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„Identifying learning needs – an anthropological Action Research about facilitating self-directed learning“

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is an Action Research (AR) in the field of non-formal adult education and my practice as a facilitator in this field. It is situated at the crossroads of theories from educational science and educational anthropology as well as empirical findings about my practice of facilitating self-directed learning (SDL), which means that learners decide when, what and how they want to learn and. As it is important for me to make this thesis as widely accessible as possible I decided to write this thesis in English.

I am working as **a facilitator of learning in the field of non-formal adult education**, which means I facilitate seminars and courses outside of formal structures such as schools and universities and I work mostly with people who are over 18 years old. Even though I also work with children and young people and in formal contexts such as university and school (for example the research cooperation JuMuW) the work with those age groups is not relevant for the content of this thesis. The biggest part of my work entails the setting up, carrying through and evaluating of several days long residential seminars on a variety of topics such as learning, self-development, volunteering and communication mostly within the Youth in Action (YiA) programme (a programme for non-formal education and international youth work by the European Commission).
My preferred educational approach in these settings is **self-directed learning**, which refers to a way of learning where the learner takes the decision when, what and how he or she wants to learn. As Maurice Gibbons, a Canadian teacher and emeritus professor, puts it, it is “an increase in knowledge, skill, accomplishment or personal development that an individual selects and brings about by his or her own efforts using any method in any circumstance at any time“ (2002: 2). SDL hereby describes two processes. It is first of all a way people learn, and second of all a way of how learning can be facilitated. I will focus on the latter in the course of this diploma thesis, as this is the process that forms part of my practice.
Many of my reflections and questions around my development as a facilitator revolve around how to facilitate these SDL based training courses and how to support learning in this specific context. Hence I wanted them to be at the core of my diploma thesis.

What was really important for me when I started to think about writing this thesis was that it was **relevant for myself and my practice as well as for my colleagues** and the field I work in. I found the idea of looking at my work in a different context that is in the context

of cultural and social anthropology and academic writing to be exciting and also a challenge I was happy to face. This situates my diploma thesis at the crossroads of theory and practice. To walk on this crossroad was an empowering experience for me when it came to conducting this research, as I had to link my practice to theoretical writings and find theories that related to my practice. Through the constant process of relating practical experience with theoretical writing I felt I gained a sound understanding of learning theories and what they mean in practice.

For the **Youth in Action programme**, where I mostly work, this combination of theory and practice is also relevant. Here loads of experience in the work with training courses and education is gathered, but often not systematically recorded and collected and therefore not introduced into the academic discourse. There is less research on non-formal education than on formal education and especially little in the program called Youth in Action (or the former programmes of the EU dedicated to youth) where I have been mainly working for the last eight years. Lynne Chisholm, a Dutch educationalist at the University of Innsbruck, and Bryony Hoskins, an English educationalist at the University of Southampton (2005: 27) see part of the reason in the fact that non-formal education is of a lesser political priority and therefore also of lesser priority on research agendas. Besides, practitioners in the field are being unsure whether or not researchers would also exercise a kind of control and regulations on their individual and collective practices (ibid.). The Youth in Action programme ends in December 2013 and there will be a new programme, but it is not yet sure in what way international youth work and non-formal education will continue there. However, with this research and the gained insights I hope to contribute to the further development of the programme. I also want to contribute to the discussions about facilitating educational activities in my field of work. To understand what this field exactly entails I want to give an overview over some essential features of non-formal learning:

- “balanced co-existence and interaction between cognitive, affective and practical dimensions of learning
- linking individual and social learning, partnership-oriented solidarity and symmetrical teaching/learning relations
- participatory and learner-centred
- holistic and process-oriented
- close to real life concerns, experiential and oriented to learning by doing, using intercultural exchanges and encounters as learning devices
- voluntary and (ideally) open-access

- aims above all to convey and practice the values and skills of democratic life“

(Council of Europe 2001: 51)

Those characteristics have been developed for non-formal education within the youth sector, however they are also relevant to all the other work I do as a facilitator.

The literature on adult education and/or non-formal education that is available, I find, does not often depict the specific reality that residential training courses have. The theoretical texts are sometimes far removed from what I experience when facilitating learning in this context. There is something also referred to as the research/practice divide, which points out that educational research and educational systems often exist next to each other instead of contributing to each other's development. This is not only an issue of non-formal education, as much of the research about the topics of learning and facilitating learning in general are not present in the educational systems of most countries (de Corte 2012: 43f).

As I am working in education while studying **Cultural and Social Anthropology** this research is supported by the insights from both disciplines. Educational anthropology and learning theories and educational science have so much to gain from each other and I find it limiting in my thought and research process to stick to only one of them if both can contribute to the topic at hand. The interdisciplinary nature of my thesis is an added value that also gave me new insights into anthropology as well as into educational science through the process of working with both.
The anthropological approach of doing research that has critical thinking, process orientation and reflexivity at its core served as the set of mind with which I approached this diploma thesis. My academic background of social and cultural anthropology is the backbone of my work.
Especially the “ethnologische Haltung” (Diel-Khalil and Götz 1999: 96-111), which refers to how I tried to carry myself throughout the research, is symbolic for my intentions. It contains among others critical awareness, continuous self-reflection, to have a holistic view of a situation and to let the research guide you (ibid.).

My mode of inquiry is **Action Research**. This is a form of qualitative research that has the aim to generate knowledge and also to improve practice (Altrichter and Posch 1996: 21), which made it perfectly fit for my diploma thesis. It is based on systematic cycles of reflection and action.

The AR cycle of finding a starting point, diagnosing, planning action/intervention, carrying out the action/intervention and then reflecting on that again served as the logic for my research and the writing up of it.

Doing research in order to also improve a situation can also be found in anthropology and is called **Applied Anthropology**. Educational anthropology has been historically seen as an applied field. The basis for those applied actions are findings and knowledge that emerged out of research (Schensul et. al. 1985: 149).
Applied Anthropology is used in Britain and the United States to mainly refer to "the employment of anthropologists by organizations involved in inducing change and enhancing human welfare." (Bennett 1996: 25) The scope of Applied Anthropology however can be understood in an even broader manner. The idea is to use the specific approach and point of view that anthropologists have to contribute to issues that are relevant in society. Action Research with an anthropological point of view and "ethnologischer Haltung" is just one way of applying anthropology. However it is the way I chose to do it in this thesis.

Action Research has many similarities with **ethnography**, a way of conducting research that is mainly used in Cultural and Social Anthropology. Important features of ethnography and also Action Research are:

- People's action are studied in the field (not in an experiment or an artificially created situation)
- Data is gathered from a range of sources (such as interviews, participant observation and/or informal talks), often called method triangulation
- Data collection is an exploratory process. There is not a fixed research design to begin with, but it evolves out of the process itself. The categories for the interpretation of the data are mostly generated from the data itself.
- Ethnography is interpretative. This means the meanings and functions of the findings are interpreted through the lens of one's own biography.
- There is an inherent cycle of action and reflection.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3, Altrichter and Posch 1996: 15-22)

All of these elements are also characteristic for **qualitative research** in general where "(a) the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and (b) the purpose is learning about some aspects of the social world." (Rosmann and Rallis 1998: 5)

Research is an active learning process where information is gathered and becomes knowledge. The researcher "(…) makes choices that shape and are shaped by the emerging processes of inquiry." (Rosmann and Rallis 1998: 5)

Both ethnography and Action Research are questioning the positivist understanding of research. Positivism stands for methodology that comes from the natural sciences and is looking for universal laws in the explanation of phenomena in doing research. There, scientific theories should be able to be verified and also falsified. The person doing the research and observing is to be eliminated as much as possible from the data collection, in order to ensure as much objectivity as possible over the data collected and the research conducted (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 5-7). However, experts and practitioners of ethnography, Action Research and many kinds of qualitative research see data collection and research as an interpretative, co-constructed and subjective process. And so do I.

In both ethnography and Action Research the finding of the research question is an exploratory process that is an important step in the research itself.
The starting question in AR is always something along the lines of: how can I/we improve my/our practice (Reason and Bradbury 2008: 11)? Practice is hereby understood as "the way you carry out your professional actions." (Water-Adams 2006)
It takes what you do and why you do it into account (ibid.).
For several weeks I was pondering on this question and using several methods proposed by Herbert Altrichter, an Austrian pedagogue and pedagogical psychologist and Peter Posch, an Austrian pedagogue and educationalist, (1996: 55f) such as a written reflection, a mind map, talking to a critical friend and with colleagues. I finally came up with the following ideas.

When I do training courses, my educational approach is closely linked to self-directed learning. This means I am asking participants what they want to learn about a certain topic, how they want to learn it, when they want to learn it rather than deciding this for them. One of my main challenges I have observed when basing courses on SDL is that learners often have a hard time figuring out what their interests are and what they would like to do with the freedom offered to them.
Hence my research question is: **What strategies can I use as a facilitator in a five days residential training course based on self-directed learning to support learners to identifying their learning needs and wishes?**

A second topic I was interested in were other insights and findings that would come out of my research that are important to be aware about when facilitating a training course based on self-directed learning.
And on top of that one of the underlying aims of my thesis is also to understand my own practice better. When I do training courses, much of the decisions I take are based on eight years of experience in the field. I often cannot explain why I do what I do; it is rather through the knowledge that my action is becoming visible. Through the writing of my diploma thesis I want to make my actions explicit and embed my understanding of learning and facilitating learning in learning theories and anthropological research. This second part of my anthropological Action Research is also the theoretical part of this thesis.

Chapter division

In order to understand this thesis it is important to understand my work and what I do. I will explain this in chapter 2. Those insights about my practice are one of the main points of writing this thesis. So first of all I will describe what I do, what the context of my work is and how I work as a facilitator. Important parts are therefore:

- The Youth in Action programme, the non-formal education programme for youth work and youth mobility from the European Commission
- The practice of being a facilitator and what I do
- My core beliefs and attitudes
- My competences

To focus the scope of my research, I chose one training course called “To live is to learn – self-directed learning as an approach towards life and education” which took place 20. - 26. May 2012 in Reykjavik, Iceland as a case study, where I inquired into the topic of how to support learners to identify their learning needs and wishes. I will go into more details about this course, how it came about, its aims and the process of the course to understand my research process and its context. Furthermore this chapter is also one of my aims when writing this research: to better understand my own practice, to make it explicit and put words to what I do.

As a next step, in chapter 3, I try to understand my practice through learning theories. I identified constructivism, situated learning and humanism as the three major theoretical strands that support my ideas and understanding about learning. While all of the theories supported my own understanding it was the anthropological insights into learning as something deeply social that is embedded in the social and cultural context of our lives

that gave me new insights into my practice. It is not so much that those insights were completely new, it is more that they now form part of my explicit knowledge and awareness about learning and I am therefore able to support this social aspect to a much greater level than before.
Then I will take a closer look at self-directed learning. As it is the educational approach that is making my research question relevant in the first place within my practice I want to look briefly at its history, the aims it has and the different processes that form part of self-directed learning. I also deal with the role of the facilitator and the peers in this process.
I close this chapter by presenting different points of views about self-directed learning and some points of criticism that have been formulated against it.

Chapter 4 is about Action Research, which is my mode of inquiry in this thesis. This chapter is as much about the methodology of Action Research and its cyclic approach as it is about the logic and rational behind it. Action Research is also a way of conducting research that is combining theory and practice, something that I stated already, which is of utter importance to me. I first explain the concept of Action Research, where it came from and what it means to use AR as the mode of inquiry. I am also showing the connection to Applied Anthropology and the "ethnologische Haltung" as important elements of how I approach this thesis. I am also linking it to qualitative research in general and ethnography. Then I look at it from a methodological point of view by looking at the Action Research cycle as the backbone of my research. The steps are: Finding a starting point – reflecting and diagnosing – planning an action – carrying out the action/intervention – reflecting on the action and then starting again with finding a new starting point out of these reflections. The cyclic nature of my research made it sometimes a challenge to write this text in a linear way, as my research was not a linear process but a mapping of the development of my practice where I often jumped back and forth between different aspects.

In chapter 5, I take a closer look at the methods I used and the context of my research process, I will first describe what the characteristics of a case study are, how I did the sampling, what was the field like, what was the role of the team in my research, how I gained access to it, how I made sure that my work was ethical and how I am interpreting the data collected. Furthermore I will explain my methods used such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

Chapter 6 is about my empirical findings and my process. I had different points I wanted to focus on: how to support learners in identifying their learning needs and finding and evaluating the specific tools and strategies we used during the course, to share important insights and tensions that I identified as relevant during my research and to better understand my practice as a facilitator I wanted to explain the process as well as the outcomes as both aspects are relevant I believe to understand why I got where I got. It also shows my systematic reflections about the research I did.

My case study is the training course “To live is to learn – self-directed learning as an approach towards education and life”, which was a five days residential training course in May 2012 in Reykjavik, Iceland with 19 participants from 13 different countries. The training course was organized by the Icelandic National Agency and we were a team of three trainers (Ann Daniels, Lenka Uhrova and me). During the preparation we had an online platform where we tried out different methods to support learners to come up with their learning needs. Those methods were individual talks with facilitators, an online library with relevant articles, three chats on the platform, exercises to support the process, videos and photos about learning and self-directed learning, the invitation to look back at their individual application forms and a facilitator’s blog. During the course we also decided on offering different possibilities for participants to support them in deciding what their learning needs were at the very moment e.g. individual talks with the facilitators, discussion groups, a library with related articles, internet research, excursions to local institutions chosen according to learning needs that people had voiced beforehand, sessions offered by trainers based on the requests of participants, Skype talks with experts, a creative table full of arts supplies, games and interesting learning venues all over Reykjavik. After the course we updated the platform with the materials used during the training course. We furthermore used an online evaluation form we sent out one month after the course to support participants in becoming more aware of the concrete learning they are taking out of the course.

In the conclusions I discuss my findings concerning the three different research questions I posed which are the strategies to support the identification of learning needs, additional insights gained about what to be aware of when facilitating SDL and more explicit better understanding of my own practice.

Action Research as a way of developing more knowledge about one’s practice and at the same time getting a better understanding and finding concrete solutions for challenges could be a way of bridging the work of many of the trainers in non-formal education with academic research. I want to therefore look at some of my own learning within this

process, discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages and give some recommendations out of my own experience about how Action Research could be transferred into the practice of other trainers or facilitators of learning.

During the whole process I understand myself as a qualitative researcher, a practitioner and most of all as a learner who is finding out new things about her own practice.

Chapter 2: Understanding my practice as a facilitator of learning

I am currently 27 years old and I work as a trainer and facilitator of learning, mostly within the frame of the Youth in Action programme of the European Union. “A facilitator helps a group work together to reach the best possible conclusions or decisions” (Fritscher 2008: 1). The work I am doing within the Youth in Action programme, which is the non-formal education programme for youth mobility of the European Commission, is the starting point for my reflections about my practice and will therefore be at the core of this thesis. Even though I am also training and facilitating in other contexts and projects, they are not relevant for this research.

My biggest challenge has been to systematically look at my own practice and to make what I do explicit to others and myself. Knowledge-in-action is knowledge that is only visible through the concrete action and that can often not be expressed verbally can be called (Schön 1983: 52). What I do as an educator is based on eight years of experience and often when taking a decision or designing an educational activity it is my intuition and gut feeling that tells me what is going to meet the needs of participants and makes sense in the given environment rather than an explicit explanation and understanding. I, thus, largely rely on knowledge-in-action.
The mapping of the context of my work has therefore two aims: for me to become more conscious about my approach to my work in order to then embed it into learning theories. And to situate my research question so as to support the identification of learning needs and wishes in it.

To support the reflections on my practice, I spoke with colleagues and critical friends about what I do and why I do it, I used mind maps and reflection questions (Altrichter and Posch 1998: 55-63) to make my own approach explicit through writing and I started to read up on relevant articles about my work such as “Quality in non-formal education and training in the field of European youth work” by Helmut Fennes, an Austrian educationalist and Hendrik Otten, a German sociologist (2008), who both have been active within the European youth work field as trainers and consultants.
I also looked at different competence profiles that have been developed such as this example from Estonia (Jeedas and Enn 2011) and also at the competence development of teachers (Stern and Streissler 2009: 20) as a frame for contextualizing and making more explicit what I do.

In order to understand the context of my work, I have identified four important elements that make up my practice:

1. The Youth in Action programme: Most of my work takes place in the context of this programme and my biography as a trainer/facilitator was mainly shaped there. I will provide an overview of the aims, target groups, structure and different actions of the programme and my own story within it.
2. Insights into practice: how does it work to be a trainer/facilitator? Where do I work? Whom do I do work for? What do I do when I work as a trainer/facilitator?
3. The training course “To live is to learn”, its aims and process, which serves as the case study of my qualitative research and as an example of how a training course looks like.
4. My competence profile as a way of analysing my practice

Another important information about my work apart from the different areas that make up my practice is about the educational context I am working in. When situating the work I do in this context, I am using the term non-formal adult education. Even though the programme I mainly work for is called Youth in Action and has youth mobility as one of its main aims, the people I work with within the programme are volunteers, youth workers, youth group leaders or trainers over the age of 18 years old. But I do not want to define adult education only by biological age but "(…) as activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults." (Merriam and Brockett 1997: 7)
Non-formal learning is at the core of the Youth in Action programme and central to my own educational practice. The **principles of non-formal education** as cited in the programme guide are the following:

- “Learning in non-formal contexts is intended and voluntary
- Education takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which training and learning are not necessarily the sole or main activity
- The activities may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers/workers) or volunteers (such as youth leaders or youth trainers)
- The activities are planned but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects
- The activities usually address specific target groups and document learning in a specific, field oriented way.”

(European Commission 2012: 7)

Non-formal learning (NFL) is often defined by what it is not: learning in formal structures. NFL is learning that is taking place outside of the formal educational system such as schools and universities. While formal education often leads to a formal certificate or degree, this is not necessarily the case for non-formal education.

Informal learning is happening in everyday activities and it is mainly learning by doing and often unintentional (Merriam et. al. 2007: 30). Anthropological research has produced an extensive account of this kind of learning such as Jean Lave, a US American social anthropologist, and Etienne Wenger, a Suisse educational theorist and practitioner, (1991), David F. Lancy, a US American anthropologist and psychologist (1980) and others (for more see Pelissier 1991: 88).
With the recent developments that give more and more attention to lifelong learning, non-formal and informal learning receive more attention as they can be complementary (for example for drop outs), supplementary (as they can respond quicker to changing needs than formal education) or even alternatives to the formal system (for example traditional or indigenous education) (Brennan 1997 quoted after Merriam et. al. 2007: 31). Lifelong learning was initially seen as an idealistic and humanistic goal to support human flourishing and learning throughout life. Over the last years it has become more and more also an economic concern (Merriam et al. 2007: 47ff). For example, the Lisbon strategy of the European Union focuses on knowledge and innovation as assets in global competition and aims to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based society. The concept of lifelong learning is one of the core strategies to reach this aim (European Commission 2004: 1).

To understand non-formal, formal and informal learning as three closed concepts however is a too simplistic notion. There is informal learning in school and there are structured and intentional learning moments in everyday activities. The definitions given are not very exact to begin with as they use words such as “often” or “usually” in them. Therefore I would like to see them as a continuum rather than hermetic categories (Zürcher 2010: 4ff).
All of these notions deal with the form of learning, whereas the concept of legitimate peripheral participation brings in a different point of view about learning (Pelissier 1991: 90). Rather than looking at the certification process or the structures it sees learning as a social process and the process of moving from the periphery into becoming a legitimate participant of social practices. This can happen in formal and non-formal education (ibid.).

I would estimate that 90% of the work I do is within non-formal education structures. And even if I am working in a formal setting such as the University of Vienna, I try to stay as close as possible, within the frame of the institution, to principles of trainings based on non-formal education

- Learner-centeredness
- Transparency
- Agreement between trainers and learners on learning objectives, content and methodology
- Confidentiality
- Voluntarism of learners
- Participation of learners
- Ownership of the learning is with the learners
- Democratic values and practices

(Fennes and Otten 2008: 15)

One of the examples I worked for was as a tutor at a seminar at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, which was called: “Researching a multicultural classroom – a classroom of researchers”. In this course, all of these principles were also kept and discussed with the students.

The principles of non-formal education are present in all the activities I do as a trainer/facilitator of learning. Most of my work however is within non-formal structures and the participants are adults. One of the main contexts I work in is the Youth in Action programme. To understand my practice and the context of this thesis, the Youth in Action programme is an important element.

1. Youth in Action

The aim of the Youth in Action programme (2007-2013) is to **support non-formal learning activities for young people**. It wants to **foster solidarity and tolerance** among young people and support them in taking an active role in shaping the future of Europe. Its priorities are the focus on European Citizenship, active participation of young people in civil society as well as in learning activities, fostering cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and inclusion of all young people regardless of their social, educational and cultural background. It is also aiming to develop support systems in the youth field and promotes European cooperation. The Youth in Action programme was based on the experience of prior programmes of the European Commission: Youth for

Europe Programme (1989-1999), the European Voluntary Service (1996-1999) and the YOUTH Programme (2000-2006) (European Commission 2012: 12).

There are five different actions in the Youth in Action programme that should lead to the goals stated above:

Action 1.1 - Youth Exchanges: The possibilities for groups of young people (accompanied by a group leader) from different countries to meet in one of the countries and get to know each other's culture. The topic is one that all groups find interesting.

Action 1.2 - Youth Initiatives: Groups of young people are supported to implement initiatives in their local and national environment. Examples are: a newspaper, a movie or workshops. It is also possible to make transnational projects.

Action 1.3 - Youth Democracy Projects: The aim is to support the participation of young people in democratic structures on a local, national and international level.

Action 2 - European Voluntary Service (EVS): Young people can take part in a variety of voluntary activities within the EU and outside. Individuals or groups are doing non-profit activities. As this is a learning activity, the volunteers have an On-Arrival Training during the first two months of their stay and a Mid-Term Evaluation in the middle of their stay (if they stay over six months) to support them in their learning and project experience.

Action 3.1 - Cooperation with the Neighbouring Partner Countries of the European Union: Developing projects such as Youth Exchanges and Training and Networking in neighbouring countries and all over the world.

Action 4.3 - Training and Networking of those active in youth work and youth organisations: This action is the most relevant for my thesis. It supports the training and education of those working in the Youth in Action field namely youth workers, volunteers, youth leaders and trainers. It aims at supporting the quality of the actions, exchanging best practice and exchange of experience. Mostly the participants are asked to carry the newly gained knowledge back into their local communities.

5.1 - Meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy: Supporting the structured dialogue between young people active in youth work and youth policy.
(European Commission 2012: 12)

<u>The structure of the Youth in Action programme</u>

The European Commission is ultimately responsible for running the Youth in Action programme. It sets the priorities, manages the budget and coordinates the National Agencies. The **Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency** is responsible

for all the decentralized actions. In each country participating in the programme there is a National Agency (NA) that is responsible for implementing the Youth in Action programme. The National Agency administrates and promotes the programme on a national level and acts as a link between the different actors on a local, national and international level, the European Commission and the young people. A second role is to also offer training and non-formal learning experiences (Programme Guide – Youth in Action 2012: 13-15) through a certain part of their budget dedicated to this purpose called TCP (Training and Cooperation Plan). Within this financial framework, NAs decide on national and international training activities and projects that support their national priorities and the aims of the Youth in Action programme. The training course that serves as an example for my research was funded through this TCP budget from the Icelandic National Agency.
(European Commission 2012: 12)

The target group of the programme are on the one hand young people between 13 and 30 years old. So the definition of youth and young people that the programme is working with is purely based on biology. However, this is the only limiting factor for participation in the programme as one of the aims is the inclusion of all young people, also young people with fewer opportunities, regardless of their social, economic or cultural background. Therefore, most of the activities within the Youth in Action programme are co-financed by the programme. If one is taking part in a Youth Exchange, one usually pays only 30% of travel costs and maybe a small participation fee; the Youth in Action Programme covers the rest.
On the other hand, the target group consists of youth workers and persons active in youth organisations (so people working with youngsters) who are legal residents of the Programme or Partner countries.
There are also indirect target groups such as funders, youth work and youth policy makers and the society at large.

Programme countries

These are all countries of the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom), the EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland) and candidates for the accession to the European Union (Croatia and Turkey).

Neighbouring countries are split into three different regions:

1. EUROMED[1],
2. Eastern Europe and Caucasus[2]
3. and South Eastern Europe[3].

There is also the possibility for countries from nearly all over the world to participate in the Youth in Action programme. More information can be found here: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/youth-in-the-world_en.htm.

Future of the programme

With 2014 the next programme period is supposed to start. The decision was made to put all the educational programmes of the European Union be they formal or non-formal or informal (such as for example: Erasmus, Socrates, Grundtvig, Youth in Action etc.) under one programme with general aims and one budget.

As of today, we know that many elements from the Youth in Action programme will be part also of the new programme. However, there is no final decision being made until July 2013. The insights from this diploma thesis will contribute to the ongoing discourse about non-formal education and hopefully also support to the development of the programme whatever form it will take.

I am here only giving an overview of the most important features of the programme, however more detailed information and the complete programme guide can be found on the website of the European Commission under http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/programme-guide-2012_en.pdf.

My story with the programme

I got to know the programme when it was still called YOUTH in 2004 while doing European Voluntary Service in Wroclaw, Poland for twelve months. I was working in a non-governmental youth organisation and there I experienced what it is to work with young people. In this non-formal education context, I started to understand that education could be something else than sitting in rows in a classroom at school. I learned that important elements of learning are also: experience, sharing, having fun and working

[1]Mediterranean Partner Countries (EUROMED): Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Syria, Tunisia

[2] Eastern Europe and Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Russian Federation

[3] South East Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav, Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Kosovo, under UNSC Resolution 1244/1999, Montenegro, Serbia

together in a group. The trainers I saw working during this year (on the On-Arrival Training and Mid-Term Evaluation especially) immediately fascinated me. When I left Poland I knew I wanted to work as a trainer within non-formal education and within the YOUTH (and later Youth in Action) programme.

In September of 2005 I moved to Vienna from my hometown Graz to start my studies of Political Science and Social and Cultural Anthropology and I asked different youth organizations (Grenzenlos and Wien Xtra) in Vienna if they needed someone to support them in projects they were doing. Both of them said yes and so I became a local support person for EVS volunteers at Grenzenlos as well as working as logistical support for Youth Exchanges for Wien Xtra. Through my work in Vienna I got to know more and more people from the field and was asked to take part and lead more projects and Youth Exchanges all over Europe. These projects were the starting point of my practice as a trainer/facilitator.

2. Insights into my practice

When I first started to work in non-formal education I thought it was crucial to know all the answers. I planned each step of the training very carefully with exact times and aims of each session. Even though there was a lot of space for participants to work with each other and discuss together, I was the main person in control of the course. This was the didactical approach I had picked up while working with other colleagues and learning by doing. I did not really question this approach as participants evaluated the courses I was doing positively. It was knowledge-in-action and also reflection-in-action according to Donald Schön, a US philosopher (1983: 52).

