

CHAPTER II

*The Youth Worker and  
the Learning*  
**ENVIRONMENT**



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## CHAPTER II

# THE YOUTH WORKER AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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## LEARNING INTENTIONS

### PROVIDE

*materials and background to the concept of the youth worker's role in developing relationships with young people.*

### EMPHASISE

*the importance of the youth worker as learner and explore what this means in practice.*

### PRESENT & EXAMINE

*examine models of youth work that explore the youth worker's role as educator, guide and facilitator in young people's learning.*

### EXPLORE

*the concept of the learning organisation and how this impacts and/or supports the youth worker's role.*

*'The youth worker is responsible for creating the learning environment, is part of it, gives to and receives from it, is in partnership with the young people, the organisation and colleagues within it, is responsible for guiding the learning that takes places in it, and the youth worker is the learning environment.'*



# INTRODUCTION

'The Youth Worker and the Learning Environment' encompasses many different aspects for the youth worker. Referring to the previous chapter's 'head, hands and heart model', some of the aspects for the youth worker and the learning environment include:

- **Heart:** being authentic and having empathy.
- **Hands:** being able to ask relevant questions and listen to answers, knowing how to give appropriate and sometimes challenging feedback, and being able to facilitate reflection on learning.
- **Head:** the ability to plan learning opportunities, the ability to be a learner themselves, and being a part of the factors that make the organisation a learning-organisation.

Across Europe, different cultures, histories and influences dictate how youth work is seen and perceived. In some countries, youth work is primarily perceived as a source of learning for young people, while in others the focus is on the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. Regardless of the primary approach, youth work is about working with young people towards a better, more equal world. Social justice features heavily in all the different theories and models that are explored in this chapter.



**THIS CHAPTER IS BROKEN DOWN INTO THE FOLLOWING FOUR AREAS:**

- The youth worker as a developer of relationships with young people.
- The youth worker as a guide to and facilitator of young people's learning.
- The youth worker as learner.
- The youth worker as part of a learning organisation.

## THE YOUTH WORKER AS A DEVELOPER OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The development of relationships is one of the foundations on which youth work is built and one of the key aspects youth workers need to be involved in – regardless of whether the relationship or the learning is the primary focus. Many other professions that work with young people do not have the luxury, space or time to build such relationships, and this focus on the relationship is one of the things that makes youth work unique. Kerry Young, in her book 'The Art of Youth Work', states:



**The youth work relationship is crucial to the process of youth work. The relationship is one in which youth workers seek to engage with young people in the deliberate and purposeful process of experience, reflection and learning through which they gain the motivation and capacity to:**

- examine their values;
- deliberate the principles of their own moral judgements;
- develop the skills and dispositions to make informed decisions and choices that can be sustained through committed action.<sup>1</sup>

This is a key element in creating the learning environment. Relationships lead to trust which leads to sharing by the young people about their lives, successes, difficulties and issues. This in turn leads to the youth worker being able to safely push and challenge the young person in a way that promotes their learning and development within a safe space. The learning here is mostly related to the young person's personal and social development.

<sup>1</sup>Young, K. (2006).



### THE YOUTH WORKER AS A GUIDE TO AND FACILITATOR OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING

The youth worker is also a guide to and facilitator of young people's learning, from situations of a more informal nature to choosing a subject/issue to work on with the young people. In terms of the informal, this could be reacting to a situation in a youth club, challenging a young person's prejudice or chatting with a group of young people and sharing insights.

A more structured approach might include a series of workshops on a particular relevant topic, a public campaign about a broader issue, an information campaign aimed at young people, supporting young people in developing and organising and therefore creating learning from experiences, or reacting to a current situation that young people become passionate or concerned about (e.g. the #FridaysforFuture movement, the #BlackLivesMatter anti-racism demonstrations, the time leading up to elections, etc.).

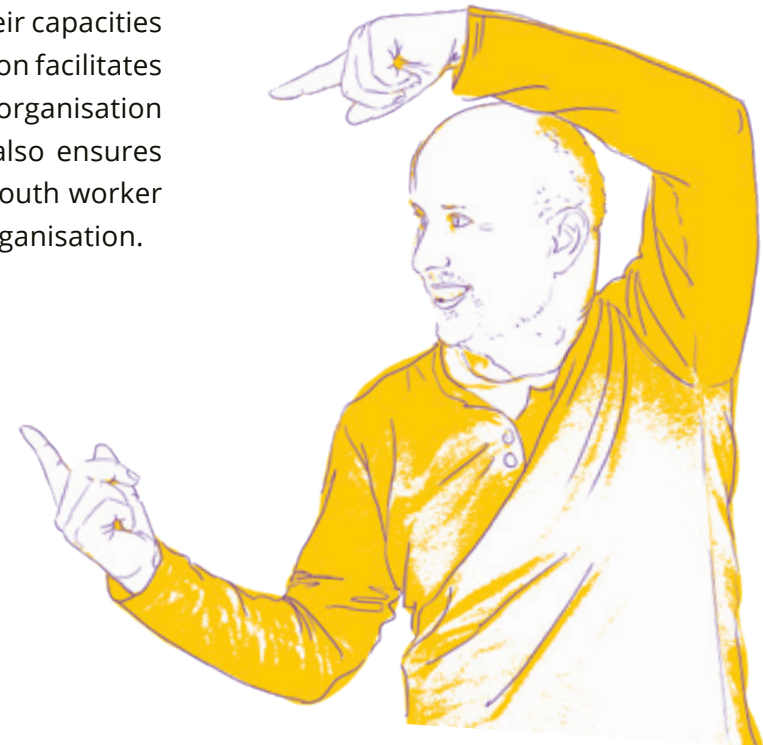
### THE YOUTH WORKER AS LEARNER

The youth worker needs to be open to learning, either in the form of engaging in training courses, workshops or conferences, or learning from their own experiences. Having an open and reflective competence is important for this role. If the youth worker is not open to learning, the young people they work with will be less likely to be open to learning. This means having the ability to admit mistakes, the readiness to be vulnerable, the ability to reflect on one's own practice, the ability to identify learning needs and the ability to seek out those resources that fulfil those needs. In other words, leading by example.



## THE YOUTH WORKER AS A PART OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

In order for all of the above to happen, the youth organisation needs to be a learning organisation. According to Peter Senge (the originator of the 'learning organisation' concept, 1990), a learning organisation is a team of people working together to develop their capacities in order to create results they really care about in their work. A learning organisation facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself. The learning organisation embraces mistakes and values the contributions of everyone in the team. It also ensures the dissemination of any new knowledge to everyone in the organisation. The youth worker needs to engage in this process and be a key element in creating the learning organisation.







## THE YOUTH WORKER AS A DEVELOPER

## OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

**This section explores the different perspectives in developing relationships with young people. This requires a lot from the youth worker. Youth workers need to be authentic: someone who walks the talk, has integrity, avoids double standards, and endeavours to be genuine with the young people. The youth worker also needs to have a level of empathy, to be willing to give time and energy to listening and, at the same time, be the person who challenges and asks challenging questions.**

As noted above, one of the cornerstones of youth work is the development of a purposeful relationship between the young person and the youth worker. Trudi Cooper and Pauline Grace (Tierney et al. 2019) both talk about building relationships with young people where the aim of the relationship is dialogue, conversation with and listening to the young people.



Cooper focuses on the activities in youth work that enable relationships to happen, while Grace emphasises 'travelling with young people' as the catalyst to the relationship.

As young people come to trust the youth worker, they will share with them different aspects of their lives – maybe some aspects that have never been shared with another adult before. If a young person can have that **trust** with a youth worker, then the youth worker is in a stronger position, for example to challenge the values and beliefs of that young person (which may or may not include prejudices and discrimination). They may also be able to get that young person to step out of their comfort zone, to consider potentially difficult questions and decisions, to try new things and gain new skills or to take action with others to challenge issues that impact them or the wider society. A combination of these aspects leads to the personal, social and political development of that young person and therefore their learning.

Mark Smith (1988) explored the importance of relationship building in youth work in the UK. He compared different youth work traditions and looked at the tensions and boundaries around relationship building in the context of the different strands of youth work: religious, political, leisure, welfare, education-based, etc.

When looking at these various different strands where positive supportive relationships were being built, he (and later Cooper, 2012) identified different purposes in those relationships:

- to encourage conformity to social norms;
- engagement in wholesome leisure activities;
- to support religious conversion;
- to bring about political, social and personal change.<sup>2</sup>



## LEARNING CARDS

*You can find a set of learning cards on the theme of 'The Youth Worker as Developer of Relationships with Young People' on the **FOCUS learning**..*  
➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)

<sup>2</sup> Cooper, T. (2018).

New skills  
Social  
Political  
**Trust**

Context  
Genuine  
**Challenging**

Advocates  
Integrity  
Values  
Empathy  
**Dialogue**

**Sharing**

Enabling

Holistic Beliefs

Travelling

Decisions

**BUILDING YOUTH WORK  
RELATIONSHIPS**

**Learning**

Personal

Moulds

Understanding

**Development**

**Authentic**

Influences

Purposeful

Awareness

Empowering

**Listening**

Being heard

Cultural and societal influences

Non-verbal communication

Learning, it can be argued, is happening at all times and in all circumstances. However, to focus on the first, second and fourth areas from Smith above, learning can be seen as an integral part of youth work. If youth work is about encouraging conformity, bringing about social and political change or providing activities for young people, then it is vital that the young person understands what it is they are engaging in. As mentioned earlier in this section, it is only through the **development of a positive and meaningful relationship** that the youth worker can be in dialogue with the young person.



LISTENING

Julie Tilsen (2018) explores this concept of **dialogue and listening** even further. She refers to the ability of 'speaking to listen', meaning that the youth worker speaks and asks questions in such a way that it invites response and that it indicates to the young person that they have been and are being heard. Tilsen also talks about the need to listen 'to things besides the words'.<sup>3</sup> The youth worker needs to build their sensitivity to non-verbal communication and to understand the ways in which young people express themselves, their thoughts and feelings. Questions are something that we take for granted and have been asking since we could speak, but understanding and knowing how to ask questions is a skill that can and should be developed. Asking the right questions in the right way creates the narrative and this provides the youth worker with the basis to support the young person in their development and create learning opportunities for the young person to respond to. The aspect of personal change is transversal, it crosses all forms and strands of youth work.



