

# VALMOPPRIS

## A Guidebook for Validation: Non-formal and Informal Learning

For facilitators, educators and  
professionals working in European  
Prisons and closed environments



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Validation and Motivation for (in)formal Learning in Prison

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# FOREWORD

## Who are we?

We are a group of dedicated professionals representing institutions and organisations from across Europe. Five of our partners deliver education in prisons and community justice settings in France, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania and Scotland. Working alongside us, we have two educational partners: die Berater who specialise in adult education training and programmes, and blinc eG who specialise in educational networking and training concepts, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The project team has worked for two years with Erasmus+ funding to explore the motivational benefits of validating competences developed through engagement with non-formal and informal learning.



## What is this document and who is it for?

As part of the VALMOPRIS project, over 30 experienced practitioners from 5 European countries designed non-formal learning activities for delivery in prisons and criminal justice settings. These practitioners work in a range of prison and criminal justice settings – as teachers, workshop leaders, psychologists, and probation workers. These competence-oriented learning activities were designed to allow these practitioners to apply a validation methodology to measure the competence progress of their learners.

We believe that non-formal and informal learning can allow for a creative approach to fostering individualised learning. The flexibility of these types of learning activity can be empowering for practitioners; but, more importantly, they can inspire engagement, personal development, and revitalise a desire to learn for reluctant learners. However, without validation, competence development can be difficult for learners to recognise and more challenging for practitioners to demonstrate.

This guidebook considers the concepts and practicalities of competence development and validation, and offers insights from participating professionals and learners to help you think about the possible benefits of validation for your own learners. Alongside this document we have produced a competence framework tailored for prison settings and a training course which provide the 'tools' and information necessary to undertake competence-oriented learning and its validation in prisons and closed environments.

One of our participants spoke about the VALMOPRIS training:

*“This training allows me to explore just how to evaluate and validate those important but informal aspects of the learning process. Many of the important messages of a play happen between the lines and off stage, and so too does much important learning occur between and outside the formal learning situation, and often in quite unexpected ways. I am keen to explore how best to enable and encourage prisoners to pursue their own learning. Nothing is more exciting than a student getting so motivated, inspired – or just itchy with curiosity – that they come back the next week with their own ideas that they want the whole class to explore.”*

**Stewart**  
Creative Writing Facilitator

## Why validate non-formal learning in prisons?

Non-formal learning opportunities, and their validation, can have a demonstrable benefit; building motivation through the visible development of competences whilst allowing learners to enter the process at their own level and progress at their own pace.

Validation can foster more efficacious, self-aware, and critical learners; learners who have the competences, self-knowledge, and capacities to engage in further learning. When a prison learner chooses to engage in a 'learning future' it can further improve their chances of social reintegration, through enhanced social capital and a sense of agency. This is the key goal of our work in prison education – to help our learners to build their capacity to desist from crime.

Yet, valuable competences – so frequently developed through informal and non-formal learning – are rarely validated and certified by learning providers. This leaves a huge amount of progress and development that cannot be demonstrated or proven to potential stakeholders beyond the prison context. Furthermore, beyond prison, there are huge obstacles to overcome. Lack of housing, low employment prospects, familial and community instability, and lack of post-prison support can all act as barriers making desistance from crime more difficult. Therefore, validation represents a tremendous opportunity for those working within a range of prison learning environments.

The VALMOPRIS partnership believe that the validation of informal and non-formal learning can help former prisoners to cope with the challenges beyond prison. Through validation, we can demonstrate learners' competence development in areas such as communication, critical thinking, self-reflection and autonomy, to name but a few. This, in turn, can help build a learner's confidence in presenting evidence of their personal development to agencies such as employers, educational institutions, etc. Our hope, is that this will help learners to develop a pro-social identity, which is so critical post-release.

Here's what a group of practitioners working in prisons and trained in our validation methodology had to say on the matter when we asked them 'How could prisoners benefit from the validation of their competences?'

*It encourages the capacity of learning to learn...and to respect the value of non-formal and informal learning*

*It can develop intrinsic and extrinsic motivation – recognition of the potential for growth and your own humanity*

*It can help learners to access prospects and opportunities on the outside (open doors to society) and, of course, it can help with employability*

*It can create encouragement – an affirmation of one's efforts which can still the mind*

*It's very important that someone believes in you... helps you to believe in yourself*

## HOW COULD PRISONERS BENEFIT FROM THE VALIDATION OF THEIR COMPETENCES?

*It can help with self-confidence... taking responsibility for your own life to avoid reoffending*

*It's great, but be careful to prioritise the impact of the activity being careful not to 'over-focus' on the recording/validation*

*It can help learners to feel more able to connect with society*

*It helps learners to measure the distance travelled in learning*

*Learners can enjoy recognition of their efforts*

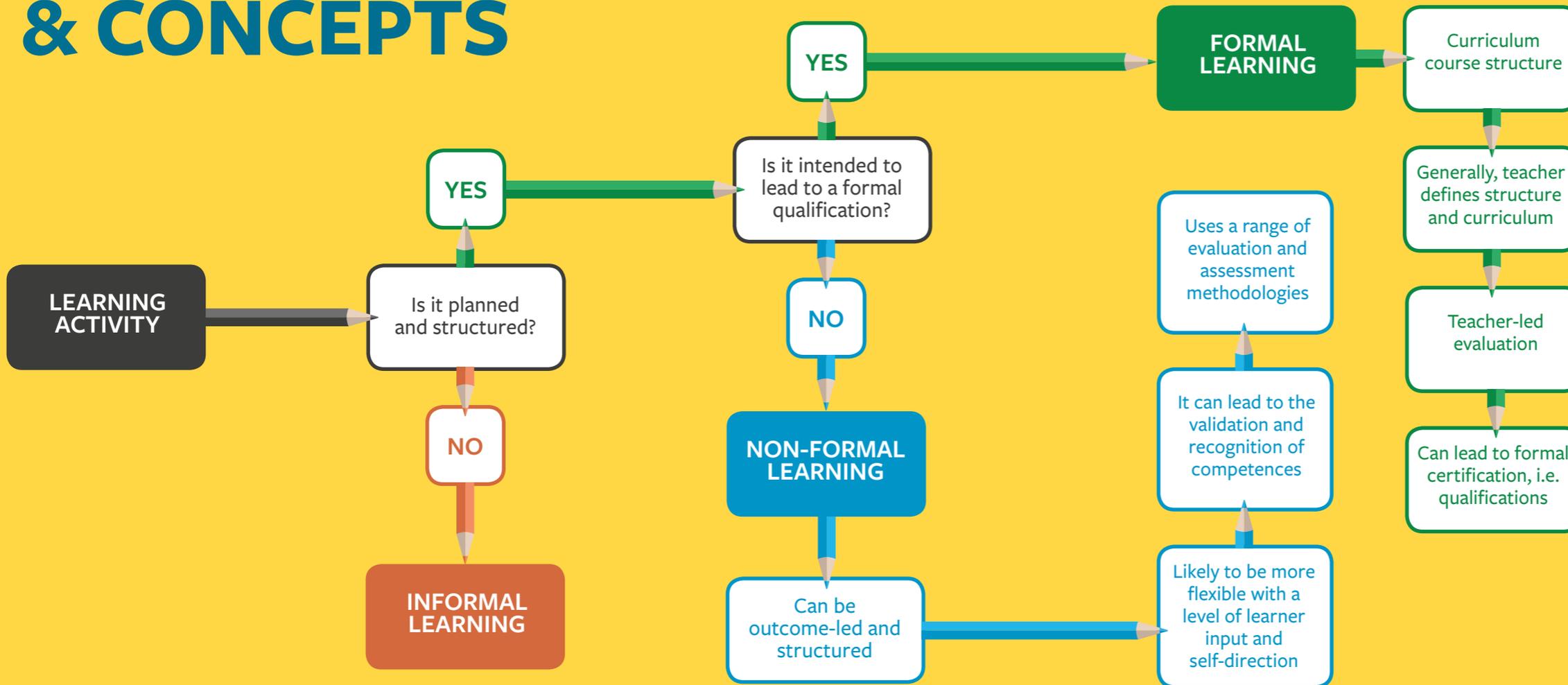
*Prison learners will benefit from working towards a goal/objective but without the pressure of needing to pass*