In 2007/2008 I took part in the SALTO Training of Trainers, a nine-month training course for trainers within the Youth in Action programme. This course was based on self-directed learning and it changed my view of what education can be. We were asked to set our own aims and decide what we wanted to learn, to reflect about our practice and come up with our own ideas of how we wanted to develop further. This made me understand that there are many different approaches on how to do training courses. I also understood and observed that learners do know what they want and need to learn and the role of the trainer is to support them in that. When I now write down my understanding of learning, my beliefs and attitudes and what I do, this was all influenced by my participation in the SALTO Training of Trainers, which marked important turning point in my practice.

However, I do believe that it is my task to check with learners on how they are doing, what is happening for them and what they would like to be doing next to make sure that the course is answering their needs rather than planning everything for them.
At this point I started to explore self-directed learning in all fields of my work and was guided by the question: How can I give space to learners to explore the aspects of a topic that they are interested in. I also started to call myself also a “facilitator of learning” rather than a “trainer”, because I wanted to state that I am supporting a learning process rather than training people to do something.

Nowadays I am working as a freelance facilitator. This means I am organizing my own time and work. When trying to find a structure that would bring some clarity into what I do, I can say I have roughly four kinds of projects I do:

I am part of the pool of trainers of the Austrian National Agency

Some National Agencies have a fixed group of trainers whom they are regularly asking to do training courses for them. I entered the Austrian trainer pool in 2007 when I was asked by one of the people working in the National Agency if I wanted to do EVS training courses for them.
In Austria, we are 16 trainers in the pool and we divide the national training courses among ourselves by indicating the amount of days we would like to work each year. The National Agency then, based on the criteria of: professional competence, experience with the topic, availability for the proposed date, gender balance, balance of having a lot of experience and less experience with the topic and the needs of the trainers is teaming up the trainers for specific trainings.
In Austria I have done training courses for people who wanted to lead and organize youth exchanges, about Youthpass (the certificate of the Youth in Action programme), I wrote a publication for EVS volunteers called “All about Austria” (Vanaga, Wohlesser et al. 2010), supported the forming process of the Austrian pool of trainers and facilitated EVS training courses.
The training courses I am doing for the Austrian National Agency are standardized training course. This means they have predefined aims and a proposed programme that is adapted to the specific group of participants.

I am part of the pool of trainers of the Polish National Agency

I entered the Polish pool of trainers in January 2011 through an open call for trainers to do EVS trainings. I learned Polish during my EVS in 2004 and always felt close to the

country and the culture. I have done training courses connected to the European Voluntary Service for them. I have worked on On-Arrival Trainings and Mid-Term Evaluations, did a training course for new hosting organisations and worked on an event to promote volunteering and EVS.
In the Polish EVS trainer pool we are seven trainers who divide up the training courses among ourselves with the intention that everyone gets, if possible, the same amount of training courses.
The training courses in Poland are process oriented and needs based. This means that the whole programme or a big part of the programme is left empty before the training course. Together with participants and based on what is happening during the course the programme is created day by day.

I organize/initiate my own training courses or projects together with colleagues

Organizing my own trainings can means we, as a team of trainers and/or organisers, apply for a grant and organize the training course (logistics and carrying out) ourselves. For example, some colleagues and I, we applied for a training course in Youth in Action under 4.3 in Poland in September 2009 to do a training course about creative participation in public space. Or we proposed a training course within the Grundtvig programme (European programme for adult education) about the topic of self-development within a community context in December 2011. In this case, together with colleagues, we come up with a topic that we find interesting to work with and for which we see the need. Then we write an application stating the aims, the expected outcomes, the methods etc. This means we have a lot of influence on how the training course looks like, what we want to do there, and we have a big influence on the selection of participants.
Also, together with colleagues we came up with training courses that we then proposed to different National Agencies, who decide whether or not they want to finance them as part of their Training and Cooperation Plan (TCP) budget. The TCP budget is used by the National Agencies to offer trainings that they see as relevant for the aims of Youth in Action programme and to ensure the quality development within the programme. I have done three training courses like this in the Netherlands, Iceland and Latvia. “To live is to learn” is an example of such a training course.

I am asked to do a training course or project for organisations other than Youth in Action

Organizations or individuals ask me directly to work with them. This means that they had an idea or wrote the application for a project and they want me to be involved in carrying

out, facilitating and evaluating the activity. I was asked e.g. to be part of the education research cooperation JuMuW, which is a project at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna, I have worked for organisations (mainly NGOs) in the Netherlands, the UK, Austria, Poland and Spain, I was a tutor at a course at the University of Vienna in the winter semester of 2008 and I worked for UNESCO Austria, Loesje Poland and boscop Berlin.
This has happened only a few times so far. It is the least common way for me to do a training course or project.

The work I do can be roughly inserted into these four different categories. However, one of the main features of my work is that it is ever changing and no two training courses or projects are the same. As I am working with people this is the natural course of things I guess. I want to give a specific example of what I do to give a better insight of what it means when I facilitate learning at a training course.

3. "To live is to learn - self directed learning as an approach towards life and education" 20. - 26.May 2012 in Reykjavik, Iceland

The training course I want to examine more closely during this research is based on an idea Ann Daniels and Lenka Uhrova and myself. It was Lenka Uhrova who connected the three of us, as she knew we were all interested in the concept of self-directed learning and wanted to explore its potential within the Youth in Action programme. So this was a training course initiated by my colleagues and me.
Ann Daniels is part of the pool of trainers of the National Agency of the Flemish part of Belgium and the Dutch National Agency and has been working for ten years as a trainer within the Youth in Action programme. She is working with self-directed learning especially when it comes to supporting young people with fewer opportunities in the context of youth initiatives.
Lenka Uhrova is working for the Czech and Icelandic National Agency and has been working with the Youth in Action programme for five years. She is mainly working with European Voluntary Service and there she uses self-directed learning to support and empower the volunteers to take responsibility for their learning process.

Getting funding

In August 2011 we started to speak with each other about the course and our ideas on Skype and by September 2011 we had come up with a proposal about what we wanted

to do. Our aim was to organize an activity based on self-directed learning that let people experience it first as participants and then to support the reflection of how to support others in a self-directed learning process. Our background was: “Self-directed learning pops up more and more in the Youth in Action framework, but what does it really mean for a trainer? This training wants to give trainers and youth workers the opportunity to experience a self-directed learning approach themselves, share their experiences and ideas and reflect on it from a trainer’s perspective (meta-level). We proposed to do the training course in May 2012 for five days for 20 participants. The whole course was to be based on self-directed learning meaning that there was no pre-planned programme but it was co-created with participants during the preparation. The working language was English.

We shared this proposal with the Austrian and Icelandic National Agency who brought it into the Training and Cooperation Plan meeting in the middle of October 2012. In this meeting, the representatives of the National Agencies from all Programme Countries meet together to decide what training courses they will be hosting and sending participants to. A training course is only taking place when first of all a National Agency is prepared to host the training course and then when there are enough National Agencies that are willing to send participants from their country. This means, a National Agency proposing a course needs to make sure that enough other National Agencies are interested to send participants otherwise the training course is not happening.
Hosting a training course means paying for the food and lodging of participants and trainers, the trainers, the materials needed and being the coordinator and organizer of the course. Usually that also means that one member of the National Agency is present during the course. Sending participants means that the National Agency is selecting the participants who apply for the course and agree on paying their travel costs. Each National Agency who is willing to send participants also declare on the TCP meeting already how many participants they are willing to support and therefore send. However, this is not always the way it works in the end, because sometimes many people apply from one country and then the National Agency might send more participants than planned, sometimes not enough people apply so the National Agency is not sending all the participants they had planned initially. Sometimes so many people apply and so many National Agencies are interested that even though they want to send three participants, only one participant is possible. So, there is still a lot of room for change from the initial plan, this is why the National Agencies are also staying in contact with each other and negotiate the exact amount of participants coming from each country one

the application deadline is over. As the Youth in Action programme is a co-financing programme, each participant has to contribute to his/her travel costs. There are different policies from different National Agencies as to how much this contribution is.
“To live is to learn” was discussed during the 2011 TCP meeting and the Icelandic National Agency informed us that they would be happy to host the course.

Preparation

As a next step, we as a team met in Prague, the Czech Republic in November 2011 for three days to clarify the aims and the set up of the course in order to write a call for applications (http://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/to-live-is-to-learn-self-directed-learning-sdl-as-an-approach-towards-life-and-education.2433/) to send out to promote the course. Usually this kind of preparation meeting is happening one month or two before the course. However, flying to Iceland for three days is very expensive due to the high prices of plane tickets. Also, Lenka Uhrova was pregnant and November 2011 was the last opportunity for her to fly to continental Europe.
Already during this preparation meeting we discussed the possibility of me writing a thesis about the training course. However at that point it was not clear yet on what topic exactly I would write the thesis and what would be my approach. When I knew I wanted to find out more about how to support learners in finding out what they want to learn, I discussed with both of them via Skype and both felt excited and happy as we had identified this challenge already together during the preparation. Furthermore we all believed that the thesis would help to spread the outcomes of the course. In the call for applicants we already included a note that explained that I would be doing my diploma thesis about the course and the possibility for people to contact me if they had any questions. This did not happen.

Promotion

This promotion happened via the website of the Icelandic National Agency, our own networks and via the European Training Calendar (http://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/). SALTO-YOUTH stands for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the European Youth in Action programme. It is the combination of eight resource centres and part of their service is the European Training Calendar. There, organizations, trainers and National Agencies advertise training courses they are offering and an email is sent to everybody who subscribed to the platform about the new training offer. This platform is one of the main

tools used within the Youth in Action programme to promote international training courses.

Participants

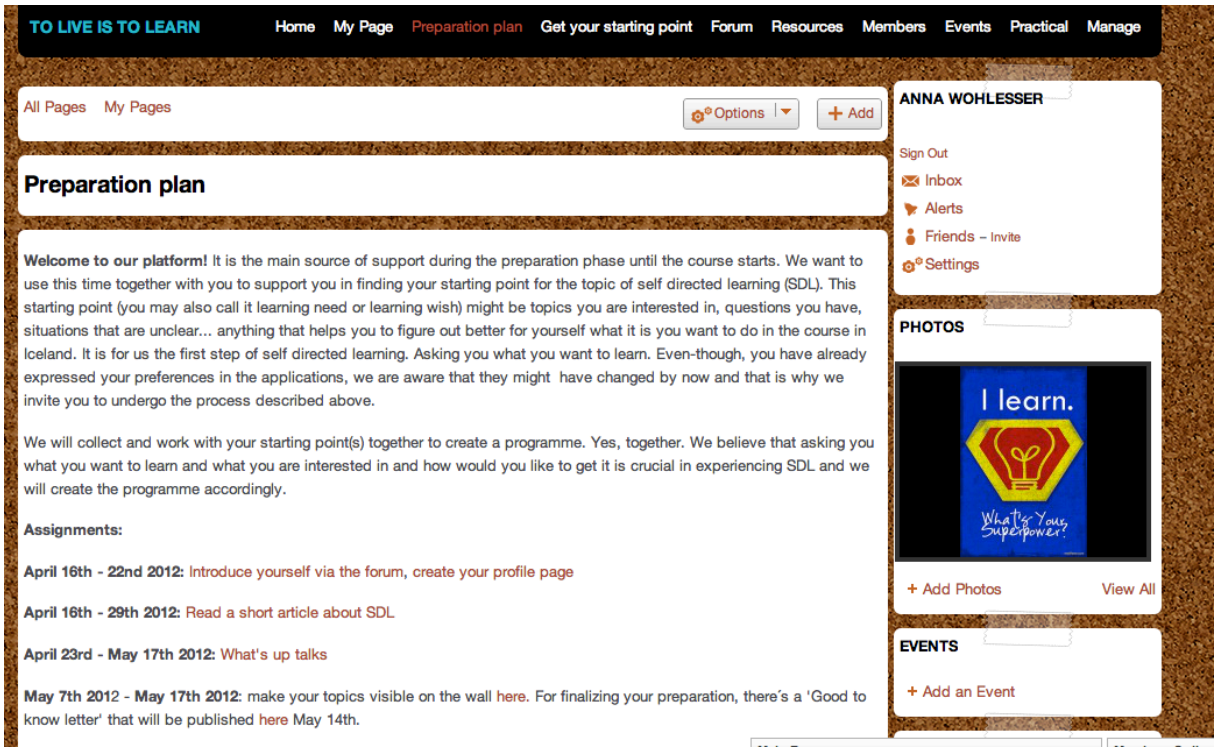
176 people applied for the course and finally 20 participants were selected by their National Agencies. This is a good amount of people applying for a training course. One participant from Hungary told us two weeks before the course that she was not able to come. Hence, we had 19 participants.

7 men and 12 women from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden and United Kingdom. The youngest participant was 20 years old at the time of the training course; the oldest participant was 54 years old. The profile of participants was diverse meaning we had youth workers, students, coaches, teachers, trainers and theatre pedagogues present at the course. This diversity of backgrounds and ages is something common in my experience with Youth in Action training courses. Our intention was to keep the course open to anyone who had a real interest and motivation to learn about self-directed learning as this approach gives space to heterogeneity and individual needs and wishes. What was important to us that participants were willing to share and use their learning from the course back home in their work and life.

Participants came from all different kinds of backgrounds: teachers, youth workers, students, and volunteers in NGOs, educational researchers, trainers and facilitators.

Preparation of the participants

The course started five weeks before the onsite meeting on a closed online platform (toliveistolearn.ning.com) where participants introduced themselves and their interests, had access to relevant articles, videos, photos and exercises to prepare them for the course and the opportunity to get to know each other.



Picture 1: Online preparation platform

Before the course, each participant was offered the possibility to have a Skype meeting or a meeting in the chat on the online platform with one of the trainers to get support in clarifying his or her learning needs. Furthermore we organized three chats online that everyone could join and wrote a facilitator's blog about our thought process behind the preparation phase. The mains aims of the platform were to get into the topic, to clarify one's own needs and wishes and to communicate this with the trainers so we could set up the programme accordingly. All of the tools and methods offered were planned to support the participants in identifying their learning needs and wishes. Some of the learning aims included:

- How to use SDL with disadvantaged youngsters?
- How does motivation work in self-directed learning?
- How can SDL be relevant both in non-formal and formal contexts?
- How to use SDL in EVS training courses?
- How does mindfulness relate to SDL?

In Reykjavik, the team of trainers arrived three days before the course started to do some final preparation and to meet with Hjörtur Ágústsson, the logistical support person from the Icelandic National Agency.

During the course

The first evening of the course the head of the Icelandic National Agency welcomed us in Iceland and we did a round of introduction where everyone (trainers, participants and support person from the NA) said their name, the country they came from and what had brought them to the course.

On the first day in the morning we started with getting to know each other activities, explained the rationale of the course and asked participants to clarify once again what they want to get out of the course. In the afternoon we proposed an exercise called "Learning space dynamics" where different lectures, articles, talks with experts, discussion groups etc. were offered about self-directed learning and participants decided themselves where they wanted to go and what they wanted to focus on. The day ended with a storytelling circle, where everyone first shared three words about the day and then told stories about these three words. The structure of the day was mainly organised around the eating times. Breakfast was till 9.00 o'clock and we started with the course at 9.00 o'clock, then lunch was at 13.00 o'clock, we proposed to start again at 15.00 and dinner was at 19.00 o'clock. As participants from the second day until lunch of the last day were responsible for their own programme, these were just indications, however participants could arrange their days the way they found most suitable.

Every day we met for 60 – 90min in a storytelling circle at 17.30 o'clock as a whole group to share what had happened during the day as well as other relevant stories.

After the first day, participants were working on their own topic and organized themselves around their needs and interests. Topics of interest were for example: find a definition of self-directed learning, how can SDL work in a school context, how to organize a training course based on SDL etc. Based on the wishes also expressed beforehand we organized excursions and set up sessions that participants could choose to participate in.

We as trainers were available for individual talks as well as facilitated some sessions that participants asked for either beforehand or during the course. (See programme in the annex). On the last day in the afternoon we came together again and we proposed different ways of transferring the learning into the realities of participants back home and evaluated and closed the course.

After the course

Participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form on the last day of the course and also to share some important learning moments in three small groups that were facilitated by

each of the three team members. We as a team stayed two days longer to evaluate the course and make our own learning more explicit.
Three weeks after the course we sent out a second evaluation form that had the intention to gather more information about the learning process of participants as well as support them in understanding their own process better.
As a result of the course we will publish an article online about our experience and conclusions we made. Furthermore we have written proposals to the Czech, Dutch and Belgian National Agency to organize the course once again in 2013.

Even though this course is a specific example, it gives a good insight into my everyday practice, what I do and how I do it. Some training courses need less preparation (standardized ones) some need more preparation. The main common feature I believe is that it is a process. It starts with an idea and an intention that changes again over time and adapts to the people and the situations. In this process oriented kind of work, the values and beliefs one has constitute the base of many of these processes.

4. My professional self-understanding

My thesis advisor Anna Streissler, an Austrian anthropologist, proposed to analyse my professional self-understanding along twelve criteria for professional development of teachers, which her colleague Thomas Stern, an Austrian teacher and educational researcher working in Action Research, and she had originally developed for school teachers (Stern and Streissler 2006: 18, Stern and Streissler 2009: 20) I adapted these criteria to my reality of facilitating learning in non-formal education processes. Even though the first purpose of those criteria is to analyse and support the professional development of educators, the proposed structure helped me clarify important aspects of my practice. As these criteria relate to the school system and teachers, some of the terms used are not accurate for describing my practice as facilitator of learning in the context of non-formal education. I therefore adapted them to fit my practice:

The twelve criteria are as proposed by Anna Streissler and Thomas Stern:	My adaption to facilitating learning in non-formal adult education:
1.Innovative teaching and learning methods	1. Innovative facilitating and learning methods
2.Current developments in maths & science education	2. Keeping up to date with current developments in (non-formal)

	education
3. Creating suitable learning conditions (resources, environment)	3. Creating suitable learning conditions (resources, environment)
4. Taking students‘ perspectives into account	4. Taking participants’ perspectives into account
5. Teamwork	5. Teamwork
6. Organizational development (including parents)	6. Development of the education organisation (e.g. Youth in Action programme)
7. Cooperation with institutions outside school	7. Cooperation with institutions from various fields
8. Dissemination & public relations	8. Dissemination & public relations: Reaching a wider audience
9. Evaluation of effects of teacher‘s actions	9. Evaluation of effects of facilitator’s actions
10. Taking professional development into one‘s own hands („Lifelong Learning“)	10. Taking professional development into one‘s own hands („Lifelong Learning“)
11. Attitudes & beliefs about teaching & learning	11. Attitudes & beliefs about facilitating & learning
12. Reflecting on ideas about mathematical & scientific literacy („Bildung“)	12. Reflecting on ideas about education and learning

Table 1: Adaptation of the competence profile to analyse professional self-understanding (by the author)

In the next section, I am looking into each of these twelve professional development areas one after the other.

1. Innovative facilitating and learning methods

I am trying to use a big variety of methods during a training course and to take the body, mind and heart of the learners into consideration. Methods I use to foster the skills, knowledge and attitudes of participants. Important elements of the methods I use are: interaction, dialogue, specific experience, teamwork, self-responsibility and creativity.

At the beginning of each course I use methods that allow people to get to know each other, break the ice to create a safe environment. Methods are based on the principles of

non-formal education, which means important elements are: participation is voluntary, the needs of the learners are in the centre and active participation is fostered.
The intention is that the methods used are negotiated with the participants.
Example: When participants as part of the evaluation told us that they want to spend more time together with other participants playing, we began to start each day with 20 minutes of playing and having fun together.
Other reasons for choosing certain methods are also considerations of group dynamics, the environment we are in (for example are there places such as museums or parks that could be used in the programme) the objectives of the course and the approach used.
Rather than answering questions of participants, I try to support them in finding their own answers by asking questions back. However, my repertoire of methods is constantly expanding through working with colleagues, taking part in training courses myself and learning by doing.

2. Keeping up to date with current developments in (non-formal) education

I am trying to keep updated with new developments and new methods in the field of education concerning new ideas about how training courses and education could look like. I am keeping updated especially through some of my colleagues who love to look for interesting articles or videos such as Naomi den Besten, a Dutch learning consultant, Paul Kloosterman, a Dutch trainer and facilitator mainly within the Youth in Action programme, Peter Hofmann, an Austrian trainer and facilitator, and Anna Streissler, and Austrian anthropologist. Most of the time I keep updated by talking and exchanging about them with colleagues from my field but also from other fields such as researchers, consultants and coaches.
I am regularly reflecting on my practice and asking myself where I need to improve myself through discussions with my colleagues, feedback and introspection. Furthermore my membership in the Austrian and Polish pool of trainers helps me to keep up-to-date about the developments and plans within the Youth in Action programme and education in general.

3. Creating suitable learning conditions (resources, environment)

The frame of the training course depends on the aims set beforehand and on the needs of participants attending the course. The physical space we are working in is often pre-decided by the organisers. However, when we as a team have an influence we want a big enough room so there is space for working with the whole group, spaces for working in small groups and also spaces for individual work. In the room I work is mostly a space

with games and videos related to the training course and a resource table with relevant articles and books. On most of the training courses (apart from EVS) there is an online platform beforehand where we are starting the learning process.
Almost all the projects and trainings I do are residential training courses, which means that the trainers, organizers and participants are sleeping, eating and working in the same space. We are living and learning together for the duration of the course.
Example: In Iceland we checked out different venues before the course to make sure we would have a big working space plus many break out spaces for small group and individual work. We suggested the KEX Hostel as a creative and stimulating learning environment and it was accepted by the Icelandic National Agency.

4. Taking participants' perspectives into account

The perspective of the participants and their opinions and needs is at the core of my practice. There is at least one activity each day that asks participants how they are doing, where they are in their learning process. Also there is a final evaluation on each training course, often also a mid term evaluation to constantly check in with people and see if the course is fitting to their needs and wishes. Also open dialogue in the breaks and during meals is an important element of my work.
Example: In Iceland from the 3rd day on we proposed written evaluation forms to get more of the perspective of participants about what we were doing. This helped us to restructure the final two days and adapt and add tools and methods to the possibilities we offered.

5. Teamwork

As mentioned before, I nearly always work in teams. In the YiA programme the intention is to have gender balance if possible and on international trainings that the teamers are coming from different countries. However, in the team of facilitators for "To live is to learn" we were three women as we initiated the course together. That happens, however, the intention is still to have a gender balance.
For each activity I am involved in, we first spend several hours on getting to know each other, hearing from each other's background and looking at common values and creating a common vision of the training. There is a team meeting each day of the training course where there is room to discuss personal well being and learning as well as the process of the group and possible changes that are occurring in the process.

The advantage of working in a team is also that you can really support individual learning trajectories of participants and have time and the opportunities to offer different sessions at the same time.
Example: For “To live is to learn” we spent the three days of the preparation meeting in Prague mainly to get to know each other, hear each other’s stories and background and define a common vision as well as a set of values for the course.

6. Development of the education organisation (e.g. Youth in Action programme)

The development of the Youth in Action programme is an important aspect of my work. I am trying to keep up to date with all the changes that are made each year and to also actively discuss the direction the programme is taking with other trainers, organisations and National Agencies.
The development of the organisations and local communities of participants is the reason most of them are coming to the training course in the first place. To help them transfer their newly gained knowledge and competences back home is an important part of my work.
I am also interested in having an impact on the education system, formal and non-formal as a whole. Offering innovative courses such as “To live is to learn” is one way of contributing to changing practice on an institutional level.

7. Cooperations with institutions from various fields

Within YiA I work with EVS volunteers, their organisation, the National Agencies, other trainers and youth workers. The cooperation and global vision of my work is present in all of my activities. Furthermore I have also cooperated with UNESCO Austria, the University of Vienna and NGOs and organisations all over Europe. Over the last years I started to work more outside of the Youth in Action programme. This happened partly due to me gaining more experience, but also because I was looking for opportunities outside the programme to not become blinded by only one way of working and doing trainings.

8. Dissemination & public relations: Reaching a wider audience

I am writing an online blog to share my work and other topics that interest me with a larger audience and to connect with people who are also involved in education. I have written three publications on the topics: communication in a group that doesn’t speak a common language (Wohlesser 2007), self-directed learning (Wohlesser et al. 2009) and information about Austria for EVS volunteers (Vanaga, Wohlesser et al. 2010). I have

become more aware in the last years that I want to make the work I do visible and reach a broader audience with the impact and outcomes of my work. I am trying together with colleagues to publish articles in my network and share relevant insights. The aim is also to foster mutual learning.
Example: After the course in Iceland we are working on an article to sum up the things we learned in order to share our knowledge with colleagues and other people working in the field with the topic of self-directed learning.

9. Evaluation of effects of facilitator's actions

In order to check the influence my practice has I try to be in dialogue with participants during the whole course. Evaluation forms and discussion groups about the training course are not only giving information about the course but also about my own practice as a facilitator. In the last year I also started to send out a second evaluation form two to three weeks after the course to get another point of view on the work we did in the team, hence also on my own practice.

10. Taking professional development into one's own hands („Lifelong Learning")

Each year I am choosing a special focus for my own professional development. This year I am doing a long-term training course on mediation and communication. Last year I focused on narrative coaching and the year before that on self-directed learning. Another important resource is the Internet where I am connected via tumblr.com and twitter.com with educators all around the world who are posting about new approaches such as: appreciative inquiry, design thinking etc. I furthermore identify topics that I want to keep on developing more consciously. At the moment an example would be: group decision-making processes.
Attending the SALTO Training of Trainers supported me in becoming a self-directed learner and facilitator and I am trying consciously to move forward in my personal and professional development.

11. Attitudes & beliefs about facilitating & learning

When asked why I do my work the way I do there are some key elements, sentences and phrases that are coming back over and over again, thus being part of my educational core attitudes and values. These beliefs are based on my eight years of experience and learning from and with groups and colleagues in informal, non-formal and formal educational settings.

- People are different when it comes to their expectations, needs, wishes, prior knowledge and experience. Therefore it is important to a) offer different approaches to tackle one topic and b) to offer different subtopics around the main topic
- As a facilitator I see my role as creating space rather than transferring knowledge, which asks often for a paradigm shift in the understanding of learning especially for participants. They are often coming to courses expecting to be fed knowledge.
- To equip participants with learning competences (rather than transferring knowledge) keeps them going on learning and therefore they become more independent and their learning is more sustainable. I see this as an aim of education.
- I believe that people know best what they want to learn if given the time, space and support. And I also believe that people know when, where and how to learn if given the opportunity.
- I want education to be empowering and I want people to feel empowered through educational activities. Empowerment for me means to feel that the power lies within you to take action on the things that are important to you. Empowerment for me means to be aware of one's personal agency.
- I believe that it is important to connect learning to the strengths and passions of people. It is important that learners are aware of what are their talents so they can make use of them and know what excites them and makes them passionate. Both strengths and passions are important aspects of "The Element", a book by Ken Robinson (2009), an English educationalist
- Transformational learning and social change are important aspects of education. When I see the challenges we face in the world at the moment I want to contribute and education is my way of doing so.
- To connect to others, to live and learn together in a group are important elements of learning and can be challenging for many. Learning is not happening disconnected from others. Learning is a social process.

