

ACTION LEARNING



**Camilla Englyst-Nielsen
Malene Fregil**

**The Danish Children and Youth NGO Network
MS Action Aid**

2012

Contents

- Preface by the Danish Child and Youth NGO Network..... 3**
- Introduction..... 4**
- Concepts.....5**
 - We call it 'peer to peer' - 'youth to youth' and 'peer education'5
- Action learning: A bit of theory and a definition 7**
 - Action works well in groups!8
 - The action learning cycle9
- Action learning in a fictional setting 10**
 - Experience based learning10
 - An inbuilt duality of interests10
 - Learning is playing?10
- Person, project or politics? 12**
- Teacher, trainer, facilitator or leader? 13**
 - Roles and relations13
- The participant 15**
 - Verbalizing silent knowledge.....15
 - Motivation.....15
- A good space for reflection?..... 16**
 - Debriefing.....16
 - Feedback.....17
 - Evaluation17
- Training in context 18**
- Final remarks 19**
- Reading list 20**

Preface by the Danish Child and Youth NGO Network

In 2010 and 2011 the Danish Child and Youth NGO Network has in collaboration with Action Aid Denmark implemented a range of youth-to-youth activities. The purpose of these activities was to strengthen the youth employees and volunteers in their methodological and perceptual approach to youth work as well as improve their ability to mobilise, engage and network with other youth.

The point of youth-to-youth training is to inspire youth employees and volunteer and provide them with tools to improve their ability to implement development activities within their youth organisation. This might sound easy however in order for the training to bring about positive changes the youth trainers continuously need to reflect on the approaches they apply in the trainings.

This publication is put together by Malene Fregil and Camilla Englyst-Nielsen, both volunteer trainers at Action Aid Denmark and it is based on their experiences with the challenges and strengths of action learning.

We hope this publication will contribute to improving the quality of youth training and thereby strengthening the development work performed by youth employees and volunteers within Danish civil society organisations.

On behalf of the Danish Child and Youth NGO Network

Marianne Bo Paludan

Chairperson



**BØRNE- OG
UNGDOMSNETVÆRKET**

Introduction

Youth leadership, facilitation and training are all common notions in the field of youth activism. Many youth organisations engage themselves in training, aiming to provide young people with a platform to develop their skills, which will assist them to create positive change processes in the societies in which they live. Training can indeed be transformational - it is intentional and it is planned with a certain learning outcome in mind, which the framework of the training seeks to give participants the best change to achieve. But many organisations and youth trainers conduct training without always really knowing how to position themselves in the training and learning landscape and the strengths and weaknesses or chosen approaches they might have. It is therefore encouraged to continuously reflect on these matters, in organisations and as youth trainers/facilitators.



This publication is a follow up to a ‘Study of Action Learning in Youth-to-Youth Work’, conducted by GEJST (www.gejst.nu) in 2011, for the Children and Youth Network, Denmark. Two practical cases were used: International Leadership Training Seminar (ILTS) at MS Action Aid Denmark and Youth Against Racism at Crossing Borders, to exemplify the points raised. In this publication we are not looking into the cases but rather intend to cover some more general, relevant issues concerning youth training.

The vision behind the study was: “To strengthen youth training through the spread of reflected knowledge on methods, approaches and learning amongst volunteer trainers and others interested in youth-to-youth work.”

The following points of interest were identified and explored in depth in the study report:

- Action Learning in a Fictional Setting
- Debriefing and Evaluation
- Feedback and Positive Critique
- Political Perspective and Existential Learning
- Participatory Learning and Individual Reflection
- Inter-group competition
- Leader versus Group

See *this publication* as an invitation to further reflect upon youth facilitation and training, peer to peer approaches and action learning – to sharpen perceptions about the good work being done and through discussions and recommendations qualify it more by raising the level of awareness on vital relevant issues.

The target group of the leaflet is therefore primarily young people, who facilitate and train others – and of course new trainers/facilitators.

From the report we have chosen selected discussions and conclusions to present here in a shorter format, as an appetizer and supplemented with points of attention for further reflection and discussion. As such the publication can hopefully be used in the preparation phase prior to a training course, to give attention to these factors.