QUESTIONING

In Australia, the USA and Canada, there is a broad spectrum of youth work approaches that coexist. In most of these areas, the focus is on the development of relationships with young people. There is a strong emphasis on the holistic approach and on understanding the social context of the young person. This building and developing of a positive and supportive relationship with the young person ultimately enables the young person to begin **to guide how and what happens** to themselves, both in the youth work setting and in their lives in general.



TRUSTING

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, T. (2018). pp71-72.

### **ACCORDING TO THE AUSTRALIAN YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL (2013):**

Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interests first; Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context; Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights.<sup>4</sup>

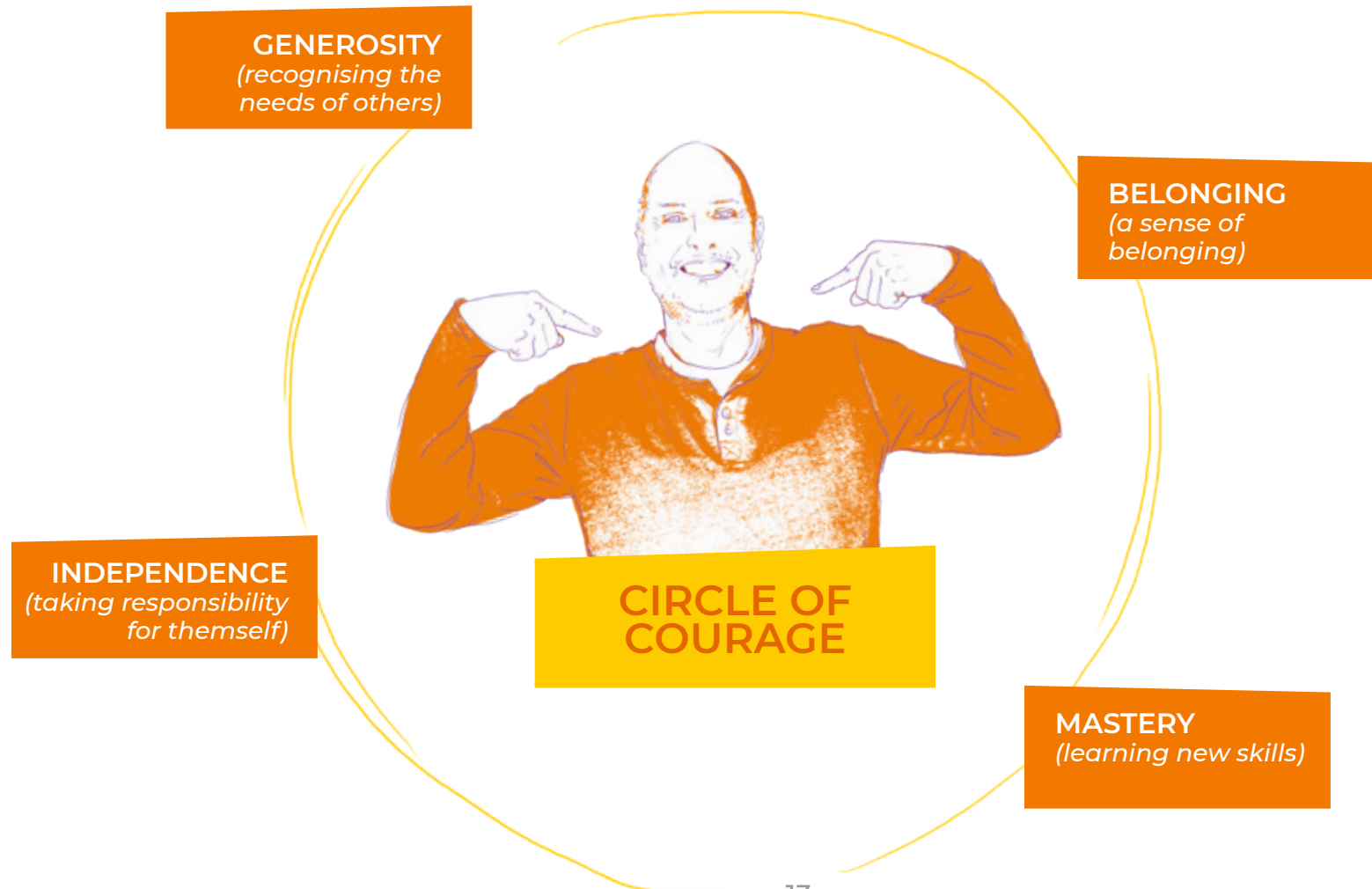
The young person is not just another number in youth work. Each young person is on their own specific and individual physical, mental, emotional and spiritual journey as an adolescent. The young person is also an individual with a specific and unique background with cultural and societal influences. They are a part of many somethings: high school or higher education classes, family, youth organisations, groups of peers that hang out together, sports groups, a neighbourhood, a community, an identity group, etc. All of these relationships influence and mould the young person – for good and/or bad. The youth worker needs to understand the holistic picture, not only seeing the young person for who they are, but for seeing all that surrounds them as well. This particular model promotes the fact that developing relationships with young people is about getting to know the context of the young person. Through this, the learning relationship can evolve.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Youth Affairs Coalition. (2013).

## THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE MODEL

The 'Circle of Courage' is a particular model developed in the USA.<sup>5</sup> This is an intervention-based model that has also become influential in, for example, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia. It is based on four areas that interlink through a cycle:

<sup>5</sup> Brendtro, L. K. (2002).



This specific model is worth exploring because it shows the steps that exist for learning in the concept of the relationship. The model was originally developed for working with young people in care or those in the justice system but, as it spread to other countries, it has become a model that can be used in general youth work. The building and developing of relationships and personal support for and with young people is what allows this cycle to commence and keep going.

### **BELONGING** *(a sense of belonging)*

This is about developing a sense of belonging, i.e. healthy attachments to individuals and groups. Here, the youth worker is a prime example and, in some instances, the only adult a young person wants to rely on. This step is also about the young person experiencing life as part of the community, getting involved in actions, events, activities, festivals, movements, a youth group, etc., with the support of the youth worker. The importance of being loved and having the ability to love others is something that can be learned as well as experienced.

### **MASTERY** *(learning new skills)*

When there is a development in the sense of belonging, the young person is in a better position to develop skills and increase their ability to be able to do things and learn how to do new things. This is very much connected to intellectual, physical and social development: intellectual in terms of learning, memorising something, learning a fact or gaining general information from reading, seeing or listening; physical because it includes learning new practical things, including how to work a new computer programme, play a game, operate a tool, etc.; social development in terms of behaviour and the development of social skills, how to deal with conflict, understanding how society functions, taking responsibility and understanding oneself and one's behaviour and attitudes.

## GENEROSITY

*(recognising the needs of others)*

Once solid learning is happening for the young person, their self-esteem and self-confidence will grow. From this, young people can start to see beyond themselves and can gain empathy and the ability and desire to care for others. This is about the young person being part of a group at the youth organisation and understanding their role and their responsibilities as a member of that group(s), not only in the practical sense of the role, but in terms of being open, listening, moving away from a self-centred approach to life and recognising the needs of others and/or the needs of the group.

## INDEPENDENCE

*(taking responsibility for themselves)*

With the development in empathy, young people can begin to explore the road to autonomy and gain more independence. This is part of adolescence development, moving from being influenced and reliant on others to making up one's own mind about things and becoming more independent in making decisions and taking action. Here, the young person moves towards taking responsibility for themselves and being responsible – owning not only the good that happens, but also the mistakes made.

From this point of growing independence, the young person can more easily find themselves in the groups they are a part of, which leads to an increasing sense of belonging, and so on ...



## THE CYCLE

This cycle is part of a young person's youth work experience, and the role of the youth worker is to support young people on this journey. In reality, each young person and their circumstances are unique and the cycle will most often not be a smooth experience for the either young person or the youth worker. Many young people will get stuck and not be able to move on, while some will struggle to even start. The cycle should not be seen as a perfect formula because it will not work for every young person, but it can be a useful tool in understanding the journey the youth worker accompanies the young person on.

## CONCLUSION

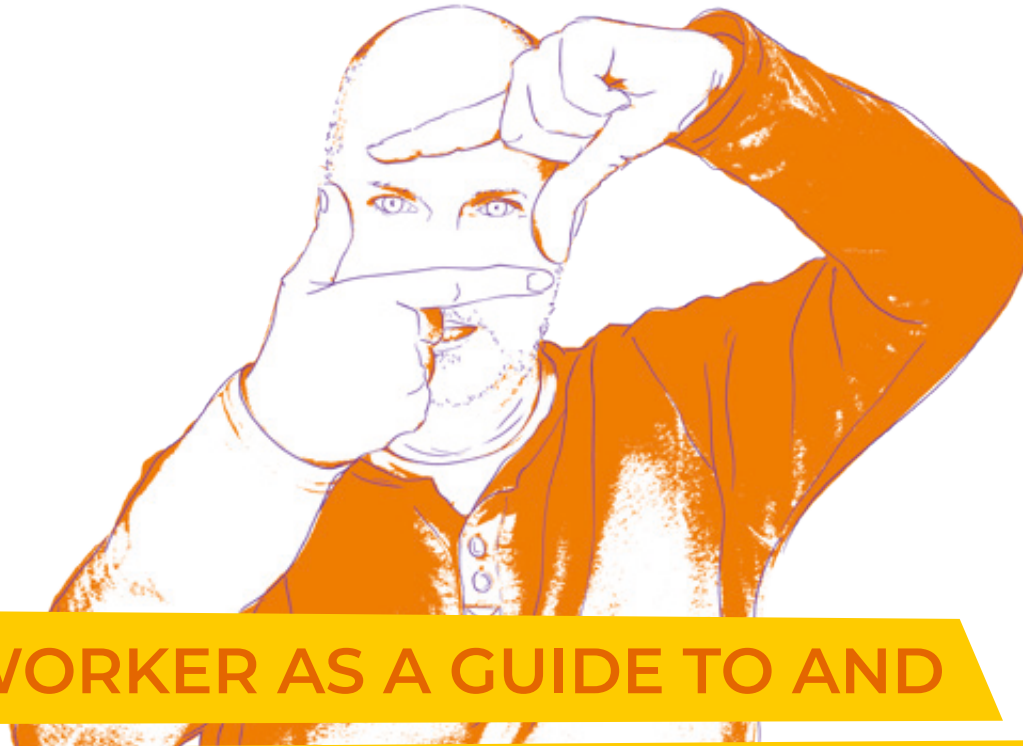
A central idea of all of these models is that youth work is about the personal and social development of the young person. In other words, youth work creates opportunities for a young person to become the best person they can be no matter what their identity or situation is. In reality, this happens to young people outside of youth work as well, but, in most instances, it is not the aim of the relationship. The thing that makes youth work unique and important, is that it is!