Those beliefs are not carved in stone and have changed over the years and will certainly continue to change over the years to come.

12. Reflecting on ideas about education and learning

To reflect about education and learning is what I am intending with this diploma thesis.

With this chapter I intended to create clarity and awareness about what it means to work as a facilitator of learning in non-formal adult education and how my particular practice looks like. One has to first understand my practice in order for this thesis to really make sense. By explaining and writing about the Youth in Action programme, how I work as a facilitator and for whom, giving the example of the training course „To live is to learn“ and by analysing my practice with the help of twelve criteria of professional development I also became more conscious about what I do and how I do it. It was an important first step to make my tacit knowledge as a faciliator of learning more explicit. As a next step I want to situate and embed my practice in educational and anthropological theories about learning to get a better understanding of how other people understand learning. I want to weave my own thoughts about those ideas into the text to again become more aware of what I do and why I do it.

Chapter 3: Situating my educational practice in learning theories

The purpose of this chapter is to situate my practice in relevant educational and anthropological theories. I selected theories from different disciplines (anthropology, psychology, philosophy) that are related to self-directed learning. The theories represented were chosen because of them being close to or complimentary to my understanding of learning. This was a conscious decision, as I wanted to focus on writers and concepts that support my practice rather than giving an overview of all the theoretical concepts out there (which would be impossible anyway).

I want to especially single out 1) constructivism from educational psychology, 2) situated learning and other relevant theories from educational anthropology 3) humanism from educational philosophy and 4) the socio-cultural approach as concepts that I have found insightful as well as matching my own experience. Especially anthropological research has put some interesting aspects about the social nature of learning onto the table that has given me some new insights.
It needs some detail and insights into the different ways learning can be understood in order to follow my train of thought and also relate my practice to these different concepts. My approach when facilitating learning is close to the ideas and concepts of self-directed learning. As a second step in this chapter I will explore self-directed learning, its aims and processes and look at the advantages and disadvantages I experienced when using it as an educational approach.

What is learning?

One of my first questions when I started to think more about writing this thesis and engaging with educational and anthropological theories related to my practice was: What is learning? This question symbolizes my way of approaching all the different models and ideas about learning. Quickly I became aware that this simple question might require a very complex answer.
Through examining the history of how learning was understood (such as behaviourism, where learning was seen as a change in behaviour that comes from outside stimuli and cognitive psychology where learning is understood as the transfer of knowledge) and how instruction was perceived as a result of that, I got a better understanding of how ideas about learning have changed over time and how learning institutions were based

on these understandings of learning. Both behaviourism and cognitive psychology, in my opinion however do not depict and explain the complexity of learning processes that I experience in my life and work. However learning being understood as transfer of knowledge is something I have experienced very massively during my years in school and at university.

Before I will explore other concepts that are closer to my own understanding of learning I want to also briefly discuss the term education as it also plays a role in the process of writing about learning. Richard Stanley Peters, an educational philosopher, states that there have been a big variety of definitions about education over time and it is therefore tricky to find a definition. For him, education is the "linking of concepts by the learner to gain a wider understanding of the world" (Peters 1966 quoted after Bartlett and Burton 2007: 12).

There are also other ways of understanding learning that are closer to my understanding such as constructivism.

Constructivism

Lev Vygostky, a Russian psychologist, and his ideas about learning made much more sense to me. For him the connections between language, communication and social life, are all crucial in the forming and construction of meaning. Even though his writing date back to the 1920s and 1930s, his insights are still of value today. At the core of his writings was the development of children. Despite this diploma thesis being mainly about my practice as a facilitator in adult education, I also see the way learning is understood throughout childhood as an important aspect of understanding learning in general.

Furthermore, Vygotsky had a strong influence on the development of different ideas about learning, especially constructivism, a concept I will be turning to in more below.

One of Vygotsky's main ideas was that one could only understand the development of children in the social, cultural and historical context that they experience (Boudourides 1998:7). He also recognized the importance of language in this process. By actively discussing their ideas, children would be able to produce more complex ideas and concepts. The development of thought follows that of speech: thought develops from society to the individual and not the other way around (ibid.). This means that discussions and conversations are important tools when it comes to facilitating learning in order to collectively and individually negotiate knowledge and concepts. Also, knowledge is not just transferred from the teacher to the learner, but rather through active participation and social interaction the learners are creating their own meaning (D'Amato 2006: 784f). One of Vygostky's key concepts is the "Zone of Peripheral

Development" which indicates that learning and development is happening by being exposed to more and more complex vocabulary and through social interactions (Bartlett and Burton 2007: 128). The zones are two circles as indicated on the figure below. The first circle represents the ability of a child on its own. The second circle shows what the child is able to do when being guided. This concept was the base of cooperative learning that has now become quite popular in the United States, Canada and other countries around the world (D'Amato 206: 784).

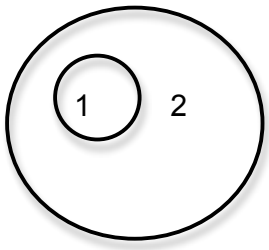


Figure 1: Vygotsky's Zone of Peripheral Development (by the author)

This model when used in cooperative learning also means that tasks have to be sufficiently difficult in order to challenge the group of learners. But not too difficult so they are outside of the zones of development as a whole. And also the task should not be too easy so there is no real challenge for the group (D'Amato 2006: 784).

Another important thinker when it comes to the development of children is Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, who also had an important influence on constructivism.
Piaget, other than Vygotsky, defines clear stages of cognitive development that children are going through. At each stage the child has a certain view on the world and operates within a certain logic. This development happens because the child has an inner need to understand the world. Piaget's stages are: sensorimotor stage (birth – 2 years), preoperational stage (2-6 years), concrete operational stage (6-12 year) and formal operational stage (12 years +). Piaget was criticised for the aspects, which are also most appealing about his theory. It neither took individual differences, nor the social context nor modes of learning into consideration (Bartlett and Burton 2007: 112-114).

Vygotsky and Piaget have many things in common. Both of their theories are child-centred, underline the importance of activities as something that is forming thought and both are looking for a systematic understanding of psychological functioning (Kozulin 1998: 34 quoted after Barlett and Burton 2007: 125). But for Piaget language is not a very important element in the development of a child, whereas for Vygostky this aspect is central to his theory (Bartlett and Burton 2007: 112-114).

Both Vygotsky and Piaget influenced constructivist orientations of learning theories. Learning in a constructivist understanding is an active (rather than a passive) process, learners are supported to collaborate and interact. The educator is asked to create space and accompany this learning process and create opportunities for this to happen.
"Basically, a constructivist stance maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience" (Merriam et. al. 2007: 291).

One of the things that I understood early on in my work as a facilitator is that participants take out very different things from one and the same training course. And they are not just passively receiving information or knowledge, but they are trying to connect it to their own experience and actively interact with it hence making sense out of their personal experience. So even if I was making an input about a model of participation (for example: Ladder of Participation by Hart (1992:b)), not everyone got it. At least this is what I thought in the beginning. However it was not so much that they did not get it, it was only they were getting very different things, relating to it differently and hence learned different things. Learners are creating and constructing meaning themselves, not simply receiving the knowledge I present to them.
Even tough both Piaget and Vygotsky agreed with the fact that learning is a process of meaning making, they had different ideas of whether it was an individual or social process:

For Piaget the construction of meaning is primarily a personal endeavour. Meaning making is a cognitive activity and is dependent on previous knowledge and activities (Driver et al. 1994: 6 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 291). A good example illustrating this perception of learning is the research of de Eric de Corte, a Belgium educational psychologist, and Lieven Verschaffel, a Belgian educationalist (1987 quoted in de Corte 2010: 39). They asked children the question: If A had some apples and he gave away 5 apples to B and now still has 12 apples, how many did he have originally? Even though the pupils were instructed a certain way of solving this basic mathematical problem in school de Corte and Verschaffel observed the children used their own systems (such as estimating the initial amount, then taking five apples away and checking if there were twelve apples left – a trial and error approach) and ways to arrive at the solution. This is also an example of how learners are taking what is important to them and connect it to their own life and experience and so find their own ways also of getting at a solution to a

mathematical problem. They actively influence the information and knowledge they are getting.

One the other side there is the point of view that learning and meaning making is a deeply social process. Learning happens in dialogue where individuals negotiate and make meaning. Vygotsky and his ideas about communication and talking as being vital in learning and development were crucial to this social constructivist understanding.
Learning, as being something socially constructed is something that I see happening in my training courses over and over. To reduce it to an individual cognitive process in my opinion does not explain the importance of peers that my training participants are repeating all the time. It is through the social interactions, the contact with the peers that people are learning. Major parts of facilitating learning are the facilitation of discussions and the creation of opportunities to share, talk and exchange opinions.

Situated learning and other relevant theories from anthropology

And not only the social processes are important when constructing meaning, also the context and the situation are crucial. In their anthropological research, Lave and Wenger (1991) made explicit that learning is embedded in the activity, context and culture of the moment. So it is not only social, it is also situated. This also means "(…) that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of the community" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29) Situated learning is thereby a way of understanding learning rather than a form of education or a pedagogical strategy (Lave and Wenger 1991: 40).
Social interactions and co-operation with others are very important elements of learning, and so are the physical experiences and concrete situations (Merriam et al. 2007: 178).
Lave and Wenger started off their discovery into the situated nature of learning with the concept of apprenticeship and understanding learning as apprenticeship. It was based on Lave's research in Liberia where she observed tailor's apprentices and she noted the historically and culturally specific circumstances of the practice (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29f).
As the context in which the learning occurs is so important, one of the big questions for putting situated learning into practice is: can knowledge be transferred or not?
This is especially important when it comes to designing educational activities. Are we able to transfer what we are learning in a training course to other situations but also, are we able to transfer what we are learning in the classroom into the real world? From a

constructivist point of view is possible, however as tacit knowledge is happening through the interactions and social contact with others it is harder to actually transfer into other situations, however explicit knowledge can be transferred (Fenwick 2003 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 179).

One of the key concepts of situated learning is legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29): a learner participates in a socio-cultural practice and gets full access to the resources and experiences of the community over time. S/he becomes legitimate. Peripheral means that there are people more and less engaged in the community. Participation refers to the intention of being part of a community. An example would be children who are legitimate peripheral participants in the world of adults (ibid.: 32). The membership in communities of practice is another important aspect of participation. “A community of practice is a set of relations and among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (ibid.: 98).
If we look at this in the context of a training course, then the responsibility of the facilitators is to support the creation of a community of practice made up of all the people present. It also means to work with real life, authentic situations, as knowing and doing cannot be separated. It gives a special emphasis on the collaboration with other learners and the educator to form a community of learners (Ho (no date): 3).

Situated learning emerged out of anthropological research; however, throughout the history of the anthropology of education there were many other interesting insights as well. Looking at the take that cultural and social anthropology has on learning was an interesting challenge in writing this diploma thesis. It was clear to me from the very beginning that I want this thesis to be interdisciplinary and to let those different disciplines support my work. First, I was looking for literature that was close to my understanding of my practice and found many relevant articles and books from the field of pedagogy and adult education. The relevant texts I found from anthropology were a big inspiration to look at learning and education from a different perspective and allow space for a different kind of view. Anthropology in my understanding puts the social dimension of the way we live our life into focus and never forgets to look at the bigger picture that is the context. Comparing and testing my understanding of learning in the context of anthropology, anthropology of education and anthropology of learning gave me important insights.

When trying to find relevant literature I had a really hard time finding out how learning was understood in anthropology. Even though several authors attested the similarities and the usefulness of the combination of the two disciplines education and anthropology (D'Amato 2006: 778, Wolcott 1982: 83f, Pelissier 1991: 72) as I also imagined they would be. "Learning and teaching are fundamental, explicitly or implicitly, to human adaptation, socialization, culture change and, at the broadest level, the production and reproduction of culture and society. (…) teaching and learning – the social processes involved in constructing, acquiring and transforming knowledge – lie at the heart of anthropology." (Pelissier 1991: 72)

One of the first in anthropology to look upon the topic of education was Margaret Mead, a US American anthropologist. She was interested in the process of socialisation of young people in Samoa and wrote about it in her book "Coming of age in Samoa" (1928). She wanted to find out if a stormy adolescence is a human universal. She focused thereby on teaching and learning outside of the school and formal structures and shows many different ways of how culture can be transmitted (1928: 144-162).

Another important figure/author is Gregory Bateson, a US American anthropologist, who proposed four different kinds of learning, which I will discuss here shortly.
Zero-Learning is "(…) not subject to correction by trial-and-error" (Bateson 1971: 287). An example for such a kind of learning would be an automated response to a question (Tosey 2006: 7). Proto-Learning would be the learning of a new skill or knowledge (ibid.)
Deutero-Learning is the learning of the contexts. It is about learning how to learn as well as learning something new (ibid.) Trito-Learning refers to the learning of the contexts of the contexts of deutero-learning. Habits that are acquired in deutero learning can be changed in trito-learning however it " involves a profound redefinition of one's character " (Vissier 2003: 276).
These different concepts about learning are all very complex, however deutero-learning which involves both the learning of a subject and at the same time to learn how to learn is a concept that has also gained importance again and can be compared also to self-directed learning which is as much about learning something about a subject as it is about developing one's abilities to direct one's own learning.

Mead and Bateson form the history of educational anthropology however; there are also some newer developments when it comes how learning is understood. For example Levinson, a US American educational anthropologist, sees the socio-cultural

understanding as crucial for designing educational activities that are “worthy of the multicultural societies of the present and future. It is this socio-cultural understanding that has been missing up until this point in my thought process about education” (2000: 1).
“The process of education thus can be construed broadly as humanity’s unique methods of *acquiring*, *transmitting*, and *producing* knowledge for interpreting and acting upon the world.” (ibid.: 2, emphasis in the original) Over time, there were many different foci on what was important in education: the cultural transmission of a society to reproduce their cultural features and also the acquisition of cultural knowledge by individuals and how they still managed to insert their own interests into the process. However it is a dynamic process where culture is transmitted and changed and acquired and produced (ibid.: 15f). Education supports the abilities of a group to adapt to ever-changing environments and at the same time, it may be individuals that change the social patterns that are reproduced. “In this sense, education is often a balancing act between group interests and individual concerns” (ibid.: 2)

One of the most influential theories that stems out of anthropological research is the already discussed situated nature of learning by Lave and Wenger as already discussed. This situatedness is also discussed and explored by Plumb (2006) in his article “The Nature and Archaic Origins of Lifelong Learning Processes: The Relevance of Anthropology to Adult Education” where he draws from the work of Donald (2001), Mithen (2005), Tomasello (1999, 2004) and Ingold (2000) to show the contributions that anthropology and in his opinion especially paleoanthropology can make for adult education. He contests that the field of adult education has a too shallow theoretical base, where learning is understood mainly as gaining and transferring knowledge. For him, learning is something social and situated and cultural. He proposes to see learning as something that is not happening in the mind of a single person, but that it is happening through our capacity to join a community: “joined to a community of its fellows, it has this remarkable capacity to create a community of mind (…) and expand the range of its own awareness, in proportion to the depth of its enculturation. (Donald 2001: 326 quoted after Plumb 2006: 289). He sees adult education as a “deeply cultural process” (Plumb 2006: 292) and for him learning is “the way we twist the threads of our life into the ever-changing fabric of our world.” (Plumb 2006: 293). This metaphor as a definition again underlines the dynamic process of learning already mentioned by Levinson (2000: 15).

Teaching and learning lie at the heart of anthropology (Pelissier 1991: 71) and already in the first half of the 20th century important text have been written about learning by Margret Mead and Gregory Bateson. Especially the concept of learning to learning to learn by Gregory Bateson has still a lot of value today and can be also compared to self-directed learning. Newer voices in educational anthropology speak about the socio-cultural dimension of learning and the focus is on the dynamic process of transmitting, changing and acquiring culture (Levinson 2000: 15f). However the most influential theory from anthropology concerned with learning is the situated nature of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). To get a better understanding of this situated nature I want to give an example.

Boaler, an English mathematics educator, (2000) in her article "Exploring Situated Insights Into Research and Learning" demonstrates what the situated cognition perspective can add to our understanding of learning, the construction of knowledge and the making of meaning. I use her here as an example as it also explains in my opinion the usefulness of the concept of situated learning.

While situated cognition is not in itself a constructivist theory, the parts that are used in the article and that are relevant for adult education such as situated learning, reflective practice and communities of practice, are (Merriam et al. 2007: 293).

Boaler researched children learning mathematics in two English schools. One class was following the traditional textbook based approach as a mode of instruction. The other class focused on open-ended projects at all times that were similar to situations from everyday life (Boaler 1997 quoted after Boaler 2000: 13). Boaler examined how the students applied their knowledge in three different settings: school, exams and real world. In all of those three, the project students (she called them Amber Hill students) outperformed the textbook students (which were called Phoenix Park students). In her first analysis of the research she looked at the students as individuals, who had all developed (or constructed) different kinds of knowledge that they applied differently in those three settings (ibid.). However, Boaler re-examines her analysis using the framework of situated cognition, which gives her "an increased understanding of the influence of the classroom community and the social, cultural processes that stemmed from that community had on students' production of knowledge in different situations" (Boaler 2000: 114). The Amber Hill students did not use their mathematical knowledge outside of the school, because for them, the school and the rest of the world were separate communities of practice and they were not able to transfer their knowledge from one to the other (Lave 1988 quoted after Boaler 2000: 115).

Whereas the students from Phoenix Park reported that they did so, because in their mathematic classes they had interacted with a broad variety of tools and had been confronted with mathematical problems that were similar to those in the real world. (ibid: 116). The fact that the Amber Hill students did not manage to use the methods learned in school in real life scenarios might lead to different conclusions: A behaviourist might say they did not have enough time and possibilities to practice, a constructivist might say they had not enough opportunities to create their own understanding (ibid.: 115) But Boaler argues: “Both observations might be accurate, but a situated perspective adds an important but rarely acknowledged observation – that the Amber Hill students learned a great deal during their time in the mathematics classroom. They learned to become extremely effective in the practices of their school community.” (ibid.: 115f)
Transferring this into the context of a training course, the pitfall could be that learners learn how to engage in the practice of the training course, how to interact with each other in this environment, they would be able to easier feel comfortable and find their way in other training courses rather than being able to transfer what they have learned to their own practice as youth workers, trainers etc.

This realization, so Boaler (2000: 117), carries important insights for educational practice. Hence, it is not simply enough to give the possibility to learners to construct their own understanding, but they need to be able to negotiate and discuss it, choose methods and be in situations that are close enough to the real world in order to be able to transfer it, hence engage in realistic practices. Like this learners are able to engage in those kinds of practices and understand them at the same time. Having a situated perspective also means that a person does not “have” or “not have” knowledge, but that this depends on the situation (ibid.).

This is especially interesting when we look at children who are being labelled for example: “Learning disabled” and to see that they have different abilities at different times (McDermott 1993 quoted after Boaler 2000). The situated perspective invites us to go away from seeing learning and knowledge as something that is a cognitive structure, but rather as an engagement in situations and communities of practice. So the environments students work in can has an influence on the knowledge and learning that is happening. So a child labelled learning disabled might not be learning disabled in all areas of studies and in all situations and social interactions. We will need to focus on broader systems as educators and be aware of the practice learners engage in if we

want to make our education meaningful in various everyday contexts our learners are engaging in.

Here we also come back to the concept of Zone of Peripheral Development by Vygotsky who points out the amount of things one can learn on one's own and that in relation with others, there is a whole different dimension that is available to the learner. Even though I believe that learning is a social process, it is not only a social process. Learners can also become aware and realize new things and see new patterns by themselves, I do believe though those through the interaction with others these learning become meaningful.

Socio-cultural approach to learning

Learning is not only situated in its context but also in culture and power relations.

Another approach that is aware of the social nature of learning is the socio-cultural approach to transformative learning (Merriam et al. 2007: 140). Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, is the best-known author of this field. "Freire's theory emerges from the context of poverty, illiteracy, and oppression and is set in a larger framework of radical social change" (ibid).

Freire (1971: 29-31) worked with poor illiterates in Brazil and realized that just passive listening and repeating is reproducing the oppressive structures that the people are in. He coined the saying: "Education is never neutral. It is either an instrument for the liberation of people, or it is an instrument of domestication, serving oppression" (Freire 1971: 14, translated by the author). He therefore started to discuss and reflect on topics that were relevant for the people he was working with such as inadequate pay. He calls this process dialogic and problem formulating pedagogic. These reflections helped the people to realize the bigger structures that oppressed them and by becoming aware of them they could also find strategies of overcoming them.

His best know concept is "conscientization" (Freire 1971: 15) which means that learning is not just a process of uncritically swallowing chunks pre-formed knowledge, but of becoming aware of one's own life situation and finding solutions to the problems by a process of action and reflection. Education and learning are always political processes, either they support the status quo or they question it. (Freire 1971: 20).

Humanism

These different ways of looking at learning (constructivist, situated, socio-cultural) have important things to contribute to the understanding and practice of educators. What is missing in all of them is what kind of view they have on humans and learners as such.

The humanistic psychology and the writings of Carl Rogers, a US psychologist, represent the educational philosophy that is behind my practice. Here, self-actualization and self-realisation of learners are seen as goals of learning (Huitt 2009: 2). People want to learn and want to reach their own potential and these ideas are also crucial for self-directed learning (Barlett and Burton 2007: 105f). Important principles are (Gage and Berliner 1991 quoted after Huitt 2009: 2f):

1. Learners learn best when they learn what they want to learn
2. Learning to learn is given more importance than learning knowledge
3. Self-assessment is the only meaningful way of evaluating a learner
4. Facts and feelings have the same importance
5. Students learn best in a safe environment where they do not feel threatened (ibid.)

This school of thought is more concerned with the educator as a person and his/her attitudes rather than methods or tools for instruction. This understanding of the role of the educator offers something that is very close to my own understanding of learning.

So, what is learning?

Learning is a complex social process (Lave and Wenger 1991: 35): "learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world." Hence learning is a social activity, not something only happening in the minds of the individual. It is "the way we twist the threads of our life into the ever-changing fabric of our world." (Plumb 2006: 293)

Learning is the activity of weaving and twisting of what we understand. Knowledge is the threads we twist and weave in our lives in the ever-changing world we live in. This definition gives space to the changing, social, situated and complex nature of learning. Learning "involves the mental, the emotional, the physical and the practical, and that these are interrelated, not separate." (Hodkinsons et al. 2006: 30)

So what does this mean for facilitating learning?

Learners, taking part in the same educational activity will learn very different things, will see different aspects as relevant and will connect them to their own personal experiences, which again are very diverse. In this light, how can learning be facilitated taking all these things into consideration?

One option is to create a learning environment in which people can choose themselves and decide where, what and how they want to work. Another key aspect is for tasks and

learning to be connected to real life and to support the transfer of certain knowledge and learning to other contexts. This needs to be supported by the facilitator. What is more, the exchange of the knowledge among the people present is essential. This encourages group work and discussions in order for the knowledge to be related to the social environment and to gain a more complex understanding of the topic at hand. Knowledge construction is encouraged rather than knowledge production. Through these social interactions there will be new knowledge that is generated as the practice of the people present at the given time and moment.
I see it as especially important to give participants the chance to explore topics in different ways or propose different subtopics that they can choose from. This aspect of choosing and having the responsibility is crucial in learning and education. The theoretical background and methods and tools proposed by self-directed learning represent an approach that sees learning and knowledge as actively constructed. It is also based on the humanistic principles that learners want to learn and to grow and to tap into their own potential.

In this chapter I reflect on my actions and my practice in a theoretical context. By looking at educational concepts and theories I managed to make much of my knowledge explicit. Especially the constructivist nature of learning and the way learners create meaning are concepts that helped me to name processes that I have been observing in my practice.
Situating my experience and knowledge in learning theories has also inspired me to consider other points of views about learning and supported me in sharpening and developing my own approach further. Especially anthropological research that underlines the situated nature of learning as developed by Lave and Wenger (1991: 29f) has given me important insights and ideas of how to improve my practice. To make sure that the learning and knowledge that is happening during the training courses is also transferred into the realities of participants is an important goal for me. As well as the notion of the social nature of learning that has been automatically involved in all of my activities however, I now feel able to consciously and explicitly integrate social activities and discussions into my practice. Freire (1971) and his point of view on how education can support and should support social change also supported me in voicing my own ideas about the aims of education as well as giving me concrete ideas of how to do that in my practice.

It was truly exciting and empowering to read theories that were saying something along the lines of what I have experienced and learned through my own practice.

There are many different points of view on how people are learning. As a facilitator of learning, I came to understand, it is crucial to realise one's own beliefs and approach of how people are learning and therefore what kind of environment is needed to create learning opportunities accordingly. An example would be: if one believes learning is transferring knowledge and information (cognitive psychology), the learning environment would be made in a way so the most amount of information can be transferred to learners in the most efficient way possible. If one believes that learning is strongly connected to social interactions then a learning environment would be fostered that allows for these interactions to happen very easily.
The most important reflection I have after reading much about learning is that it is a process that is social, embedded in the situation and a weaving and twisting of threads i.e. an active process on the part of the learner.

This constructivist view of learning is very compatible with self-directed learning "since it emphasizes the combined characteristics of active inquiry, independence, and individuality in a learning task." (Candy 1991: 278 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 293) and it "emphasizes the need to give learners responsibility for directing their own learning experience" (Barlett and Burton 2007: 124).

Understanding self directed learning

As I underlined before, in self-directed learning, the learner has the responsibility for his/her learning process. It is the process where an individual increases his or her knowledge, skill or attitude using any method at any time in any environment (Gibbons 2002: 2). When working with self-directed learning, over the years I also came up with my own definition that I want to share here as an additional information about my educational practice. "Self directed learning describes the educational approach in which an educational setting is organized in a way that participants themselves can decide how, what and how much they want to learn about a given topic. The aim of this educational activity is as much the topic itself as to support learners to take more responsibility for their learning process" (Wohlesser 2012: 70). But working with the approach over the years I understand it more and more also as an approach towards learning as such and a value on how I want my training courses and my facilitations to look like. Naomi den Besten, a Dutch learning consultant, even describes facilitating SDL rather as an attitude than an approach for an educational activity. When she is working with organisations as a learning consultant she tries to check in with them and to make sure that the programmes or initiatives taking place are really what people want and

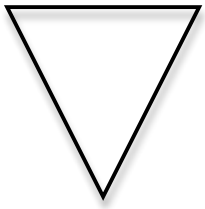
need. “with consultancy (…) you are very often asked to do things for people (…) so I think it’s a helpful perspective to go back to their (…) ambitions and curiosities and questions and take that as a starting point for whatever kind of learning or changing process we’re going to start” (den Besten 2012: 14-17).

Peter Hofmann, an Austrian trainer and facilitator, describes the SDL process “like a river which is going to flow. And (…) I can see how much I can steer my boat on it also and what do I need from my boat (…) where I need to stop, where I need to go to (…). It’s more this feeling of being on top of the wave.” (Hofmann 2012: 208-211)

Another way of looking at it is that SDL is at the opposite end on the scale of teacher directed learning (TDL), something most of us are familiar with from formal education. There, a teacher decides based on the curriculum what it is you should be learning (for example the imperative in English), decides how you are going to learn it (for example with an input about the topic, a practice sheet and some homework) and then assesses whether or not you have learned this (for example in an exam). The practice of the teacher is embedded in the structure of the school, the curriculum applicable and the outputs the students are supposed to produce according to this curriculum. So imagine it is you who decides what you find interesting about a topic, e.g. English (for example different dialects) and you decide how you want to learn more about it (by talking to your colleagues and friends) and when this should happen.