Concepts

We call it ‘peer to peer’ – ‘youth to youth’ and ‘peer education’

When young people act as trainers or facilitators they are often not professionals in the sense of having gone through formal education with corresponding titles, but engage (often voluntarily) in training of other youth after perhaps a Training of Trainers (ToT) course or similar preparation.



Peer education is a popular concept that implies both an approach, a communication Channel, a methodology, a philosophy, and a strategy, building on the positive force within peer groups, where peers (those similar in age, background or interests) train their peers in a certain field. There is the widespread perception within both formal and informal education systems that the adult voice seem to be unable to carry the same credibility regarding

some youth issues as that of a young person, a strong argument for the peer to peer approach in for instance HIV/AIDS education. Furthermore, peer to peer approaches tend to open a space for identification: with time and further training a motivated participant can become a peer facilitator. As such, there is less distance between a peer facilitator and the participants.

It has been argued that what peer to peer education ought to do is promote the kind of critical consciousness encouraged by Paulo Freire.¹ In the field of development aid and especially within health education, peer to peer approaches are widely used. This means that peers use the peer education process to critically discuss their circumstances, especially the social factors impacting upon their health. Becoming critically aware of these forces is the first step to tackling them. So, for instance, if local norms regarding sexuality and gender put people’s health at risk, this approach argues that peers should critically discuss those norms, so that they can then collectively seek to establish new more health-enhancing norms.

Peer education can be seen as a widely used 'buzz word', could be a panic strategy or as critics would say, simply a cheap way to implement activities.

In modern times, the term 'peer' has come to mean fellow, equal, like, co-equal or match, according to the dictionary of synonyms (Oxford Thesaurus)

Youth training must contain the following elements to be described as 'peer to peer':

- The youth themselves wish to participate in the group and the training.
- The subject /task must be of relevance to the youth themselves.
- The youth are facilitators and not teachers of other youth.
- The youth have the right to express their own values, ethics, morals and opinions.
- Democracy and responsibility must be a part of the criteria of peer group – there has to be a reason behind the activity.¹

ATTENTION POINTS

- Bring attention to the issue of power distance between you and the participants. Do they know your background for being a trainer, what kind of training you had to go through to get that status?
- Did you inform them about the possibilities of becoming a trainer themselves?
- If your participants are older or more experienced than you, how does that affect the peer to peer process? Do you give it attention, for yourself?
- What do you do to keep or diminish a power distance? Does it make you stronger, as a trainer, to be part of an exclusive group? Are you an expert or a trained participant-how do you define your role?

¹ "Youth On Track - Training manual, Ungdomsringen 2003"

Action learning: A bit of theory and a definition

Action is important to youth organisations, since the common goal of engaging in training activities of this kind is to create positive change in the world. We engage, as we believe our training to be a powerful way to learn; a way of learning that creates strong results and can be used to deal with complex matters.

The phrase “learning by doing” is so known that it sometimes even feels like a cliché. Action learning is in its essence “learning by doing”, but not all learning by doing is action learning. Indeed, there are many ways of “learning by doing”. One way is to imitate someone else doing something, another way is to try something on your own, and learning from your mistakes. However, when we want to go for an action learning approach, we often want to learn stuff that is more complex than what can be learned by imitating or trying out things by ourselves. Also, it breaks a dichotomy between learning by instruction and learning by experience, as it is a reflective facilitated process, bringing aspects of both positions into play.

The report by Gejst explores in more depth the theoretical field of peer-to-peer action learning, with a strong focus on the theories of especially Revans and Rogers.² Through the combination of these theories we have arrived at a definition that describes what kind of learning promoted when talking about action learning.

Peer-to-peer action learning:

A form of learning that is social and focused on group processes, where the subjects and projects of the learning processes are important to the participants and may change their outlook on life, and where the learning processes involved have real-life problems or challenges as their focus

Action learning, according to this view, is created through action and contrasted with ‘book knowledge’. A book has a fixed input that does not change much according to who reads it. An action is a process that individuals perform together, and they experience it in each their way. Because it is so closely tied to the real experience of the individual, action learning is a powerful method for learning.

Revans argues that action learning is created through knowledge (the stuff of ordinary classroom teaching), but supplemented with questioning insight (developing new ideas and thereby questioning the old). Action learning is thus not concerned with reproducing old knowledge, but rather with developing new ways of thinking and new, innovative solutions. Action learning can use academic knowledge as a point of departure, but its focus is on experiential knowledge; that is, the things we know because we have tried them out.

