

Vocational Trainers and Non-formal Learning

Keywords:

- Non-formal learning
- Training tools
- Vocational training
- Vocational trainers
- Non-formal training tools

What is non-formal learning?

Non-formal learning according to the CEDEFOP definition is *“Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.”*¹

There may be an overlap of definition between non-formal and informal learning, where scholars such as MacGivney² presents the difficulty in making clear distinctions. Currently, these distinctions are becoming more important within today’s vocational training classroom due to national efforts of European countries trying to recognise knowledge acquired through non-formal learning. This leaves vocational trainers with the following two questions: 1. How do you distinguish between the two in your classroom? And 2. How can you make sure you are using the correct learning method and tools for your trainees or the correct blend?

Questions such as the above are posed continuously by the vocational trainer community who follow educational progress and the new tools presented frequently. Trainers who are confident in employing tested training delivery methods and individual ways of working may find it difficult to change them or another pedagogical approach. What is needed to motivate them? Testing and evaluation, discussion and reflection are key processes to alleviate and facilitate non-formal training tools uptake in a vocational training classroom.

How do I identify non-formal learning in my classroom?

Non-formal learning is structured training and learning in the form of conference seminars, games, interviews, case studies but can also include placements, swimming lessons, coaching etc. covering various structured learning situations and provides according to

¹ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#l>

² [McGivney, V. (1999) *Informal learning in the community: a trigger for change and development* (Leicester: NIACE). Cited in ‘Helen Colley, Phil Hodgkinson & Janice Malcolm (2002) *Non-formal learning: mapping the conceptual terrain. A Consultation Report*, Leeds: University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Institute. Also available in the informal education archives: http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/colley_informal_learning.htm]

Russel³ “experiential learning activities that foster the development of skills and knowledge”.

Vocational trainers today have a plethora of tools and information available alleviating analysis, identification and implementation of non-formal learning in their workplace and when designing training courses for adults. To their aid, when setting up the learning course objectives, they can include in their curricula diverse tools that will allow the course participants obtain information and knowledge through various means. In formal training and certification courses, the trainers can integrate case studies, group work and board games within the course material to allow participants interact and learn from each other. Moreover, they can build on each other’s knowledge, reflect and associate information which can subsequently, be connected to the formal learning material. The trainer can aid in this process and through using a checklist, confirm used and successful learning methods and tools for their specific trainees. The final outcome will help build confidence and abilities in the training group, enforce and enhance interpersonal trainee relations.

Learning tools and vocational training

The flexible structure of non-formal learning is becoming more and more popular in today’s society forming a matrix which combines formal education to additional structured learning. Vocational training centres and even universities are opting for such courses paving the way to new learning tools and facilitating identification, assessment and certification of non-formal learning in Europe. Similarly, the world of work is opting for non-formal and informal training, combined with formal, having employees interact and learn from each other or learn by doing. People who have undergone this type of training are more willing to participate again due to its flexible structure.

Types of non-formal training and tools in vocational settings are:

- Case study discussions and study visits where group work and reflection can take place
- Playing games and discussing
- Community work / volunteer work
- Presentations
- Using theatre techniques to convey information and motivate/stimulate learning
- Conference style seminars

Advantages of non-formal education in Vocational training

Cedefop⁴ has created guidelines for all European countries on how to provide validation to various learning experiences basing it on models such as the learning outcomes. This will help transparency and allow comparison between the European countries borders. More information can be found on the Cedefop’s website.⁵

³ Stephen T. Russell. "[The Developmental Benefits of Nonformal Education and Youth Development](#)" (PDF) (The University of California, Davis).

⁴ www.cedefop.europa.eu

⁵ European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning; Routes from learning to certification. figure 2 p.18. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4054_en.pdf

To this extend, vocational trainers can use the framework and design accordingly vocational training courses suitable not only for their trainees identified needs but also for future mobility opportunity of European citizens.

Advantages of non-formal training in vocational settings reported, include:

- The trainees learn exactly what is necessary, an evident knowledge transfer can be identified either in work or in the training room. Motivation and willingness to learn are high because the purpose is clear and the learned material immediately applicable.⁶
- the learning environment is a simulation to what is expected in a work situation and can relate to work duties, organisation structure, qualification demands, while offering additional resources in the form of space, time, material, and staff.
- Learning becomes integrated, subject-oriented, and in many cases accompanied to formal learning processes, hence development of competencies are seldom random and situational.
- Creates self-reliant and independent learners who always strive to learn more and improve.
- An open learning process allowing trainees to start and finish as they please, motivate them because training objective is based on individual needs and interest,
- Trainees do not have the pressure of failure and rejection (as in formal education).

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⁶ www.soufflearning.com