*It can help to rehabilitate – provide evidence of time well-spent for other agencies and the prison/justice system*

*Learners can gain a sense of achievement*

*It will raise self-esteem*

# A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE TERMS & CONCEPTS



## Formal, informal and non-formal learning

**Formal learning** tends to be teacher-directed and organised by some form of curriculum. Formal learning follows a clear set of goals and objectives. It is intentional from the learner's point of view; it is generally assessed, and it typically leads to certification.

**Non-formal learning** is also organised, but it typically does not lead to certification and is less likely to be linked to the national qualifications frameworks. Non-formal learning can be intentional but this type of learning tends to focus on aspects crucial to personal development.

**Informal Learning** tends to occur through the experiences of day-to-day situations; 'life lessons'. However, this type of experiential learning is often unintentional but can occur as a by-product of more organised learning. There may, therefore, be a time when this learning would benefit from validation.

### Note

*It's important to remember that there is a bit of flexibility in how the terms non-formal and informal learning are defined. There are often crossovers and slight contradictions within the definitions. Because of this, we've used both non-formal and informal within our project tagline.*

## What is the difference between evaluation, assessment, validation, & certification?

**Evaluation** is the process of observing and measuring a thing for the purpose of judging it and determining its 'value' or 'worth', generally by comparison to an agreed standard.

**Assessment** involves a process of observing or measuring the effectiveness of something. 'Summative' assessment measures the end-point: how well the learner has done or how much the learner has achieved. A 'formative' assessment is measured for the purpose of improving something. It is learner-centred, course-based and not graded.

**Validation** is the process where a competent person formally recognises the progress of others: it establishes if the assessment is correct. When validation is embedded in an educational framework, e.g., the European Qualifications Framework, it will allow the production of a certificate, and thus **Certification** of the person's attainment.

## What is the European Qualifications Framework?

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which was formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in April 2008, is a European-wide qualifications framework which joins the qualifications of different EU members together. Individuals and employers can thus use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries, as well as different education and training systems. The EQF aims to facilitate mobility of students and workers within the EU in order to encourage the development of a mobile and flexible workforce throughout Europe and to help develop lifelong learning.



## What are competences?

A **Competence** is the ability to do something successfully – blending **knowledge, skills and attitudes** in a particular situation.

Within European policy, there has been a big push towards the development and validation of key competences, often aligned with 21st century skills. These include the traits and abilities that policy-makers believe are vital for individual learners to operate, meet demands, and thrive in an increasingly dynamic and competitive knowledge-based society. On a community level, the development and measurement of competences can help with sustainable development and social cohesion, through an active and engaged citizenship.

In 2006, the European Parliament & Council gave their recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning.

**The framework introduces eight key competences:**

- 1 Communicating in a mother tongue
- 2 Communicating in a foreign language
- 3 Mathematical, scientific and technological competence
- 4 Digital competence
- 5 Learning to learn
- 6 Social and civic competences
- 7 Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- 8 Cultural awareness and expression

**Transversal competences** are those which can be learned and developed in one context and utilised in many other social and employment contexts. In this respect, they look to the future – they are cross-curricular and transferable – and are now considered for their potential to set learners 'on a path to lifetime learning'.

**Competence-oriented learning is considered important for a range of collective goals:**

### Competence-Oriented Learning (COL)

#### Benefits for individuals

- Employment & income
- Participation & engagement in political & social spheres
- Personal development
- Health & wellbeing
- Potential to motivate

#### Benefits for educators

- Learner-centred instruction
- Individualised progress
- Applies to all forms of learning
- Supports lifelong learning
- Localises authority
- Greater autonomy, creativity, flexibility

#### Benefits for society

- Economic productivity
- Adaptable & robust workforce
- Improved engagement in social & democratic processes
- Social cohesion & greater equity
- Modernisation & connectivity

## How can we measure competence development? Approaches to assessment

When assessing competence development we need to move from ‘closed’ approaches, typical of formal learning, where questions target correct answers and a tallying of marks result in a pass or fail. In measuring competences, facilitators use ‘open’ approaches to assessment, to allow an individual to demonstrate their capacity and progress.

But competences can cover a wide range of capacities. They can be simple (e.g. sharing an opinion or potting a plant) or complex (e.g. knowing how to guide others to communicate appropriately in different situations or an awareness of nutrients required for vascular plant care). One of the primary benefits of validating competences within non-formal learning is that the process allows you to involve all learners, regardless of their level of expertise.

The VALMOPRIS validation process involves three key stages:



### CONSTRUCTING COMPETENCE

**Constructing competence:** The VALMOPRIS project has developed a competence framework, which target the competences considered most relevant to learners within prisons. These competences are generic. This is the starting point for facilitators – to ‘personalise’ this framework for their own group of learners and the learning content of a project or activity.



### OBSERVATION, ASSESSMENT & REFLECTION

**Observation, assessment and reflection:** A wide range of assessment methodologies can be utilised to measure the competence development of learners – such as peer discussion, self-reflection, facilitator observation, and visual mapping. One or more assessment approaches can be used during the process.



### INTERPRETATION & VALIDATION

**Interpretation and validation:** As a result of the process of observation, assessment and reflection, the competence development of each learner can be measured and officially validated. This is done through a process of reasoning and rating, which uses the ‘personalised’ competence framework to map the learners’ progress in selected competences.

## Non-formal learning, informal learning and competence development in prisons

Whilst the importance of competences, competence-oriented learning, and validation is highlighted on a policy level, there has been limited research into their role and value within prisons and there is no unified approach to the validation of non-formal learning within prisons (nationally or across Europe).

At the outset, our research set out to find out how competence development relates to prison education. A network of 87 professionals working within European prisons responded to a series of questions to assess the importance and impact of this area and to ascertain whether competence development was routinely measured across European prisons.

Firstly, we wanted to find out how important non-formal and informal learning opportunities were within prisons in terms of learner engagement. Our research showed that:

**84%** agree that prisoners engage in non-formal and informal learning opportunities.

However, **only 23%** of respondents feel that the potential of non-formal and informal learning is understood by prisoners. Another point for concern was that **only 27%** of respondents believed the prisons and institutions fully understand the potential benefits of these learning opportunities.