² R.W. Revans: ABC of Action Learning, Lemos and Crane 1998
Carl R. Rogers: Freedom to Learn, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company 1969

'Action learning is about making sense'

For Revans, in order for something to be action learning it must be based on personal and voluntary involvement. The learning comes into being through doing something (for instance, working on a project or a campaign) that is meaningful to the participant. In short, it has to matter.

This also means that any form of force and coercion is foreign to action learning. An individual's motivation for a project can vary with the phases and challenges within the projects, and be influenced by other factors in that individual's life.

However, the personal and voluntary involvement is the base of action learning, and this involvement should be nurtured during the learning process – by allocating lots of attention to the ownership

Action works well in groups!

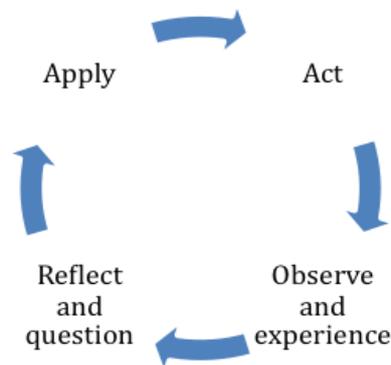
Action learning is undertaken by individuals together in a group; at trainings often 4-6 people is grouped together. It is a participatory process, through which the members of the group learn from each other, share their experiences and develop new ideas and insights together. This implies that the learning process is closely tied to the dynamics of the group, with the challenges this involves in relation to group coherence, group identity, struggles and pressure. However, since action learning is also based on personal and voluntary involvement, the group processes of action learning are ideally democratic, respectful and caring.



The action learning cycle

Action learning consists of a cycle of action and feedback, which is the dynamics of action learning. Doing something without reflecting on it is not really action learning. In the same way, reflection without doing is not action learning either!

The combination on doing something, reflecting on the experience, and putting this new learning into practice again is what creates powerful results. We think of this as the action learning cycle:³



The point of departure is the action. We act, based on our experience and knowledge about being in the world. Secondly, we observe what happens, and experience how it feels. Then comes a crucial step, namely the phase in which we analyse what happened and reflect on what we may learn from it. In this phase, it is crucial to ask critical questions and evaluate what may be done better or different. The last phase is then to put that new experience into practice again by applying the new knowledge in a new action.

NB! In that way, the action learning cycle should actually be thought of as a spiral rather than a circle, since we do not come back to where we started, but continually learn and go forward through re-interpreting our past experience.

Note that learning does not use teachers. Teaching is something that a teacher does – learning is something that you do. However, action learning processes can and often have facilitators or trainers, who help you on the way. Facilitation means ‘to make easy’. You can say that the facilitator or trainer becomes a co-creator of the learning process.

ATTENTION POINTS

- Which part of the action learning cycle has your special focus and strength? Are you naturally a reflective being or do you tend to jump into action?
- Action learning also means that you develop together, which again has implications for you as a trainer as you will never know completely how the group will react to your facilitation, as you encourage co creation and not just delivery of knowledge.

³ Figure developed by the authors of this leaflet, based on the discussion in Study of Action Learning in Youth-to-Youth Work’, (www.gejst.nu, 2011)

Action learning in a fictional setting

One of the central components of action learning is that the process has to take place in real life, with real people and based on real challenges, which are important to the people working with them. However, youth organisations regularly use fictional settings for action learning processes – as it is faster and more accessible. Some run seminars and courses that use case stories, role plays or fictional projects. There are certain risks to be aware of when using such fictional projects. The central point here is to critically consider what level of “realness” is necessary and beneficial when creating action-learning processes.

Experience based learning

The potential of action learning is that it is not a single-media type of learning, but rather that the learning is *experienced* with body and mind, through all the senses. A certain level of emotional investment in the process is therefore essential. One risk of using fictional settings is that the make-believe of the learning process could make the learning outcomes imaginary as well. If the fictional setting is too different from the reality of the participant, the learning outcome may be less applicable in real projects and tend to be more of a dream and therefore lose its realism. There has to be a level of identification or easy contextualisation. Therefore, it is important that the nature of the intended fictional setting is considered by the trainers, and that the purpose of the training is clear to both participants and facilitators at all times.

