



YouthWorkAndYou.org

Tallinn University, Estonia
in collaboration with
Victoria University,
Australia

Unit 1

Youth Participation and Non-formal Learning

**Non-formal learning: concept and
opportunities in youth work**

YouthWorkAndYou.org is brought to you by the Youth Work eLearning Partnership [YWeLP], an Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership 2017-2019.

Introduction

Non-formal learning

This unit provides you with a short introductory video, some historical and theoretical overviews regarding non-formal learning concepts and the opportunity to connect this knowledge to youth work contexts.

This unit will introduce the concept of non-formal learning and its main principles. It will encourage you to see non-formal learning opportunities in youth work.

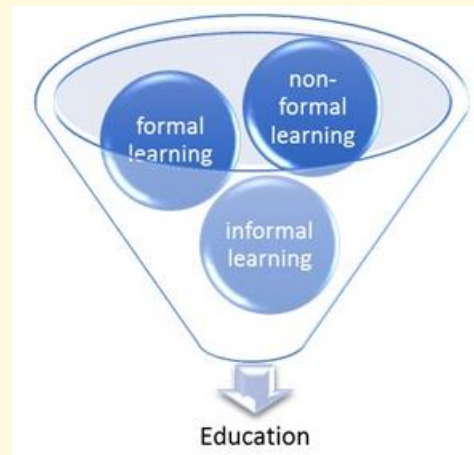
Please watch the Unit 1 interactive video before proceeding further.

Setting the Scene

This unit explains the main concepts and principles of non-formal learning. It also defines the term 'non-formal learning' and explains its application in youth work contexts.

Before defining non-formal learning or education, we should understand the concept of education and the concept of learning. The educational theorist John Dewey (1997, p.50) described “the process of education as the constant ability to grow and to break away from the mere routines”.

Education nowadays has been often defined according to its functions and formality level: formal, non-formal and informal education.



Topics and issues around formal and informal learning have been widely discussed. This unit is about the meaning, functions and possibilities of non-formal learning as a main learning method and principle in the field of youth work.

There are several ways to define the term ‘non-formal learning’ and several opportunities to understand the whole concept of non-formal education.

To understand the meaning of non-formal learning before proceeding further, please watch the interactive video for this unit.

What you will learn

Unit 1 Non-formal Learning covers the following:

- Understanding non-formal learning as a planned process (aim, methods, environments, assessment, feedback).
- Knowing the key competences of non-formal learning.
- Analysing and relating opportunities of non-formal learning to youth work

Unit 1 Contents



1. Understanding non-formal learning as a planned process (aim, methods, environments, assessment, feedback).

This section will examine terminology, historical development of the concept, primary theories and contemporary practice.

2. Knowing the key competences of non-formal learning.

This section will clarify different meanings and understandings of the concept as well as the main principles of non-formal learning. It also contains an individual learning task to understand and reflect on the key competences of non-formal learning.

3. Analysing and relating opportunities of non-formal learning to youth work

This section will show the possibilities of non-formal learning in the context of youth work and emphasizes that non-formal learning is not a separate learning method or concept, but that it complements formal education.

Questions

What is non-formal learning?

What are the main principles and practices of non-formal learning?

What are the possibilities for non-formal learning in youth work?

Engaging with the Interactive Video Content

1. Non-formal learning – what is it?

As you heard in the video, learning is a dynamic process that happens all the time and education involves intention and total commitment (Smith, 1994).

The most well-known way to describe the concept of non-formal learning is to explain it as learning which happens outside of formal education institutions – outside of kindergartens, schools, colleges, universities etc. But it is not the only way to clarify this complex learning concept.

Coombs and Ahmed (1974) were the first to use the term ‘non-formal education’. They postulated that “education can no longer be confined to any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children.” (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 8).

According to Reddy (2003, p. 21), non-formal learning consists of “activities outside the formal learning setting, characterized by voluntary as opposed to mandatory participation.”

Nowadays the concept of non-formal learning is strongly associated with the concept of lifelong learning. According to lifelong learning strategy documents, non-formal learning can take place in very different environments (for example, in hobby education or supplementary education, but also in nature), where learning and teaching may not be the only objectives. Non-formal learning has an objective in the same way as formal education, but it is voluntary and aimed. It can be carried out by professional trainers or, for example, volunteers or peers (The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020).

At the present time we use non-formal learning in almost all areas of education: in youth work as well as in adult education. It is important to stress that in youth work non-formal learning is an important learning concept and idea because of its potential to incorporate the interests and needs of all young people.

2. Principles of Non-formal Learning

Non-formal learning takes place in activities which are designed, but not necessarily for, the purposes of learning. Young people learn social skills when doing sports; they learn foreign languages when communicating on the internet and they may develop their identity when taking part in youth activities (Kiilakoski, 2015).