As well as a lack of awareness (amongst prison management and learners) of the benefits of non-formal and informal learning, our research highlighted that no consistent approach to validation is utilised within prisons. Respondents rated the challenges or obstacles to validation of informal learning fairly equally: citing lack of training for staff, capacity issues (such as workload, funding and contact time), as well as lack of understanding from learners and stakeholders. Other considerations included a lack of value and lack of methodology among the challenges.

Our project aimed to address these challenges.



Prisoners engage in non-formal and informal learning opportunities



The potential of non-formal and informal learning is understood by prisoners



Prisons and institutions fully understand the potential benefits of these learning opportunities

When designing our pilot learning activities, we set out to find the types of competence that those working within prison felt were most important for their learners to develop. The prison educators and professionals from across Europe recognised the following competences as being most important for prison learners:



Our research shows that professionals believe that communication is the most important competence for prison learners.

Communication and a range of other important competences – including problem solving, autonomy, team-working, critical thinking, creativity self-reflection, and learning to learn – were selected to inform the design of our pilot learning activities and validation methodology\*.

In the following pages we have compiled the details of our 30 pilot learning activities delivered across 5 EU countries. These pilots are organised under the most popular competences from our research. In our project design, each facilitator was asked to design two pilot activities; each would test two distinct competences (including learning to learn or a sub-competence of it) which the teacher or facilitator felt was most appropriate to their learners, the context, and the activity.

These summaries will give you a brief insight into the types of non-formal learning activities going on in prison, how competence-oriented learning activities can be managed and how those involved felt about the processes of competence-oriented learning and validation.

Our hope is that you are inspired by the learning contexts and can see parallels between your own practice and the day-to-day work you do with prison learners. We also hope they help to convince you to consider the benefits of undertaking a process of competence validation which can run alongside any non-formal learning activities.

**\*Note**

*Piloting teachers considered that flexibility (a willingness to try new things and attempt new challenges, adapt to changes – both anticipated and unexpected) was covered within many of the competences above and was a key aspect of learning to learn. Therefore, none of the pilots measured flexibility directly.*

# KEY COMPETENCE: LEARNING TO LEARN

Learning to learn is one of the eight key European competences. It might sound a bit vague or be difficult to characterise, but it is considered integral to fostering the potential of lifelong learners. It is defined as *“the ability to effectively manage one’s own learning, either individually or in groups”*.

The concept behind learning to learn derives from the ideas of Comenius, when in the 17th Century, he coined the terms Mathetics (the art of learning) and Didactics (the art of teaching). For learners – learning to learn focuses on metacognitive and thinking skills, as well as the self-management strategies required to engage confidently in self-directed learning – in other words, how well you have mastered the ‘art’ of learning.



In 2000, the Campaign for Learning created a 5R model to break the competence learning to learn into smaller categories which will help learners to learn and develop independently.

**These categories are:**

**Readiness to learn** – motivation, curiosity, self-efficacy, sense of self-worth

**Resourcefulness** – creativity, flexibility, search strategies, innovative ways of thinking

**Responsible learning** – teamwork, communication, delegation and ability to apply skills and knowledge to a set task

**Resilient learning** – ability to cope with negative feelings and challenges, commitment to a task

**Reflective learning** – celebrating achievement, able to plan next steps and areas for development, improving and learning from mistakes

*Campaign for Learning - 5R Model (2002)*

Whilst we can fully grasp the benefit of this competence, it feels very difficult to measure.

**So what does this mean for teachers?**

Helping a learner to develop their key competence, learning to learn, requires a focus on self-reflection. In group work, learners benefit from a real focus on positive group dynamics where honesty, safety, and open lines of communication are really important. It is vital to be flexible as a practitioner and help learners to find and reflect on the processes that work for them; work with them to develop strategies for future learning and stretch their capacities to communicate and work alongside others.

If you do decide to measure and validate a learner’s competence development, typical learning outcomes associated with learning to learn might include:

- Demonstrating an understanding of your personal qualities, skills and knowledge
- Showing an appreciation that learning can involve thinking, doing and feeling
- Feeling ready to identify goals to work towards, and being able to explain why
- Having an ability to make future plans

We asked all of our pilot practitioners to work with learners to measure the development in the key competence of learning to learn (or a sub-competence of it). Why? Because we believe it can lead to the motivation and agency that is so vital to support ongoing and self-directed learning.

We have selected three of our pilots, just to give a quick sense of the types of experiential non-formal learning activity which are ideally suited to learning to learn. These are not prescriptive, but use tried-and-tested approaches to arrive at the same end: learners who are more able and ready to learn, and flexible enough to adapt to change.

## Forum Theatre

Lucia Cojocaru, Romania

**Duration:** 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences validated:** Learning to Learn and Self-reflection

**Location and Learners:** Centrul Educativ Buzias, young offenders

Forum Theatre is a method of non-formal education explored in Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal wanted to transform the realities of young people facing social and political oppression in 1970s Latin America. It was a dramaturgical approach which used intervention to teach them how to change their world – audience members were encouraged to become actively involved, speaking out about oppression they witnessed on-stage and suggesting alternative approaches.

Still today, Forum Theatre is used as a tool of social intervention, which gives people the opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions. The principle is simple: it lingers on everyday problems, and translates them into little sketches so that viewers can see where they may be displaying ignorance, indifference, labelling or discrimination. It also gives them an opportunity to learn about themselves through the views and feedback of their peers.

*“It’s about improvisation, creativity, teamwork; it’s about reflecting on your own thought processes, how to be better, and to help the guy next to you. Learning the script for the forum theatre helps to develop the learning to learn competence, and there is the continuous possibility for the final outcome of the story to change, which always involves learners’ capacity to learn; to communicate ideas, and to be adaptable.”*

*The activity also underlines the importance of experiential learning. Using your own experience in order to learn and to find new solutions acts as an internal motivational factor.”*

Lucia Cojocaru  
Forum Theatre

## From ‘Which links to grow’

AJ, France

**Duration:** 7 weeks (twice weekly sessions of 50 minutes)

**Competences validated:** Learning to Learn and Civic & Social Competences

**Location and Learners:** Centre éducatif fermé, young offenders

An important part of the work we do as professionals and practitioners working in prisons and with young offenders – whether consciously or sub-consciously – is to encourage learners to develop self-awareness, confidence, empathy, and to engage in the expression of emotions. These types of pro-social behaviour are considered an integral precursor to desistance from crime, rehabilitation, and re-engagement with society. In these workshops, Anne worked with a group of 3 young people, engaged in practical ‘tutorials’ developed as a result of the experiments of Michèle Bannay (school psychologist) and Anne Bordage (therapist), presented in their book ‘Which Links to Grow’. Each week, in two ‘tutorials’ the learners, with Anne as facilitator, used a ‘Head-Heart-Body’ approach to focus on relationships (with self, others, and group).