However, this process in an educational setting is not so straightforward, as the learning process is embedded in certain structures. Helmut Fennes, an Austrian educationalist and Hendrik Otten, a German sociologist (2008: 14) call this the “training triangle”. Even though the educational activity is about e.g. gender equality, it can happen that participants have some other topic that is more important for them at the moment. This usually leads to a negotiation of the content and learning in the training course and a solution is found in cooperation with the participant, the institution and the trainer. But also the other way around, the institutions might realize in the middle of a course or through an evaluation that they need or want something else to happen, then this also needs to be negotiated and explored in the triangle relation. The agency of the teacher or facilitator is always also embedded in the structures of the institutions including mission statements about the goals of education (the national school curriculum or in my case the Youth in Action programme.

Institutional client/school Trainee client (participant/pupil)



Trainer/facilitator/teacher

Figure 2: Training triangle (Fennes and Otten 2008: 14)

Especially when doing a course that based on self-directed learning one has to check with the people hiring or giving the money what is possible as one is giving a lot of responsibility to participants, therefore not being able to predict what will be the outcome. "(…) if your context allows you to basically really start from building the agenda with people and their learning needs, then it's perfect. We know that sometimes we work in contexts where there is different other influences where this is not possible. Then you make all kind of compromises." (Hofmann: 284-287)

However, SDL and TDL exist on a continuum; they are not extreme and exclusive ways of learning. Most education at offer is mixing elements of both in different ratios. And so are most of the educational activities and training courses I am facilitating, because of certain needs of the organizers or the context or participants or trainers. Here is an overview of how these different scenarios can look like. The quantitative indicators are there to give a better orientation of what this could mean in practice.

Trainer-directed learning – the participants control ±10 % of the learning process
The trainers determine almost all aspects of the learning process: the learning goals, the activities and their order, the methods and the assessment procedure.
Incidental self-directed learning - the participants control ± 20% of the learning process
The trainers sometimes introduce SDL activities into training courses that are otherwise mainly TDL. For example: participants can choose from different workshops.
Self managed learning – the participants control ± 30 % of the learning process
The trainers still control the learning goals, the activities and the order they need to be completed in and the assessment process. The participants now are responsible for managing their own speed and progress through the training course. There can be a learning guide to help the participants work independently.
Self planned learning – the participants control ± 50% of the learning process

The trainers control the learning goals and (part of) the assessment process. The participants choose the activities that are part of the learning process and also monitor their own speed and progress towards the learning goals.
Self-directed learning – the participants control ± 70 % of the learning process
The participants choose the outcomes, design their own activities and pursue them in their own way. They also monitor and evaluate their own learning process. They can discuss this with and get support from trainers and peers.

Table 2: Continuum of trainer directed and self-directed learning adapted by Wohlesser et al. (2009: 22) after Maurice Gibbons (2002: 24-28)

There are a number of other concepts that are closely linked to self directed learning, such as self-planned learning, autonomous learning, autodidactic, self-education and open learning. There is not the space to go into detail with each and every one of them in the frame of this thesis, however they have different theoretical underpinnings, even though sometimes the terms are used interchangeably (for more information and a complete overview see Hiemstra 1994: 3-4).

Self-directed learning as a concept comes out of the context of adult education. In the next part I will focus on its history and important milestones in the development of self-directed learning as a theoretical concept.

History of self-directed learning

Self-directed learning is not a new concept - already in Ancient Greece self-study formed an important part of learning and education for example for philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates (Hiemstra 1994: 2). When in 1971, Allen Tough, a Canadian social scientist, published "The Adult Learning Project" he provided a first description of SDL as a form of study (Merriam et al. 2007: 105). As mentioned before, people have been directing their own learning for a very long time, however it was through Tough's book that it came into the focus of research (1971: 3). According to Tough, learning is happening all around us and there are deliberate efforts taking place all the time (ibid.). In his study he indentified that 70% of all learning among adults is self-directed learning (ibid.). Indeed, when looking at one's own learning plans it might be that one realizes that one wants to learn more about pottery. So one starts to look around what courses exist, or one just goes and buy some clay and tries forming an animal or a mug at home. One might discuss this process with a friend until one finds to have learned enough about pottery. So one decides, when, how and what one wants to learn. And one decides when

one has finished learning. It is this person who is in charge of the process. One might substitute the word pottery with the word: basketball, cooking Chinese food, overcoming the fear of heights or knowing more about the history of Namibia to get an idea of things one might decide to learn.

In 1975, Malcolm Knowles, a US American adult educator, published his book "Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers" on self-directed learning which provided a foundation for most of the research that happened from there on (Hiemstra 1994: 2). There he defined SDL as the process "in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes." (Knowles 1975: 18)

Since Malcolm Knowles published his book about self-directed learning, much has been written about the concept, its purpose, its ideas, and its criticism. When reading literature about self-directed learning, there is a certain structure proposed by Sharan B. Merriam, a US professor of adult education, Rosemary S. Caffarella, a US professor of adult education, and Lisa Baumgartner, a US associate professor on adult education, to look at the processes, goals and the learner (2007: 106). This made sense to me; so I follow this logic here as well.

Models of self-directed learning

SDL can be understood as mentioned before as a way of learning or as a mode of instruction. For an overview about the different processes, there are three models proposed:

1. linear,
2. interactive and
3. instructional

(Merriam et al. 2007: 110). I will give an overview of each one of them for a better understanding what they actually entail.

1. Linear models of self directed learning

Linear models describe self directed learning as a step by step activity, as for example seen by Malcolm Knowles (1975: 18): "Self-directed learning is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others to diagnose their learning needs (1), formulate learning goals (2), identify resources for learning (3), select and implement learning strategies (4), and evaluate learning outcomes (5)." (Numbers added by the author). Hence, he identifies these five concrete steps for carrying out self-

directed learning activities that are happening one after the other. Tough (1971) identified even 13 steps of SDL, which contain also the five steps of Knowles, just in other words, and adds further aspects such as: deciding where to learn, setting deadlines and targets, identifying challenges, finding time. Even though all of these different steps can be relevant during a self-directed learning process, these two examples show an ideal and step-by-step learning path that rarely happens. Often the learning journey goes in circles, is more organic and goes back and forth between diagnosing learning needs and formulating goals. Also sometimes the formulated goals are not relevant anymore after some time and need to be re-evaluated (Hofmann: 110-112). All these side steps are taken into consideration when it comes to the interactive models of self directed learning.

2. Interactive models of self directed learning

They were developed as an alternative to the linear models (Peters, Taylor and Doi 2009: 24ff). Here, factors such as context, opportunity, personality and serendipity are influencing factors of SDL (Peters, Taylor and Doi 2009: 25). The development of these concepts came from the need to explain the complexity of the SDL process, which the linear models did not account for. Three elements are hereby important: the opportunities that people find, their previous knowledge and chance (Spear 1988 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 112). “A successful self-directed learning project is one in which a person can engage in a sufficient number of relevant clusters of learning activities and then assemble these clusters into a coherent whole” (ibid.). In practice that would mean that learners engage in many different activities during a training course and that in the end they need time and space to bring together those different activities together into a coherent form. Interactive models as linear models describe ways in which people learn in a self-directed manner, as a facilitator of learning the most interesting however is how to support those learning processes.

3. Instructional models of self directed learning

Instructional models are of the most interest to me in this diploma thesis, and were developed to support self-directed learning taking place in educational settings. The main focus is on how can educators and learners be assisted to have a self directed learning experience, what are their roles, and how can self directed learning occur and be supported in formal educational settings (Peters, Taylor and Doi 2009: 25).

Gerald Grow, a US American professor of journalism, developed one of these models: the Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL). He (1991: 2) identified certain stages of SDL

and for each stage the learner is in, the educator may adapt a certain attitude and support in order to respond to the learners needs.

	Student	Teacher	Examples
Stage 1	Dependent	Authority, Coach	Coaching with immediate feedback. Drill. Informational lecture. Overcoming deficiencies and resistance.
Stage 2	Interested	Motivator, guide	Inspiring lecture plus guided discussion. Goal setting and learning strategies.
Stage 3	Involved	Facilitator	Discussion facilitated by teacher who participates as equal. Seminar. Group projects.
Stage 4	Self-directed	Consultant, delegator	Internship, dissertation, individual work or self-directed study-group.

Table 3: Stages of self-directed learning (Grow 1991: 2)

This model of learning and how it can be supported is very similar to a model that is taking the social and situated character of learning into consideration: cognitive apprenticeship (Merriam et al. 2007: 180, Greeno 1997: 10). There are five phases (Brandt, Farmer and Buckmaster 1993: 70-72):

1. modelling: the activity is shown while verbally described at the same time
2. scaffolding: learner is doing the activity while getting support
3. the support is getting less from the teacher and the situations are becoming less defined (individually and in groups)
4. learners directs his/her own learning and is only asking for help when needed
5. generalizing: learners are encouraged to try the skill in new situations

The similarities of both of these models show how self-directed learning is based on constructivist and situated understanding of learning. Both approaches have a gradual approach where in the beginning the educator is closely involved in the activities of the learner, and with time and the learner gaining more skills and expertise the educator becomes less and less present and more in the role of a coach or a consultant.
This is one model of instructing self-directed learning, however, I would also like to point at another way of instructing SDL that is also related to emancipatory learning. Here the tasks of the facilitator are:

1. “Building a cooperative learning climate
2. Analyzing and critically reflecting on themselves and the social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated
3. Generating competency profiles for themselves
4. Diagnosing their learning needs within the framework of both the personal and social context
5. Formulating socially and personally relevant learning goals that result in learning agreements
6. Implementing and managing their learning
7. Reflecting on and evaluating their learning”

(Hammond and Collins 1991 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 119)

This view is taking both the individual and group needs of a learning process into consideration as well as the context, which is important for emancipatory learning as well as the reflection and evaluation process.

In my experience when instructing or facilitating self-directed learning I see learners starting with the expectation of a linear learning process. However, in my experience, learning is mostly a non-linear hence interactive process, where the decision making process and the bringing things together in the end are the most important (Spear 1988 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 112). One of the participants also shared this experience and saw the decision making process as one of her challenges: “(…) there were so many things happening and many different workshops and the main problem I was facing was that I wanted to learn everything.” (Julia: 101-102) She finally took decisions according to three different parameters she describes: to stay true to her aims and objectives, to choose random things and to go to places where other people were present that she found interesting (ibid.: 209-219).

One inspiring author for me when thinking about facilitating SDL has been Maurice Gibbons (2002), a Canadian teacher and emeritus professor, who describes specific activities and methods that can support a self-directed learning experience. He is also managing the website www.selfdirectedlearning.com where one may find many useful tips and inspirations for using SDL as an educational approach. How to instruct self-directed learning and how to support learners in directing their own learning is most interesting for me in the context of this thesis. This understanding of self-directed learning, as an instructional model is how I will keep on using the term self-directed

learning. It will refer to the situation of an educational activity that is facilitated by trainers to support self-directed learning.

So what does it mean for a facilitator to support self-directed learning processes?

The "educator's roles and purposes differ according to their theoretical orientation." (Merriam et al. 2007: 171). There is not one way in which SDL is facilitated. As this chapter is about exploring my own practice, I want to stick to my own experiences and theoretical background of doing so. In my experience learners want to learn and want to reach their potential; one of the roles of the facilitator is to actually trust in the abilities of learners to do so. This allows a shift in power and puts the ownership into the learners' hands.

Roger Hiemstra (1985: 7), a US American professor of adult education, notes some important aspects of facilitating SDL that in his opinion are necessary when fostering learning such as

1. To recognize different stlyes of learning
2. To be familiar with a wide range of material resources and experts
3. To support the process of learning how to learn
4. Skills in communication and listening
5. The ability to make decisions
6. And to link the learner to other peers and also to the organizing institution.

I would like to also add some elements that are important in my practice when facilitating self-directed learning and would like to give examples from the training course "To live is to learn". As we were a team of three people with Ann Daniels and Lenka Uhrova, we discussed and explored together how we wanted to approach our role during the course.

- Being available for support (via „What's up talks" and „office hours" and being present in the room)
- Asking questions and support participants in finding their own answers
- Support critical reflection
- Creating different physical spaces where different learning needs can be filled
- Being coherent with the approach. This means to really show people that they can learn whatever they want to learn
- Trusting that people will learn what they need to learn
- Communicate in a clear and empathic way
- Ability to connect people to each other and each other's projects
- Supporting participants to form a community of practice

- Have a wide array of resources (also in the form of people) available and use them if needed

When facilitating SDL it is important to realize that it is a gradual process and over time learners are able to direct their own learning more and more. Therefore different kinds of support measures are needed during the process. Gerald Grow (1991: 2) identifies the role of the facilitator as a coach, a motivator, a facilitator and a consultant depending on the process of the leaner. Even though these stages are for sure relevant they are not closed categories and learners are not exclusively in one stage or another. Also, depending on the situation and the context, learners might be able to take more or less control over their learning process. The facilitator needs to stay flexible and to adapt to the situation at hand. This process of becoming more self-directed in the process is also identified in the literature about self-directed learning as one of the aims.

Goals of self directed learning

The first goal of SDL is for learners to become

1. self-directed learners,
2. to support transformational learning and
3. to promote social action and support social change

(Merriam et al. 2007: 107). I will explain each of these goals in more detail to foster an understanding of what they mean.

1. Enhance the ability as a self-directed learner:

This means that part of the work as a facilitator, is to support learners to become able to plan, carry out and evaluate learning activities (Merriam et al. 2007: 107). This aim is rooted also in humanistic psychology where self-growth and self-actualization are the aims of learning; therefore to take responsibility for one's learning and proactively pursue the things one is interested in is a major point here. This aim also implies: not everyone is a self-directed learner to begin with, but it is something that everyone can learn.

Learners' becoming more self-directed is also not a linear process. In reality, participants might need more support in some activities than in others, are self-directed in one subject and not so much in the other. However, the importance of this realization in my experience is, when working with a group of people, they might need very different support and have very different capacities of dealing with the invitation to direct their own learning also in different situations. This needs to be kept in mind when organizing an

educational activity based on SDL. Most of the research in self-directed learning has been about this first goal (Merriam et al. 2007:107).

2. Fostering transformational learning:

This goal is about "adults need to reflect critically and have an understanding of the historical, cultural and biographic reasons for their needs, wants and interests" (Merriam et al. 2007: 108). Some of the most prominent representatives of transformational learning are Jack Mezirow, an emeritus professor of continuous and adult education, and Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher.

Both of them believe that education should lead to empowerment and also both see learning as something constructed and created through interpretations (Baumgartner 2001: 16). Mezirow sees critical reflection as a crucial element of directing one's own learning (1985: 27). For him rational thought and reflection are crucial in a transformational learning process (Mezirow 1991: 4). It is about changing or transforming a belief or an attitude or our perspective (Mezirow 2000 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 133). At first Mezirow was criticised for not taking the context of the learning process into consideration, then revised his point of view though with stating that learning occurs in "the real world in complex institutional, interpersonal, and historical settings (and) must be understood in the context of cultural orientations embodied in our frames of reference" (2000: 24 quoted after Baumgartner 2001: 17).

3. Promotion of emancipatory learning and social action:

The authors writing about this goal have been some of the ferocious critics of the first goal of self-directed learning. They want learners to examine "the socio-political assumptions under which they learn and function but also the incorporation of collective actions as an outcome (Merriam et al. 2007:108). Emancipatory learning should be one of the main focuses of self-directed learning and some of the strategies proposed are: participatory research methods to foster democracy and using critical theory (Collins 1996: 119 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007:109).

Self-directed learning has been criticized for being based on an interpretation of humanism that depoliticizes and decontextualizes learning and puts everything into personal growth (Collins 1998 quoted after Brookfield 1993). But Stephen Brookfield, an English scholar in adult education, argues that self-directed learning is an inherent political concept: "First, that at the intellectual heart of self-direction is the issue of control, particularly control over what are conceived as acceptable and appropriate learning activities and processes. Second, that exercising self-direction requires that

certain conditions be in place regarding access to resources, conditions that are essentially political in nature." (1993: 3) For example, one may decides to want to become a researcher and decides that in order to do so one needs to publish many articles and makes plans and strategies to do so and to evaluate one's effort (Brookfield 1993: 5). Even though this is a self-directed project, it is also representing one of the pitfalls as it just accepts that becoming a scholar means to publish articles. Brookfield points out that it is also important to question the systems and structure one interacts with when directing one's learning, so, "an important aspect of a fully adult self-directed learning project should be a reflective awareness of how one's desires and needs have been culturally formed and of how cultural factors can convince one to pursue learning projects that are against one's own best interests" (Brookfield 1993: 5).

As I mentioned before, giving up control as a facilitator/trainer and handing over this control to the learner in itself is a powerful process that is questioning the existing power structures. It gives the learner permission to learn the things he/she wants to learn and does not value certain ways of constructing knowledge, skills and values more than others. This process of becoming aware of one's own interests and needs in the safe environment of an educational activity can strengthen and give more power to the individual who then can also take a more active position in other areas of his/her life as well.

SDL as a personal characteristic

The final distinction in the literature is the extent to which "self directedness is an a priori personal characteristic and associated with other variables such as educational level, creativity, learning style and so on (Merriam 2001: 10). Even though this question has also received a lot of attention from researchers, I found it very difficult to relate this to my practice. The readiness of students and the concept of autonomy are both concepts that I find one sentence for: "it depends". Self-directed learning, I know form my own experience, is situational. Therefore to find indicators of both of these can be tricky.

Four major areas appear to be of most interest in the literature:

- technical skills related to the learning process,
- familiarity with the subject matter
- their sense of personal comptenece as a learner
- and their commitment to learning at this point in time. (Merriam et al. 2007: 123)

If the social practice is one of the most important tools of learning, then readiness or not might not be the right questions by which to assess self-directed learners. However, there are certain strategies I know from practice to make sure learners are supported as much as possible to direct their own learning. Here are some examples:

- In order to make sure that learners are familiar with the subject matter, Naomi den Besten proposes to give introduction sessions on the topic: “I think if it’s a topic that’s new for people I think it really just makes complete sense to offer a lot of inspiration.” (506-507)
- In the SALTO Training of Training course, the first two days are spent on the reflection of the participant as a learner. “Again making conscious (…) what’s my learning biography (…) and to see what does that actually mean when I say: I need to learn something. How did I go about it in my history, in my learning biography so far?“ (Hofmann: 81-83) as a first step to support the participant to direct his or her own learning.
- Also in this course participants are asked to identify one learning commitment they want to work on between the first and second seminar. And most of them, „Two out of three (...)“ (Hofmann: 103) come to the second seminar without having done so. Then, so Hofmann, you come to the essence: „(...) if your motivation is there, if you need to learn this, then you make space for it. If you don’t make space for it, then it’s obviously not as important in this moment.“ (Hofmann: 115-117)

Even though all of these goals are familiar to me in my work as a facilitator and when working with self directed learning as the overall educational approach, I have to admit that most of the time I am focusing on the first and the second goal, even mostly on the first goal. As the first challenge I see for learners is to find their own way when given so much freedom and choice over their learning process. However, if one is only learning what one knows, there is a big chance that the structures and understanding we are living in will simply be reproduced. To critically reflect and question the things one is learning are important elements as well. Furthermore, as much as the educational approach can be proposed and negotiated with the institution sponsoring and/or organizing the activity, so can also be the aims. Within the Youth in Action programme it is important to have a positive impact on society to being with. This aim can be more stretched and made more explicit to learners participating in courses as well.

Criticism of self-directed learning

I would now like to focus my attention on the criticism levelled against self-directed learning. One of the main points I found in the literature is that SDL is ignoring the political and social context it is happening in. This is also a criticism I know from the field and also from my interview partner Peter Hofmann. He was in a team of a long term Training of Trainers (two year long process with four residential seminars) organised by the European Commission and the Council of Europe called TALE, where SDL was also used as an educational approach. The main criticism of the course was that it was apolitical. Not having any concrete message and/or values with it. Hofmann explained that when this criticism was voiced they were already too far along in the process to really change anything, however in the SALTO Training of Trainers they are trying to put more focus on this topic and raising awareness about the social and cultural context that learners decide in what they want to be learning. This criticism is also something Stephen Brookfield (1993: 3f), an English scholar of adult education, addresses and he invites us to look at the political aspects of self-directed learning. His main focus thereby is on the control that people have on their learning process (ibid.). Basically SDL challenges and changes existing power structures because it makes the learners less dependent on the (often more powerful) teacher/trainer/facilitator, etc. (ibid.). This power I think cannot be directly transferred ('here it is') but a facilitator can give somebody access to his/her knowledge, network and ability to facilitate learning. Learning, in my opinion, is always embedded in its context. It is happening in connection with others, in a certain social context with certain power relations. I can see this criticism though and it raises awareness about how to make this aspect, which is also an important part of my personal belief system, a more explicit part when working with self-directed learning.

One of the main criticisms from my field of work that comes up when talking about self directed learning is the strong emphasis on the individual. Some of the points are that self-directed learning can become selfish learning, meaning that learners are focused on their own process rather than interacting or sharing with others. The frame I am working in has some basic values that are e.g. to connect to people from different countries, cultures and contexts to find a way of living together in a peaceful way. But learning is a social practice in itself. Hence it cannot be the case that learning becomes an individual activity. It is through the discussion and the negotiation with others that learning is happening as well. Another aspect is learning in the group. This tension was also a big topic for the participants during the training course and was mentioned several times. Martin Cadee, a Dutch social entrepreneur, sees it as a paradox that is inherent to self-

directed learning in a group process. Together with his colleague he founded a school based on self-directed learning and social entrepreneurship called Kaospilots NL. There they made also the conscious decision to bring those two together as it happens all the time that you have something that is really important to you, but at the same time you are connect to other people or a team (Cadee: 363-367). For me there is no question that self-directed learning needs to happen in a group context, as learning is a process that is also happening through social interactions and the creation of a community of practice. We are living in a connected world and to learn how to negotiate one's own needs with the needs of others is a crucial experience for becoming a self-responsible and self-directed learner.

What is the usefulness of self-directed learning as an educational approach for a facilitator of learning?

Roger Hiemstra (1994: 6), a US professor for adult education, suggests that "non-traditional programs, distance education, and self-directed learning efforts can meet many challenges associated with keeping current on constantly changing knowledge." This is a similar thought process that we also noted with two colleagues: SDL can be important in supporting learners to find their way in the overflow of information and in the ever-changing world (Wohlesser et al. 2009: 24). Maurice Gibbons, a Canadian teacher, speaks about the diversity of learners in their learning styles, talents and strengths and the need for all of them to be accommodated in education (2002: 5ff). I would go even a step further saying that learners come with different needs and interests and wishes when it comes to a learning activity and there needs to be space for this diversity inside a learning process. And giving responsibility over the learning process back to the learner is more beneficial than other approaches (Hiemstra 1994: 6) and can be an empowering experience (Wohlesser et al. 2009: 24). And "Perhaps most important of all, self-directed learning works!" (Hiemstra 1994: 6).

Exploring my practice and making it more explicit is one of the aims of my thesis. This direct involvement with my own practice requires an approach to research that is equipped with an understanding of what it means to research one's own practice while still creating more knowledge about the topic. Action Research is providing exactly this framework that served as my theoretical and methodological approach towards my research.

Chapter 4: Action Research – a way of inquiry to combine theory and practice

When deciding to write my thesis I was looking for a way of approaching this inquiry that would be useful and relevant in my practice as well as generating new knowledge (Altrichter and Posch 1996: 21) about my work and the topic of self-directed learning.
Action Research is therefore a suitable approach as it looks at practice and experiences and considers both as relevant - with political and philosophical underpinnings (Reason and Bradbury 2008: 15).

In this chapter, I want to first explore the origins of Action Research shortly and then explain my rationale behind using it as the approach of my diploma thesis. Action Research is a form of qualitative research and I want to elaborate on what that actually means. I will further identify some of the characteristics of Action Research and then explain its cyclic nature. In the end I want to also introduce Applied Anthropology as a context that is similar to Action Research and in my opinion gives additional insights into this specific way of doing research.

Kurt Lewin, a American psychologist born in Germany, is the person who coined the term Action Research: “The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice” (1948: 202-3). He is emphasizing the importance of research contributing to society and to generate social actions. Action Research has since then developed and is present in many disciplines such as education, health services, community services and policy.

In the broadest definition of the term and as I want to understand it in my thesis, Action Research is „a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human progress. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.“ (Reason and Bradbury 2008: 4)

The research paradigm of Action Research also fits my values, my approach to life and work. It sees one's own experience and practice as relevant sources of generating knowledge and wants this knowledge to serve practice in turn. Based on these principals, the methodological approach of Action Research is to test and gather evidence (reflection) and to then draw conclusions, plan actions, act accordingly (action) and to then go back again, reflect and gather more evidence (reflection). Knowing and acting are integrated as a whole in this cyclic way of improving practice (Reason and Bradbury 2008: 1).
This is something I also know from my practice as a facilitator of learning although not as systematic and critical as for example the way I used it in this diploma thesis. One identifies an issue one wants to gain more information and awareness about, reflects personally on this issue, talks to colleagues and participants, plans an action to improve one's practice accordingly, sees how it goes and then reflects on the outcomes. A question that has often been raised is: if the steps of AR are so close to everyday learning processes, is it still a scientific method. I can clearly answer this question with yes. Action Research, as one way of conducting qualitative research, is working with the interpretative paradigm that sees knowledge as something constructed rather than fixed and objective. It challenges the positivistic understanding of research which is looking for universal laws and standardized procedures of data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 5f) and therefore, in the beginning, it developed on the margins of academia.

Qualitative research is a way of conducting research that I am quite familiar with through my studies of Social and Cultural Anthropology. In a qualitative research inquiry "(a) the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and (b) the purpose is learning about some aspects of the social world." (Rosmann and Rallis 1998: 5) Research is an active learning process where information is not gathered but becomes information as it is constructed like this by the researcher in the interaction with other people and through the researchers reflection on them. The researcher "makes choices that shape and are shaped by the emerging processes of inquiry" (Rosmann and Rallis 1998: 5). Qualitative research is rooted in empiricism, which means that knowledge is obtained via the concrete experience through the senses. Some characteristics are:

- Multiple methods are used that are interactive and humanistic
- The context of the research is important
- Qualitative research is also fundamentally interpretive, which means that the understandings and writings about the findings are interpreted through one's own

biography.

- The research is emerging rather than predefined and fixed

The researcher is systematically reflecting about the research and his/her presence in the field, and is sensitive to his/her personal biography and is viewing the phenomena holistically (Rossman and Rallis 1998: 7-11). Action Research is one way of conducting qualitative research that additionally focuses on a specific action as a result of the research.