Having a youth worker to support this process is vital for many young people, and the youth worker, through the relationship, can be a guide and challenger, building trust and confidence in and with the young people. If these principles are followed then youth work is, by default, a place of learning and growing and the youth worker's role is to make this happen.



### LEARNING POSTER

*You can find a poster that explores the 'Circle of Courage' on the **FOCUS** learning website.*  
➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)



## THE YOUTH WORKER AS A GUIDE TO AND

## FACILITATOR OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING

In contrast to the previous section, there are models of youth work around the world whose primary focus is not the relationship, but rather learning. This does not mean that the relationship is not important or is ignored, it is simply not prioritised in the same way or is not the main focus. All human interaction is about relationships, so this aspect will still be very strong, but in the following models, the aim of youth work becomes the development of the young person through learning.

## A FOCUS ON LEARNING

In the UK, the 'In Defence of Youth Work' (IDYW)<sup>6</sup> movement defines youth work in their operational statement. In this example, the relationship is clearly stated, although it is in a secondary position to 'educational practice':

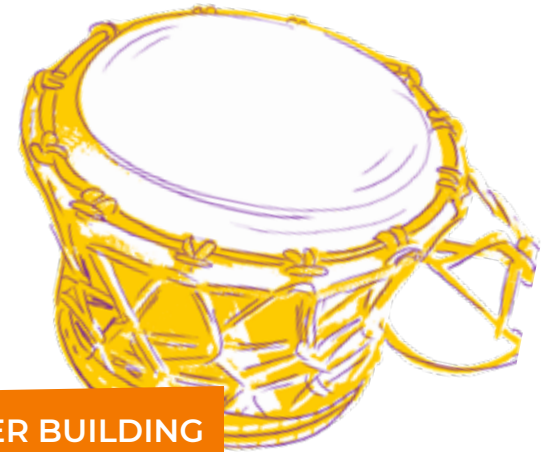


In the UK, Butters and Newell (1978) developed a concept with five approaches to youth work. The focus they gave to youth work was from the perspective of youth work being a tool for social justice. Although this model is now outdated and some of the expressions used would not be used today, there is still a value in exploring it.

<sup>6</sup> IDYW is a campaign movement that started in 2009 and seeks to defend youth work against more than ten years of financial and infrastructure cuts to the support of young people.

<sup>7</sup> IDYW. (2009).

## THE FIVE AREAS ARE:



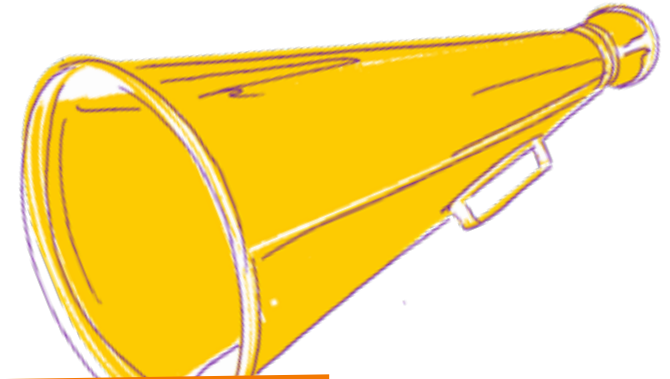
## CHARACTER BUILDING

Here, the youth worker's role includes encouraging and enabling the young people they work with to express themselves. With the support of the youth worker, young people can learn about their own behaviour and how they are perceived by those around them, and the youth worker can support the young person in better understanding the social norms that surround them. The youth worker can work with the young people in becoming positioned in society, not simply as obedient sheep, but as individuals who want to see a better society and are willing to work for it.



## CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Youth work provides the youth worker with a multitude of different approaches, methods, tools and creativity to support the young people in becoming healthy adults transitioning from childhood to adulthood. The youth worker takes a non-directive approach in enabling an individual towards self-realisation and therefore a part of their life learning. Many young people experience these situations as challenging situations. The youth worker can work with young people to support them through these challenges, turning them into experiences of learning and growth.



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Often young people are not provided with opportunities to be engaged in their communities or with the space to express themselves in their communities. One of the reasons for this is the systems in place and how those systems operate. This is partly because society does not provide many options for young people to be involved and partly because, even when opportunities do arise, young people are often unprepared or unable to participate. Young people have ideas, an understanding of issues, opinions, emotions and aspirations that they want to express, either within the youth work setting or in society. This is a huge part of the role of the youth worker – to act as a guide to the learning that enables growth in young people and supports them in getting their voices heard and engaging meaningfully in their communities.



## INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

One of the roles of the youth worker is to facilitate young people to express themselves, their desires, needs, wants, ideas and beliefs. If what is expressed goes against the principles and values of human and social rights, then a challenge, rather than condemnation, is needed. If these expressions go against an injustice they see in society, but are not in contrast to human and social rights, then support is needed. The youth worker can mobilise individuals and groups to work for structural changes and the extension of rights. The youth worker needs to be working as a 'guide', supplying learning opportunities through challenges and through guidance.



## SELF-EMANCIPATION

Young people can easily become overwhelmed by the structures and institutions that are so often in their way and prevent them from realising their full potential. Through youth workers encouraging, guiding, facilitating and challenging young people, the young people can fulfil their potential and join with other young people in their struggles with institutions and negative ideologies.

## THE FOCUS

This section provides an ideal – an ideal that in reality is very difficult for many young people to achieve for themselves, and for the youth worker to achieve with the young people. The focus of this chapter is to encourage a broader vision of what learning-focused youth work can look like. In many places and countries, the focus is on providing workshops and educational-based activities to ‘teach’ young people about whatever subject youth work or the young people feel is current or necessary. A learning-centred approach to youth work is much broader than this, it is the youth worker using the youth work setting (which could include workshops and educational activities) to realise learning opportunities as they arise and encourage young people to see the learning opportunities in their everyday lives. The youth work setting is perfectly placed to take advantage of the areas described above and thus support the young people in their development.



### LEARNING CARDS

*You can find a set of learning cards on the theme of 'The Youth Worker as a Guide to and Facilitator of Young People's Learning' on the **FOCUS** learning website.*  
➤ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)



## NON-FORMAL LEARNING

## AND PARTICIPATION

Smith (2013) explores the learning perspective, describing youth work as having a non-formal education context that:

- Focuses on young people.
- Emphasises voluntary participation and relationships.
- Provides commitment to association.
- Is friendly and informal and is based on integrity.
- Is concerned with the education and welfare of young people.

In this section, the focus will be on the aspect of participation. This is not to the exclusion of the other areas Smith listed but because, when exploring participation, the other elements naturally emerge.



## PARTICIPATION

Many young people want to have a voice and be heard, while many others don't even know they have the option to have a voice. Participation is not a black-and-white issue: it has many shades with many forms and many aspects that need to be taken into account. Most young people need guidance and support in finding their way in the world. This is something the youth worker can facilitate, using non-formal learning to support it.

When facilitating young people to have a voice, there are two main aspects that need to be taken into account: the participation of young people in society and the participation of young people in the youth organisation. The youth worker needs to facilitate both aspects simultaneously. Focusing only on participation in society and not on the youth work diminishes the integrity of the worker and the work. For example, supporting young people to have a voice in their local municipal council but excluding them from decision-making in the youth organisation is contradictory.

Regarding participation in the youth organisation, the role of the youth worker is to focus on the young people and encourage them through their voluntary attendance to have a say in what they want and/or need. Workshops and learning activities can be created, both directly and indirectly related to participation. On the direct side, these could include leadership, communication, meeting to discuss the future of the organisation, etc. Indirect aspects could include tackling hate speech, doing a team building activity including a structured debrief, informally asking what ideas they have for things they would like to do in the future, etc.

All of these examples are about working with young people so that they become partners in, and share responsibility for, the opportunities, learning processes and decision-making structures of which they are a part in the organisation.



### VIDEO

*You can find a short video about 'Non-Formal Learning and Participation' by Forum MNE, Montenegro on the **FOCUS learning website**.  
➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)*



SOCIAL CONTROL OR

SOCIAL CHANGE

Hurley and Treacy (1993) explored youth work from two perspectives: they saw it as either trying to **fit young people into society** or as **encouraging young people to bring about social change**. In the UK, this argument was expressed as youth work being an 'agent of social control or an agent of social change'. The following section uses their work to explore the role of the youth worker in guiding and facilitating the learning of young people in these concepts.



*'I'm working a lot with young people who are in one way or another excludes from society. As a youth worker you have to understand the complexity these young people have to deal with when it comes to identity, to self-awareness, how they relate to society; it's all super complex.'*

Annamaria

## FITTING INTO SOCIETY

### SOCIAL CONTROL

Young people growing into the society they are a part of is about personal development and character building. In the context of personal development, the role of the youth worker as a guide and facilitator of learning is to act as a listener and supporter, promoting self-responsibility for choices, developing leadership skills, and facilitating life/social skills. In terms of character building, the youth worker is the role model – the young people learn by example. The youth worker encourages young people to be constructive and supports them to lead healthy lives. Examples of this could be the running of workshops on the dangers of smoking or taking drugs.