**The following reflective questions structured the sessions:**

- Who am I?
- I feel, I live
- My big questions, my fears
- Being and doing together
- Where do I come from?
- My difficulties, my requests
- Ourselves in everyday life

*“It can be difficult for the young learners to begin their learning. It can be difficult to mobilise the interest of not only the learners but also the staff team, but once you get going you see learners become curious to get involved, it can help to develop positive teacher/learner relationships. That’s great and it’s really important for validation.”*

AJ  
Which links to grow

## Mediation: Mission (im)possible

Aina Vilcane, Latvia

**Duration:** 10 months (weekly sessions)

**Competences validated:** Learning to Learn and Creativity

**Location and Learners:** Daugavgrivas prison (Daugavpils Department), Life-term prisoners



Aina runs workshops with prisoners serving a life sentence. These sessions allow learners to try out a variety of activities and exercises, which help to develop team-working and communication within a collaborative group setting. The main goals of the sessions are to help the group to learn how to live together without conflicts and to overcome communication barriers.

The facilitators take an active role in the sessions, each with about 12 prisoners, and competence development is measured through a blend of observation, discussion, self-assessment and peer-assessment. A development of trust in each other and the safety of the space is vitally important during these sessions.

*“The sessions with this target group are usually very difficult emotionally, both for learners and teachers. At the beginning of their sentence prisoners sentenced to life spend virtually all the time in their cell, going out for only one hour per day. After some time, the regime is changed to semi-closed, so they can go out from the cell during the day. During this time conflicts start arising. Very often, prisoners simply have forgotten how to communicate with others.”*

*These sessions give prisoners the possibility to learn these competences again. We use modelling for positive behaviours. We discover possibilities for how to do many things without conflict and misunderstanding. We learn methods for how to control anger and aggression. This can include very creative approaches.*

*Daugavpils University students also take part during the activity sessions together with teachers; this helps prison learners to connect the outside world.”*

Aina Vilcane  
Mediation: mission (im)possible

In your own day-to-day work, and in almost any activity you can work with learners to help develop their capacity for learning to learn.

Here's a list of **THINGS TO DO** when you want to focus on learning to learn:

Consider setting ground rules for discussion to ensure a safe space. Just a note: rules work best when they are set collaboratively. The ability to make the rules can be empowering rather than inhibiting for prison learners

In any activity or session, you can build in a brief and informal reflection element to allow learners to consider the experience: lessons learned, success of the activity, future goals etc. This works best when it is done every session, perhaps in log books. These can be creative and personal and are a great way of getting learners to record or journal their own progress. All this reflection is great for considering competence development or future validation activities.

Work with learners using a range of different approaches to help engagement

Make space for discussion, debate and peer learning. These all help to engage learners in active communication and reflection

Take part!  
Model the processes you want learners to develop. Reflect on your own strengths, weaknesses and lessons learned. It's important for our learners to know that we are all still learning and striving for improvement!

Encourage learners to reflect on their own learning styles – a range of questionnaires are available online and more detail is included in our training programme

# COMMUNICATION

Communication is a broad-based competence. Whilst it is primarily linked to linguistic and cultural competences, communication is also connected to a range of other key competences.

*For example: leadership and teamwork requires the ability to explain issues and, through discussion, to identify problems and implement solutions.*

Competence in communication at a fundamental level outlines the ability to adjust tone and style according to the needs of your audience and particular settings. Effective communication is important for learners to comprehend, give and act upon instructions.

**Connects to the following Key European Competences:**

- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative
- Learning to learn
- Cultural awareness and expression
- Communication in mother tongue



Within prisons, the role of communication is vital for learners and practitioners alike. A prison learner's engagement with services within the prison – for example, education, social work, psychology – relies on trust and the ability to express thoughts and feelings.

Moreover, by developing a prison learner's capacity to communicate more effectively, we are better able to support their transition from prison into the wider community – helping them to engage with employment, education, services and – perhaps most importantly – family.

Five of the VALMOPRIS pilots looked to develop and validate learners' competences within communication.

**Two of these pilots were art-based projects in Latvia and France – both aimed to reach out to others within their communities and beyond:**

### Book Illustration

Zanna Busargina, Latvia

**Duration:** 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences Targeted:** Communication and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Daugavgrivas prison, male prisoners (mixed demographic)

Never judge a book by its cover – there may well be some beautiful illustrations lurking on the inside!

These art-based sessions focused on illustrations from the classic children's book, *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats. The learners developed their competences in communication by discussing Keats' book and, in particular, the impact of the illustrations for children, describing what makes the illustrations beautiful.

This type of communication involves critical thinking and a degree of confidence in your own thoughts and opinions. As well as the discussion element, learners completed an art project, using different Keats' work as inspiration and allowing for experimentation with media, textures and dimensions.

As a result of the sessions an exhibition of the work was organised for children and relatives who visit the prison; with the aim to foster a sense of achievement and pride in the learners and their families.

Maintaining close family bonds and family learning are vital aspects of the rehabilitation agenda in prisons in most EU countries. Many prisoners report that the most isolating and difficult factor of prison is being separated from their family.

Therefore, projects such as this provide important opportunities for positive and fun activities to promote positive relationships between family members and provide opportunities for intergenerational learning.

### What do the learners say?

*"The success depends on the teachers without any doubt and the members of the group. You don't need to be an artist, but (you do need to be) a member of the group who is happy to discuss the book and illustrations."*

*"We did the work together and the exhibition of the work will be organised for our relatives who visit us in the prison."*

*"I was part of the team and it was a positive and useful activity for me and my family. I will take part in more projects like this and will tell my cellmate."*

### Crossing Lives

DE, France

**Duration:** 3 months (16 hours)

**Competences Targeted:** Communication and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Centre Pénitentiaire, Adult male prisoners (refugees)

Working together, the group of learners – many of whom hadn't engaged in art since they were young children – devised a set of postcards that had messages for 'change', 'hope', 'love', and 'courage'.

### Deborah told us about her concept for the project:

*"The idea behind these postcards was to send them to families, friends, younger prisoners, and refugees. The emphasis was on finding shared or universal messages that could reach out to others in vulnerable situations as prisoners often explain the need to communicate outside the negative constraints of 'prison talk'."*

DE

Crossing Lives



The project combined art with language and cultural workshops. The group of participants embarked on an informal exploration of English, French and Arabic through discussion, poetry, hip hop, and fables, which helped them to develop personal messages, connected to their own experiences and cultural identities.

The project sought to help prisoners develop their communicative and creative competences through informal discussion and experimentation with techniques and processes. Deborah worked hard to create a space where the learners could explore their feelings and express them through language and art in a creative way; promoting cross cultural understandings whilst learning.

Competence development was measured in this activity through peer reflection and discussion.



In Scotland and Romania, further pilot activities looked to employment contexts to develop the learner's communicative capacities:

## Magazine Production

Marioara Bîlba, Romania

**Duration:** 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences Targeted:** Intercultural communications and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Centrul Educativ Buziaş, young offenders

Marioara's pilot activity also took place in the Centrul Educativ Buzias with a group of 10 young offenders. The group worked together to create a magazine for the centre, which has a very diverse population.

**The pilot activity followed a series of processes:**

- Selecting participants
- Attributing tasks
- Identifying future collaborators
- Choosing the magazine's name and designing the logo
- Designing the cover of the magazine
- Choosing the topics and sections of the magazine
- Developing the magazine
- Printing the magazine
- Magazine dissemination inside the centre
- Feedback and analysis

In testing the validation process, Marioara chose to focus on intercultural communication because she wanted her learners to know and understand the benefits of difference and diversity when developing the magazine. The magazine's focus was designed by the learners – taking account of their various interests – and asking them to communicate effectively to overcome difficulties and misunderstandings.