The “ethnologische Haltung” (Diel-Khalil and Götz 1999: 96-111) was the mindset with which I approached this research. I deliberately did not translate this concept as the German word “Haltung” has two meanings: first of all it is posture or composure. The second meaning of “Haltung” is “attitude”. I would like to translate it roughly with: “The way you carry yourself”. The term “ethnologische Haltung” therefore refers to how I tried to carry myself throughout the research. It contains among other things: critical awareness, continuous self-reflection, dealing with the tension between proximity and distance, to have a holistic view of a situation and not take specific issues out of their context, to let the situations guide you and not have ready-made models to put onto the situations (ibid.). Especially the understanding of the importance of self-reflection is something that is vital in ethnography and anthropological research just as much as in Action Research. Another important aspect, which stems from ethnographic work as much as from Action Research, is the importance of letting the research guide you to take the next step rather than having a predefined concept. I am emphasizing this part of the research, as it has been a crucial part in my own research to trust myself and to trust my data to guide me to the next step.

Characteristics of Action Research

Herbert Altrichter and Peter Posch (1998: 15-23) single out certain characteristics of Action Research that help to get a clearer idea of how it looks like in practice:

1. Practitioners and the people concerned are carrying out the research.
2. The inquiry question is coming out of the practice.
3. Action Research is the confrontation of different perspectives.
4. The individual research is embedded in a professional community.
5. The ethical rules of cooperation are developed in agreement with other people involved rather than made up beforehand.
6. The practical knowledge and the theories of practice are published and seen as an important aspect of developing the educational system.

7. As our actions are symbols of our values, our practice implies those values as well.
8. Aims of Action Research are generating BOTH: knowledge (out of the reflections) and development (out of the actions).
9. Action and reflection cycles are the main line of inquiry.

(translated by the author)

All of these aspects have been important guidelines for my research and also helped me to get a good feeling about what Action Research is about.

1. Practitioners and the people concerned are carrying out the research**.**

The importance is not about the specific discipline that people are coming from or what they have studied, but about their willingness to improve their practice (ibid.: 15). I am looking at my practice as a facilitator of learning trying to answer three questions:

- How can I support learners in identifying their learning needs and wishes?
- What other insights can I identify as useful when planning a residential training course based on self-directed learning?
- How can I situate my practice in learning theories?

2. The inquiry question is coming out of the practice.

The immediate aim is not to contribute to a certain theoretical strand of writing, but to find a key issue or challenge in the everyday practice. Often this research is interdisciplinary, as practitioners are not bothered by the strict boundaries between scientific disciplines (ibid.:15f). The questions mentioned above have been with me for a long time. Now I am deciding to systematically approach them in this diploma thesis.

3. Action Research is the confrontation of different perspectives.

For example. teachers are encouraged to compare and share their own perceptions with the pupils and check how they see it. This is also making AR a participatory process where co-creation of knowledge is more important than one person finding out the answers (ibid.: 17f).

In my concrete example this means the interaction with the participants of the training course, the discussions with the colleagues of “To live is to learn” and the organizer, Hjörtur Ágústsson, from the Icelandic National Agency.

4. The individual research is embedded in a professional community.

Critical friends and the shared process of reflection are encouraged and welcomed (ibid.: 18). In my research I had several colleagues who during the whole writing process of my thesis were there to discuss, connect and reflect on our practice in this light of my question of facilitating self-directed learning: Ann Daniels (Belgium), Anna Streissler (Austria), Naomi den Besten (the Netherlands), Lenka Uhrova (Slovakia/Iceland), Peter Hofmann (Austria) and Paul Kloostermann (the Netherlands/Italy).

5. The ethical rules of cooperation are developed in agreement with other people involved rather than made up beforehand.

So the people involved are asked about how they want to proceed with the ethics. It is not enough to just let someone sign a form it is important to keep those ethical considerations present during the whole research and also renegotiate the consent throughout the research process (ibid.: 18f). An important topic is also confidentiality.

6. The practical knowledge and the theories of practice are published and seen as an important aspect of developing the educational system.

One of the often heard criticism of AR is that it is only concerned with single activities and research and not advancing enough in knowledge. Action researchers are aware however and try to come together, share their experiences and outcomes (Gergen and Gergen 2008: 169). The encouragement to publish the practical knowledge and theories of practice is also an answer to this criticism. By making the material gathered and conclusions drawn available to a bigger amount of people, they may serve in supporting change in other contexts as well (Altrichter and Posch 1996: 19).

Most of the people from my field, who I have talked to, want to read my work. They see it as an interesting opportunity to find new tools and a new form of improving their own practice. Furthermore the results of my thesis are valuable for their own practice.

7. As our actions are symbols of our values, our practice implies those values as well.

To become aware of the relations to the reflection - action cycle is an important step in the research. Some of our beliefs and values are rooted in specific theoretical approaches; however, some of them are also subconscious and require specific reflection to come to this awareness (ibid.: 21). The chapter on understanding my own practice and situating it in the context of theories is the outcomes of these reflections for myself.

8. Aims of Action Research are generating BOTH: knowledge (out of the reflections) and development (out of the actions) (ibid. 21).

For me, this goes without saying, as I do not see any sense in researching something that has no direct practical application. The aims are present in the outcomes part of my thesis.

9. Action and reflection cycles are the main line of inquiry.

They are often planned over a longer period of time and are cyclic in nature. Often AR is a longer planned process that is not fixed beforehand (this is true for most qualitative research) rather the most recent findings are informing the decisions of what is happening as a next step (ibid.: 16). I can already see that even though my data collection process is over for the scope of my thesis, I am still discussing and creating an understanding regarding my three central questions.

Action Research cycle

The first step is to start and to find out what is the question one wants to inquire into. Only then the cycle starts. Usually this cycle contains four different aspects: diagnosing (sometimes called reflection or defining the issue), planning the action/intervention, taking action/intervening and evaluation (analysing and reflecting on the action) (Altrichter and Posch 1996: 22; Reason and Bradbury 2008: 1). Susman (1983: 125f) adds a 5th aspect: Specifying learning. This happens after the evaluation and before going back to the diagnosing of the new situation. This 5th step is a useful addition to the Action Research cycle as it makes the learning happening during the process explicit and serves as an important element to improve the practice. I want to specify my own learning that is happening during this Action Research, and share with others it hence forms part of my conclusions in this thesis.

Rather than depicting this cycle as only one circle where the end point overlaps with the beginning, it can be seen as more dynamic, such as a succession of circles or even a spiral. The move from one circle to the next happens both on a temporal level and on the level of changing practice. Action Research is a cyclic process that represents a continuous process of diagnosing, action planning, taking action, evaluation, specifying learning and then again: diagnosing, action planning… Often there are also jumps in between the different stages: While planning an action, one realizes the need for more diagnosing and reflection for example.

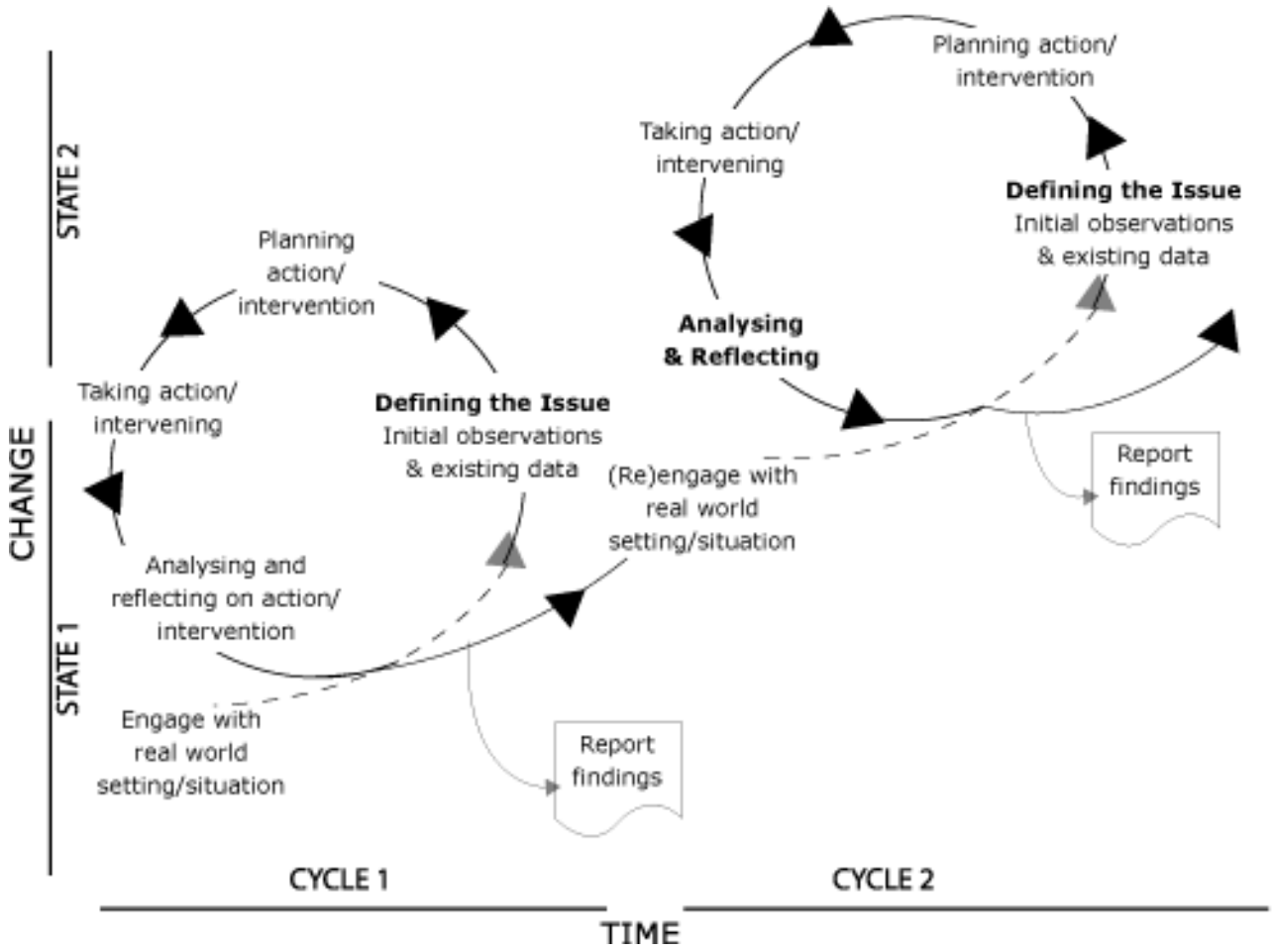


Figure 3: Different cycles of Action Research (Muir 2007: 3)

A research design based on the AR cycle looks like the following: **Finding a starting point** is the crucial first step. Action Research encourages finding a topic and spending time on figuring out what part of the practice one wants to improve. Several different methods are proposed to circle around important topics and find the starting point for the research. Similar to ethnography it is an exploratory process in which the data and the process are showing the way. Then the **issue is defined** and once the starting point is clear, now is time to look closer at the topic and finding out what it entails and where it is used. Then, based on the issue, useful **plans and interventions are developed**. In this stage, choosing research methods and thinking about their ethical implications is crucial. Also questions about monitoring the action are answered in this phase. **The action and intervention** is based on the planning of the action. How the action will be evaluated and monitored is already described in the planning phase of the research. As a last point the **data is analysed** and the action is reflected. Then learning is specified and made explicit. With the newly found results, there are probably other questions coming up. The cycle starts again, but on a different level.

When the AR cycle is being implemented, there are three broad strategies (also called orders), which can be present during the implementation:

- First person (or order) Action Research (the researcher inquires into his or her own life in order to act with awareness and choice)
- Second person (or order) Action Research (to inquire face to face with others about issues of mutual concern – e.g. personal or professional practice)
- Third person (or order) Action Research (the research is always embedded in a community of wider inquiry, others are supported in the process of engaging in Action Research)

(Reason and Bradbury 2008: 6)

I am conducting first person Action Research, as I am researching my work as a facilitator. However, the strategies we planned and the part of the reflections on the actions were done with my colleague Ann Daniels and Lenka Uhrova. They did not consciously choose to be part of their own Action Research process, however they were involved in my process. Still, I would say I conducted first person Action Research as we did not inquire together. Even though, the research is always embedded in a community of wider inquiry. Working as a facilitator of learning, doing Action Research poses some specific questions.

Conducting Action Research as a facilitator of learning

There is an abundance of literature supporting teachers to do Action Research compared to facilitators of learning in a non-formal educational setting (I actually have found no example of the latter). Therefore a lot of inspiration for my thesis came from literature about teachers carrying out Action Research. However there are also many differences that are important to keep in mind between my practice and the practice of a teacher:

- I do not work with the same group of participants over a longer period of time. It is rather five or six days of intensive work together. A teacher usually stays with a class of people over a semester or even more.
- I am working for different national and international institutions and organisations (mostly within the Youth in Action programme of the European Comission) hence the framework and structures differ according to the project whereas a teacher is usually working for a limited amount of schools within the framework of a national curriculum.
- Depending on the institution I work for I (or my team) have a different amount of

influence on how the training course will look like. To negotiate this kind of influence is actually a crucial point for what is possible to be done during the training course. (For example if the institution requires certain outcomes it is very tricky to ask learners to simply learn whatever they want to learn. This negotiation process is part of the triangle of training (Hennes and Otten 2008: 14)

- As a facilitator I always work in a team. There is at least one other person also working as a trainer and often also a person from the organisation or institutions present; These people form the team. Teamwork is an important part of my work and usually every training course starts with figuring out in a team how to work together.
- I do not have a national curriculum to follow, there are of course aims and objectives set with the organizers and institutions and the colleagues and those aims exist in the framework of the programmes I work in. However, there are certain very general aims such as supporting the active participation of participants, inclusion of everyone regardless of the social, economic or ethnic background, having a positive impact on society etc.

So, Action Research entails a cyclic research process of action and reflection, paired with a critical awareness and self-reflection and an emerging research process. However at its core is the contribution to practice. Doing research to also contribute to the improvement of a practice or a situation can also be found in anthropology called Applied Anthropology.

Applied Anthropology

A simple way of defining Applied Anthropology is anthropology put to use. However, a more differentiated definition that encompasses the multiple ways anthropology is put to use would be: “applied anthropology is a complex of related, research-based, instrumental methods which produce change or stability in specific cultural systems through provisions of data, initiation of direct action, and/or the formation of policy. This process can take many forms, varying in terms of problem, role of the anthropologist, motivating values, and extent of action involvement” (van Willigen 2002: 10).

Even though Applied Anthropology is often interdisciplinary (Bennett 1996: 26) the researchers still start out as trained anthropologists. They work in many different professions, for example as needs assessors, evaluators, trainers, research analysts, administrators or advocates (van Willigen 2002: 4-7). The anthropologist is especially qualified due to “a particular capability in helping to solve human problems through

building partnerships in research and problem solving; acknowledging the perspectives of all people involved; focusing on challenges and opportunities presented by biological variability, cultural diversity, ethnicity, gender, poverty and class; and addressing imbalances in resources, rights, and power (Bennett, Wiedman and Whiteford 1999).
These specific competences also show the value of anthropologists putting their knowledge into practice and applying it to other fields.

In Britain, Applied Anthropology emerged out of the colonial administration apparatus and began in the 1920s (Bennett 1996: 26). In the US however it started in the late 1930s with work in US Native Reservations, Harvard studies and American rural communities studies (ibid.). Nowadays the US has two professional societies concerned with the topic of Applied Anthropology (Society for Applied Anthropology and National Association of the Practice of Anthropology) whereas in Britain some anthropologists are still waiting for this kind of institutionalizing to happen even though they are carefully optimistic (Pink 2006: 19-20).
Both Applied Anthropology and Action Research have at its core the intention to improve a situation. For practitioners the danger lies in thinking to know better what is needed. This was one of the pitfalls of early Applied Anthropology (Bennett 1996: 28-30) and therefore the concepts of self-reflection and critical awareness paired with the recommendations of having critical friends are of major importance when deciding to conduct this kind of inquiry.

Action Research served as the logic and structure of my thesis. In the next chapter, I want to give more details about the methods and the methodological implications of my approach and of the way I carried out this research.

Chapter 5: Methods

Before I could carry out the research I needed to plan its process. For my empirical inquiry I decided on a case study, which means I was trying to answer my research questions by looking at one specific example, which was the training course “To live is to learn”. A case study is the “close examination of a specific case” (Rossmann and Rallis 1998: 70). The idea is to provide a holistic and rich description of the case with a lot of details to help the reader understand the complexity of what happened. Typically a case study is conducted with a variety of methods; such as I decided to do for my thesis (Rossmann and Rallis 1998: 70-71). I did some participant observation, semi-structured interviews and I analysed relevant documents that were available from the training course, especially evaluation forms. But first of all I needed to define the field and how I was going enter and leave the field, sample my interview partners, decide on my involvement during the training course and how I was going to make sure that my research was ethical. All these considerations are an important part of understanding the research and the outcomes of my research. They are giving the context and background information to my inquiry and explain how I did my research and why I did what I did. Additional important information is the work in the team that played an important role during the research, the seminar “Build your frame” and how I dealt with the writing up and quoting of the interviews and questionnaires.

Field situation

When I was thinking about the field I was entering I realized that I am already in the field I am entering - my practice as a facilitator of learning. That was my job at the beginning of the research and it still is. However, I did enter it with a different pair of glasses on, so to say, the glasses of looking at my practice from the perspective of an anthropological Action Researcher. However, there are several specific fields I did enter and leave again during the research. I want to discuss the different fields I entered and also how I left them again.

The preparation and work and evaluation with my team of trainers

I actually entered the field already in the preparation with my colleagues when we agreed to also research the outcomes of the training course and put a specific emphasis on how to support learners in identifying their learning needs and wishes. I took the decision that I was going to do my research on “To live is to learn” after our preparation meeting, but

we had already discussed the possibility there. I asked Ann Daniels and Lenka Uhrova for their agreement officially via email on January 18th 2012. They both replied within two days and agreed happily. Then we wrote some emails back and forth about how to formulate the fact that I was using "To live is to learn" as a case study in the call for participants. We met three days before the course started and the participants arrived and left one day later as to prepare and evaluate with calm. I have not left that field yet as we are still in the process of writing an article about our experience.

The training course with the participants

The training course "To live is to learn" was the second field I entered. It was a five-day residential training course about self-directed learning using the educational approach of self-directed learning. It took place in Reykjavik, Iceland in the KEX Hostel. There were 19 participants from 13 different countries. I chose this training course because all the people coming to the training course specifically applied to be there, hence wanted to be part of a self-directed learning experience. Also, because my team was happy and willing to go along with this endeavour. And the timing was good, as it would allow me to have enough time to prepare and to write up my research afterwards.

With some participants (four in total) I had already had contact with before the course, as we offered each participant the possibility to have a one-hour talk via Skype or chat. I did not really leave the field as the field ceased to exist at the end of the training course. We all together constituted this short-lived field together. Hence, the notion of leaving the field is actually misleading in this context.

The interviews with the participants

Participants were informed as mentioned about the research via the Call and also on the first day of the course. Both of my interview partners approached me with the intention to share their experience. This is why I chose them after checking that they were suitable for my research. As they are from different countries in Europe we decided that the most convenient way of talking to each other was Skype. I asked all of them again in July 2012 via email to confirm a specific date to meet via Skype. With one person I managed to also use the video, with the second person the connection was so bad only the audio worked.

The interviews with the experts

For my expert interviews I knew from the beginning that I wanted to talk to Naomi den Besten, a Dutch learning consultant. I contacted her via email and we met in July 2012

over Skype to talk about self-directed learning. After the interview we spent another hour catching up on our lives and what we were working on at the moment, as we had not talked for some months at that point. I kept on talking all the way through my thesis with Naomi den Besten about my work and my questions as she was also one of the critical friends who supported me by asking questions to help me clarify what I wanted to know and also by pointing out some interesting literature that might help me to support my work.

Also it was clear to me that I wanted Peter Hofmann to be present as an expert in my thesis as I know he likes educational theories and we have been good friends and colleagues for several years. We share a passion for the topic of self-directed learning and have discussed about it a great deal over the years. He has accompanied me in my thesis writing from the beginning, reading drafts and supporting me in gathering and specifying my thoughts.

Naomi den Besten and Peter Hofmann actually form part of the same field. I met Naomi den Besten when we were both participants at the SALTO Training of Trainers course I attended and she used to work as a trainer and facilitator within the Youth in Action programme as well. However, she is not working there anymore. Hofmann and den Besten still form part of the same field, albeit different ones. What is important to understand is that I am still in frequent contact with both of them; hence I have not left this field yet.

With Martin Cadee it was very different as our contact solely happened for the reason that I wanted to interview him, even though we had known each other beforehand. As he agreed to the interview while he was in India we had no time to talk after the interview as he had to leave the computer immediately as he had another meeting. However he offered to be available for further questions if necessary.

Sampling of interview partners

I decided to interview two different kinds of people. First of all participants of the training course “To live is to learn” and second of all people who have been working with self-directed learning as an educational approach in various settings.

During the course, there were three individuals that came up to me and offered to be available for in-depth conversations or interviews about the course if I needed that. I took all three of them up on their offer. However, I was also aware that even though this self-selection is really helpful for me that I needed to make sure the data I was going to collect was not going to be misleading, but the group was very diverse anyways (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 104). They were one man and two women, all of them

at a different age and with a different way of approaching the topic of self-directed learning and also with different experience with SDL beforehand. They were all from different countries and I had different kinds of contact with them all over the seminar.
In the end I only managed to interview two of them as one just did not reply to my emails when it came to setting a specific date. Even though I contacted two more participants who had also agreed to be questioned during the second online evaluation, no one got back to me. So in the end I interviewed two people. Besides this interview with one female and one male participants, I also interviewed three experts: Naomi den Besten is from the Netherlands and now works as a learning consultant at Kessels & Smit. She used to also work as a facilitator within the Youth in Action programme and she was my colleague in the first ("Paint your own picture – another training course about participation" in March 2008 in Latvia) and second ("Lead the way" in February 2011 in Utrecht, the Netherlands) training course that was based on self-directed learning as an educational approach. She is using SDL also in her work as a learning consultant and she describes it more as an attitude rather than a concept for a training course. This point of view was interesting to me in my research. As she is living in the Netherlands we made the interview via Skype with the video camera turned on.
Peter Hofmann is from Austria and was my trainer in the SALTO Training of Trainer course that I attended in 2007/08 and this is also where I got to know the first time about self-directed learning. I made my first interview with him, even though I do not consider it so much an interview as rather a talk about self-directed learning as at that point I still needed help to clarify what I was particularly interested in. I met him in February 2012 already in the HUB in Vienna where we did the interview. He was interesting to me as he has been working for many years with the concept of self-directed learning and in many discussions we had talked about how you can do a training course of five days based on SDL. I wanted to discuss my initial ideas for the research with him and also to see how he perceived his role when facilitating self-directed learning to clarify more for myself what I wanted this research to be about.
My third expert, whom I interviewed, was Martin Cadee from the Netherlands. I met him in November 2011 on the European Council Network meeting for practitioners of the non-hierarchical group communication method Council, in Austria and we got to talk about self-directed learning. I told him about my beliefs that self-directed learning helps to support learners to take responsibility for their learning and their life. He told me that he also sees SDL as an important part of how we can educate people in the future and that he founded a school on the basis of it. I had heard of the school he was referring to, the Kaospilots Netherlands before and knew that there he used SDL in a long term

educational setting that was connected also to social entrepreneurship. I wanted a perspective from someone outside the field of Youth in Action and therefore I asked him if he was willing to be interviewed by me. Even though I had contacted him already in February 2012 I didn't hear back from him until September 2012 and in the end we did an interview over Skype while he was in India and I was in Vienna. As the Internet connection was very bad I only managed to talk to him without seeing him over the video.

Involvement

As I was going to be one of the facilitators of the training course, from the beginning the question was: How will I be involved as researcher during the training course? What will be my role? And how will I communicate that to the participants? All these reflections were also relevant for my participant observation that I will be discussing in the next paragraph. Gretchen B. Rossmann, a US professor of education, and Sharon F. Rallis, a US lecturer of education, (1998: 96) propose a continuum of:

co-participation – immersion – limited participation – spectator

when looking at one's own role in qualitative research.

Being one of the trainers of the course, I was fully involved in the course, participated in discussions, provided coaching and guidance, answered questions, led sessions, gave inputs and at the same time was present as a participant observer. I was present in a dual role: as facilitator and as researcher. But I was primarily seen as a facilitator and approached as a facilitator, however I repeated several times in the plenary that I was conducting research during the training course and also discussed with three participants who were interested in more details about my questions and the approach I had chosen.

Participant observation

This is the central method of ethnography that is mostly used in Social and Cultural Anthropology and is describing the process by which the researcher immerses him or herself into the field of research (Delamont 2002: 7)..The researcher is present as an observer, but also talks to people and participates in the everyday activities (ibid.). I was present as a participant observer the whole time through even though I had a really hard time actually writing field notes as I was working there at the same time. Being responsible for the learning environment for 19 people and being part of a team gave me little time to breathe and write notes. However I wrote a short diary at the end of each day, trying to summarize what had happened during that day. Also, together with my

colleagues we collected observations about the participants and what they were doing each day. Therefore my participant observation unfortunately is playing a much smaller role in the empirical part of my thesis than I originally thought it would.

One of the main aspects when doing participant observation is reflexivity. This means that the researcher should be conscious at all times "about her role, her interactions and her theoretical and empirical material that it accumulates" (Delamont 2002: 9). This also means making each step of research explicit (what one is doing and why one is doing it) in order to make sure the research is valid. This relates back to the question I posed myself about the involvement. Apart from doing participants observation I also conducted interviews.

Semi-structured interviews

This form of making interviews is based on an interview guide while still allowing for new topics and leads to arise out of the conversation (Bernard 2011: 158). I prepared a questionnaire for each of my interviews. However I remained open to the things my interview partners were saying and pursued them if I thought them relevant. I identified some of the topics that would be interesting for me as questions and formulated them to be open.

My first expert interview with Peter Hofmann, an Austrian trainer and facilitator, was the least structured of all of them, as it took place in the initial phase of my research when I was still trying to find the focus of my research. I knew I wanted to speak about his experience with self-directed learning and hear about some of the challenges that arose for him in working with SDL as an educational approach. This interview already took place in February 2012 while the rest of the interviews were conducted between July and September 2012. I then did two semi-structured interviews with participants from "To live is to learn". After the first interview I adjusted my questionnaire and added some questions that I realized after transcribing had not yet been covered or not to the extent I wanted them to be covered. Critical friends, who read parts of my first drafts for my thesis, pointed out some additional topics that I added to the following interviews as well(for example the role of peers in self-directed learning).