An argument for using a fictional setting is to provide a “playground”, where tools and approaches may be tested in a safe environment without serious consequences if failure. In this way, the suspension of reality is a way to achieve freedom to experiment, play, try and fail in order to become more confident with project work and the action learning process itself.

An inbuilt duality of interests

When working with fictional settings, a duality of perspectives is created. The participants will deal, sometimes highly engaged, with the fictional projects or situations – trying to make sense of it and create full ownership to the process, in the group. On top of that, there is the primary purpose of hopefully achieving to learn some new skills, or what may be the desired learning outcomes of the specific training. A risk of using fictional settings is that “playing the game” – in the fictional situation of for example planning a campaign – may overshadow what the desired learning outcome was really about. It is therefore important to make participants aware of this duality, and talk about what happens at the different levels in order for the learning still to be of higher importance than the learning setting in which it is placed.

Learning is playing?

Trainers planning a learning process with a fictional setting need to consider how much “reality” is possible and desired. Here the youth perspective is important. Young people are most often craving for ‘live’ experiences and therefore even a fictional project may be a huge

step forward in terms of learning opportunities. This depends, of course, on the participants involved. Also, the possibility of participants to actually succeed in their learning achievements through real life projects needs to be considered as engaging in a real cause does have learning outcomes different than the fictional ones as the realistic scene brings a strong meaning of sense and ownership.

The youth perspective is equally important when it comes to the acceptance of “playing”. The age of the participants may be of importance to how much acceptance for working with a fictional project exists. Younger people are more used to playing games and not being in “real (meaning “adult”) life”, whereas older youth may question the purpose of the fictional setting more, as well as being more ready to handle the hardships of a real-life project.



It is important to have the action learning cycle in mind: Acting, reflecting and applying the new learning is central. Applying a fictional setting is a way of training using this cycle, but it also creates challenges of its own, since the learning becomes somewhat removed from “real life”.

ATTENTION POINTS

- What is the primary purpose of your training?
- Consider making the desired learning outcome and the choice of methods known and subjected to discussion and reflection. This requires that you know what you are doing, and it forms a vital part of the preparation process for the trainers.
- Are there secondary purposes? Which? Do you need the participants to develop campaign ideas that are to be used, by them or others?
- How real is you setting? Do the participants have any chance to work on their own projects or have you chosen some for them?
- How will you make participants aware of the duality of perspectives? That the action learning approach gives a framework for learning, which is the highest priority? Or do you want to change the duality so that actions, campaigns, projects will be targeted higher?

Person, project or politics?

Training is about change – people should possibly leave from a training session transformed, if the training should have had any effect. Also, terms like youth leadership, youth



empowerment and youth mobilization most often call for a desire for not only personal change, but social change, which led by the inner transformation make the need for action and the confidence in ones own ability to act higher. As such, much youth training has a strong focus on involvement and changing the world through activism, lobbyism and political involvement. As such, it is to a high degree normative as it has a political focus and not only a set of tools. Rogers, who has developed a theory of facilitative learning, terms this as “significant

learning”. He even states, that significant learning cannot take place without resulting in a change of behavior in the individual⁴. When training is therefore politicised it can bring yet another dimension into the learning space, as both the person involved, the specific project worked with and then the more politicised agenda has to be attended to. When the subject matter is strongly politicised, it also holds the danger of people not agreeing with what is presented, thereby abandoning it and the learning that was connected to it. If things go very wrong, the whole learning process is abandoned, as significant existential learning can only happen if the individual feels strongly enough about it.

ATTENTION POINTS:

- Is the political agenda clear, negotiable, discussed?
- Explore how much is being done to recruit new members or activists through this training, for the organisation. Be very clear on your own loyalty towards the organisation that is behind the training and its political agenda.
- What do you do if participants accuse you of brainwashing, propaganda etc.?
- Bring attention to where people are coming from and the motivation they bring with them. Are they much involved in their own project? Their own learning?

⁴ Carl R. Rogers: Freedom to Learn, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company 1969

Teacher, trainer, facilitator or leader?