## Starting a Business

David McCusker, Scotland

**Duration:** 2 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences Targeted:** Communication and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** HMP Greenock, adult male prisoners

**David explained to us why the project is so important for prison learners:**

*“The job market can be difficult for former prisoners on their release and prisoners often speak of their desire to be self-employed. However, it has been recognised that one of the main reasons that prisoners do not invest in a new business is their lack of confidence in their ability to start their own company and their belief that the chances of success will not be high. In the US, the top three prison business start-up courses spend up to 50% of their effort in confidence boosting and motivation. With confidence being linked to their ability to communicate and present, the validation of these competences is vitally important.”*

David McCusker  
Starting a Business

In these business sessions, which are now well-established, the learners spend time sharing their business ideas. They discussed the importance of a company image and how best they can present to clients and stakeholders. Many practical situations are played out in this setting.

Over the weeks, learners develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to present their business ideas - including business plan, products, services - to local commercial contacts. This could include the bank, investors, customers or suppliers.

The sessions use a blend of tutor, peer, and self-assessment to help measure learner progress in competence development and these sessions provide the opportunity to blend the validation of competences from non-formal aspects of the course with formal accreditation.

## Agriculture

Codrin Rosu, Romania

**Duration:** 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences Targeted:** Communication and Learning to Learn

**Location and Learners:** Centrul Educativ Buziaş (Agricol Field), young offenders



**The phases of the project involved:**

- Preparing the field for the vegetable crops
- Cleaning vegetable residues from the field
- Digging the field
- Using fertilizer for the vegetable crops
- Choosing the types of vegetables that are resistant at low temperatures
- Planting vegetables that will be used in the spring time

Codrin was keen that this project also validated the competences that are useful at a personal and community level. The learners' ability to communicate effectively with each other and work as a team is so important to the smooth running of this project. It helps to prepare them for life beyond the centre and future employment.

In order to measure competence development, Codrin used tutor assessment: he assessed the learners' level of engagement in the project, and how effectively they managed to communicate with each other to complete the tasks.

Codrin worked with a group of six young offenders – both male and female – in the development of an agricultural project. The aim of the project is to give learners a range of practical skills and improve their self-esteem, with the ultimate aim of helping them to secure work placements beyond their sentence.

The project involved a range of learning opportunities which saw the learners both gain practical skills and develop broader transversal competences.

# AUTONOMY

Broadly speaking, autonomy refers to our ability to act independently and with free will. However, within competence development it is closely aligned with our ability and confidence to make future plans; to set and work towards personal goals; and a developing sense of agency.

As such, autonomy is an important element of key psychological theory around motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) developed their self-determination theory (SDT). This theory is concerned with the relationship between motivation, personality, and functioning. SDT outlines three basic psychological needs in the development of motivation:

- 1 **Competence** (effectiveness of dealing with environment, ability to achieve a particular outcome)
- 2 **Autonomy** (ability to control a course of action, not necessarily independently, but engaging with free will)
- 3 **Relatedness** (interaction, connection, care, ability to develop close relationship with others)

## Connects to the following Key European Competences:

- Learning to learn
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship



Autonomy is vitally important for prisoners. The lives of imprisoned peoples are subject to many restrictions. Working autonomously allows prison learners to develop their ability to think and act independently, and within groups, to achieve particular aims or outcomes. Learning activities which provide opportunities to experience a sense of autonomy can help learners to improve their decision-making. It can also result in a feeling of empowerment; helping learners to exercise some control and gain an improved sense of self-worth.

**Four of our pilot activities measured their learners' competence development in autonomy, which aim to help learners to develop a sense of control and agency in their learning:**

## Visual Mapping

AJ, France

**Duration:** 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences targeted:** Autonomy and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Centre éducatif fermé, young offenders

Young people coming from chaotic educational backgrounds require an individualised approach to teaching and learning, often with adapted tools, which can enable them to regain confidence.

In these workshops Anne takes the time with learners to experiment with visual thinking; utilising tools from the corporate world in order to support learners in critical thinking and metacognitive reflection. The workshops include lots of creative elements, such as: role play; pooling; discussion and questioning; and memory games.

These workshops can help to improve thinking processes, organisational skills and memory. The sessions are not overly complicated but focus on practical tools and approaches.

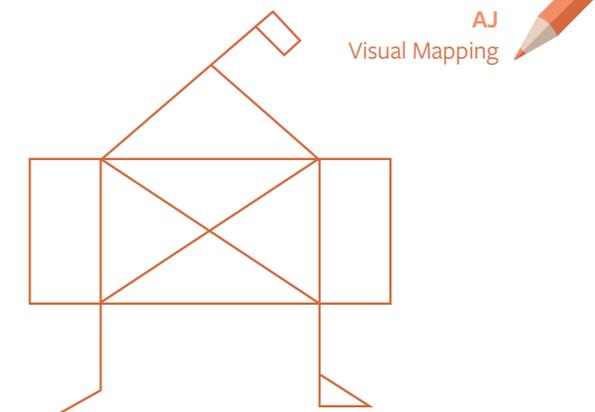
Our hope is that these methodologies can help with future training and employment opportunities, providing practical strategies for application throughout their professional lives.

**We asked Anne how this activity specifically helped with competence development:**

*“Visual mind-mapping is based on the thinking that mental management helps learners to find the best way to learn to suit their own learning profile. This is a person-centred approach and asks learners to consider and reflect, as well as involving the learner in asking questions that will allow learners to respond to what they need to acquire or learn. The aim is that the student is able to work on this approach individually and in a systematic way.*

*Mind-mapping helps to deepen the work begun with mental management (planning, organisation and memorisation), since it involves using something visual and the brain more easily retains images. Learners who experiment with this learning approach can be reluctant but they very often quickly realise the benefits for their own autonomous learning.*

*It is wonderful to see learners' pride when they are able to memories and restore information.”*



## Fit Together (ASN)

David McCusker, Scotland

**Duration:** 6-week snapshot  
(one session per week of 90 minutes)

**Competences targeted:** Autonomy and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** HMP Greenock, adult male prisoners



David gave us an insight into this innovative project:

*“The Fit Together club in HMP Greenock is a unique activity in Scottish prisons, designed primarily at building the civic and social skills of the prison learners.*

*It is a weekly session where adults with learning difficulties and/or challenges from a local adult support centre visit the prison to engage and interact with prisoners. The sessions consist of about 45 minutes of gym activity followed by 30 minutes socialising with refreshments, where the visitors are hosted by the prison learners in the cafeteria. There are approximately 5-6 prisoners and the same number of adults from the centre (both male and female). This is attended by a support worker from the centre, a prison officer and a teacher.”*

David McCusker  
Fit Together

The gym session has a wellbeing element and activities such as skittles, volleyball, badminton and rounders are common. The sessions are shaped by input from all participants: prisoners are encouraged to suggest individual activities and they take ownership for designing the whole session for that day.

Prisoners and the visiting adults are paired together to provide support and encourage positive interaction. No special rules are applied to prisoner/visitor interaction, and all the group members are able to interact spontaneously and naturally.

The project is well-established and is very popular with learners. David was keen to explore with learners how they felt the autonomous aspects of the project helped them to develop their capacity to take ownership of an activity and responsibility for others.

