsenenbildung” in Pöggeler, *Handbuch der Erwachsenenbildung*, Stuttgart).

Reflection moment

- ▶ Having studied this list of questions, can you add any more to the different categories?
- ▶ Do you find any questions particularly important or particularly controversial?

3.3.3. Methods online and online methods

You might have noticed that one of the insides of the fish is dedicated to a type of chosen learning environment – whether the training is happening in the residential setting, online or as a blended option. While this might not have such a huge influence when choosing which type of theory to offer to the learners or which

kinds of questions to use for reflection, when choosing a method this is one of the determining factors. Many trainers who have ventured from residential training settings into online learning realms have tried the first logical thing – to adapt the methods used in face-to-face interaction to those new contexts. In some cases that works, in some it does not. Or at least it does not to the same extent.

That said, when you put all the other aspects of the insides of the fish together, you should also add the following considerations about online learning environments.

- ▶ Online learning platforms allow for a self-paced exploration of the content, at least to some degree. This allows for creating multiple learning pathways with different methods and activities (allowing learners to choose their own way).
- ▶ By using different platforms and tools, learning can be a combination of synchronous (online meetings) and asynchronous elements and methods. This also caters for a combination of online meetings and individual and/or collaborative tasks in between.
- ▶ Online meetings are an invaluable element to create connection and bring learners together, but at the same time it can lead to videoconferencing fatigue.
- ▶ A lot of content can be stored online and online learning platforms are a good place for gathering resources in different formats.
- ▶ Arguably, online learning caters quite well to different visual content: images, videos, memes, GIFs, you name it! It is important, however, that the visual content is accessible to all group members, with all their abilities.
- ▶ Online segments can stretch over a period of several weeks, during which participants are usually in their home contexts. This allows for research and practical tasks in their local environments.
- ▶ Learners connect to online meetings from their homes and/or offices, which means that they bring elements of familiar environments with them. This familiar environment can be utilised to break the ice and reduce the awkwardness.
- ▶ A written word is not the same as a spoken word and it does not allow for a lot of clarification. This might imply that whatever input is being made it needs to be very clear and to the point. Which goes for face-to-face inputs as well.
- ▶ A blended-learning environment allows for local groups getting together face to face, doing certain tasks and activities, and then using online elements to connect to the whole international group.

Finally, an important aspect to be considered is the trainers themselves. Whether they are comfortable online, whether they feel this environment as their own and whether they have trust that it can provide learners with meaningful insights and interactions. There is quite some resistance among youth workers and the youth training community towards the online learning environments and this is something that needs to be taken into consideration when planning training that includes an online dimension as well.

For an overview and inspiration of possible methods to be implemented online, check Digi Youth Portal,¹⁰⁶ Nerijus Kriauciunas's article on "Smart and digital youth work resources: where to find more,"¹⁰⁷ *Leading groups online guide*,¹⁰⁸ or DOYIT *eLearning guide* by ERYCA.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, when deciding on which method to choose, digital tools are increasingly entering residential training rooms – treasure hunt apps, online quizzes, apps for quick collection of people's feelings and opinions, etc. They can be very useful and engaging, but they come with a risk of taking attention away from the here and now and into the World Wide Web, where a lot of different temptations lurk just behind the next click. That said, although humans are reportedly carrying their phones wherever they go, including to a residential session, this does not mean the end of civilisation. Trainers need to adapt to these realities and take them into consideration when choosing their methods. A number of trainers are stating that residential training settings should provide an alternative to this and therefore we can see an increase in numbers of face-to-face

106. Digi Youth Portal: *Methods in online learning – part 1*, available at www.digi-youth.com/, author for part 1 and 2, Ivana Volf, accessed 21 August 2020.

107. Kriauciunas (2020).

108. Rewa and Hunter (2020).

109. DOYIT (*developing online youth information trainings*) *eLearning guide* by ERYCA, available at static1.squarespace.com/static/59ab1130ff7c50083fc9736c/t/5c04f9d18985834de3f1247c/1543829976368/DOYIT+eLearning+Guide.pdf, accessed 21 August 2020.

courses and outdoor pursuits, while others are saying that we should start utilising the advantages of digital technologies and create methods that will utilise them as well. As often happens, the truth is somewhere in between and trainers should strive to find a way that feels comfortable for them and plays well with their competences. In all that, it is important to walk the talk – we are all humans as well and most of us flick through our phone while watching a series on a streaming service or seeing a quick video tutorial on how to assemble a piece of furniture.