For my expert interviews a similar process happened. I did the first interview, transcribed it and realized what questions were still open for me, so I added them to the next interview I conducted. I did consider re-interviewing the experts and the participants, but I simply had too limited time available. In that sense my research was a truly emerging process, where one interview informed and supported the next one. It also made me more aware of what topics might be of interest to write about and where that could come

from. At times the interviews became also dialogic, in a sense that together with my interview partner we exchanged a certain understanding of a concept or exchanged ideas (e.g. Hofmann: 417-435 and Cadee: 133-143)

Due to the fact that all except one person were in the same city I was in, all but one interview were made through Skype. I had never conducted a qualitative interview before via Skype and found it rather interesting to observe some additional things about the interviews that I would like to share here. With two out of four interviews made via Skype due to the Internet connection, I was not able to see the other person. During those two interviews I made non-verbal reassuring sounds such as: “Mhm” or “Hm” as I made with the people I could see. I remember that during the interviews I was very concerned about the other people feeling listened to and being heard. I therefore believe that this is the reason I had for making these additional non-verbal cues. Also, it was harder to sense how the other person is feeling if you cannot see the person and it was also harder for me to concentrate on what the other person was saying at all times. I therefore even more notes to make sure I was really listening to what the person was saying and staying concentrated during the interview process.
I transcribed all of the interviews before I analysed them.

Questionnaires

After the third day of the training course “To live is to learn” we wanted to make sure that people got the opportunity to have an influence on the setting and the frame. We therefore asked them to fill in a mid-term evaluation questionnaire (see annex 3). This was optional and we got ten back. At the end of the course we handed out evaluation questionnaires to the participants (evaluation form I see annex 4). The first part of this evaluation form were scaling questions where we wanted to know how useful they found the different methods we had proposed to them during the course. The second part consisted of open-ended questions. This is a standard procedure of each course done within the frame of the Youth in Action programme. However, we wanted to especially focus on the strategies that we had proposed and asked the participants to evaluate each one of them, which made the evaluation form a lot longer than it would be usually. We asked them to send back the questionnaires via email or put them on a USB stick if it was important to them to stay anonymous. Two participants asked if they could send it in later as they felt they did not have enough time to fill out the questionnaire in the way they wanted to. However we did receive all of the evaluation forms.

After one month, we sent another questionnaire (evaluation form II see annex 5) via Google docs to the participants and asked them some further questions (such as “How would you describe the course now? (feel free to use metaphors from nature or any form that works for you) or what are the most important learning moments that you can see now, thinking back of the course?”) and how they now evaluated their experiences after some time had passed. The second questionnaire consisted of exclusively open-end questions. Participants had the option to be anonymous, but we asked them to fill in their names if it was okay for them to be contacted by me to ask further questions. 13 out of 20 people (19 participants plus one support person from the National Agency) replied to this second questionnaire and all of them gave their names. To send out a second questionnaire is not so usual in my experience in the Youth in Action programme, but we saw two benefits from getting a second evaluation form:

1. Participants would have had time to gather their thoughts and also potentially see first effects of their participation in the course.
2. It would allow participants to maybe gain some new insights on by reflecting back on their process and answering questions about it.

Ethical considerations

An important part of my research was to ensure that it was ethical. Here I present the concrete actions that I therefore took.

Informed consent

In the Call for Participants we already mentioned that I was going to be conducting research during the part of the training course (see annex). And on the first day of the training course again I made a short oral presentation about my research and its aims and asked participants to fill in an informed consent form where I stated again my intentions, my methods and the purpose of the research. I also offered my availability for questions, but no one took me up on it. I got all except two forms back on the same day. I approached the two people who had not given me their consent form to ask whether they had forgotten or did not want to participate, as that was an important information for me. Both of them stated that they had forgotten and handed me the paper instantly.

Confidentiality

I ensured that both participants that I interviewed stayed anonymous and the information shared would be confidential. I wanted to make sure that they are protected while at the same time making sure they would feel comfortable to say whatever was on their mind.

In order to still see them as humans, I decided against calling them “Respondent A” and “Respondent B”, but gave them names the names Carl and Julia. As the group was an international one I chose names that were quite international in order to not let the names give away the nationality of the participants.

Team

The work in the team was a crucial aspect of this thesis as planning, carrying out and evaluating the course was a common effort. Ann Daniels, Lenka Uhrova and me invested time and energy into getting to know each other, sharing a common vision about the training course and about learning and sharing responsibilities. We planned the training course together every step of the way and developed the strategies together. As I had the research question in my mind, it was my role to make sure we would look specifically to the aspect of developing strategies for the participants, however we put them into action together.

We met three days before the course to bring together all the questions and topics that participants had raised during the preparation phase and finalized the programme. We furthermore talked again about our role and how we were going to work together during the course. Lenka Uhrova had her four months old daughter Sarah with her on the course as she was still breastfeeding as well as her partner Eggert Briem who supported her in taking care of her daughter while also facilitating the training course. We also came together those three days before as a team to see how we could best accommodate Sarah and Eggert Briem into the training process. In the end it worked like this that Eggert Briem was taking care and feeding Sarah during the programme time in the morning and in the afternoon, while Lenka Uhrova was doing so in the morning, during lunch and in the evening. As a team we had agreed that Lenka Uhrova would communicate clearly if she would need something from Ann Daniels and me and we discussed it openly when this was the case.

We took time each day also to check with each other how we were doing emotionally and to see if something was needed. Also, we discussed the process of participants individually and as a group each day to see if we needed to change something in the set up or our role as facilitators. This strong orientation on the process and reflection helped us to react flexible to what was happening in the moment, something participants very much appreciated. We stayed a day longer to go through the evaluation forms and check the outcomes as well as planning the writing of the final report and sharing our personal learning.

“Build your frame” study seminar based on self-directed learning

As one part of the preparation for writing my thesis and my inquiry about strategies for learning needs I decided to participate in the three-day seminar “Build your frame” that took place in March 2012 in Vienna, Austria. Peter Hofmann and Ann Daniels were the trainers.

There, 22 participants from different countries came to learn more about learning theories. The concept was based on self-directed learning and we were asked to figure out what topic we wanted to work on the first day in the morning and then work on that topic. During the training course many participants felt lost and did not know how to behave with the concept of self-directed learning. We had many discussions with Ann Daniels after the course about how we could do it differently and also Ann Daniels and Peter Hofmann published an article about their lessons learned from that experience. Some of the challenges they faced:

- Participants needed quite a lot of support in identifying their starting points
- Participants were confused as to what the seminar was about, it needed more clarity before the arrival at the seminar
- The role of the group in the self-directed learning process (some people felt „they did not have a place in the group“)

(Daniels and Hofmann 2012: 2-4)

This seminar and the tensions that appeared during this course were a big learning for me and Ann Daniels inspired many of the strategies we developed together as a team. Therefore it is important to mention it here and give more information about it as I will also come back to it several times when writing about the findings about facilitating self-directed learning.

Language

When it came to using direct quotes from the participants I made sure to write them down grammatically correct if needed.

Finding the starting point

Before going through the different stages of the Action Research cycle, I spent quite some time figuring out what I wanted to research. As mentioned earlier, Action Research practitioners and experts do not believe in the dogma of one fixed research question, they rather encourage to find a starting point and go from there (Altrichter and Posch 1996:57). However, there are different starting points that might be relevant. Just

to sit and think, what is relevant to be researched in my practice did not seem like such a good start. There are several different proposals of how one may start an Action Research; such as identifying three potential starting points:

- interest
- a problem
- an unclear situation

(Dadds 1985 quoted after Altrichter and Posch 1996: 53)

Diagnosing my learning needs and my needs for action was the first step. For two weeks I was making mind maps and writing lists and writing my diary and then more mind maps and slowly figuring out what were the questions I was actually interested in. What was really helpful was a „written reflection“ (Rico 1984 quoted after Altrichter and Posch 1996: 49) to understand better my own practice and to connect to my wisdom and knowledge that you might not be aware of.

1. Write down associations to the following questions:
   - What joy and problems do I have in my job?
   - What would I like to do next week?
   - What would make my work definitely easier?
   - What is my biggest professional disappointment?
   - What pupil do I remember fondly? Why?

   Write down one word into the middle of a piece of paper start to make a mind map out of it.

   Try to find a pattern in it, make a system of recognizing and write a text. You may choose to share this text with other people, rework it, or discuss it with colleagues.

I adapted these questions to my work, for example I did not ask myself what I want to do next week, as I did not have a training course coming up next week. The word pupil I exchanged with the word participants. I then circled the most interesting words that came up for me. The point that spoke most to me was about what I would like to do during my next training course (which was a training course for people doing European Voluntary Service in Poland): To invite participants to fill in a similar questionnaire as I am doing right now to help them to discover their learning needs connected to their work and life. This made it clear to me that one of the challenges we are often discussing in different teams is: How do we support participants in connecting to their needs, being able to identify them and what tools are there to do so? However, this was not the only question that stuck with me after the exercises. The second one was: How can I develop a community of practice regarding my work in the city of Warsaw?

As Herbert Altrichter and Peter Posch (1996: 57) suggest, I did not immediately decide on one of the topics, but kept both of them in mind and decided to analyse them further. Another suggestion was to find a critical friend (Waters-Adams 2006: 11) to help focusing the research topic. I have been discussing the topic with the Dutch learning consultant Naomi den Besten and Marta Brzezinska-Hubert, a Polish trainer working mainly within Youth in Action, who both have experience in my field of work. This has been extremely helpful, first in formulating my interest to someone else and then to hear the responses that my interest generated. It was clear to me then that finding strategies that would support participants to figure out their learning needs and wishes was what I wanted to do. Already at that moment the first action came to me, let's try out a method. However, I realized that this might be the next action loop; first I wanted to share my experience with other people and make some interviews to see how other people are dealing with this topic. An important step was to talk to Peter Hofmann about his experience with organizing educational activities based on self-directed learning. I also understood at that moment the importance of having the Action Research cycle as a structure. Often in my work I identify certain topics that are challenging or repeating themselves. Then I immediately try to find actions around it. However, to take time and discuss the topic with colleagues is also a rewarding. It brought more depth and reflection to my research as such.

When I had decided on my research question on finding tools and strategies of supporting the identification of learning needs and wishes, I wanted to look upon this question in every possible setting. So I discussed it with colleagues from the Polish pool of trainers, with my research cooperation project colleagues from JuMuW (a research cooperation project at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna) and my colleagues from "To live is to learn". In all of these three settings the question is relevant. The training courses I do with the Polish pool of trainers for EVS volunteers is completely based on the wishes and needs of the participants. We asked them what they want to happen during the course and we prepare ourselves and then do it. Every day we also evaluate together with them and ask them what they liked and what they wished for the next day to happen. In JuMuW, we worked with pupils from Viennese secondary schools (Hauptschulen) to show them how they can do their own social scientific research projects. Also here the question was: How can we support them in identifying topics that really interest them? The training course "To live is to learn" was perhaps the most obvious choice as it is based on self-directed learning and has the question on how to organize a training course based on the needs of participants

embedded in the concept from the very start. Initially I wanted to do my research in all three projects. However I realized that in JuMuW and in EVS the participants of the projects (the volunteers and the pupils) did not choose to participate. However when you are asked what you want to learn, it is important also to willingly engage in this kind of process. The volunteers have the training courses as part of the volunteering program they signed up for and for JuMuW the teachers had declared their interest, not the pupils. That is why I decided to focus only on “To live is to learn” as my case study.

Chapter 6: Findings about facilitating self-directed learning

This chapter is about the findings from the interviews, the participant observation and the questionnaires that participants filled in. The findings are divided into three different segments according to my three main questions of interest:

1. strategies to support learners identifying learning needs
2. other findings from the research that are relevant to consider when facilitating self-directed learning
3. and findings from my process of becoming more aware of my practice as a facilitator of learning.

Ad.1.: The challenge when writing about the strategies to identify learning needs was the cyclic nature of the Action Research of planning then taking action and then evaluation. I decided to not present all of the process at once in a chronological order, but to look at each of the strategies independently. Where I will be first talking about the planning process involved, then I will take a look at information gathered about them and finally summarize the reflections and evaluations we did in the team. I hereby hope that the different findings will be more comprehensible for the reader.
Ad. 2.: My second question had initially been to find parameters that are important to consider when wanting to organize a training course based on self-directed learning. However, most of the strategies we employed are exactly the important aspects to be aware about. I hence added additional findings that are relevant in this part.
Ad.3.: The insights gained from my third research question form the second and third chapter of this thesis. However, in this chapter, I will share some insights about the process as a whole and how it contributed to my practice.

I will first present the findings about the strategies we, my co-facilitators Ann Daniels and Lenka Uhrova, employed to support the identification of learning needs, then other insights I gained and things to be aware of when organizing a training course based on self directed learning and finally look upon my process of becoming more aware of my practice as a facilitator of learning. Then I will discuss the limitations of this kind of research as the training course was a unique event and the field I was conducting the research in simply ceased to exit after the course as the participants, the facilitators and the hostel constituted it at the given moment.

It is therefore important to see how my own findings could or could not be transferred to other similar activities and be relevant for my field of work and academic research.

Reflection on the support measures and strategies offered to participants to identify their learning needs

In this part of my findings I want to focus on the strategies we as a team of facilitators chose to support learners to identify and find their learning needs and wishes before and during the training course. The tools and methods we employed were discussed and selected as a team of facilitators, we implemented them and evaluated those strategies together. The reflections present in this part of the thesis are therefore a common effort if not specified otherwise.

The strategies we developed were:

- An **online platform** (toliveistolearn.ning.com) as a preparation tool to support participants to understand more about SDL and also to help them find a starting point in their learning process.
- A **gradual approach** towards self-directed learning to make sure everyone was able to follow no matter how much experience they had had beforehand with the approach.
- An **inspiring learning environment** that would accommodate different learning trajectories and needs in the physical space.
- A **visualization of all the possible** strategies („sea of possibilites“) they could use during their learning journey.
- **Strategies to ensure individual and group learning processes,**
- A **learning flipchart** as a way of documenting one’s learning for oneself and the other participants.
- Strategies of supporting the dilemma of **not being available as a resource for others when focusing on one’s own needs**.
- The **role of facilitators** as supporting the learning process of directing their own learning.

<u>Preparation phase</u>

We wanted to put a special emphasis on the preparation phase and this was also something that Hofmann recommended: “In a way, ideally you start before they are coming to your event.” (259-260). We decided to use an online platform for the preparation. This is also an experience I made in another course I did based on self-

directed learning called “Lead the way” and it worked well. We had already decided on having a preparation phase during our preparation meeting in November 2011 and had written about it in the call for applicants. So participants knew that approx. one month before the course we were going to invite them to an online platform and that the preparation process would require one to two hours per week.

The preparation phase had three aims:

1. To make sure participants knew what they were particularly interested in about self-directed learning,
2. to make them aware that they were going to have a lot of space and responsibility in creating the programme together with the trainers (Hofmann: 263-267),
3. to give them time and space to prepare for the course in general and get familiar with the topic of self-directed learning

The platform went online on April 17th 2012 so a bit less than five weeks before the course started.

The possibilities we offered on the platform were:

1. Three chats (we called them „Learning chats“), once a week with one of the facilitators at different times during the day so as to accommodate different working hours and time differences. Participants had the possibility to ask questions about the process and we supported them in structuring their preparation process.
2. Each participant had the possibility to each participant for a one hour Skype talk or chat with one of the facilitators that we randomly assigned. We called them “What’s up talks”.
3. Four different assignments for each week the platform was online:
   April 16th - 22nd 2012: Introduce yourself via the forum, create your profile page
   April 16th - 29th 2012: Read a short article about SDL
   April 23rd - May 17th 2012: What's up talks
   May 7th 2012 - May 17th 2012: Make your topics visible on a wall of virtual post-its
4. „Get your starting point“ exercises, which consisted of the following activities: free writing, words associations and collages. We invited participants to try out different ways of figuring out what was important to them at the moment. My own process of finding a starting point for this thesis mainly inspired this element of the platform. The LAB Assistant created by Jonathan Robertson for the SALTO Training of Trainers 2011/12 inspired the specific exercises.

- An online library with articles about learning, self-directed learning and learning theories, links to useful websites about self-directed learning and recommendations for movies and books about the topic.
- Videos and photos that were connected to the topics of learning and self-directed learning.
- We wrote facilitator's blogs. The intention was to be transparent about our process and give participants a chance to see why we did what we did and what was our thought process behind.
- We invited the participants to take a look again at their own application forms and see if it to them what they had written about their motivation and aims for the course still made sense.

We decided we would inquire about each of those components in the evaluation form at the end of the course and ask participants if they used them and how helpful those tools had been in their preparation process.

When looking at our intentions that we had for the preparation phase these are the outcomes and findings:

1. Participants know their starting point

We did support learners in knowing what their particular interest were, which is something we observed in the first round on the arrival evening where we asked participants to state what had brought them here. We heard everyone express very clearly what their aims for the week were. However both of the interviewed participants stated that they knew their aims from the beginning, as their aims were the reason they applied to the training course in the first place (Carl: 58, Julia: 31-36).

For Carl, who is a youth worker, those aims included to reflect on his own practice with people from different political and social systems (39-40) and to see how self-directed learning could be used in his practice (44-45). "Yes, actually I think that was very clear to me. The first one was why I was looking for training through the SALTO programme (…) and the second one (…) was the content of the course." (Carl: 58-61)

Julia, who is studying to become a teacher, wanted to find more tools and methods that were less formalized than what she had experienced in university and also that would support pupils to become more self-directed (35-36), to be on a training course, meet new people and being connected to the youth work field again (51-52). This was something that I had overlooked when I came up with my research question that people

would come already with some specific aims into the process, as they had to fill in an application form and state their aims and motivation already beforehand. This was also an important learning for me about the process of Action Research that I will be talking more about in my conclusions.

However, participants also learned many other things than what they had initially planned. For Carl even though he achieved the two aims he came for, the most important thing, far more important than the other two, was a shift in his values about seeing other people's learning styles as equally valuable to his own (480-483). Julia wanted to mainly learn specific skills about supporting SDL processes, however it was mainly new attitudes that she discovered (158-159). For someone preparing a course based on self-directed learning that shows the tension between making sure that learners know what it is they want to learn beforehand so they have a starting point to go into the process and on the other hand, to give space for these accidental and also potentially meaningful learning processes to happen on the spot. As an organizer, it is important to know the wishes and needs beforehand so one can actually organize the programme accordingly (e.g. get in contact with local institutions and also experts). However, in our opinion, there should also still to be space for spontaneous things to happen. Concretely this means not to pre-plan the whole programme completely, but leave some time slots open.

Julia's and Carl's experiences also show the non-linearity of the self-directed learning process. Both paths did not happen one step after the other, but several learning opportunities happened along the way that were also meaningful even though they had no connection to the initial aims. This also fits the definition of non-linear learning (Spear 1985 quoted after Merriam et al. 2007: 112): "A successful self-directed learning project is one in which a person can engage in a sufficient number of relevant clusters of learning activities and then assemble these clusters into a coherent whole". I discussed this definition with Carl who agreed that it would be an accurate description of his process (502).

2. Make participants aware of the responsibility they have during the course

We wanted to make participants aware during the preparation that they were going to have a lot of space and could decide on their own learning path during the training course. Both Carl (204) and Julia (100) answered that they knew there was not going to

be a programme, but for Julia that still made her feel confused and lost during the course (100-102).

3. Give time and space for participants to prepare for the course

We managed to give participants time and space to prepare themselves for the course. The impact for everyone but one person was rather positive as it helped them to get into the mood, feeling prepared and getting some inspiration about the topic. For one person the preparation was both frustrating and exciting. And for one person the preparation phase was confusing. However, this person also said that he did not understand the project at this phase and that it was difficult to understand SDL via chat. What participants found limiting was time (47% or nine participants): Five of those stated additionally that time was an issue because of their busy schedules and because of their work. “I struggled to properly engage in it as much as I should have done. That was mostly due to time capacity on my side. (...) the preparation was mostly kind of saying hello to other participants online and (…) reading a few articles really.” (Carl: 31-36)
Other things that were limiting were: two people found that SDL was difficult to understand via chat or by just reading about it, one person had to learn how to use the platform first and one more person did not know where to start.

<u>Conclusions about the preparation process</u>

We see the many different elements that were available on the platform as a way of catering to the different needs of participants and that worked really well. What was really appreciated during the preparation were

- the “What’s up talks” (47% found it very helpful or helpful),
- the library with relevant articles (42% found it very helpful or helpful)
- and the fact that it served as a basic introduction to other participants (26% found it very helpful or helpful)

(Other things mentioned were: information about SDL, getting some goals and learning needs, the Paint your own Picture booklet, the interactive website). We would give some more explanation about the different articles and also some recommendations as to what article to read as an overview or as an introduction to help people to navigate the library easier.

One of the tensions concerning this preparation process is that we wanted participants to be prepared enough so they would not struggle with the concept of the training course and at the same time leave it up to them to decide how and in what way they want to

participate also in the preparation process so as be coherent already in the preparation phase and handing over the responsibility of the learning process to the participants. One of our reflections in the team was to state that the preparation process is optional and can help to prepare for the course, but it is up to the participants. Julia expressed that she did have a bad conscience all the time about not preparing enough beforehand (62). This is exactly one of the pitfalls of such a potentially intense preparation phase and it is not our intention as a team to make participants feel like that. One request we would make as a team to the participants though is to keep the "What's up talks" to get in contact with participants and support them with any questions or doubts they have before the course so they know what is awaiting them. The preparation phase was also especially helpful for us as a team as we got to know the participants beforehand and already knew what kind of topics they wanted to focus on. That gave us also the time to contact local institutions and experts for the required topics and also prepare ourselves more specifically about what would be interesting for the participants.

<u>During the course: Gradual move towards more self-direction over the days</u>

During the preparation phase we decided to make the programme of the training course a gradual process of easing into self-directed learning and the process of participants deciding on what one want and need to learn at any given moment. Even though participants already had the chance to familiarize themselves with the concept of SDL beforehand, we wanted to make sure that all participants were on board and could follow the process no matter how much or how little experience they had with the process or the topic. Practically that meant that on the first morning we as facilitators still proposed all the activities and exercises to get to know each other, we looked at the initial starting points that people had identified beforehand and as a team, we shared more about our approach and the thinking behind the training course based and what that would mean for the participants e.g. that from Tuesday on they would create their own programme. This meant they could choose from some of the things offered or also initiate or organize something for themselves. In the afternoon of the first day we organized an introduction to self-directed learning as a topic where participants themselves could decide on the method they wanted to use to explore more about self-directed learning, hence gradually taking more responsibility about the way the wanted to learn, while we as facilitators still decided on the topic. In this exercise called "Learning space dynamics" we offered: Lectures about learning theories and self-directed learning, individual talks with facilitators, a library with relevant articles, a creative table with pens, colours and paper, a discussion board where people could meet in small groups to talk about different

interests connected with SDL, games (connected to skills and strategies) and computers to do their own research online. At 17.30 o'clock we went for the storytelling circle.
Then during the next three and a half days participants could organize themselves and choose what they wanted to do. There were different options visible (see sea of possibilities) or they could decide on something of their own. On the last afternoon we asked participants to come together again as we planned to do different exercises to harvest the learning, reflect on the process, evaluate the course and close the training.
In order to understand how this gradual process worked for people I propose to first have a look at the different processes the interviewed participants went through.

Carl describes his course in three phases: The first one where he went to read books and theories with another participant from the course. He describes this phase as his "very normal modes of learning" (88-91). This already fulfilled all the aims he came with to the course initially (96). Then he wanted to see what extra he could get out of the course (100). This was the second phase, which started in the middle of the course where his paradigm shift in values happened as described before. The final phase was about transferring the personal things he learned into his professional experience (153f). Julia describes her experience differently. She felt a bit lost on the first days as so many things were happening and she wanted to participate in all of them (100-102). She felt insecure in the beginning and everything seemed new and she was not sure how to structure the whole process and the decision making process (366-370) and this is something she also saw happening to others (371). Then on Wednesday she describes her state as being confused as there were so many things going on, which she could not order (119-120) and also frustrated as she was scared she would be alone in her learning process as she did not see many people that day (126-129). On Thursday Julia started to feel much better again and on the last day she noted that there were so many different things and activities happening (371-373), which led her to the conclusion that "by the end of the course (…) people actually were, including me, getting what it was about" (378-379). These two examples show already the variety of processes that participants might experience in a course based on SDL. It does happen in every training course that learners experience different things. However, during a course based on SDL it is even more apparent, as it is focuses strongly on individual needs, hence asking people to follow their individual learning plans.

The different processes also relate to the prior experience people have in directing their own learning. Carl stated that he found the descriptions of SDL sounded familiar from

youth work pedagogy (26-29) and that already before the course when it came to getting knowledge his self-direction was a ten and stayed a ten (234f) on a scale from one to ten with ten being a very advanced ability of self-direction. However his learning during the course was mainly focused on the emotional and value based learning where he went from a zero to a seven in his ability to direct his own learning (239-240).
Julia started with an ability to direct her own learning at three and ended at six (234). She stated that she was used to finding her own ways when it comes to how to learn something, but had no prior experience of setting her own aims (226f). Julia says also that her ability of directing her own learning could be higher, but in the current environment at university she is not able to have more self-direction because of the constraints of the system (236). So Carl could already build on experiences with directing his own learning, whereas it was quite new for Julia. This could be one of the indications of why their learning processes went so differently. However, it is important to keep in mind that the ability to direct one's own learning is also situational.

One way of supporting all the different kinds of processes is to offer more sessions as facilitators along the way during the course. This is one of the conclusions we drew in the team as well: We would offer more sessions from the second days onwards about self-directed learning in particular to make sure people understand the concept and the proposed process. Also for Julia some more input during the first few days from the facilitators would have been helpful (381f). One suggestion from Naomi den Besten here is to offer a variety of views and methods on self-directed learning so to still give people a choice on how they want to approach the topic and what they want to get out of it (506-511). One way of doing so is to e.g. make sure to present different theories with different points of views connected to learning. The sessions offered throughout the week should not fill up the whole programme, but give overviews on relevant topics that are connected to the main theme of the course so participants that feel lost have some points during the day where they can connect again to the process. Another way of supporting people who have little experience with directing their own learning would be to support learners to make small steps and to break the whole process down, as all the opportunities one sees might be overwhelming in the beginning (Naomi den Besten: 343-347) as it happened to Julia. This would mainly happen in one to one talks though.

During the course: Learning environment as a supporting factor of supporting self-directed learning

We wanted to create a learning space that would give many different possibilities to participants in how they could use the space and create their learning environment, the physical space should be in line with the intentions of SDL where participants decide what, when and also where they want to learn. We had specifically looked for a learning environment that would offer a lot of different working possibilities (alone, in small groups, in the big group) as well as being an inspiring place. The Icelandic NA agreed with our choice of the KEX Hostel (http://www.kexhostel.is) as it was anyways the venue they use usually for international training courses they are hosting. The space was appreciated very much by the participants and contributed greatly to the atmosphere of the training course. “It was certainly an ideal setting” (Julia: 288)

In the seminar room we installed a library with many relevant books and articles, a games table, a creative table with different paint and art supplies, a table for individual work and a table with a computer for Internet research. To have the room full of resources was really helpful and for Julia the room linked everything that people did during the week (291). It was like the framework holding the training course together (ibid.: 293f). We also wanted to put all those different options of how to approach a topic of interest alongside each other to show the different ways one could approach his/her learning during the week. For Carl to have the creative table sitting next to the library and being seen as equally important helped him to engage with processes he would not normally engage in (322-331).