The terms are many – teacher and facilitator may be the most clear, distinct ones. The notion of a trainer as in the International Leadership Training Seminar ILTS with MS requires also a clear idea of a ‘specific curriculum’ or set of skills that is to be learned. The action learning terminology does not include the concept of teachers as such, but rather uses the term facilitator. The concept of teaching involves a teacher, who has knowledge, and pupils and students, who are to receive that knowledge by being taught. In contrast to this, by focusing on the concept of learning, we instead see learning as a process that involves learners who actively seek to acquire knowledge and skills by practicing, experimenting, discussing and thinking together. The people who help learners to achieve that kind of learning are often called trainers or facilitators, as different, much more broad and more flexible term than a teacher or and educator. The role of the facilitator is mainly to organize the learning process and to help the group to focus, explore and acknowledge the experiences of the group members.

According to Rogers general characteristics of a facilitator is to:

- provide trust
- to aspire to participate at the same level as the participants, and
- to be a real person with real emotions and ambitions.¹

The facilitator’s most important role is to create a safe and sound learning environment. People learn most when they are out of their comfort zone and being challenged, but in a safe and trustful environment. The facilitator is an important role model and sets the standard by his or her own example for how the group communicates internally. The facilitator must “walk the talk” at all times, otherwise trust may be lost.

Being a facilitator has its own challenges. The facilitator is, in a way, both a member of the group and not a member of the group. The facilitator aims at participating at the same level as the participants, but at the same time the facilitator has more and different knowledge about where the group might be going, and is consciously analysing the group processes as they progress. In a way, the facilitator has to take on a role: to be what the group members need, but at the same time the facilitator must also be “a real person”. The facilitator is an individual with emotions and opinions, but also needs to moderate her-or himself in accordance with what the group needs at any given time. This can be challenging!

Roles and relations

There are special challenges for young people engaging in peer-to-peer learning. For facilitators, it is important to reflect on roles and relations throughout the action learning process. It is important to think of how new friendships, identity building and status may influence the group learning processes.

Dealing with roles and relations is an important challenge in peer-to-peer action learning. Young people are generally less established and more open to making new friends, for instance. Also young volunteers tend to be more emotionally involved and less used to “professional distance” between people than older people or professionals. This emotional engagement is the strength and the power of many youth initiatives. However, the facilitator needs to be aware of his or her own emotions, motives and needs.

There can be differences between how the facilitator wants to be seen and how the participants see her/him. A common situation is that the facilitator wants to make friends and be a part of the group, but the group regards the facilitator as a leader with a different status, and not as “one of them”. The facilitator can actually feel left out of the group, not being invited for a social event or the similar.

Another quite common situation is that the facilitator likes the status that the role brings. In the beginning of a process, a facilitator has high status within the group, and is looked upon as a leader. As the group gains more experience and becomes closer knit, the status of the facilitator often changes. The pitfall here is if the facilitator reacts to this loss of status by trying to increase his or her authority. Facilitators have to be aware of their reaction to changing or loosing authority within the group. In accordance with the principle of participation, the facilitator needs to “let go” of prestige and control of the group at some time, during the process.



ATTENTION POINTS

- What are your needs, as a trainer and as a person?
What are the needs of your group? Do these needs match?
- What is your present status level within the group?
How close are you or do you want to be with the group?
- Do you participate at the same level as the group? Why or why not?

The participant



Verbalizing silent knowledge

During seminars and trainings, individual learning tools, such as diaries and learner logs, are often used as a way to capture the learning process. The purpose of these tools are often to build a bridge from the learning created and discussed in the group to the kind of learning that the individual can take with him/her from the seminar to other contexts.

However, if the participant is left alone to reflect on their learning journey and own goals, much significant learning may go unnoticed by the participant. For the participant it is important to realize what they know and what their competencies and challenges are. The verbalization of such learning goals, insights and frustrations may be important, to change silent knowledge into operational knowledge. In other words, silent knowledge and competencies first need to be pointed out by others and then recognised by the individual, before the individual can use these skills to their full extent.

The facilitator may be involved in setting and evaluating individual learning goals. The facilitator may also take on the role of a coach who asks questions and guides the individual to acknowledge own skills as well as developing new skills – working consciously with strengths and weaknesses.