### Positive Impacts

The Fit Together Group allows prisoners – often for the first time in a long time – to show affection and understanding in a non-judgemental environment. Full of smiles and laughter, the activity has given prisoners the opportunity to develop their confidence, their ability to work on their own, their problem solving and many other competences.

In terms of validation, the learners liked getting involved in something innovative. The assessment processes are relaxed, informal and outwith the normal physical constraints of a classroom. It thus allowed students to develop and reflect on their abilities in a new way.

### Challenges

That said, the validation process can be challenging at first. It's new, so it takes a bit of work to get it started. Competences can be a bit difficult for learners to grasp, so you need to contextualise it for your learners and activities. You also need to keep returning the focus to reflection for the students; though this can be done easily in group discussion.

## Education for Health

Lucia Cojocaru, Romania

**Duration:** 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences targeted:** Autonomy and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Centrul Educativ Buzias, young offenders



Among the oldest human concerns are the preservation of health and our ability to fight disease. Medical science has determined that it is more useful and easier to prevent suffering than to act retrospectively by healing.

The Education for Health group is aimed at supporting young people in the Buzias Education Centre to work together, in order to develop a positive health culture: to appreciate and help learners to improve their own health and quality of life, as well as the health and wellbeing of others.

Health and wellbeing should be a dynamic and fascinating opportunity for learning to take place. Sessions and activities include discussion, experiments, challenges and lots of opportunities for peer reflection and learning.

## Authoring for Illiterate Adults

EP, France

**Duration:** 3 months (twice a week for 90 minutes)

**Competences targeted:** Autonomy (Project Management) and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Centre pénitentiaire, short- and long-term adult male prisoners

This activity involved a small group of illiterate adults who worked together to make a short book. The process uses oral story-telling traditions to help learners to achieve a sense of autonomy and control over the ‘writing’ process.

The first step of the project found the prisoners briefly imagining a story and discussing the different themes they have come up with, within the group context.

Then, the distinct stories are combined to create a new collaborative one – again discussion plays a crucial role here to help learners gain a sense of collective ownership.

The prison learners then select the literary form of the narrative (short story, comics, novel) and the writing and the illustrating process then began. The script is dictated as a starting point, with a teacher, facilitator, peer tutor scribing the content. The group then reflect and edit on the version before making revisions, finalising the content, and working on illustrations.

The focus is of course also to stimulate a desire to read. The book which comes out of those writing workshops are issued and used by other adult groups in the future.

# PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving focuses on someone's ability to identify a problem situation, assess the situation, potential impacts and consequences, then act to arrive at a positive solution.

It requires analytical, creative and critical skills and involves applying logic, knowledge and reasons towards an actual problem, or difficult or complex issues. The ability to remain calm and purposeful is important and it often relies on effective teamwork and the foresight to utilise the skills of others.

It is a competence that many employers look for in self-directed and autonomous employees.

#### Connects to Key European Competences:

- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Learning to learn



For prison learners, improving their ability to solve problems is particularly important. Prisoners face a range of barriers, challenges and opportunities, which can impede their ability to desist from crime on their release. Work in this area can help prison learners to develop their ability to face up to barriers and develop their abilities to find productive and proactive responses to challenges.

**The following two pilot activities in France and Scotland looked to measure the learners' distance-travelled in terms of their problem-solving competence. Both use very different approaches, but the goal is the same – to allow learners to face a situation where they need to apply critical thinking, work in collaboration, and come to a solution.**

## Maths Debates

EP, France

**Duration:** 30 hours over 12 weeks

**Competences validated:** Problem solving and Learning to Learn  
**Location and learners:** Centre Pénitencière, short- and long-term adult male prisoners

This non-formal activity has been developed as an innovative working habit during Eric's mathematics classes. Eric realised the opportunity for much broader competence development within the more traditional subject area of maths.

When working on operations or problem solving, the learners are invited to share their thoughts and results; then work together to 'uncover' the correct solution. If unable to come to an agreement, learners will have to present arguments to justify and prove the correct answer. In class, 'debate' springs from disagreement and, together, we work to try and derive the appropriate mathematics rules to solve the problems.

Brief problem-solving questions were posed to the learners as a fun and engaging way both to develop their mathematical knowledge and to tackle competence development in problem solving.

The rules, problems and exercises mentioned during classes are all recorded and turned into a collection for future prison learners to ponder during the classes to come.

**Eric gave us an insight into how he got on with this new process and its validation:**

*"This kind of activity and its validation can be difficult, because it's quite unusual to use debate in a maths class. The learners are more often used to proposing a solution and to receive an answer from the teacher whether it's right or wrong. The debate forces students to argue. The main challenge is to avoid the learners changing their minds about an answer just because the others say it's not correct. Learning to argue when you're the only one...is difficult."*

*But this way of working has two advantages: Firstly, by using "cold" subjects such as mathematics, the debate can be held without it becoming an ideological confrontation such as when we debate a question of society.*

*Second, for the majority of learners, they were not used to defending a point of view by arguing to try to convince others. This is great for helping to develop their problem-solving competence."*

EP  
Maths Debates

## What do the learners say?

*"I was eager to see how the debate was going to unfold and especially how the professor would do when it degenerated. In fact the teacher hardly ever needed to intervene because we remained calm and we were able to self-regulate."*

*"I was not expecting much, I was just curious to see what was going to happen. I was surprised that we were able to debate without getting angry."*

*"I was able to listen carefully to other points of view and change my mind when I'm wrong. I did not wait for the results to come from the teacher, but I can think for myself."*

*"I realised that we could talk and listen even when we disagree – I learned not to get annoyed. The main difficulty was going back to the learning after the debates. It would be good if school is always like this."*

*"I really discovered the power of reasoning together. The question is whether we would be able to debate like this outside the prison – I think it would be difficult. It would be nice if, on TV, politicians who were debating agreed to recognise their mistakes."*

IS THE  
SQUARE  
A  
RECTANGLE?

The debate on this question was very intense. Most learners felt that the square was not a rectangle. Others disagreed!

So, the debate began in earnest. We were obliged to use and compare the geometric properties of the two figures. At the end of the process, the majority of learners have changed their mind on the issue during the debate even though some never wanted to admit that YES the square is a rectangle!

## Logo Design Iñigo Garrido, Scotland

**Duration:** 1 month (10 x 3 hour sessions)

**Competences validated:** Problem Solving and Teamwork

**Location and learners:** HMP Shotts, long-term adult male prisoners

This experiential project-based learning is linked to the country's first prison-based creative industries work party. The work is by commission, from external stakeholders. The wealth of learning that takes place in the context of this employment – production, teamwork, brief development, art and digital design – is not summative, assessed or monitored for grading or qualifications.

So Iñigo, the project's facilitator, chose the problem-solving sub-competence of the key competence Learning to Learn because the learner needs to be competent in acquiring, processing and mastering new knowledge and skills to be able to design a logo, as well as to develop their own learning strategies during the development process.

**Inigo told us:**

*"During this activity my learners develop knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to how and when to apply their strengths, learning styles and personality types, setting goals, managing time and acquiring necessary information resources, reflecting upon the new knowledge and experience as well as interacting with others in order to reach learning challenges."*

Iñigo Garrido  
Logo Design

This project focused on the creation of a new logo for SERA – 'Secularism and Radicalisation' is an ERASMUS+ European initiative to address the radicalisation of young people in prison, with five countries taking part: Belgium, France, Italy, Malta, Spain, Turkey.