After this experience for us it is clear that it supports the process of SDL when the learning environment is representing the different possibilities. A big variety of seating and working areas offered by the place itself and many options of ways of using the seminar room is definitely a support in an SDL process and serves as a material example of the diversity of choices the learners have.

During the course: “Sea of possibilities” as a visualization of the possible strategies for learning

We also prepared examples of different strategies learners could use in their processes to identify their next steps or what they wanted to focus on during the course at a given time. The decision making process can be quite tricky (Julia: 101f), during SDL so we wanted participants to be aware of their options. We called this visualization the “sea of

possibilities". Each of those possibilities was visible on an colourful A5 paper and lying in a corner of the room so participants could have access to them at all times.

- "What's up talks" (one on one with the facilitators and the options of coaching, being listened to, going for a walk and a talk at a kitchen table)
- Discussion groups (with topics initiated by the participants)
- Library with relevant books and articles (including the possibility to get recommendations from the facilitators)
- Internet research (Course resources were updated on the platform and recommended internet sites were available)
- Excursions: Hitt Husit – Youth Centre with an 8-week course called Vitamin which supports long time unemployed youngsters to get back on track using SDL, one participant's school, Nordalingaskóli, Conference on Green Growth)
- Sessions (offered based on the requests of participants or proposed by participants on the topics of non violent communication, SDL with disadvantaged youngsters, SDL within Youth in Action programme, Youthpass, challenges in organizing a training course based on SDL, silence workshop, SDL in formal settings and yoga)
- Skype talks (Salvi Greco, an Italian trainer, on motivation and Naomi den Besten, a Dutch learning consultant, on creative work spaces)
- Creative table with art supplies
- Magical cubes and other games
- Learning venues (interesting places in Reykjavik such as libraries, bookshops museums)
- Reflection cards (with exercises similar to what was offered on the platform beforehand)
- Go for a walk
- Others

All of the options were seen very useful by at least two people. The "What's up talks" were considered as very helpful by twelve out of 19 people and the discussion groups by 14 out of 19 people. There were also activities offered that were used only by a small percentage of the group such as the internet research, one of the participant's school visit, the reflection cards, magical cubes and games and learning venues (less than half of the group). However for some those aspects had still been very useful.

For one participant this was one of the most important learning moments during the course: “Seeing the possibilities. The sea of possibilities and taking advantage of the options that we had in our learning. One moment when I wasn’t sure what to do I went behind the bar, into the "sea" and I realized all the things I can do. Another moment was when I actually made use of those means (conversation, workshop, creative table, library, museum etc.) and realized it truly works.“ (Evaluation form II: 3)

Already during the course we asked participants if they were working on the things they wanted to work on and what kind of support they needed from each other, and the facilitators through a written mid-term evaluation. According to this we made several changes and additions to the options proposed.

- We made a feedback form available every day from Wednesday on so everyone anonymously had the chance to express if he/she needed something else from the facilitators or the group.
- The participants could share outcomes of discussions and/or self study and ask for feedback on a flipchart posted on the entrance of the seminar room so it would be visible for everyone.
- An empty flipchart with time slots with the possibilities for participants to propose discussion groups was also hung in the entrance of the seminar room as participants had found it difficult to organize those groups and get an overview when they were happening and where.
- A specific time schedule about the possibility to talk with the facilitators was present in the room at all times on the door of the seminar room as we realized that there were moments we were available but no one approached us while at the same time people gave the feedback that they needed more individual support from the facilitator.
- We visualized the programme more clearly so participants understood when something was happening as participants told us that they were sometimes confused about when an activity was starting and ending and where it was happening.

Picture 2: Visualization of the programme – Friday

The process of offering a sea of possibilities and the positive feedback we received on the different options led us to the conclusion to offer again a big variety of opportunities. These different possibilities made it easier for people to decide on specific ways of approaching their learning. Also it was a good idea to check in the middle of the course with participants about what else they needed and to adapt the possibilities accordingly. The feedback helped us to tailor the strategies even more to the needs of participants and as each group is different this is an important tool to keep.

<u>During the course: Creating the space for individual and group learning</u>

How can it be a SDL process that allows individuals to focus on their own wishes and needs and still give space for a group learning process? Within the team we had several discussions already in the preparation phase about the topic of how can both individual needs and the needs of the group be addressed during a training course based on self-directed learning. Because in order to be able to follow one's personal learning journey, one also needs to feel part of the group of people that is on the same training course. So how can we make sure that people find a place in the group and find some peer connections that are really important (Daniels and Hofmann 2012: 2)? Martin Cadee states this dilemma as the biggest paradox in working with self-directed learning in a group context: to hold your own wishes and drives while still being part of a team (407f).

Even though some of the questions still remain open I would like to share our process as a team, the reactions of participants and some of the conclusions we drew from it.

For the training course “To live is to learn” we agreed on the following scenario to make sure there was enough group learning present while still respecting the self directed learning trajectories. We would start the first day in the morning with activities to get to know each other, learn each other’s names and create a feeling of safety together.
We asked everyone to come together each day at 17.30 o’clock for one hour and a half at the end of the day to share stories and learning and reflections in the group. This was the only activity during the week that was compulsory as we decided to take on the responsibility of making sure that people can connect to each other again and have a common process at least once each day. The storytelling circle also had the intention for everyone to “listen with attention” and to “speak from the heart” therefore clearly giving space to emotions and feelings that might come up in the sometime challenging SDL process. These are also two intentions from Council, a practice of non-hierarchical form of communication in a group that inspired the storytelling circle (Hotchkiss 2009: 3). Our aims were to provide a space where learners could feel part of the group and share stories that were important to them while also bringing in the dimension of the heart, honesty and openness. Eight people saw the storytelling circle as one of the three most important things that happened during the course. We thought that the storytelling circle would provide a feeling of belonging and being part of the group. This was certainly the case, however during the week some participants made the requests to spend even more time in the group as a whole (Mid Term 1). So from Thursday on we decided to also start each day together and also play a short game together to laugh and have fun together in the morning. We also spent some more time to get to know each other better on those occasions and there was the possibility to ask questions and clarify what was planned for the day. However, there were only two mornings left: Thursday morning where only five people were present due to a conference and an excursion happening at the same time and Friday morning, where everyone was present. Julia stated that those meetings in the morning and in the evening as a whole group prevented her from feeling lost (267-269). For the next course we would keep an update meeting in the morning and the storytelling circle in the afternoon as the closing of the day.

In the final evaluation and during the interviews participants again pointed out that they would have liked to have more of a group learning process. For Julia the self-directed learning experience was very individualistic and she was sometimes missing a support

network during the course (251-254). And for Carl there was no group learning at all (436). This tension and how to react to it appropriately has not been clearly resolved for us as a team of trainers. However, in the course of writing up my research, I discovered through Anna Streissler a useful model that explains the tensions of the individual and the group in a group context. It stems from theme-centred interaction, which was developed by Ruth Cohn (1960), a German humanistic psychologist. One of the principles of theme centred interaction is that there should be a dynamic balance between the individual process (ME), the group process (WE) and the topic at hand (IT). When one process is more dominant than the others it is the role of the facilitator to bring back the balance (Cohn 1997: 161). The thought behind those elements is that they are all equally relevant and also interdependent (ibid.: 160). The three corners of a triangle symbolize those three elements. The triangle is situated in a globe symbolizing the political, social and economical surroundings, which influence the group and the process. This model also allows looking at the individual and the group not so much as two sides of a continuum but as a process that, including the topic of the course, needs to be in balance. For the process of a training course based on self-directed learning this means to be aware of the aspect of the group especially as the content and the individual learning are anyways stronger present during this process. It is the role of the facilitator to make sure the component of the group is present and balanced out.
Also the added dimension of the global surroundings that also always play into the training course at hand is something to be aware of as a facilitator.

<u>During the course: Staying updated on the different learning trajectories of individual people so to also allow for a shared learning processes</u>

We wanted to make sure that participants had the chance to see what everyone was doing and working so to give the chance to discuss and share about the processes going on and also to potentially join together. However, we wanted to make sure this process was effective and fulfilling its aim of updating each other as we had other activities planned that were for the purpose of connecting to the whole group. This was also something me and Ann Daniels had experienced during “Build your frame” where the updating process took over one hour and a half and was still not very informative, therefore creating a lot of frustration and tension. So we agreed on using visual tools to document each person’s process. We planned a session of 45min on the first day where participants visualized their learning aims for the duration of the course on a flipchart. We invited them to keep it up to date during the course by putting all the materials that they were working on and the insights they gained over the days onto that flipchart. However,

very few people actually used it to document their process, and most of them did not add anything after the first day. So the need of getting updated about each other's process was still there and participants expressed that also (Mid Term 1).

During the course we did not directly address this topic in a systematic way. We rather used the morning circle from Thursday on to talk about the propositions and offers for everyone in the group such as discussion groups and workshops. However, there are some ideas how this can be addressed more concretely the next time:

- One coffee break each day is designated as an "updating session". People are sitting together in groups of four or five or even as the whole group and have some basic questions that they need to answer such as: What was the most exciting things you discovered today? What is the topic you are working on? What are your plans for the coming hours? These meetings could also be optional so only the people who want to be updated come there.
- Another option would be to make the morning meeting also into an update meeting, so first there is time to play together and to get to know each other better, there is some news about what is going to happen during the day and then also a short update from everyone. As the pitfall is that this might take too long, everyone gets only two sentences to describe what they have been doing and want to be doing. Other possibilities would be to use cards with images that one could use to demonstrate his/her process although that probably might take longer.
- The update is done in the middle of the course where there is time for everyone to do a personal mid-term evaluation and then share the outcomes with others.

<u>During the course: Are learners focusing too much on their own learning needs not as available to the other learners?</u>

Due to our experience with courses based on self-directed learning we were aware that when one is focusing on one's individual learning needs that can makes this person less available as a resource for others. There are several ways of how to deal with this dilemma. Here are some of the options we discussed beforehand.

- One can put in the introduction of the course that people should go where they can not only learn, but also contribute something. So inviting learners to support also the learning processes of other people. This could bring the awareness about other people's needs and wishes more into the minds of people. However,

as the responsibility lies with the learner, there is also no guarantee for this to happen.

- Another example is to also make the work in the team part of the process in the first place (e.g. supporting a group finding process around common interests). For example, Martin Cadee and his partner took the decision to set up the learning environment in a way that learners were working and learning in a team(366f).

We decided against both of these options, as we wanted to be coherent with letting participants decide and take responsibility on their learning paths, which also means letting them decide the way they wanted to contribute and interact with each other. Our reflections behind this decision were: We wanted the learners to focus on their own process and not having to feel responsible for the other people's learning. This was also one of the conclusions we took out from the seminar "Build your frame" where this was a challenge for more experienced participants that others wanted to learn from them, which prevented them sometimes from focusing on the things they rather wanted to explore.
The process of everyone following his or her own learning needs in a group is a constant negotiation between personal needs and other people's needs and also small group needs. In the team we were aware that this would cause tensions and we decided to try out this way of approaching the course and see how it would go.

However, Julia noted still as one of her challenges that she was not able to get out as much as she would like to from the course, as others focused on their individual learning hence were not accessible to her (257f). Looking back, there might be some other options how to deal with this issue.

- One of the options might be to address it and make it part of the discussion when setting up the frame with the participants on the first day.
- Another option is to take a decision in the team to support the process of participants having at least one or two other people with them as "process buddies", who would be invited to meet regularly and act as peer support so as to assure at least some availability of others. Those "process buddies" would have to agree together on how they want to support each other though. This idea is inspired by the „Build your frame" seminar, where this was part of the seminar set-up.

This discussed tension however is simply part of the process and the awareness of it is something important when preparing a training course based on SDL.

During the course: How to support the process of self-directed learning as a facilitator?

For Carl an important point was the availability of support provided by the team(375), which Naomi den Besten also recommends when facilitating SDL (408). Some examples of how this support could look like are helping people to come up with new ideas and fresh perspectives by asking questions, helping them reflect, structuring ideas (ibid.: 409-412). However the support being provided depends also on the abilities and strengths of the facilitators (ibid: 413). We thought a lot about our role as facilitators during the course and how we wanted to approach the self-directed learning environment. We saw our role as supporters of the learning process of the individuals, as the people holding the space and setting the frame while at the same time also sharing honestly and openly our own experience and insights into the process and about self-directed learning. We wanted to make sure we would gradually hand over the responsibility to participants on the first day. And then from the second day onwards to be available for one to one talks for further support. Lenka Uhrova offered coaching, Ann Daniels to sit together and chat informally at a table in the café that she called kitchen table and I was offering to go for a walk. These ways of support also connect to our personal preferences and strengths. But even though we had organized that one person of the team was available at all times for individual talks, we realized that not many people actually used this opportunity. After the wish to get more individual support from the facilitators was also addressed in the mid-term evaluation (Mid Term 2, 9 and 10) we started to make “office hours” for the facilitators that we advertised in the entrance to the room to make sure that people would know who of the team would be available and when and where. From this moment on all of the facilitators had more individual talks. In these individual talks we saw our role as helping participants first of all to clarify what kind of support they needed from us and then to act accordingly. We also tried to support them to critically reflect on their process and connect them to other people or material resources if needed.

Another idea of offering support to participants is to take on the role of a mentor for the participants. Peter Hofmann, in his trainings where he uses self-directed learning as the educational approach, is working with mentorship and mentor talks. “Our role, as we see it, is a lot of making things conscious. (…) it works a lot through questioning and helping people to see (…) what’s happening.” (Hofmann: 58-60) Here each participant is assigned a mentee and in each of the three residential seminars that form part of the SALTO Training of Trainers course there is one fixed mentor talk and also there are mentor talks in between the seminars. We consciously decided against the idea of having one assigned talk with participants during the week. It was important for us that

participants approached us when they needed support and we left this responsibility in their hands while making very clear that we saw our role as being there to support and listen and discuss and also to simply go for a walk. We therefore did not make specific appointments with all participants. However the role of supporting the process of becoming more conscious through questioning was still present. Participants also mentioned that they felt this support: facilitators made sure that a "safety net" was there (evaluation form I: 15), "I received support according to my needs and learning style" (evaluation form I: 14).

Another thing we decided upon for the role of facilitators was that we would offer to organize the activities related to the requests and interests participants stated during the preparation phase. We did organize experts and excursions and offered discussions for some of the topics but not for all of them. This was also something mentioned by the participants (evaluation form I: 1). As a team we would make sure that all of the topics asked about beforehand would be tackled in one way or another during the course (such as providing an article, an expert, a discussion) while at the same time making participants aware that they might choose to focus on something else.

Julia sees important aspects of being a facilitator of a self-directed learning process to be "sensitive and sensible for what is there, flexible to adapt (…) to be open minded and tolerant and see what is coming from everyone." (339-342) The ability to adapt and be open to change is also something that was noted several times by other participants as helpful in their process (evaluation form I: 5, 7, 15,) as well as by Martin Cadee (290). To trust the learners that they are able to reach what they want to reach is one of the main roles when facilitating self-directed learning in our opinion as a team. Carl formulated it like that: "it felt like there was no goal specified from you for us." (349). For him this was visible in the fact that there was neither positive praise nor negative comments (352-355), which would imply "(…) one place was better than another place to be at (…) the end of it." (366) In his opinion both positive praise and negative comments reinforce normal power dynamics where the trainer is in the more powerful position. For Carl this shift in power was an important observation he made during the course: The trainer is in the powerful position. (…) So you're relinquishing that power by giving me permission to reach any endpoint that I want to." (Carl: 396-400) To be okay with whatever endpoint that the learner is reaching is also something Martin Cadee sees as important: "(…) you need to be willing to let go." (285)

This was also a point we discussed fat lengths in the preparation phase. Would it be really okay for us if participants reached any outcome they wanted? And we agreed that this was the attitude we wanted to have for this training course and see how it would work. As shown before, it worked well for Carl.

However, there were also moments of doubts for us as facilitators.
One day during the course, one participant left in the afternoon to do a sightseeing tour and only came back for dinner. Hence he missed the storytelling circle, which was the one element that we had asked everyone to attend during the whole duration of the course. We still did the storytelling circle and left his chair empty. That left me personally very worried. I was not sure if he was getting what the course was about and I wanted to make sure that he was going to have a "good outcome".
At that point we sat down together in the team and discussed first of all what a "good outcome" means and that we want to trust participants in knowing what is good for them and take them serious in their decisions. Hence, we cannot judge what is a good or a bad outcome; it is simply not in our hand. Then we assessed the situation and decided that we would keep trusting the participant that he was on his way, but ask him to be back from wherever he was going for the storytelling circle as requested. When we talked to him he explained that he had not understood that the tour was going to be so long and that it had been his intention to come back earlier, which had not been possible.
This is where another tension comes in: Is it really okay if people go and do sightseeing while being on a training course?
Here several ways of seeing this situation are possible.

- First of all one could say: everyone is responsible for his/her learning, hence one is also responsible for how one spends his/her time during the course
- On the other hand this is an educational activity that is paid for and part of the Youth in Action programme and therefore also comes with a certain frame. One of those frames is to participate in the activities, even though there is a lot of freedom of choice.
- And then again, maybe the tour around town is the much-needed inspiration one was looking for and brought a breakthrough in the learning. For example for Carl observing someone else in a museum setting brought him to some really crucial reflections about learning spaces (Carl: 442).

This is not a debate with a clear conclusion, but I wanted to present different ways of looking at it. As mentioned, in our case we worked hard on the fact that we would really let people decide on their own what they wanted to do in order to really give them the

experience of directing their own learning. However, we decided that the group moment was a request we would keep on making as we saw our role as well to make sure there would be a group learning process. So we made a conscious decision of how to deal with this tension.

Other relevant findings for facilitating self-directed learning

Apart from the specific strategies we had planned together beforehand, carried out and evaluated, there are also some additional findings that I find relevant for the facilitation of SDL processes.

Learning new attitudes or shifts in attitudes were the most important learning outcomes

Both participants I interviewed emphasized a shift that happened during the training course about how they see other people and as a result also facilitating learning and their attitudes towards their way of working with people. For Carl the outcome was a "massive paradigm shift in the way I think about (…) relationships with others and interactions with others" (109-110). He realized that his personal way of approaching learning was very product and theory focused and that facilitated learning for others in the same way. "I am trying to constrict people into my own method of learning, because it is very product focused and outcome focused" (159-160). However, during the training course he realized that there are so many other routes and options one can take and he learned to value those equally (115-126). This personal realization then tied into his practice and especially his facilitation style, as valuing one learning style over another is actually contrary to his personal values of empowerment and the way he wants to work with people (164-165). For him this was "hugely significant" (174). He went into the course thinking he would gain new knowledge, and so he did, however he also experienced a shift in his emotions and values and that is very unusual for him (193-195) and also more important. Because when asked about his initial aims he stated that they were not relevant anymore (482) and that the shift in his values was far more important to the other two aims he has reached (480). Julia had expected to learn mainly skills and in the end she learned mainly attitudes and some skills (141-146). The new attitude she describes as: "that students don't need to learn what I think is relevant for them" (158-159). An example she gives is: "I thought I need to kind of get students where I think they need to communicate [orally] in English for example (…) But maybe that's not what they need. Maybe they want to know how to chat [on their computer] in English or whatever" (173-177).

When you divide learning into knowledge, skills and attitudes, a definition that is very commonly used within the Youth in Action programme these two examples show that the learning was mainly a shift in attitude even though learning skills and knowledge was also important, it was not what both emphasized that they got out. Also in the second evaluation form when we asked about the learning participants are seeing in their personal or professional lives they mainly referred to attitudes and ideas that they had taken from the course as well as specific methods ("sea of possibilities", "learning space dynamics") that they experienced in the training course.

This is something worth discussing in the preparation of a training course. Do we want there to be a balance between skills, knowledge and attitudes for people to learn? If yes, how can we ensure that we offer appropriate sessions. When you want people to practice skills what you could offer for example would be role-playing exercises.

Final steps of learning are happening back home

What is interesting is that both Carl and Julia said that they could only do the final steps of their learning in practice and back home. Carl sees the final step of his learning as taking action in his work back home and this is only possible after the course (184-186). Julia does not yet consider the new attitude she discovered as a real outcome for her professional development as she has not been teaching since the training course. However she wants to implement SDL in class and she already has some ideas about how to do that (426-438). This is again asking the question of whether transfer of learned things in training courses is possible or not and how to make sure that the learning connects to the reality back home so as to make this transfer easier. As the context is differing greatly from one participant to another this is also a challenge. However, one idea is to give and/or develop learning tasks with participants that they are likely to encounter in the future and look for possibilities to incorporate them into the training course (idea inspired by Gregory M. Francom 2010: 36). Maybe learning or discovering a new attitude or value needs the experience in the field and context to practice the necessary skills and to find the knowledge to support it. This would be certainly true for Carl and Julia.

The topic of how to transfer what has been learned during the training course into the reality back home is an important discussion. What can be helpful is to support this last step by offering action planning activities and project management on the last day.

We did offer three different activities to participants on how they wanted to harvest their learning: one was more metaphorical and asked them to symbolize their learning journey as a river, the second was an interview about the learning competences they had developed and the third step was a step by step action planning.

During a self-directed learning process, participants need to take many decisions of what they actually want to learn

The decision making process necessary during a learning activity where you have so many possibilities is crucial. “there were so many things happening and so many different workshops and the main problem I was facing was that I wanted to learn everything.” (Julia: 101-102) For Julia that was one of the challenges (104-105), but in the end she identified three different strategies to deal with the decision-making process: to follow her initial aims (209), to choose random things that appealed to her at the moment (211) and to get together with people whom she found really interesting (218-219). These are strategies used by Julia: to follow the initial aims, to go with the moment and also to go with people one finds interesting can be discussed and shown to participants also. One participant also noted in the evaluation form: “In the beginning I didn’t like the complete freedom but in the end it was very interesting to see how you started automatically trusting yourself a little bit better to pick out what and when you wanted to do t.” (evaluation form 2: 6). So the process itself also helps to grow in one’s ability to take decisions.

How can a non-linear process be visualized in a programme?

We told participants beforehand that there would be no pre-planned programme, but that we would create it together. Carl pointed out that there had been a programme, just not in the chronological sense of the word and that he actually is thinking how one can display the non-linearity of the process from the beginning on the wall (210-217).

This was also a discussion we had in the team. During one storytelling circle a participant said that it was hard to deal with the fact that there was no structure. After discussing this we realized that it is not so much that there is no structure, however it is a different kind of structure. The programme is not pre-planned and also not completely filled by the facilitators. To find a way of visualizing the non-linear process that people are going through would be an interesting aspect to make also the structure of the training course come more alive.

Role of peers

Peter Hofmann sees the peer element as really crucial element in the self-directed learning experience (122). One example is that people see they are not alone especially in situations that are difficult or where one is upset (129-134). This is a similar experience for Julia who stated that when she was lost it was great to talk to another participant who seemed to share the same feelings it made her feel that this was okay (391-394).

Another role can be to work together on commitments or learning projects and to support each other in this process (Hofmann: 134-136). Julia formulated how she would like the role of peers to be. For her it includes offering advice if asked and sometimes just listening and bringing the person forward maybe by asking questions. Furthermore peers are there also to offer new perspectives and to share (318-325). During the interview with Martin Cadee we also discussed that the ability to connect with others is an important quality in directing one's own learning process (338-340), which is also something Julia agreed upon (331-333). The importance of peers was clear to us as a team also through the most important learning moments where one to one conversations with other participants were stated as important by five people and discussions in groups was mentioned by ten people. For Carl being alongside the others helped him to reflect also on his own journey (453f). The discussions were seen as important as it gave time to reflect, to exchange experience and being confronted with different perspectives (e.g. evaluation form 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19). A proposal from one of the participants to foster the role of peers even more was to have reflection groups, which would be small groups where the day would be reflected and discussed together (evaluation form 8: 7). In the proposal it was seen as happening also with one of the facilitators present, however, it could also happen without in my opinion. Furthermore these reflection groups could also happen in the evening with one facilitator present and only those who want can join the group. The role of the facilitator in this process can be to give opportunities for peers to connect to each other, to connect people who are working on similar topics and to create opportunities for people to exchange.

Reflections on improving my practice

The third aspect and aim of my thesis was to better understand my practice and be able to be more explicit about what I do. The first step of this process can be read in the second chapter of this diploma thesis. It contains important elements of my work such as the Youth in Action programme, insights into my practice on what I do and who I work for, the training course "To live is to learn" as an example from my practice and a competence profile as a way of analysing my professional self-understanding. By writing

about those elements I had to find patterns, link different areas of my work and to systematically and critically look at what I am actually doing. In this process I had to make my reflections and thoughts explicit and I also developed a better understanding of how to describe to others what I do: I am a facilitator of learning in non-formal adult education. Before I called myself a trainer within the Youth in Action programme, but I have never been really happy with this description, as it did not entail all of the things I do. Furthermore I rarely met people who understood what I do, so I always had to explain myself. However, I already realized that the term adult education is more known and spread and non-formal education is quickly explained. I want to emphasize on how happy I am that I found a label that fits my practice.

As a second step I situated my practice in theories that complemented or described my understanding of learning such as constructivism especially socio-cultural aspects from educational psychology, situated learning from educational anthropology and humanism from educational philosophy. This can be read about in the third chapter of this diploma thesis. It was an empowering experience to read texts by authors working on theses issues that I have also experienced in my work. Additionally it also gave me important new insights into the learning process and the role of the facilitator. The most important aspects that I take with me for my practice are the ability to ask questions to let participants discover for themselves, to allow and give space to social interactions and the forming of a community of practice, to make sure the learning is close to real life scenarios so it can be transferred and to trust the learner's ability. Those things are not new to me, however, reading and reflecting about them strengthened my understanding about them and made me them more explicitly present in my practice. One thing that was especially relevant for me was the emphasis on the social nature of learning and how it is interweaving into our lives. Reading about the ideas of Lev Vygostky and theories about the situated nature of learning as well as educational anthropology made me aware of this. Now, I feel I actually have names and concepts that I can use to explain why I do what I do and how that is linked to learning and learning theories. Another aspect is to consciously give space to this aspect in projects I am developing and it has been really present with me in the trainings and workshop I did ever since I started to write and read for my thesis. And I can see the explicit awareness about this has already contributed to the quality of the work I do. Furthermore it is a useful and interesting aspects to further discuss with colleagues, especially when working with self-directed learning where the tension between individual and group work is present. An important concept in this context is also the theme-centred interaction (Cohn 1997: 161),

which entails a balance between subject, individual and group learning in the context of the global.

To make the outcomes of my research more accessible I also want to discuss the limitations that these findings contain.

Limitations

As the training course “To live is to learn” was a very specific field that ceased to exist, it also carries certain limitations that make some of the findings difficult to generalize. It was the only course looked upon and even though critical reflection was an integral part of my analysis, it still needs some further research to check upon the findings for the strategies that support the identification of learning needs and wishes. However, the insights and ideas present here are for sure serving as an inspiration and will contribute to the ongoing discourse about self-directed learning within the Youth in Action programme and hopefully also beyond. Other insights that developed out of “To live is to learn” can already be taken as an initial research interest and explored further.