Motivation

When planning a training activity, it is important to consider what types of motivation the training stimulates. In general, we distinguish between two types of motivation, the inner and outer. Inner motivation is when you feel that doing something is worth it in itself. Outer motivation is when you are motivated by some outer means, such as prizes, a need for a specific certificate or fear of negative consequences. A training that seeks to motivate the individual to engage in social change should seek to nurture inner motivation, even if an outer motivation is present.

ATTENTION POINTS:

- Consider how you can assist individual participants on their learning journey. What questions could you ask to bring out the resources that each person possesses?
- What types of motivation do your training components promote?

A good space for reflection?

Going back to the action learning cycle, an important step is the reflection process. Some kind of structure on how to reflect, give feedback and evaluate learning is usually planned for. Structure is important to give shape and form to what people have really learned, but how to create this structure is a delicate exercise.

The reflection process is often divided into different aspects:

- *Debriefing* - being the reflective and analytical session that usually takes place right after some activity or session has happened, and is aimed at given an immediate analysis to it.
- *Feedback* – being positive and negative critique given to members within a group, most often connected to their performance.
- *Evaluation* – being positive and negative critique on a more overarching level, aimed at a program, seminar, process or project.

Debriefing

During debriefing, the group analyses what happened in a session, meeting or action that has happened just prior to the debriefing. Debriefing is the natural partner to briefing (or giving instructions). During debriefing, the group explores and negotiates a story of “what happened just now”, to sharpen the reflection and awareness to the learning process.

The facilitator can focus the group’s attention on specific issues that are important to learn from. It is important for the facilitator to make sure that all voices are heard in the debriefing, to avoid the risk of someone feeling that the interpretation of events are not what “really” happened. Interpretations of events often differ, and it is important to show how one event may be interpreted in many ways - on the other hand, it is also important to find general lessons that people can take with them.



Feedback

By feedback we mean the process of giving reactions on someone's performance in a given situation. For a person to take in feedback, it should be given in a non-threatening situation, and there should both be constructive positive and constructive negative critique.

It is important to give participants tools to express and frame important and maybe negative critique in a constructive manner. It is also important to make a distinction between the person and the performance of that person, as it is important to comment on the action and not on the person as a being. Actions can be changed, through experience and training!

The peer-to-peer situation may influence what critique is offered and how it is given. In most youth seminars, there is a focus on making new friends and having a good time, while learning about and trying to create social change. If the critique is framed too positively and relevant challenges are glossed over in order to be friendly, the learning that the person takes from the feedback is not founded in reality. At the same time, it is not easy to manage the processes in which emotions and sensitive issues are voiced. The time schedule is very often important. If there is a lack of time and a feeling of urgency in the project group, feedback sessions could tend to gloss over problems and focus on the positive – or leave some unconstructive feedback hanging in the air, unsolved.

Evaluation

By evaluation we mean the process of giving feedback on for instance a project or seminar, rather than on a person's performance.

When it comes to evaluation, there is some truth to the saying that 'you get what you ask for'. It is relatively easy for facilitators and course planners to control and limit what kind of response they get. By asking certain questions and not others, by using certain structures and not others, facilitators can direct what kind of responses it is possible to get through.

It can be a delicate and difficult thing to ask for, and consequently get, the feedback that you need and that is really useful to you as facilitators. Here we need to open and accustom ourselves to asking uncomfortable questions.

ATTENTION POINTS:

- How do you structure your debriefing, feedback or evaluation?
- Feedback: What do you want the participants to get out of it?
- Evaluation: What do you really need to know and why?
- What types of responses are you inviting by choosing this method?
- What types of responses are you excluding by choosing this method?
- Do the responses match your true feeling of what happened and how it went?

Training in context

When planning trainings, facilitators often have ideas (conscious or unconscious) about what the participants already know, feel or think before they arrive. These preconceived conceptions may be worked into the trainings, and the participants will experience them as requirements that they either live up to or not – creating an image of the ‘perfect participant’ that should be live dup to.

Some requirements are often mentioned in the advertising materials for the seminar, but many requirements are left unspoken or taken for granted. It is important to try to uncover some of these. What kind of participant do we (really) want? Do we have unspoken requirements, like that the participants should be creative, musical, funny, well-spoken, or that they have a particular world view when it comes to politics or religion?