**The different stages of the process involved:**

- Stage 1** Establishing a creative communication with client about project brief
- Stage 2** The group devised a concept based on the brief
- Stage 3** They prepared designs and made a proof sheet
- Stage 4** They liaised with the client on a creative level
- Stage 5** Finally, they made a final graphic product ready for professional use

**The logo was devised based on the client's brief as follows:**

*"The purpose of the project is to strengthen the understanding of the values of secularism in order to combat the risk of radicalisation in prisons.*

*We do not expect specific colours (all your propositions will be welcomed). We will harmonise the website colour with the logo..."*

The students came up with the following concept for this logo:

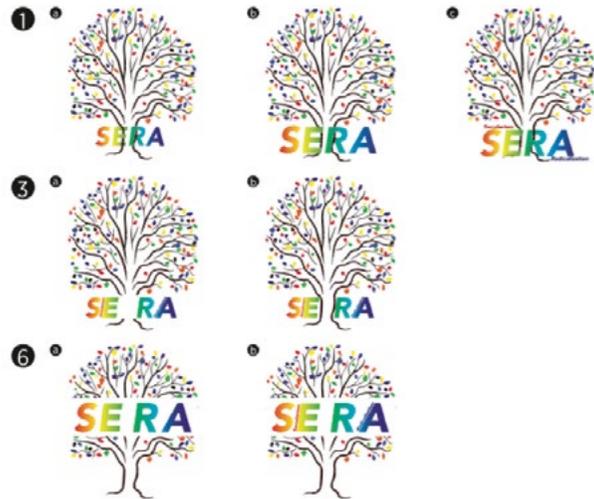
*“We wanted to represent the positive change that SERA can have on the individual by acknowledging the variety among people’s backgrounds and preferences in life, and step away from radicalisation. The colours of the leaves represent the multicultural nature of humanity and its diversity, while the tree represents the tree of life. We may all have different colours and beliefs systems. However, we all belong to the same world.”*

Student Group  
Logo Design

One learner explained how he felt after the process:

*“I enjoyed learning to think, act and communicate better in a group or team workspace; but also just to improve learning skills. I enjoyed communicating as part of a team and working on weaknesses. It made me focus on points that I didn’t think of before, like critical thinking and problem solving.”*

The proof sheet from the LOGO Design non-formal learning activity:



Final logo Design:



The logo is currently being used on the following webpage:  
<http://euro-cides.eu/SERA>

# SELF-REFLECTION

Self-reflection involves a process of examining your own values, beliefs and experiences – as well as their impact. It involves gaining a deeper understanding of your own culture and the biases you hold.

It asks you to consider the ways you communicate, your abilities: both strengths and weaknesses.

As Thomas Paine told us, we “grow brave by reflection”. It is vital starting point for learners to allow them to develop strategies which will improve their self-efficacy and self-esteem; and is so important to becoming an active and lifelong learner.

**Connects to the following Key European Competences:**

- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression
- Learning to learn



Self-reflection was an important aspect of many of the pilot learning activities because it is a vital aspect of learners being able to measure their own progress in competence development.

The validation of non-formal learning allows learners to reflect on learning without having the prescribed standards of assessment and accreditation associated with formal learning. So, this type of self-reflective process can help the learner to identify weaknesses, strengths, preferred learning styles and plan for their own personal development.

Where the goals are to support prison learners to be more independent; to develop improved pro-social behaviours; to engage with their own learning – then focusing on competence development in self-reflection can be an immensely powerful approach for practitioners.

### Three pilots measured the learners' progress in self-reflection:

## Developing Readers

Anna Mackenzie, Scotland

**Duration:** 10 weeks (twice weekly sessions of 60 minutes)

**Competences validated:** Self-reflection and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** HMP Low Moss, mixed population adult male prisoners

Developing literacy is one of our central aims in prison education. Basic literacy is often a precursor to formal education and key skills development. But literacy education is also a vital opportunity for engaging and lively non-formal learning. Fed up with book groups being the preserve of highly literate prisoners, Anna Mackenzie and her literacy learners were inspired to set up the well-established 'developing readers' group.

### Anna spoke to us about the project:

*“Developing Readers is a group of mixed ability learners who take part in an ongoing reading group with the main aim of developing their literacy skills.*

*Many of my learners also display varying degrees of emotional and mental health problems that can often adversely affect their social skills. So, we always encourage and support each other to discuss and relate the issues raised within the text back to our own experiences and reflect upon them. The learners' abilities to listen to their peers, express opinions and explore larger issues are also developed through this group. Perhaps most importantly, their literacy and confidence to read is developed through the security of peer learning.”*

Anna Mackenzie  
Developing Readers

### We asked Anna how she managed the validation process:

#### Stage 1: Identify the relevant competences

“As the facilitator, I identified the competences. But this can also be discussed and agreed with the participants within a group. I wanted to really focus on self-reflection – how this group helped learners to reflect on their learning and progress and how they could use these competences in their future learning. It's important to me to take time to mark the personal progress of learners.”

#### Stage 2: Drawing up frameworks

“I contextualised the framework and the language to suit my sessions and the learners' level of understanding.

I gave each learner a start point based on their abilities, confidence levels etc. I documented this with some supporting evidence as I saw it. This was shared and discussed with the learners. In other projects I've worked with students using self-assessment to help them rate themselves on the competency framework. This works well too, particularly for self-reflection, and can help with learners you are less familiar with.”

#### Stage 3: Delivery of Developing Readers Group

“Active discussion was a key feature of the reading group and every session, we often took time to reflect on learners' progress: on their grasp, engagement, motivation and all those small victories – when someone speaks up for the first time, when they've read an entire page, answered a question, or offered a thoughtful opinion. All of these actions represent progress for my learners. These are the actions that help us rate and validate competence development.”

#### Stage 4: Reviewing frameworks

“After the pilot project was finished, I assessed the learners' ability to reflect on their progress and their learning. We discussed this progress, whether they agreed and what it meant to them; what it would mean for next time. This debriefing process matters, it helps to make sense of the whole process. So too does the certificate – it underpins the value of their learning journey.”

#### Positive Impact for the learners

It's great for the learners – they are able to see their personal development and learning over the course of time in class. It can be very motivating for learners, especially those that are unable to achieve any validated formal learning in education, to have their development in class identified and certificated for them.

#### Challenges for the practitioner

There's a bit of work in this process, adapting the language of the competence framework to the task and for the students. But once it's done you have it for the future. Keep things simple – tutor assessment and/or self-assessment both work well. Don't concern yourself with over-assessing; let the framework do the work and reflect holistically on progress to motivate and encourage learners.

## Can You Express Yourself?

Marioara Bîlba, Romania

**Duration:** 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

**Competences validated:** Self-reflection and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Centrul Educativ Buzias, young offenders

This pilot focused on self-expression. The ability to communicate and to show feelings is a very important aspect of self-awareness; being aware of our feelings and reactions helps us to know who we really are.

Often not knowing how to express their feelings, young offenders can become easily frustrated. Very often they experience moments of discouragement when they cannot communicate and experience feelings of being misunderstood.