Furthermore the reflections about my own practice are relevant first and foremost for my own learning and professional development. However, the process itself is something that for sure can be useful also to other trainers and facilitators in their personal and professional development.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

As the final step of my thesis I want to give an overview over the findings and insights regarding my research questions as well as share realizations and my learning after going through an Action Research process. I will end with some recommendations that are hopefully useful to other facilitators and trainers who consider doing the same.

Conclusions

My research question was to see how participants can be supported in identifying what they want and need to learn in the process of a training course that is based on self-directed learning. As a team of trainers, Ann Daniels, Lenka Uhrova and me prepared many different strategies for the training course “To live is to learn” to support this process.

During the preparation phase we set up an online platform that contained articles, photos and videos about learning and self-directed learning, exercises to identify current learning needs and also the possibility to read a blog by the facilitators. We furthermore offered the possibility to have a talk one on one with one of the facilitators (What’s up talks) and three learning chats during the time of the preparation.

During the course we decided to gradually hand over more responsibility to the learners, create an inspiring learning environment, to offer them a “sea of possibilities” of how to approach their days (individual talks with facilitators, discussion groups, library, internet research, sessions offered by the facilitators and participants, Skype talks with experts, a creative table with arts supplies, games, the possibility to visit inspiring learning venues in Reykjavik, reflection cards and going for a walk), created space for individual and group learning, a way of keeping updated about each person’s learning process, how to be available as a resource to the group in self-directed learning and important aspects of the role of the facilitators in SDL. All of these strategies were evaluated with the help of a written mid-term evaluation of participants, the evaluation forms handed in by participants (one at the end of the course, the second one online one month after the course), the final reflections of the team, two interviews made with participants from “To live is to learn”, three expert interviews with Peter Hofmann, an Austrian trainer and facilitator, Naomi den Besten, a Dutch learning consultant, and Martin Cadee, a Dutch social entrepreneur and participants observation during the course.

Here I want to give a summary about the main outcomes when it comes to choosing and employing strategies for supporting learners in identifying their learning needs and wishes.

One of the assumptions I had when starting this research was that the preparation phase would be crucial to support the identification of learning needs. However, the participants already had to fill in an application form and apply for the course. Hence they knew why they wanted to come for the course. But they also learned other important things that were not related to their initial aims. So it is not so much about supporting participant to have one concrete aim and to follow through with this, but rather to constantly help them decide on which of the potential learning needs they wish to follow at any given moment. Hence, when wanting to support learners to identify their learning needs and wishes it is important to offer a great variety of options to choose from in every step of the process. All the tools and methods we offered before and during the course were seen as very helpful and supportive by at least one person. To offer diversity is crucial to accommodate the different preferred learning ways. It is a good idea to check with participants for example via an evaluation form or talking with them directly to find out if the offers are really fitting their current needs and what needs to be changed. To show participants what they can potentially choose from (Naomi den Besten: 477f) and what they can ask for is helping them to gradually take on more and more responsibility for their learning process. This range of possibilities was present in “To live is to learn” in the preparation process, as well as during the training course as options of how to spend the day learning as well as in the setting of the room where different possibilities to work and learn offered a big variety of strategies to identify and also meet one’s learning needs.

The gradual approach of handing over of responsibility of the learning process during the course was a good idea. However, and varies throughout the duration of the course of how little or how much support participants need it. Therefore it is still recommendable to continue to be present regularly and offer sessions around the topic of the course, which supports learners to become more familiar with the concept. However these should be clearly marked as optional so as to give participants the choice whether or not they take up this kind of support.

After the first day we only had one activity planned that was compulsory, which was the storytelling circle, where the whole group came together and shared stories and reflection each day. To have a balance between a group process in addition to the rather

individual self-directed learning process is important. Participants mentioned that they want to have both space for their individual learning as well as experience a group learning process. As a facilitator one's role is to keep a balance and offer more or less individual or group related activities depending on what is missing. One conclusion for us was to start every day in the morning together as a whole group, to play some games and also speak about the upcoming day and to have a story telling circle every day at 17.30.

The attitude of the facilitators that is coherent with the approach was very much appreciated by the participants. The roles and actions one takes as a facilitator in an SDL process are tricky to name as they depend on the needs of the specific person. However, it is important to be willing to step into different roles and stay flexible about what is coming up during the course. We saw ourselves at different points as coaches, listeners, guides, lecturers, facilitators, presenters, reflectors, critical friends, advisors… depending on how participants wanted to be supported.
What was especially helpful for us as a team was the trust we had established amongst each other so to be able to honestly and constructively discuss tensions we faced when facilitating a SDL based process. Some of the tensions to be aware of are:

- Group versus individual learning
- The focus on one's own needs makes you not as available for others
- Balancing learning knowledge, skills and attitudes
- Transfering the learning
- Process versus product orientation
- Participants focusing on the goals versus going with the flow

There are also additional insights that stemmed from the research but were not directly connected with the research questions. They were: Participants learned mostly attitudes rather than skills and knowledge. And they saw the final steps of their learning process to be only possible after coming back home again. The role of peers was important in the process, which is something we did not prepare for much in the team.

The final point of conclusions is my process of becoming more aware of why I do what I do. Through making my knowledge more explicit I became more aware of a term that described what I do: I am a facilitator of learning in non-formal adult education. Even though I was aware of the existence of all of these terms before it was through the Action Research and by looking systematically at my practice that made me aware of the

nuances and implications that these words carry and that this is how I want to label myself. The whole process also made me more confident as a facilitator as I am able to talk specifically about my role and why I do what I do and what I do. Also, my awareness of the social processes going on in a learning environment and the idea of critical reflection as an important aspect of learning increased.
As mentioned in the introduction, I see this process of conducting Action Research also as an opportunity to bring important insights from my field into the academic discourse. I therefore want to give some recommendations and learning from my own process to support other facilitators and trainers who want to go through a similar process.

Recommendations: My learning about Action Research as a facilitator of learning

I would like to first of all describe the process itself, how I discovered Action Research and what I found really useful in it. Then I would like to give some specific recommendations for other facilitators and trainers who would like to use Action Research to improve their practice and generate more knowledge about it.

When I started to think about writing my thesis it was extremely important that it would be relevant to me and to others. I did not want to spend the time to write a hundred pages without getting a practical benefit from the process. So I knew I wanted to write about my work, however, I was not sure how to approach this kind of research. When I discovered Action Research as a concept to do academic research I was really enthusiastic as it combined both the theoretical and the empirical aspect that I was looking for. Furthermore the process was somehow familiar to me: to look back at one's actions and to reflect and then to prepare another action is something inherent in the logic of my work. However, often these processes as part of my work are done in a hurry at the end of a five days training course. And in my experience it is more a general evaluation than really looking at one specific question. Action Research offered me a way to systematically and critical engage in a reflection process about my work. The cyclic nature of planning, acting, reflecting and then planning again gave me a basic structure to organize my experiences and thoughts around. Even though it was exactly this cyclic process that made it sometimes hard to write about it, it was also supporting my insights.
I found it an enriching and also challenging experience, but it definitely gave me important insights into my research question about self-directed learning and into my practice, which I want to share with others:

1) Take time to find your starting point and try to get some observations about it first

Even though this recommendation is also written in each book and article about Action Research that I read (Altrichter and Posch 1998, Water-Adams 2006) and I thought I had taken enough time, in the end I found out, I didn't. Even though my research question about supporting participants to identify learning needs and wishes is very relevant to my practice, I did not realize that participants who applied to a training course and had already filled in an application form mostly know why they come to a training course and also know what they want and need to learn. I still believe my research question to be very relevant, however, my assumptions and strategies might have looked different if I had had that awareness all along. Had I had the chance to do a training course based on self-directed learning before "To live is to learn" I would have definitely changed my research question and made different assumptions. However, the process of Action Research is emerging and exploratory and these kinds of realizations form part of the learning process. As a recommendation I would try to get a good understanding of the situation one actually wants to improve, and to choose something that one has the chance to observe once just to see if it fits as a research question before actually doing an Action Research about it.

2) Action Research is an exploratory process – take it as a learning

When I realized that I had made the assumptions that people would have very few ideas about what they wanted to learn when coming to "To live is to learn" and that this was not the case, at the first moment I felt stupid. I reproached myself to not have followed the process correctly and that I had not read enough. However, I soon realized that this is part of the process. It is an exploration of the topic and there is the intention to find out more things about it. Things might not turn out the way you thought, however, try to see it as a learning process.

3) Choose a variety of methods (method triangluation)

What was really helpful for me in the process was that I chose so many different methods to inquire into my research question. As part of the course we used evaluation forms that are anyways used during training courses and I added some questions that were important for my research. This made the evaluation form longer and it took more time than planned. This is why two people asked also to get more time to fill it in. This is something one needs to be aware of when deciding to do so. We also sent a second

evaluation form via Google docs after one month with additional question. We announced this to people beforehand stating also that this would be part of my research.
I also did interviews with participants and experts about the topic of self-directed learning. Other data that I used was: notes made during the preparation meeting in Prague and all the Skype talks we had in the team, mind maps, notes on discussions with colleagues and the application forms of participants. All of these are things that are anyways available to facilitators and researchers. It is "just" a matter of actually keeping them and taking the time to analyse them, which is certainly time consuming.

4) Action Research takes time – hence plan for time during your educational activities

I was also doing participant observation as one of my methods, however, during the training course I hardly found time to do, as I was so busy with other things. If I had planned one hour or 45min each day to dedicate to participant observations and take notes of what I see, it would for sure have been possible. However, this needs planning and also discussions in the team about how this is possible. My recommendation is to plan extra time during a training course or educational activity for things to do for your research so you are able to do all the things you set out to do.

5) Doing Action Research has an impact on your team – discuss about it

My team members Ann Daniels and Lenka Uhrova were very supportive of my endeavour, as the research question was also relevant to them. We worked well together as a team and spend a lot of time discussing the different strategies we wanted to employ. When I asked if we could do a second evaluation form they were okay with this as well as when I wanted to ask about every single tool and method we had proposed in the evaluation form as they both saw this as a way for them also to improve their practice.

6) Critical friends are very important

When doing Action Research, especially first person Action Research, a lot of it is happening in the head of the researcher. It is one's own practice, one's own reflections, and one's own questions. To have the chance to discuss one's ideas with other people and also get someone to read drafts was crucial to my process. It was thanks to them that I realized new things, but also questioned some of my habits. I am extremely thankful to all the people who supported me. The feedback I got from my critical friends was that they were all interested in my research and wanted to know how I approached it

and that they also benefited from our discussions. I chose people as critical friends who I knew would be interested in the topic of self-directed learning and were familiar with my field of work, which worked well for me.

All in all the writing of this thesis has been an empowering, challenging and highly rewarding experience. It was exactly what I wanted it to be: relevant, generating more knowledge about my field of work and improving my practice as a facilitator of learning.

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Cadee, Martin, 20.09.2012

Carl, Skype, 08.09.2012

Den Besten, Naomi, Skype, 06.07.2012

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Figures, tables and pictures

Figures

Tables

Pictures

Annex

Annex 1: Call for participants “To live is to learn”

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To live is to learn

Self-directed learning (SDL) as an approach towards life and education

The essentials

Dates: 20st -26th May 2012

Venue: Reykjavík, Iceland

Application deadline: 4th March 2012

Selection results: 15th March 2012

This training course is financed by the Youth in Action programme as a TCP training course supported by the Icelandic National Agency.

We want to explore what it takes to enable an individual or a group to direct their own learning, be it as an attitude towards life or as an educational approach.

Menntun og menning

Evrópa unga fólksins

Exploring self-directed learning

Have you asked yourself:
what is self-directed learning?
what do I want to learn about self-directed learning?
what way do I learn best?
what drives me in my learning?
...And how can I support self-directed learning processes?

Self-directed learning means that you decide what you want to learn, how you wish to learn, what kind of support you need and when you have learned enough. It makes you fully responsible for your learning process. Normally a trainer or a teacher would decide all of this for you, we won't do that.

We all want to learn and grow to face the challenges of our lives. How cool would it be if we could feel in charge of our own learning? If we could take a proactive role? This is what self-directed learning can bring you. The benefit is that you can make sure you learn exactly what you need to learn.

Once you have figured out how to direct your own learning, we will support you to figure out how to support others in directing their learning. What does it take to enable an individual or a group to direct his/their own learning? How can you balance providing support with giving space and freedom?

Process of **this learning** course

Objectives

- ❑ Let participants experience SDL as a learner,
- ❑ Share experiences, ideas, visions, doubts and challenges connected to SDL,
- ❑ Reflect on SDL from a meta level as a supporter of SDL processes,
- ❑ Strengthen and enrich the educational approach of supporters of SDL processes,
- ❑ Support the transfer of SDL as a tool, approach or idea into relevant areas of participants´ lives.

Duration of the course:

Self-directed learning is a process that takes time. Our experience shows that figuring out what it is you want to learn is not a process that is happening in 5 days. **Therefore the learning course will start already in the end of March with an online preparation phase.** This part of the process will be essential to understand yourself as a self-directed learner better. For this preparation phase you need **approx. 1-2 hours per week.**
After the selection process we will provide you with more detailed information on how this preparation process is going to work.

Methodology

The course will be based on self-directed learning as an educational approach. This means that participants and facilitators are self-directed learners and share a common experience and journey on the topic of self-directed learning.
The facilitators will share openly their experiences, challenges and achievements on SDL with the participants as a contribution to the joint learning process. The methods and content of the programme will be co-created with the participants during the preparation process, this means there is no programme yet.
Different styles and preferences of learning will be taken into account. A holistic approach to learning is implemented by the facilitators.

Facilitators of Learning

Ann Daniels (Belgian living in Belgium; www.trainstorm.org)

Anna Wohlesser (Austrian living in Poland; becomingachangemaker.tumblr.com)

Lenka Uhrova (Slovak living in Iceland; www.rokstolar.com)

We all have a lot of experiences in faciltating international learning courses:

...all 3 of us had an intense experience as SDL learners during 9 months learning process as part of Training of Trainers
...we have implemented self directed learning as an educational approach in courses concerning Youth Initiatives, EVS, self development, communitiy building and active participation.

We will support you in:

… finding your learning needs connected to SDL
… organizing your own learning
… reflecting on your ups and down while trying SDL out
… talking about learning and living and learning to live and living to learn

Anna Wohlesser is doing research about how to support self directed learning. The course will be used as an example in her research.

Application process

Profile of participants
You are willing to explore SDL processes in trainings, Youth Initiatives or EVS,

You can be active during the whole duration of the process (preparation before, the course itself and evaluation afterwards),

You have a sufficient level of English as a working language.

How to apply
The application is online, so please apply here right now or at the latest by 4th March 2012 midnight.
The selection will be done by the Icelandic National Agency for the Youth in Action program together with the sending National Agencies.
The selection results will be communicated on the 15th March so you can book your travel in time.
Once you are selected you will get an info pack with all the information relevant you need on logistics, preparation and the online platform.

Costs
Costs of participation, food, accommodation and programme costs are covered by the Icelandic National Agency for those selected.
Your travel arrangement and travel costs are to be discussed with your National Agency for Youth in Action, so please contact them directly.

Annex 2: Programme of the training course "To live is to learn"

	May 20th Sunday	May 21st Monday	May 22nd Tuesday			May 23th Wednesday			May 24th Thursday			May 25th Friday			May 26th Saturday
til 9.30	breakfast														
morning session 1	arrival day	Getting to know each other and introduction to the course (SDL intro and Learning Theories intro)	Programme of the day and explanation of 'sea of possibilities' - course support measures	Empathy and listening (trainer´s input)	Definition of SDL / Self-study / Coaching	Tapping and how systems change	Participant's school visit	What's up talks/Self-study	Opening of the day and recap of choices	Norðlingaskóli visit / Conference on green growth and welfare	What's up talks/Self-study	Opening of the day and recap of choices	Challenges in using SDL within training courses	Silence workshop / Self-study / What's up talks	departure day
11.00 - 11.30		Coffee break													
morning session 2		Aims of the course, programme presentation and common course visioning	Kitchen table group: SDL with disadvantaged youngsters	Body work and meditation	How to implement SDL at schools? / Self-study / Coaching	Input via skype on Motivation	Participant's school visi	What's up talks/Self-study	Input via skype on Learning environment and **12.45 - closing of the day together**	Norðlingaskóli visit / Conference on green growth and welfare and **12.45 - closing of the day together**	What's up talks / Self-study	Methods and games market	Youthpass input	SDL goes formal / Self-study /What's up talks	
13.00 - 15.00		lunch													
afternoon session 1		Learning Space Dynamics: Learning about SDL using a method of SDL	15.00 - 16.00 Hitt Húsið visit and debriefing			Non-violent communication and its tools in practice	What's up talks / Self-study	Discussion group: SDL in formal education	free afternoon			Briding with reality back home: 3 different methods offered: Learning Interview / Learning river / Concrete action planning			
16.30 - 17.00		Coffee break													
afternoon session 2		Story telling circle (share powerful stories of the day)	Story telling circle (share powerful stories of the day)			Story telling circle (share powerful stories of the day)						Closing story telling/Evaluation and cleaning the room			
18.30	dinner														
20.00	welcome evening and sharing of what brought you here											dinner out			

Note: From Tuesday on, paralel to the sessions offered in the programme, pax had their individual learning paths, be it alone (self-study), with their peers or trainers (there was always one trainer available for What's up talks). Sessionss that emerged are marked blue.

Annex 3: Mid-term evaluation

To live is to learn - Feedback sheet

23.05.2012

How do you feel?

What is happening during the course that is meeting your needs? (Please be as specific as possible and give us concrete examples)

What is not meeting your needs? (Please be as specific as possible and give us concrete examples)

What is it that you can still do in order for your needs to be met?

How can we as a facilitators help you in that?

Annex 4: Evaluation form I

Evaluation form To live is to learn

Preparation phase

What's up talks

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

_____

Finding your starting point exercises (automatic writing, collage, free writing...)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

_____

Library and articles

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

_____

Learning chat (1st one with Anna, 2nd one with Ann, 3rd one with Lenka)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

_____

Videos

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

_____

What was benefitial for you during the preparation phase?

What was limiting you during the preparation phase?

What was the impact of the preparation before the course?

Support measures during the course

What's up talks (Coaching, listening, going for a walk, kitchen table)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Discussion groups (based on the needs during the course)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Library (including advice from trainers to recommend relevant material)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Internet research (Course resources updated and recommended internet sites)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Hit Husit – Youth Centre

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Runa's school

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Nordlingaskoli

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Skype talks (Salvi on motivation and Naomi on creative work spaces)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Creative table with paint and paper

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Reflection cards with exercises to use (Haiku, Concept map, Automatic writing)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Magical cubes and other games

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

Learning venues (interesting places in Reykjavik – libraries, bookshops, museums)

Very helpful □ □ □ □ □ Not helpful □ Did not use it

Comments:_____

_____

The course in general

Reflecting back to the needs and expectations you had when starting this course, which of these needs and expectations were fullfilled and which were not?

What are 3 activities you did during the course that you consider the most important and why?

How are you planning on using SDL further? Please, also specify if you are planning to use it within the Youth in Action program context. (concrete actions within the next six months)

What are, according to you, the advantages and disadvantages of SDL?

What could have supported your learning process better during the course? What was really helpful?

How do you see the role of the facilitators in supporting your learning process? What could have been different? What was great?

Please comment and make notes about these aspects of the course.

accomodation:

food:

NA support:

information before the course:

seminar room:

Any other comments you might have

Thank you for supporting our learning by filling out this questionnaire!
Ann, Anna and Lenka

Annex 5: Evaluation form II

Online evaluation: To live is to learn
13. June 2012

How are you?
How are things you have learned visible in your personal and/or private life? Please give some concrete examples if possible.
How would you describe the course now? (feel free to use metaphors from nature or any form that works for you)
When thinking about doing the course again, what would you keep from To live is to learn?
And what would you change?
What are the most important learning moments that you can see now, when thinking back to the course?
What helped you in transferring what you have learned during the course to your personal and/or professional life?
Anna can contact me if she wants to use my insights for writing her diploma thesis: Yes (Please fill in your name if you ticked this box, so Anna can contact you) / No
Name

Annex 6: Abstract in English

„Identifying learning needs – an anthropological Action Research about facilitating self-directed learning“ is the anthropological Action Research of the author Anna Wohlesser about her practice as a trainer/facilitator in non-formal adult education. She is situating her practice in relevant theories about learning such as constructivism, humanism, situated learning and socio-cultural learning to get a better understanding about her work and make her knowledge about it explicit. She is furthermore looking at strategies to support learners to identify their learning needs when using self-directed learning (SDL) as the educational approach. SDL means the learners decide when, what and how they want to learn and take the responsibility for their learning process. Her case study is the five days residential training „To live is to learn“ organized within the Youth in Action programme in May 2012 in Iceland. Her methodological approach was influenced by the "ethnologische Haltung" and consisted of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. For facilitating self-directed learning it is important to offer a variety and diversity of methods and tools that give learners the opportunity to choose their own paths within an educational activity.

Annex 7: Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

„Identifying learning needs – an anthropological Action Research about self-directed learning“ ist eine anthropologische Aktionsforschung der Autorin Anna Wohlesser über ihre Arbeit als Trainerin/Facilitatorin in der non-formalen Erwachsenenbildung. Sie situiert dabei ihre Arbeit und Erfahrungen in relevanten Lerntheorien wie Konstruktivismus, Humanismus, Situiertes Lernen und soziokulturelles Lernen und macht dabei ihre Annahmen und ihr Wissen aus acht Jahren Erfahrungen in diesem Feld explizit. Außerdem untersucht sie Strategien um Lerner dabei zu unterstützen ihre Lernbedürfnisse zu identifizieren. Diese Fragestellung ist relevant, da der pädagogische Ansatz des selbstbestimmten Lernens die Lernenden auffordert sich selber zu überlegen was, wann und wie sie lernen wollen. Die Fallstudie für diese empirische Forschung ist das fünftägige Training im Rahmen von Jugend in Aktion „To live is to learn“ das im Mai 2012 in Island stattgefunden hat. Hier handelt es sich um ein Training zum Thema selbstbestimmtes Lernen, das auch auf diesem Ansatz basiert. Durch teilnehmende Beobachtung, Interviews mit TeilnehmerInnen und ExpertInnen und der Auswertung von Fragebögen hat die Autorin die Strategien die in dem Training angewandt wurden analysiert. Vor allem ist es wichtig den Lernenden eine große Auswahl an unterschiedlichen Methoden und Wegen aufzuzeigen. Diese Wahlmöglichkeiten erleichtern den Lernenden die Entscheidungen über die nächsten relevanten Schritte in ihren Lernprozessen. Angewandte Anthropologie und die „ethnologische Haltung“ waren dabei ein weitere wichtiger Kontext für die Forschung. Zum Abschluss geht sich noch auf ihre eigenen Lernerfahrung mit anthropologischer Aktionsforschung ein und gibt Empfehlungen ab für andere TrainerInnen die diesen Ansatz selber ausprobieren wollen.

Anna Wohlesser, 10.06.1985
TEL: 0043 (0) 699 10471753
annawohlesser@gmail.com

Work experience

7.2012	Facilitation and organization of international training course **Topsy Turvy – thinking and learning in a non-linear world** in Hilversum, the Netherlands Dutch National Agency of Youth in Action (5 days)
5.2012	Facilitation and organization of the international training course **To live is to learn – self-directed learning as an approach towards life and education** in Reykjavik, Iceland Icelandic National Agency of Youth in Action (5 days)
9.2011	Expert facilitation for the **European-North American Conference on Youth Participation** in Vienna, Austria UNESCO Austria (2 days)
2.2011 – 1.2013	Organizer and trainer for **JUMUW** at the Institute for Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Vienna. Research cooperation in the frame of Sparkling Science. Pupils from Viennese Hauptschulen get to know how to do social scientific research to discover their intercultural life worlds. Institute for Cultural and Social Anthropology (2 years)
2.2011	Facilitator for the international Grundtvig workshop **Lead the way – Self directed learning in theory and practice** in Utrecht, the Netherlands Training Adventures (5 days)
Since 2011	**Trainer for the Polish National Agency** mainly working with European Voluntary Service: On-Arrival, Mid Term Meeting and new Hosting Organizations.
9.2010	Trainer and organizer at the international training course **Reclaim it! - Creative participation in public space** about using the public space to actively participate in society in Warsaw, Poland Fundacja Emma – Education, Media, Marketing and Art (7 days)
10.2008 – 1.2009	Tutor at the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Vienna **Multicultural Classroom – a classroom of researchers** with Dr. Anna Streissler Awarded with the main price of the Bank Austria for the most innovative course at the University of Vienna in 2008 (4 months)
3.2008	Trainer and organizer for the international training course **Paint your own picture - anOTHER training on participation**. Empowerment, creativity and participation through self-directed learning in Rezekne, Latvia Latvian National Agency for Youth in Action (10 days)
Since 2007	**Trainer for the Austrian National Agency of the Youth in Action programme**. Pre Departure, On Arrival Training, Mid Term Meetings and Final Evaluation meetings for EVS volunteers. Trainings for mentors, mentors and mentees, Youth Exchange leaders. (All together around 50) Publication for EVS volunteers.
9.2006 – 5.2007	Volunteer at the **Coordinating organization Grenzenlos** in Vienna, Austria. Supporting 18 EVS volunteers in their life and learning (9 months)
8.2006	Organization and facilitation of the international Youth Exchange **Cirque de l'Europe**. Young people with and without disabilities are creating a circus in Graz, Austria (2 weeks)
2. – 11.2007	**Let's communicate! How to work in an international group that doesn't speak a common language** A publication that is illustrated with pictures of young photographers and a common exhibition as a Future Capital in the frame of the Youth in Action Programme (9 months)
Since 2006	Active in the **Rückenwind** strategy that support young people with fewer opportunities in the frame of the Youth in Action Programme.
2.2004 – 2.2005	**European Voluntary Service** in the frame of the Youth in Action programme in the

youth organisation Semper Avanti in Wroclaw, Poland. Organizing activates for polish and international young people

Non-formal education

9.2007 – 6.2008	**SALTO Training of Trainers** in Austria, Turkey and Germany International training course for trainers within the Youth in Action Programme (9 months)
Since 2004	Relevant seminar and training courses on the topics of mediation, non-violent communication, Council, group dynamics, singing, learning theories and self-development.

Formal education

2.2009 – 6.2009	Studying **Political Science at the University of Warsaw, Poland** in the frame of the ERASMUS Programme
2005 – 2009	**Bachelor in Political Science**, graduated with distinction
Since 10.2005	Studying **Social and Cultural Anthropology** at the University of Vienna, Austria
7.2003	Matura, graduated with distinction
7.2001 – 1.2002	Student in Antofagasta, Chile within the AFS exchange program

Publications

All about Austria – Tips und Infos für deinen EFD in Österreich. 2010

Paint your own picture – Ideas, tools and methods to support self directed learning.
Handbook 2009

Let's communicate! – Working with an international youth group that doesn't speak a common language.
Methodology book 2007

Language	**Understanding**	**Writing**	**Speaking**
German	Mother tongue	Mother tongue	Mother tongue
English	Fluent	Fluent	Fluent
Polish	Fluent	Good	Fluent
Spanish	Fluent	Good	Fluent
French	Fluent	Fluent	Fluent