The specific target group of your training is important to direct the methods used and to keep the desired learning outcomes present in the design of the training. Without cautious attention, some learning environments can end up excluding certain types of participants and including others. There could for instance be issues of cultural sensitivity involved, different educational backgrounds and religious/political standpoints. In Denmark, a lot of different icebreaking games are normally used to spice up a training activity and to build the learning community. Also participatory methods involving a lot of critical thinking plus a low level of power distance between participants and facilitator are normal in Denmark. But do Danes then have better conditions to take part than participants from non Western countries? Or are certain active, outspoken participants, in this case not minding the national cultures, more fit for the youth training being arranged, thereby excluding the more reserved, reflective beings? How do we create a learning space – with the approach of action learning and peer to peer processes, where a diverse group of participants can be accommodated, having in mind, that ‘not one size fits all’? Trainers, facilitators and educational planners are often quite convinced about the good qualities of the training they offer, but further attention to the participant profile that we unconsciously favour and the ones we exclude in our choices is worth to reflect on when planning, inviting for and implementing a training. With that perspective in mind, training can better be contextualized according to the intended target group and desired learning outcomes, creating quality training that fulfils its purpose.

ATTENTION POINTS:

- What are your untold expectations to the participants? (If this is difficult to express, try picturing the absolute “worst” participant that you can imagine, and then turn that picture upside down!) Does that affect you as a facilitator?
- Which group of participant are you favouring in your choice of methods? Bring attention to the participant your choices might exclude from participating; how can you mitigate?
- When a training activity is successful there could be a longing to replicate it in other contexts. How will you have the different context in mind, when replicating with a new target group or context?
- Do you explain where this specific training method is derived and inspired from? For instance mentioning the work of Paulo Freire as the main inspiration, if that is so. It could sharpen the profiling and branding of the training if organisers and trainers were more aware of how this type of training and the intentions behind the training position itself in a ‘training landscape’.

Final remarks

“The purpose with training is to create the conditions for individuals to actively participate in creating social change and reduce social and economic inequality in the world.”
MS Action Aid Denmark 2011

The above quote shows what its indeed all about – building young people’s skills, motivation and understanding, enabling them to take active part in creating a different and better world. Training of youth is not only fun, but also a matter of urgent importance. Therefore both organisations, trainers and facilitators have to give further attention to the underlying principles (why), approaches (how) and learning outcomes (impact) we are striving for, to constantly improve on our contribution to this higher purpose.

We hope, that this appetizer has given some ‘food for thought’ and can inspire to further reflection and discussion. Thank you for the attention.



Reading list

'Study of Action Learning in Youth-to-Youth Work', conducted by GEJST (www.gejst.nu), 2011, The Children and Youth Network, Denmark. Can be found at www.gejst.nu, www.bu-net.dk, www.ms.dk and www.crossingborder.org

Revans, Reginald Williams: ABC of Action Learning, Lemos and Crane 1998

Pedler, Mike: Action Learning for Managers, Gower Publishin Limited 2008

Rogers, Carl R.: Freedom to Learn, Charles E. Merill Publishing Company 1969

Savedra, Richard, Article, 2005: The contagious leader: Impact of the leaders moods on the mood of group members, group affective tone, and, group processes - Journal of Applied Psychology, 2005, vol. 90, no. 2, s. 295-305.

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/action/message/escap_peers_01.pdf

[http://www.saayc.co.za/Docs/Youth_on_Track_FINAL\[1\].pdf](http://www.saayc.co.za/Docs/Youth_on_Track_FINAL[1].pdf)

http://www.aidsmark.org/ipc_en/pdf/sm/tm/Peer%20Education%20Training%20of%20Trainers%20Manual.pdf

In Danish:

Illeris, Knud: Læring, Roskilde Universitetsforlag 2004

Hermansen, Mads: Læringens univers, Forlaget Klim 2001

Hermansen, Mads: Fra læringens horisont – en antologi, Forlaget Klim 1998

Illeris, Knud (red.): Tekster om læring, Roskilde Universitetsforlag 2000

Jungk, Robert & Müllert, Norbert R.: Håndbog i Fremtidsværksteder, Politisk Revy 1998

Dewey, John: Erfaring og opdragelse, Christian Ejler's Forlag 1996