*'Every now and then certain topics get into the political picture and then youth work is expected to jump in. Suddenly there is money to do projects on youth-unemployment; so we jump in. But is that really our role?'*

Paul



*'Sometimes I have the feeling I'm dancing between social control and social change. For a year you just open your youth center on Friday-night to get the kids of the street where all the trouble happens and then maybe at a certain point you start working with them on other things more related to social change.'*

Dermot

Inclusion offers multiple learning opportunities and it is often with issues related to inclusion where young people face the most challenges – either in accepting others or being accepted by others. A young person or a group of young people may express anger towards refugees, express a discriminatory attitude towards members of the LGBTQI+ community, not want to involve someone with a disability or exclude someone from the Roma community. On the other hand, the young person might be from one or more of these groups and be the one being excluded.

Whatever the situation, the youth worker needs to guide young people through the challenges and questions and to facilitate and support young people to encourage more constructive attitudes and behaviour. The role of the youth worker is crucial in offering guidance and facilitation of often delicate and difficult situations. The learning here focuses on working alongside young people to enable them to develop their knowledge and understanding of others regardless of their heritage, ethnicity, religion, culture, ability, gender, sexuality, language, social status, etc.

## BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

### SOCIAL CHANGE

Within the concept of creating change is a concept called 'critical social education'. Here, the role of the youth worker in the learning context is that of an enabler or consciousness raiser and someone who encourages critical thinking:

<sup>8</sup> Rialto Youth Project.

*Critical Social Education is a starting point with young people, working together to develop their critical analysis and understanding of society, acknowledging the power imbalance and inequalities that exist.<sup>8</sup>*

The youth worker challenges the values and beliefs of the young people, explores current events with young people through informal discussions or organises workshops on issues like immigration to encourage critical thinking. At the extreme of social change there can be indoctrination and manipulation, and it may be that the youth worker is pushing their own agenda onto the young people – which may or may not be intentional but, either way, is not the role or the right of the youth worker. Examples of this can be found most often in the more extreme religious-based or ideological organisations and extreme left and right political organisations. It could also have an anarchistic aspect, where the youth worker engages the young people to oppose the establishment as being oppressive.



*'For me it's a problem when youth work is seen from a deficit basis. Show me the problem and youth work is the solution. I think that is a risky place for youth work to exist.'*

Dermot

## YOUTH WORKERS GUIDING

## AND FACILITATING

In general, the youth work that takes place in our respective societies is not rooted in just one camp promoting only change or conformity. Balanced youth work will have moments where the youth worker will work with young people on citizenship issues, supporting the community in which they live, becoming active with others and building themselves as responsible young adults. Balanced youth work will also have times where young people are being challenged to think outside the box and seek solutions that are not necessarily along the lines of the status quo. The youth worker will be in the position to guide young people in challenging injustice and fighting for rights – for themselves or for others – for example exploring climate issues with a group of young people and supporting them if they choose to take part in the school strikes.



*'There's a lot of pressure on young people coming from society, parents, school and I definitely don't want to be part of that, I want to show them also the other side.'*

Emil



*'I think that besides working with young people a youth worker also has a role in building a network with other people and institutions to advocate for young people.'*

Paul



*'In Germany politicians often come to youth centers to talk to the young people. I like that; it makes the young people feel that they matter.'*

Karmen



*'In youth work there is more and more this community approach. It has good sides but at the same time I think this is what young people don't want; they want to rebel against old people, not to listen to them.'*

Karmen

## CONCLUSION

Empowering young people features in all the above elements and needs to be an underlying feature of the youth worker's work. It is about equipping young people with understanding and skills, it is about building their self-esteem and self-confidence and it is about supporting them in affirming their identity. Empowerment also means enabling them to exercise their rights. This includes recognising that they have rights as well as the need for respecting the rights of others. It is also about encouraging them to engage in the community in which they live and to engage with the personal, social and political issues which affect their lives and the lives of others.

Youth work is about enabling young people to gain skills, knowledge and to think critically as well as to gain understanding, attitudes and values needed for their own personal development and fulfilment. Learning in youth work does not always have to be overt and structured. Sometimes youth work needs to be about fun for the sake of fun and allow learning to take place naturally without it being backed up or reinforced by the youth worker. Either way, it is the youth worker primarily who sets the scene for the learning to take place. Learning is also about understanding how to and wanting to contribute to society as a member of groups and communities, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.



## TABLE TALK

*You can find a Podcast exploring the concepts of 'Social Control versus Social Change' on the **FOCUS learning** website.*

➤ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)



OPPORTUNITIES

&

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



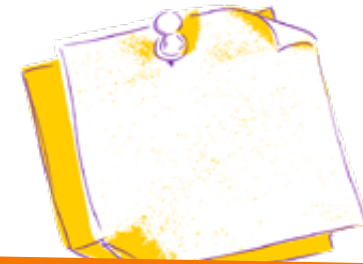
THE YOUTH WORKER AS THE LEARNER

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

No matter how small or big a youth organisation is, whether it is fully funded or based purely on volunteering, anyone who works as a youth worker needs to think about further learning. There are numerous opportunities for youth workers to be trained, taught and enter learning experiences.

Many youth organisations offer in-house training to staff and volunteers. Some regional or municipal authorities might offer local qualifications – these may also be provided by larger youth organisations from the NGO sector. At the national level, some countries have youth work courses at universities which range from earning a basic diploma, to bachelor's and master's degrees and even to the PhD level. There are international-level courses funded primarily by the European Union Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and the Council of Europe Youth Department.

Some of these courses and training opportunities are there to train people to be youth workers, while others are there to develop particular skills that a youth worker may need. For example, how to engage in advice and information work with young people, drugs education work, working with minority groups, detached youth work, etc. In all these cases there is a conscious decision to enter into a profession-based development. However, the youth worker also needs to recognise themselves as a learner as they do their work.



### LEARNING POSTER

*You can find a poster that explores the 'Youth Worker as the Learner' on the **FOCUS learning website**, through the following link.*

*➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)*

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This area of being a learner can be looked at from the perspective of a short set of principles that were developed for an area of learning under the EU youth programme's European Training Strategy.<sup>9</sup> The strategy consists of many areas of work supporting youth workers and youth work trainers. One small element in the strategy is a model designed to guide participants in their self-reflection and self-assessment as they engage in training courses.

This includes a set of 'guiding principles':<sup>10</sup>

- **Awareness:** me – the group – the field – the context,
- **Readiness** to question and to review practice,
- **Readiness** to stretch boundaries,
- **Being explicit** about choices as trainers [youth workers],<sup>11</sup>
- **Integrity:** Walk the talk!,
- **Giving** space to the whole person: body – mind – soul – heart,
- **Awareness:** Being here as a learner in a community of learners,
- **Giving to Caesar what is Caesar's:** acknowledging (re)sources of practice.

While this set of principles is oriented to international-level trainers and youth workers, the model can be adapted and applied to the youth worker in any setting. In this context, it is about the youth worker creating the learning, reacting to the learning or encouraging the learning to happen for themselves. Not all the areas fit, so only part of the model has been adapted.

<sup>9</sup> European Training Strategy.

<sup>10</sup> SALTO.

<sup>11</sup> Note: the original concept of the Guiding Principles is for people working as trainers in the youth sector, for this chapter I am changing the context to that of the 'youth worker'.





## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR

## THE YOUTH WORKER

### AWARENESS

*me  
the group  
the field  
the context*

The youth worker is an individual who is part of a larger body of individuals: co-workers, volunteers, managers, the young people they work with, etc. The people who work for the organisation as well as those who are the users of the organisation work towards a common goal in a context defined by the organisation's mission and context (poor neighbourhood, middle class urban, rural, etc.), its target group, the individual workers' own background, etc. Each individual youth worker works with and in all these groups.

It is vital that the youth worker is aware of their context because 'this defines the "wholeness" of our work'.<sup>12</sup> The youth worker needs to be aware of what they are doing, why they are doing it, how they are doing it, who they are doing it with or for, what the impact of their work is and what follow-up or action is needed. This awareness is a necessary part of being a learner.

<sup>12</sup> SALTO.

## READINESS

*to question  
and to review  
practice*

It is vital that the youth worker engages their capacity to reflect on their practice as a youth worker, their interactions with the young people they work with and their co-workers, their decisions, their approaches, the methods they engage and their conversations and quality of listening.

This is a necessary part of the work because it entails the youth worker pushing their own boundaries, not being a constant critic of themselves but examining what was done, how it was done and how it could be done differently and/or better next time. A youth worker who has the capacity to question and to review their practice is a youth worker who is constantly learning from their practice and learning about ways to improve it. This is the youth worker who recognises that they have many underlying attitudes and assumptions which, if not challenged, can lead to their practice becoming stale or of poor quality.

## READINESS

*to stretch  
boundaries*

This principle is closely linked to the previous principle. Here, the youth worker needs to create a learning atmosphere for themselves which enables them to stretch their boundaries, to be ready to challenge their comfort zone, to go beyond what they know and to sometimes accept uncertainty in their work – especially when it is being led by young people.

It is about embracing ambiguity as a potential source of learning. It is easy to stay safe with what we know, but this principle challenges the youth worker to accept that they don't know everything and that they don't need to control everything. To enable this process, it is important for the organisation to support a safe working atmosphere that encourages outside-the-box thinking and action.

## BEING EXPLICIT

*about  
choices  
as youth  
workers*

Being accountable to the young people the youth worker works with is important. The youth worker needs to be able to explain clearly and openly the reasons for decisions made and actions taken as well as the direction of a project or an activity. This applies to both the young people they work with and their colleagues and/or management.

This is also about passing on 'knowledge': the reason something needs to be accompanied with an explanation is so that it becomes a learning process not just for the youth worker but also for those they work with. It is about being able to explain choices and alternatives and their respective outcomes.

## INTEGRITY

*Walk the talk!*

This is a key part of being a youth worker. To say one thing and do another will lead to a loss of trust and destroy hard-won relationships with the young people they work with. Youth workers need to be honest with themselves, ethical, consistent and trustworthy. The learning element here is the ability of the youth worker to regularly check their own values against their work and, in their team, to engage in dialogue and reflection on principles and values and how they influence the work of the organisation.