Technology is an enabler. What we use it for is what matters. It can make us more or less productive, based on how we use it. For every distraction that the internet throws at us (memes, click-bait news, funny Reddit threads, YouTube videos, social media and so on), it also provides us tools to cut the noise.¹¹⁰

And for some inspiration, you can check the list of tools that SEEYN – South East European Youth Network compiled on its Digi Youth Portal.¹¹¹

3.3.4. Methods and the trainer

Ultimately, of course, the success of the chosen method depends on the trainer delivering the training. A method which involves a group in an experiential learning situation is not an exact science, and there is great value in unexpected contributions and directions. These can only be valuable, however, if the trainer is aware that they are unexpected, and can relate them to the objectives and anticipated flow of the session. Basically, a trainer needs to feel comfortable with the method and confident in their capability to see it through. The following questions can act as a guide to assessing the suitability of the method to you as a trainer.

- ▶ Do you feel confident and convinced about the method?
- ▶ Have you experienced the method fully as a participant? Or as part of a team where people have had that experience? Have you facilitated it yourself?
- ▶ Do you feel that you have the necessary competences, in particular background knowledge of the topic, to facilitate this method?
- ▶ Are you in a position to anticipate the outcomes but also deal with unexpected ones?
- ▶ Do you have a plan B if something goes wrong with the method?
- ▶ Can you make the objectives of the activity, while avoiding dogmatic facilitation? (i.e. pushing for the “right answers”).
- ▶ To what extent will you be able to deal with the feelings in participants or group that might arise from the method?
- ▶ Is your method fully inclusive for different abilities?
- ▶ ...

Statements adapted from Rothmund (1998), “Considerations for the design of training programmes and the choice of methods”.

The list of questions is not exhaustive (as the three dots indicate) and these are just possible aspects to take into consideration when choosing an appropriate method. Nevertheless, they should help trainers to avoid an “I have the perfect method” situation, which is based on their preferences and great past experiences and might have nothing to do with the current reality of the “theme”, “group”, “individual’ and “the globe” (as referred to in section 3.3.1).

3.4. LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Organising a training course is like preparing yourself for a journey. One of our grandmothers used to say the better you prepare your luggage, the better time you will have. And we think she is right. Furthermore, this also applies to the context of a training course. The better you prepare it, the better prepared you are to expect the unexpected.

¹¹⁰ Mandiga (2018).

¹¹¹ Digi Youth Portal: Everything you ever wanted to know about online learning and digital tools in youth work, available at www.digi-youth.com/, accessed 21 August 2020.

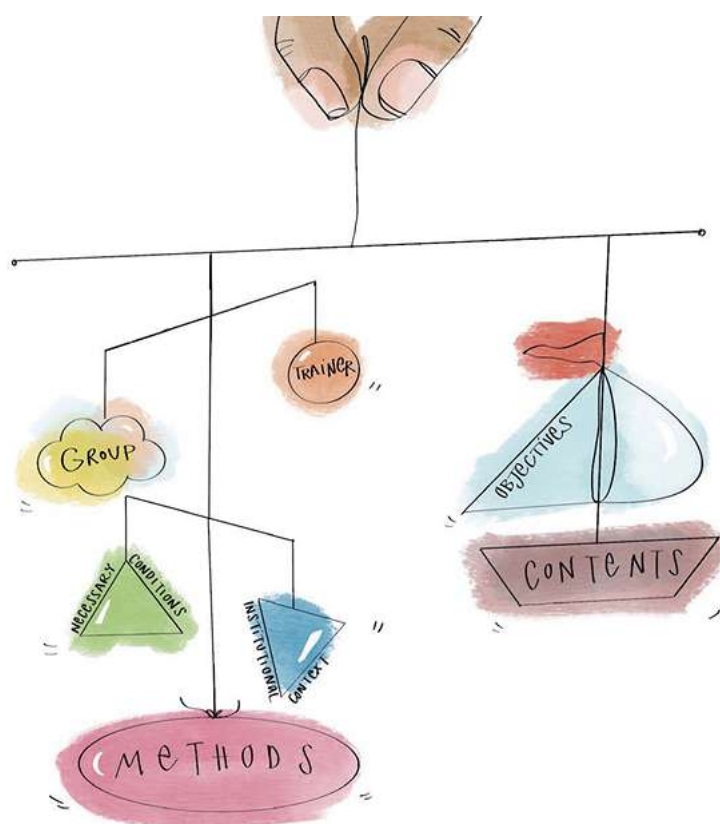
non-formal and informal learning experiences in youth work, available to the participants of the projects granted through Erasmus+ and Youth in Action programmes. The Youthpass certificate allows the participants to describe their learning experiences and learning achievements and it:

- ▶ encourages learners to reflect on their learning through the process of a youth exchange;
- ▶ guides them to learn the language of competences when translating their learning for the Youthpass;
- ▶ empowers them to be in charge of their own learning, since Youthpass is based on self-assessment and not on the external assessment.

Another example consists of digital badges,¹³⁵ also built on an ongoing process of reflection and recognition.

A training process which is relevant to multicultural groups should include different levels of learning and work with the classic elements of head, heart, hands and health. When creating your programme flow, reflect upon how you, as a trainer and in your team, see learning happening. For instance, what relation exists between experience and theory? What place should emotional learning have? Do you give enough space for reflection?

3.5.6. Session design



Adapted from Mewaldt and Gailius (1997: 25).

Once the overall programme content and flow are defined, detailed planning can begin. A session is a time slot in the programme. In the residential context, the usual template includes four to five sessions per day – two in the morning, two in the afternoon, and possibly another in the evening. However, you could also have two session blocks in a day or even one that covers a whole-day experience. This will all depend on the elements in the diagram above. Preparing a session involves concentrated planning with an eye on the whole process. How does this session fit in with the ones before and after? What do we need in this session to maintain a balance of methods and learning points? Every session should be prepared like a miniature programme, with clear objectives, content and methodology, and an awareness of trainer competencies, the group, environment and institutional context. As shown in the illustration above, the objectives and content of each session need to be balanced against all the other factors determining the specific context of the training session.

¹³⁵ Badgecraft: Digital recognition of skills and achievements, available at www.badgecraft.eu/, accessed 21 August 2020.

Things to consider when designing a session within a larger training framework

Institutional context: What outside requirements exist? Are there any expectations from the organisation or institution responsible for the training? Are there any legal restrictions?

Objectives: What are the specific objectives you want to achieve with this training session? What learning outcomes would you like to see?

Contents: What is the essence of the subject you are working on? Can you reasonably connect subjects and objectives? What should the participants experience during this session? How does this subject fit into the process and overall content of the training course?

Trainers: What are your experiences as trainers in working on this subject? When working with other groups, what was positive, and what would you like to avoid? Which methods do you value as trainers and feel competent in using?

Group: What is the present situation of the group? What needs, interests and abilities have participants expressed? What prior experience and level of competence do the participants have in this subject and approach? How is the interaction within the group and between the group and the team at present?

Conditions: What kind of learning environment would you like to have for this session? What are the working conditions? What limitations do the environment and space present? What materials do you have, what do you need? How much time do you have?

Methods: Which methods are suitable in this context? Which methods do you know? What is the accessibility and adaptability of these methods? What have you used already, or are planning to use later during this training course? What is the attention span of the participants?

Adapted from Mewaldt and Gailius (1997: 25).

One important thing to consider when planning your session is the attention span of the participants. There are inevitably fluctuations in attention, which will be impacted by environmental and group factors. Keeping that in mind will help you see what methods you need to use to keep the group involved. There are some figures out there that suggest people's attention spans with more precision and there are also theories that disprove them. Essentially, you would want to make sure that you involve different kinds of stimuli (without turning a training room or an online platform into a circus) to keep participants interested and engaged.

Finally, it is great if you can plan as many of the sessions as possible in advance, because this will provide you with an element of certainty and hopefully prevent long team meetings into silly hours of the night. Nonetheless, many of the elements will only crystallise during the training itself, so be prepared to be flexible and to rethink the session based on the reality of the group, the process and context.

3.6. EVALUATION

Evaluation is creation: hear it, you creators! Evaluating is itself the most valuable treasure of all that we value. It is only through evaluation that value exists: and without evaluation the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear it, you creators!

Friedrich Nietzsche

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

Albert Einstein



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