There are several key characteristics which define non-formal learning:

- non-formal learning takes place outside of a formal learning system in a diverse range of environments and situations
- non-formal learning is based on volunteerism
- non-formal learning is purposive
- non-formal learning involves all people over their lifespan



Based on research conducted in Estonia at Tallinn University in 2018, (Karu et al., 2019) there are five topics, or *discourses*, which characterize non-formal learning:

1. DIFFERENCE DISCOURSE
 - non-formal learning is either similar to or different from the other kinds of learning.
2. ENVIRONMENT DISCOURSE
 - learning taking place in non-formal settings or the activities of non-formal learning create a new environment for learning.
3. INCLUSION DISCOURSE
 - non-formal learning is intended for specific target groups or it is assumed that everyone has equal opportunities to be involved.
4. ACCEPTANCE DISCOURSE
 - non-formal learning is accepted formally or essentially.
5. SYSTEM DISCOURSE
 - non-formal learning is a part of a complex education system or it is an entire complex system on its own.

3. Non-formal learning in youth work

As you saw in the video and read earlier, there are several ways for young people to learn. Much learning takes place outside the school - in youth centres, in museums, in everyday situations, in cinemas, in libraries, in sport activities, etc.

One of the key constituents of youth work — leisure time of young people — needs to be rethought (Kiilakoski, 2015). The perspective of learning as acquisition should be coupled with learning as participation (Wenger, 1998; see also Unit 2: Youth Participation).

4. Non-formal learning practices – an individual reflection task)

Think about the places of non-formal learning you saw in the video and describe the non-formal learning situation you experienced. What purpose did you have and what did you learn?

5. Summary

As you saw earlier in the video, non-formal learning is a way to learn in museums, youth centres, workplaces, nature, anywhere outside of the formal educational environment.

It is important to understand that we should see non-formal education as complementing formal education. Cooperation between formal and non-formal learning institutions affects both parties and enriches a young person's possibilities for learning.

Everyone has equal chances to learn in any place at any time and in any circumstance. The main principle of non-formal learning is that everybody can learn and are able to do it everywhere and that learning continues throughout one's lifespan.

Links to further Information and Reading

Here is a list of additional information which will assist you to explore non-formal learning concepts and principles further as well as resources that you can use while working with young people.

Articles

Karu, K., Jõgi, L., Rannala, I.-E., Roosalu, T., Teder, L., & Põlda, H. (2019).

"Construction of meaning of 'non-formal learning' in policy documents." *Estonian Journal of Education*, 7(1), pp. 50–75.

Summary available at

https://eha.ut.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/12_03_karu_summary.pdf

Mok, N.A. (2011). "Non-formal learning: clarification of the concept and its application in music learning." *Australian Journal of Music Education* pp. 11–15.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ952003.pdf>

Müller, B. (2006). "Similarities and links between early childhood education and informal education in youth work for adolescents. European Early Childhood." *Education Research Journal*, 14(2), pp. 21–33.

Romi, S., & Shmida, M. (2007). "Non-formal education: a major educational force in the postmodern era." *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902904472>

Spence, J. (2007). "What Do Youth Workers Do? Communicating Youth Work." *Youth studies Ireland.*, 2(2), pp. 3–18.

<http://dro.dur.ac.uk/6426/1/6426.pdf>

Kiilakoski, T. (2015). "Youth work and non-formal learning in Europe's education landscape and the call for a shift in education." In *Youth work and non-formal learning in Europe's education landscape*.

<https://publications.europa.eu/s/mls>

Books

Batsleer, J. (2008) *Informal Learning in Youth Work*. London: Sage Publications

Bjornavold, Jens (2000). *Making Learning Visible: Identification, Assessment and Recognition of Non-Formal Learning in Europe*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED447347.pdf>

Coombs, P. H. & Ahmed, M. (1974). *Attacking rural poverty: How nonformal education can help*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Colley, H, Hodkinson, P & Malcolm, M (2002) *Non-formal learning: mapping the conceptual terrain. A Consultation Report*, Leeds: University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Institute. http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/colley_informal_learning.htm.

Jarvis, P. (2008). *Democracy, lifelong learning and the learning society: active citizenship in a late modern age*. Abingdon, UK; New York, NY: Routledge.

Youth work and non-formal learning in Europe's education landscape. A quarter of a century of EU cooperation for youth policy and practice. (2015). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/youth_work_and_non-formal_learning_in_europes_education_landscape_and_the_call_for_a_shift_in_education.pdf

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf

Smith, M. K. (1994). *Local Education. Community, conversation, action*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice — Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Websites

Council of Europe. Non-formal learning/education.

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/non-formal-learning>

Jam Making Options: Formally or Not – That’s not a Question. (2019).

<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/jam-making-options-formally-or-not-thats-not-question>

Brief Introduction to Communities of Practice. (2015).

<https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>

Wrapping Up

Non-formal education is not only a learning and development that takes place outside the formal educational field, but it is possible to complement formal education. Everyone has equal chances to learn anywhere, at any time and in any circumstances. The principle of non-formal learning is that everybody can learn and is able to do it everywhere and continue to learn throughout the lifespan.

Conclusion

1. Non-formal learning takes place outside of a formal learning system in a diverse range of environments and situations
2. Non-formal learning is based on volunteerism.
3. Non-formal learning is purposive.
4. Non-formal learning involves all people over the lifespan, including young people.
5. Non-formal learning is a main learning concept in youth work, it is a possibility complementing formal education.

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Unit 1

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<https://www.youthworkandyou.org/ywelp-module-two>

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