## GIVING

*space to the whole person:*

- *body • mind*
- *soul • heart*

A youth worker is more than just a youth worker, they are a whole being. The youth worker needs to be aware of themselves holistically. The relationship the youth worker has with themselves is just as important as the relationships they build with the young people. This is about the youth worker learning to take care of themselves.

The process of recognising and embracing the different emotions experienced while working with young people is an important skill for the youth worker – whether this is joy at a young person experiencing success, anger at two young people fighting, frustration at the lack of cooperation from the municipal authorities or general contentment after a two-hour session with a group of young people. 'Balance and harmony can favourably support learning, which doesn't mean that frustration and/or strong emotions in general are to be banned.'<sup>13</sup> It is also important for the youth worker to be able to read their body, their mental health and their emotions, and to know when they are tired and in need of a break.

## AWARENESS

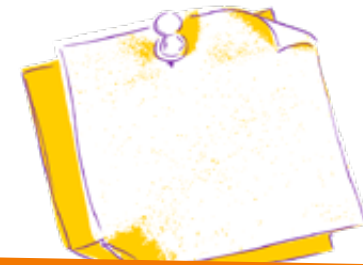
*I am here as learner in a community of learners*

Any group of young people or group of colleagues includes individuals who are all engaged to some extent in the non-formal learning that takes place in a youth organisation. The youth worker needs to recognise, understand and see themselves as a learner: in other words, they should have the desire to embrace all of the above.

<sup>13</sup> SALTO, p3.

## CONCLUSION

There are two aspects of the youth worker as learner: on the one side is seeking and identifying training opportunities, and on the other is becoming aware of the principles of conduct, behaviour and attitude that lead to learning when working with young people. This latter perspective is more than simply learning for the youth worker, it is also about creating a culture and atmosphere of learning. When the youth worker is open about their learning, this can act as a catalyst for the young people to also identify and acknowledge their learning. This set of principles is a direction, something to be worked towards. Perhaps the perfect youth worker could fulfil all these principles but the reality is that the perfect youth worker does not exist. Seeking to apply these principles as far as possible and accepting failure when it is not possible is the most important aspect relating to these principles.



## LEARNING POSTER

*You can find a poster that explores the 'Guiding Principles for the Youth Worker' on the **FOCUS learning website**.*

➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)




# THE YOUTH WORKER AS

## A PART OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

**This section explores the concept of the learning organisation and how this influences youth work and the youth worker. Whilst building relationships with young people, whilst facilitating and guiding young people in their learning journeys (consciously and subconsciously) and whilst being reflective and analytical of their own practice and learning needs, the youth worker also needs to be the rudder to guide the organisation in the context of its learning.**

If there are changes in the community, e.g. a rise in right wing sentiments and politics or an outpouring of anger due to racism, the youth worker needs to be feeding this back to the organisation, which then needs to react accordingly. If the young people are unhappy with the agenda, a member of staff or a management decision, the youth worker needs to be aware of the moods and needs of the young people and support the organisation in making adjustments when appropriate.



*'Learning organisations [are] organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.'*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Senge, P. (1990).

In her study of learning organisations, Sandra Kerka (1995) states that, in her view, 'learning is valuable, continuous, and most effective when shared and that every experience is an opportunity to learn.'<sup>15</sup> This is particularly important to consider in the context of youth work and the youth work organisation. Peter Senge, the acknowledged originator of the learning organisation concept, said that an organisation that encourages all involved to solve problems autonomously and to learn from each other and expand their knowledge and cooperate to achieve the mission of the organisation is a learning organisation, and in a learning organisation this is done without fear of being judged.

<sup>15</sup> Kerka, S. (1995).

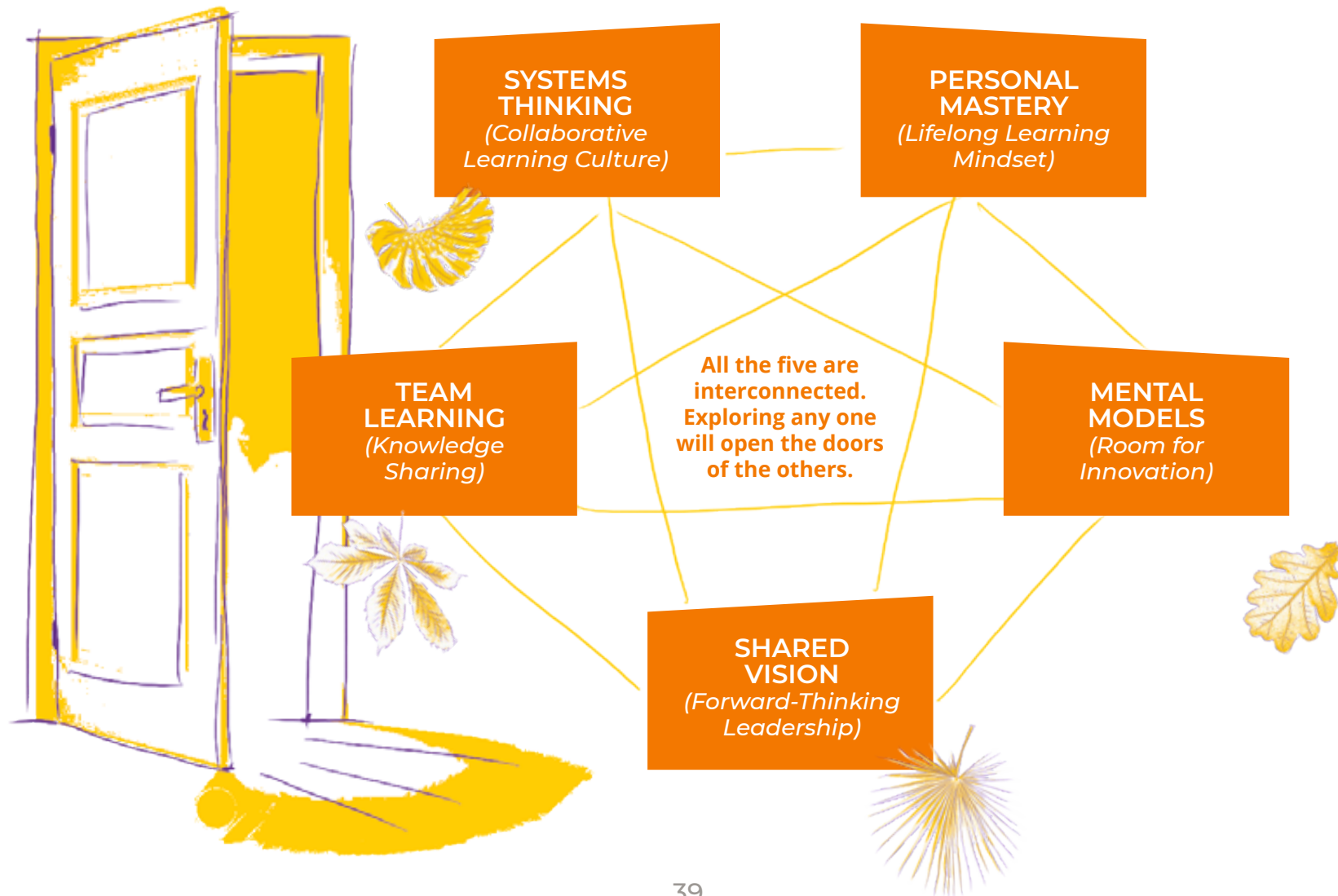
Kerka also suggests (based on Calvert et al. 1994; Watkins and Marsick 1993) that learning organisations share six particular characteristics that fit very well with the concept of a youth organisation:

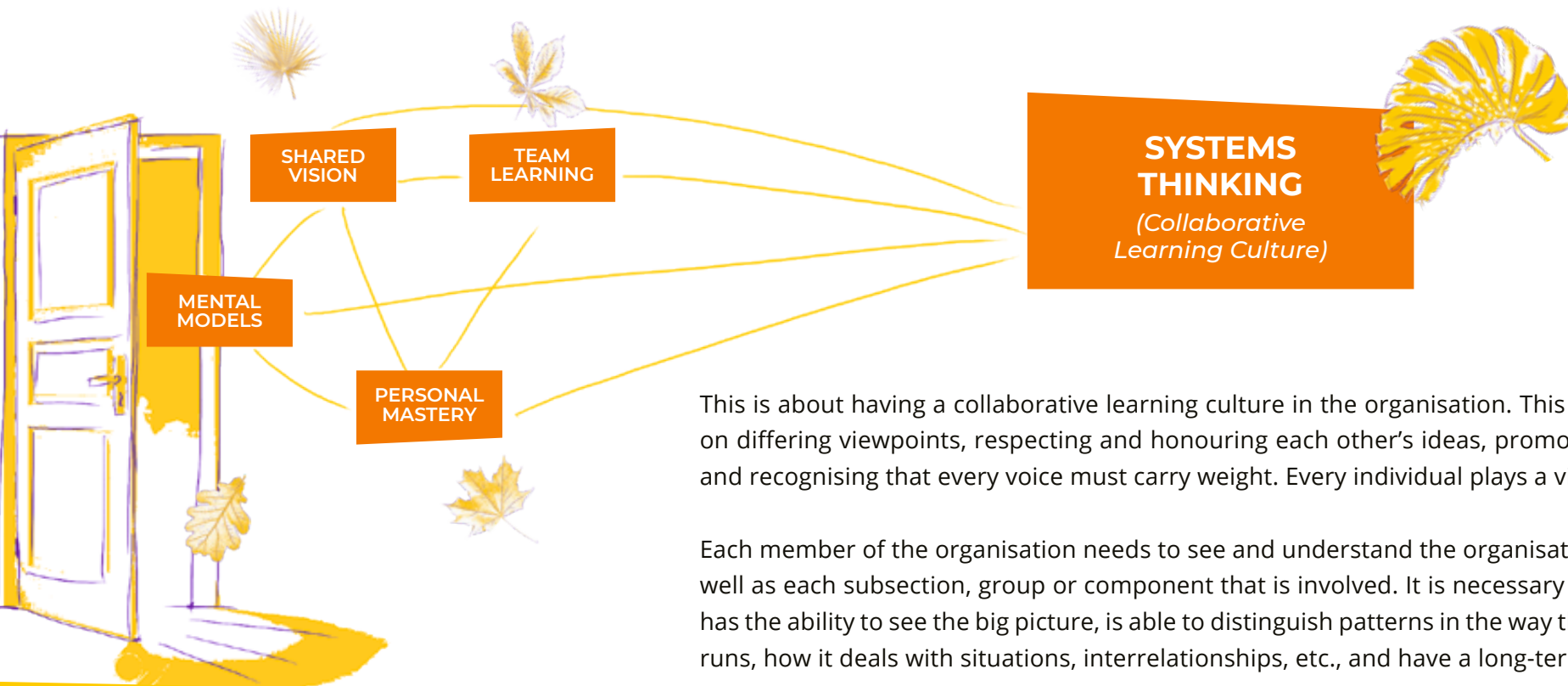
- They provide continuous learning opportunities;
- They use learning to reach their goals;
- They link individual performance with organisational performance;
- They foster inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks;
- They embrace creative tension as a source of energy and renewal;
- They are continuously aware of and interact with their environment.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Kerka, S. (1995). p3.

Senge's concept is based on five key traits that make an organisation a learning organisation.

# FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION



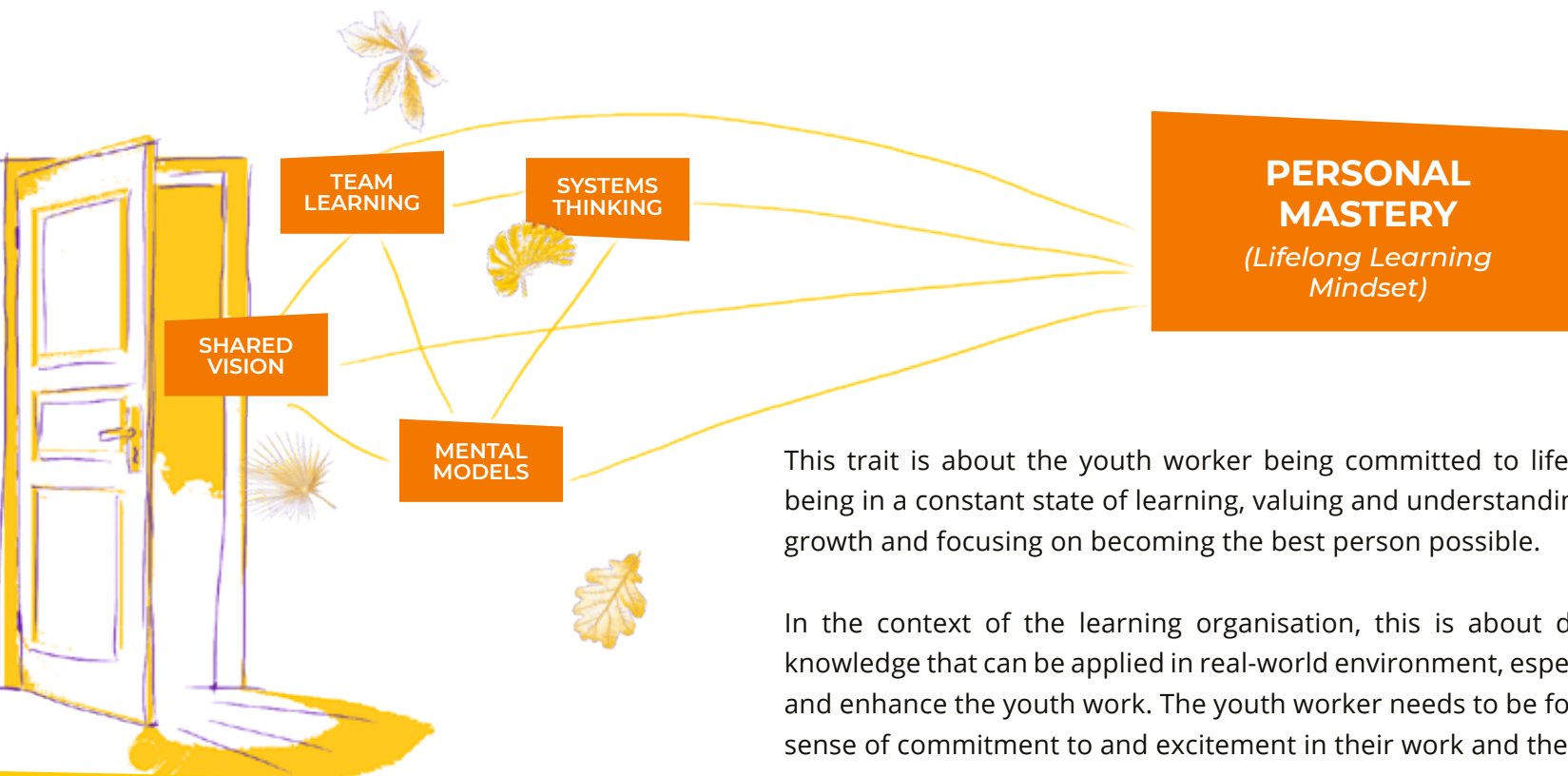


## FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

This is about having a collaborative learning culture in the organisation. This means thriving on differing viewpoints, respecting and honouring each other's ideas, promoting innovation and recognising that every voice must carry weight. Every individual plays a vital role.

Each member of the organisation needs to see and understand the organisation as whole as well as each subsection, group or component that is involved. It is necessary that everybody has the ability to see the big picture, is able to distinguish patterns in the way the organisation runs, how it deals with situations, interrelationships, etc., and have a long-term focus.

There needs to be a recognition that every action and consequence correlates with another. There needs to be an understanding and acceptance that problems cannot be blamed on external events but that they are a result of internal operations or actions.



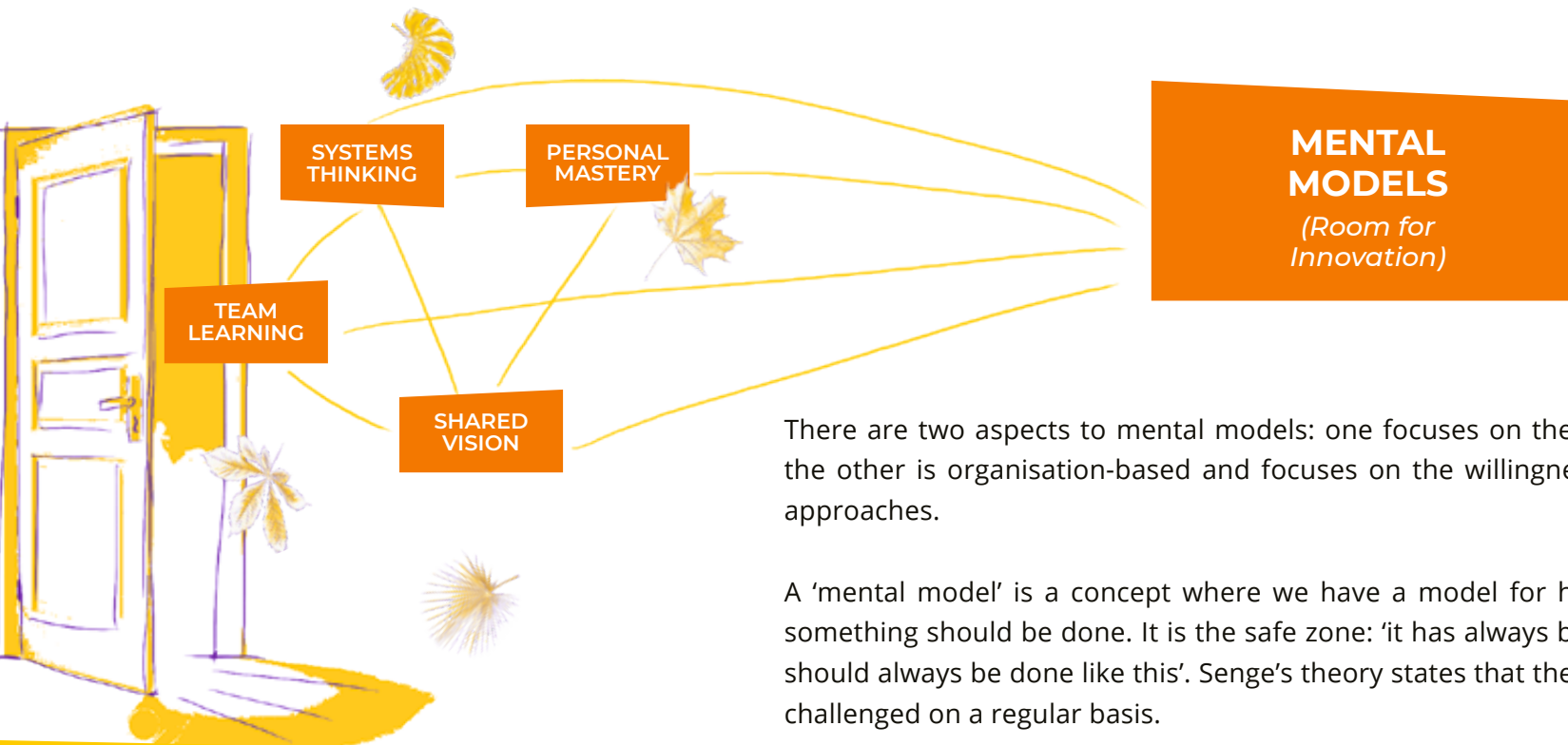
## FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

### PERSONAL MASTERY *(Lifelong Learning Mindset)*

This trait is about the youth worker being committed to lifelong learning, being aware of being in a constant state of learning, valuing and understanding the importance of continual growth and focusing on becoming the best person possible.

In the context of the learning organisation, this is about developing practical skills and knowledge that can be applied in real-world environment, especially soft skills that will benefit and enhance the youth work. The youth worker needs to be forward thinking and strive for a sense of commitment to and excitement in their work and the organisation.

The individual youth worker needs to have a clear goal for themselves and their work, and at the same time be fully committed and dedicated to the organisation's learning objectives (this could be the organisation's mission or vision or simply the dream of the organisation). In order to achieve this, the youth worker needs to be realistic about themselves, their work and their organisation. In a learning organisation where there is a gap between the vision of the organisation and reality, the youth worker is the one who needs to be driven to realise the vision.



## FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

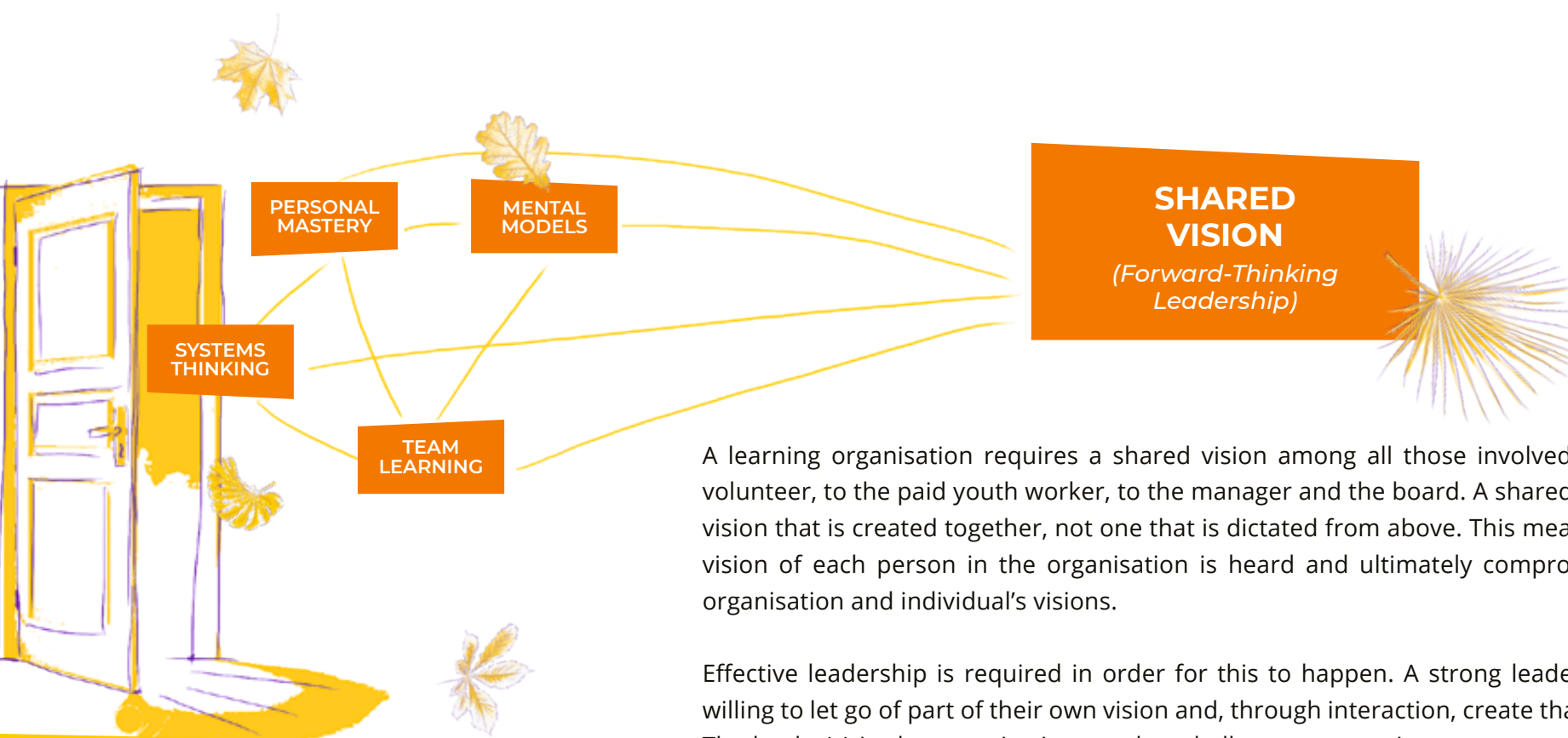
There are two aspects to mental models: one focuses on the self and self-reflection, while the other is organisation-based and focuses on the willingness to test out new ideas and approaches.

A 'mental model' is a concept where we have a model for how we do something or how something should be done. It is the safe zone: 'it has always been done like this therefore it should always be done like this'. Senge's theory states that these 'mental models' need to be challenged on a regular basis.

The youth worker needs to be able to evaluate and assess their current position, assumptions and ways of doing things through self-reflection. This process allows the individual to challenge any limiting beliefs that stand in the way of progress. 'Until there is realisation and a focus on openness, real change can never take place.'<sup>17</sup> A more open understanding of the self enables each individual to see how they fit into the bigger picture and visualise where to go and how to get there.

At the same time, at an organisational level, youth workers need to be encouraged to test out new theories and approaches, to take risks and to learn from their mistakes and continually improve. Mental models often represent stuck behaviour and assumptions. These must be recognised and challenged in order to make room for new ideas and changes. The organisation has to be flexible in accepting changes to new mental models.

<sup>17</sup> Senge, P. (1990), p12.

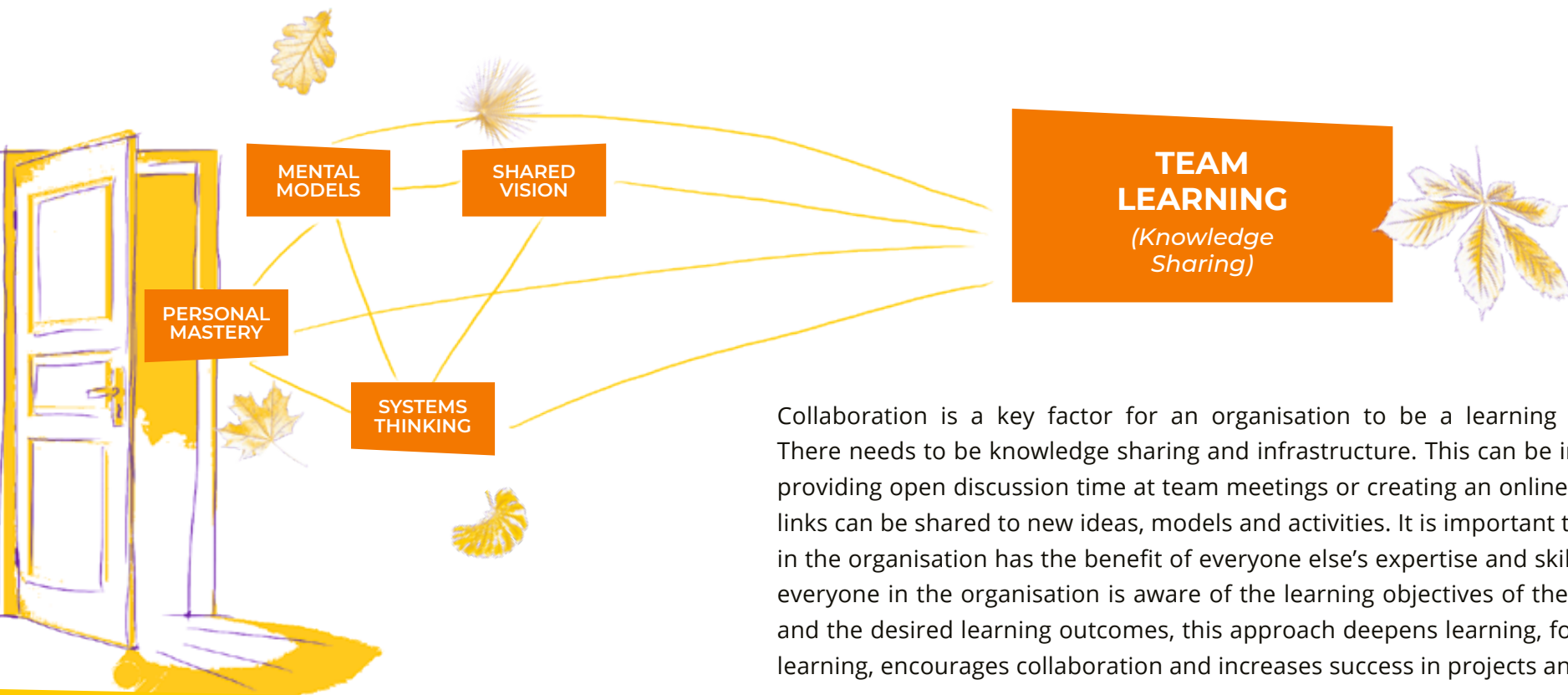


## FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

A learning organisation requires a shared vision among all those involved in it, from the volunteer, to the paid youth worker, to the manager and the board. A shared vision means a vision that is created together, not one that is dictated from above. This means the personal vision of each person in the organisation is heard and ultimately compromises both the organisation and individual's visions.

Effective leadership is required in order for this to happen. A strong leader is one who is willing to let go of part of their own vision and, through interaction, create that shared vision. The leader(s) in the organisation need to challenge assumptions, encourage self-reflection, be an example to others and be willing to let mistakes happen in order to create learning. This can be achieved using dialogue, commitment and enthusiasm, rather than by trying to dictate.

With a shared vision, people do their jobs because they want to, rather than because they are told to. This changes the relationships in the organisation and it turns its performances into a learning mechanism.



## FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

Collaboration is a key factor for an organisation to be a learning organisation. There needs to be knowledge sharing and infrastructure. This can be in the form of providing open discussion time at team meetings or creating an online space where links can be shared to new ideas, models and activities. It is important that everyone in the organisation has the benefit of everyone else's expertise and skills. So long as everyone in the organisation is aware of the learning objectives of the organisation and the desired learning outcomes, this approach deepens learning, fosters lifelong learning, encourages collaboration and increases success in projects and activities.

Organisations cannot learn if the team members do not come together and learn and be open to each other making mistakes and learning from them.

### CONCLUSION

To be a learning organisation it is necessary to apply all five disciplines. Only applying one or two does not create a learning organisation. In essence, all five are interconnected, making it difficult to only work on one or two areas. Exploring any one will open the doors to the others.





## CONCLUSION

The title 'The Youth Worker and the Learning Environment' is intentionally specific: the youth worker is responsible for creating the learning environment, the youth worker is part of the learning environment, the youth worker gives to and receives from the learning environment, the youth worker is in partnership with the young people, the organisation and their colleagues in the learning environment, the youth worker is responsible for guiding the learning that takes place in the learning environment and the youth worker is the learning environment.

This chapter puts a large emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of the youth worker and highlights how many aspects there are to the job of youth worker. However, it should also be pointed out that no youth worker is superhuman and can be all of these things to perfection. The youth worker, as stated above, is also a learner in this. For some, the picture created in this chapter is their role in a perfect world, and it is not reasonable to expect any human to be able to achieve all of this. If the youth worker strives to raise their awareness of these elements and strives to develop themselves and their work, then that is youth work and that is the youth worker and the learning environment as it needs to be. This chapter has talked a lot about what the youth worker needs to do. The following two chapters will explore more of the 'how to do'.



## LEARNING CARDS

*You can find a set of learning cards on the theme of 'The Five Disciplines of Learning' on the **FOCUS learning website**.*

*➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)*

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↗ <https://ayac.org.au/projects/youth-work-definition-2.html>.

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# GLOSSARY

The following definitions and explanations are taken from the EU-CoE Youth Partnership's Glossary on youth. The text has been shortened in some instances.

## FORMAL EDUCATION

UNESCO defines an education programme as a coherent set or sequence of educational activities or communication designed and organised to achieve pre-determined learning objectives or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period. Objectives encompass improving knowledge, skills and competencies within any personal, civic, social and/or employment-related context. Learning objectives are typically linked to the purpose of preparing for more advanced studies and/or for an occupation, trade, or class of occupations or trades but may be related to personal development or leisure. A common characteristic of an education programme is that, upon fulfilment of learning objectives or educational tasks, successful completion is certified.

REF: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012): International Standard Classification of Education 2011, Montreal.

## INFORMAL LEARNING

Informal learning, from the learner's standpoint at least, is non-purposive learning, which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community. It does have outcomes, but these are seldom recorded, virtually never certified and are typically neither immediately visible for the learner nor do they count in themselves for education, training or employment purposes.

REF: Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across Europe, Leuven-Louvain.

## LIFELONG LEARNING

The European Commission has defined lifelong learning in its communication 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality' as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.'

The key features of lifelong learning include the principles that learning:

- (1) Is an integral part of life from cradle to grave.
- (2) Should be accessible to all in the forms, at the times, at the stages and in the places people want and need to learn.
- (3) Takes place across the continuum of informal, non-formal and formal education and training in all spheres of life.

REF: European Commission: Communication from the Commission, COM(2001) 678: 21.11.2001 – Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality.

## **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

Non-formal education is any educational action that takes place outside of the formal education system. Non-formal education is an integral part of a lifelong learning concept that ensures that young people and adults acquire and maintain the skills, abilities and dispositions needed to adapt to a continuously changing environment. It can be acquired on the personal initiative of each individual through different learning activities taking place outside the formal educational system. An important part of non-formal education is carried out by non-governmental organisations involved in community and youth work.

REF: Parliamentary Assembly (1999): Report of the Committee on Culture and Education, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, document 8595: Non-formal education; Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 1930 and Recommendation 2014 (2013): Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge.

## **NON-FORMAL LEARNING**

Non-formal learning is a purposive, but voluntary, learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects.

REF: Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across Europe, Leuven-Louvain and Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth (2011): Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe, Strasbourg.

## **NON-FORMAL LEARNING AND EDUCATION**

Non-formal learning and education, understood as learning outside institutional contexts (out-of-school) is the key activity, but also the key competence, of youth work. Non-formal learning/education in youth work is often structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support and it is intentional. It typically does not lead to certification, but in an increasing number of cases, certificates are delivered, leading to a better recognition of the individual learning outcome.

REF: Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across Europe, Leuven-Louvain and Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth (2011): Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe, Strasbourg.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are persons 13–30 years old. For the purposes of European youth policies this age is used both by the European Commission and Council of Europe.

REF: Council of Europe and European Commission Research Partnership: Report of the Research Seminar 'The Youth Sector and Non-formal Education/ Learning: working to make lifelong learning a reality and contributing to the Third Sector', Strasbourg 28-30, April 2004.

## YOUTH WORK

Youth work is a summary expression for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. The main objective of youth work is to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures.

The general aims of youth work are the integration and inclusion of young people in society. It may also aim towards the personal and social emancipation of young people from dependency and exploitation. Youth work belongs both to the social welfare and to the educational systems. In some countries it is regulated by law and administered by state civil servants, in particular at local level. However, there is an important relation between these professional and voluntary workers, which is at times antagonistic, and at others, cooperative. The definitions of youth work are diverse.

REF: Lauritzen P. (2006): Defining youth work. Internal working paper, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

## YOUTH WORKER

Youth workers are people who work with young people in a wide variety of non-formal and informal contexts, typically focusing on personal and social development through one-to-one relationships and in group-based activities. Being learning facilitators may be their main task, but it is at least as likely that youth workers take a social pedagogic or directly social work-based approach. In many cases, these roles and functions are combined with each other.

REF: Chisholm, L. (2005): Bridges for Recognition Cheat Sheet: Proceedings of the SALTO Bridges for Recognition: Promoting Recognition of Youth Work across Europe, Leuven-Louvain.

## AN EXAMINATION OF LEARNING IN YOUTH WORK

**FOCUS learning** is resource for youth worker trainers and educators. It is the culmination of over 6 years work exploring the subject of learning in youth work. It has involved numerous members of the youth work community of practice. The **FOCUS learning** website is a resource with a large quantity of materials contained within it that can be easily accessed and used in lectures, training courses, workshop, and conferences on the subject of youth work. The resources are designed and written in such a way that they can be used for basic youth worker training and they can be used for advanced youth worker training / education. The emphasis here is that they are intended for both the nonformal education and formal education of youth workers.

### THE FOLLOWING LEARNING MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE:



#### TABLE TALKS

You can find various dynamic podcasts with 5 experienced youth workers in lively debates about practice on the **FOCUS learning** website.

➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)



#### POSTERS

You can find numerous posters and diagrams visually exploring an overview of each topic on the **FOCUS learning** website.

➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)



#### CARD SETS

You can find several easy to use and to understand sets of learning cards exploring theories, posing questions and could be projected, downloaded and printed on:

➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)



#### VIDEOS

You can find 8 engaging videos:

- 4 with input from experts
- 4 by local youth work organisations on the

**FOCUS learning** website.

➔ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)

## THE PUBLICATION

The development of youth worker competences in facilitating learning in youth work is at the heart of this publication. It is envisaged that the content of the publication and the various materials connected to it, can be used by educators and trainers who are involved in the education and training of youth workers. **FOCUS learning** and all its content should be seen as being complementary to Youthpass and the European Training Strategy Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally. The **FOCUS learning** publication is the culmination of many years of work and stands as a unique resource dedicated to learning in youth work.

### THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE:

#### CHAPTER I



**EXPLORING**  
*Learning in Youth Work*

➤ [www.focus-learning.eu](http://www.focus-learning.eu)

#### CHAPTER II



*The Youth Worker  
and the Learning*  
**ENVIRONMENT**

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#### CHAPTER III



**FACILITATION**  
*of Learning*

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#### CHAPTER IV



**TRANSFERRING**  
*Learning*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## THE WRITERS

The team of writers was selected for their broad spectrum of knowledge and understanding of youth work and learning – in both the formal and non-formal learning contexts.



**NATALJA GUDAKOVSKA**

Natalja has a background in training, youth work and psychology. She is based in Latvia. Her story in youth work started in 2000 when she joined a youth organisation as a volunteer. Since 2003, she has been developing and running training courses in the youth field on a regular basis. She has been a trainer in the Trainers Pool of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the Latvian National Agency of Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme since 2006. She has training experience across Europe and beyond, and cooperates with the Salto Resource Centres, the National Agencies and different international and local organisations. She is an author of different publications, educational manuals and pedagogical resources in the youth field. On an everyday basis she leads the international 'Participation for All' (Līdzdalības platforma) organisation. Her professional interests include learning, learning motivation, self-directed and game-based learning, training of trainers, intercultural learning, social inclusion, human rights education and leadership. She believes that learning and youth work are strongly connected and that non-formal education has an incredible power to support people in building their lives and shaping communities.



**NORA FURLONG**

Nora is a freelance youth worker, trainer and educator based in the South East region of Ireland. She is passionate about the role of youth work and non-formal learning in making a positive change in the lives of young people, communities and society at large. She has a particular interest in areas of wellbeing, resilience, environmental sustainability and lots, lots more. Creative approaches lie at the core of her practice provoking curiosity, critical thinking, learning and action for healthier, kinder and more inclusive communities. Nora is a lecturer with the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork. She is part of the Léargas (Irish National Agency) Trainers Pool. Nora maintains her practice with young people on a voluntary basis. She strongly believes that her work with young people informs her teaching and training, and vice versa.



## NIK PADDISON

With a background as a youth worker from the UK, Nik is a trainer of trainers, youth workers, leaders, volunteers and activists in the European youth field. He is a full-time freelance trainer, writer and editor. He develops educational games, activities, theories and approaches related to the youth field in the context of non-formal learning. He is regularly employed with the youth sectors of both the European Union and the Council of Europe, although he primarily works with locally based youth NGOs across Europe. His work focuses on a broad spectrum of subject areas including human rights, peace building, combatting hate speech, exploring issues of right-wing populism, extremism and radicalisation, work with Roma young people, gender issues, refugees, digital training and youth work development at the European level.



## PAUL KLOOSTERMAN

Paul is a freelance trainer, writer and researcher based in the south of Italy. He has been and still is involved in training courses for trainers, youth workers, teachers and policy makers. He is a member of the Youthpass Advisory Group, responsible for the implementation of the Youthpass in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme. He has been involved in different research projects focusing on learning to learn and self-directed learning in youth work and training. In the last 15 years he has predominantly focused on his passion: the topic of learning to learn and self-directed learning.

## THE PARTNERS



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