In **Can You Express Yourself?** learners are encouraged to express emotions in a creative way, using sculpture, drawing, music and drama-therapy to help learners reflect and express their emotional status. The workshops use a range of materials and approaches to develop self-expression and self-development as well as foster a sense of achievement within learners.

Marioara explained how she felt about her role in this project:

*“This VALMOPRIS methodology is a new challenge for employees of penitentiary institutions, but it can help us to stimulate communication and openness within our thinking. These types of learning activity create a free space of communication. This is a prerequisite for recovering juvenile offenders.”*

*Also, the multitude of learning projects shows how flexible the approach is – it enables free choice in approach and activity to fit any type of personality.”*

Marioara Bîlba  
Can You Express Yourself

### What do the learners say about their learning experiences?

*“It will help me, after I get out of prison, when I search for a place to live. It also helps me to make a distinction between what I should do and what I did. It will help me to learn starting a new life, to talk with friends and with family in another way, because I really don't know what to do outside. I don't have a place to stay and this programme will help me.”*

*“This programme is like a second mother, because it leads you in a special way, teaching you how to react when you face the real world again and that you have to take your life in your own hands.”*

## Creativity and Citizenship in DNK

Rene Boeijen, Rosa Rizzo, Toine Bakermans, Daniël Wolf & Pris Tatipikalawan, Netherlands

**Duration:** 1 month (range of activities)

**Competences validated:** Self-reflection and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** De Nieuwe Kans, intervention centre for young people

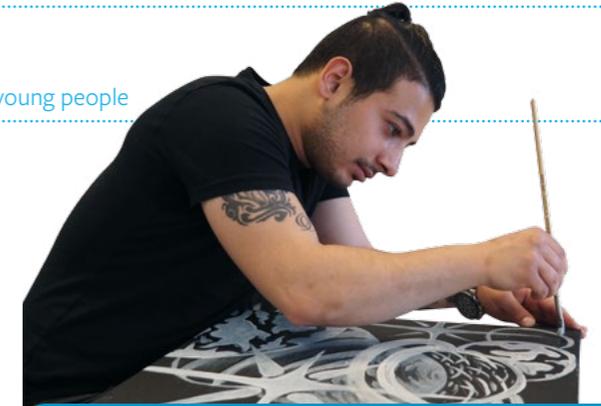
De Nieuwe Kans (DNK) is an intervention which focuses on a lasting transformation in thinking and behaviour. The organisation and its activities guide the participant from a place outside the social system to a stable place within education, work or care. DNK is a pedagogical institute, but doesn't lead to specific learning targets in assigned learning periods and the learning ethos blends formal and non-formal learning. But, crucially, young people do not come to DNK specifically to get an education. They come for experiences and support.

In their creative workshops, DNK blend experiential learning opportunities in music, theatre and the visual arts to allow the young people to reflect creatively and communicate their thoughts and feelings, whilst providing experiences to open new avenues and opportunities.

In these activities, there were three 'measuring moments' in which the participant reflected on their own distance-travelled as a result of their engagement in the creative learning activities within the programme. In these sessions, participants were asked to consider: what they felt the value of their engagement was, what knowledge they had gathered, how well they interacted with others, their ability to self-reflect and the insights they had gained.

### What do the learners say?

*“I suffer from ADHD and then your thoughts are chaotic, you know. Now I can reflect better. Before there would be a negative experience and only afterwards you reflect on it. But now I know this, and I can apply it better, because I think ahead.”*



*“it was wonderful to see everybody finding their own talents. The variety on offer in these creative workshops allows everyone to flourish and develop their competences in a real variety of ways.”*

Pris Tatipikalawan  
Creativity and Citizenship in DNK

*“I know now what works. I make summaries and I make plannings and schedules. Daniël and René (teachers) help me with this.”*

*“Everything helps some, not only the creative activities. It is fun participating, you always learn from it.”*

*“I have become more independent. I do much more myself, but know that I can always fall back on my 'triangle'.”*

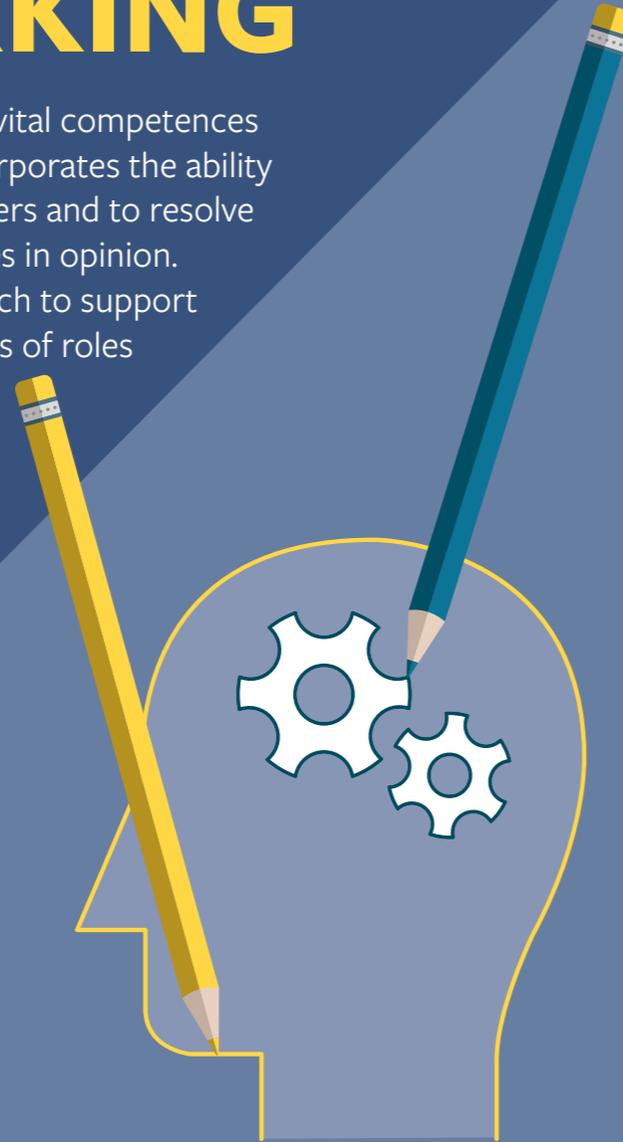
# TEAM-WORKING

Team-working is considered one of the most vital competences for employment and active citizenship. It incorporates the ability to collaborate and work successfully with others and to resolve conflict, disagreement, and respect differences in opinion. It can include the ability to adapt your approach to support the needs of others and requires an awareness of roles and the ability to act accordingly.

The ability to work towards a common goal and contribute to the success of a team includes important communication skills, such as: active listening, assertiveness, as well as the ability to engage in and respond to constructive criticism. Furthermore, areas like planning, problem solving and decision-making are vital to fostering success within the team.

## Connects to the following Key European Competences:

- Learning to learn
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Social and civic competences



Recidivism rates are high for prisoners across Europe. Statistics and experience tell us that prison learners are often re-incarcerated after release. Released prisoners have a great deal of challenges to overcome – including resettlement, housing, employment, healthcare, reconnecting with families and friends; some will be continuing to battle addiction. For long-term prisoners, on release, they have to reacclimatise to vast technological developments and socio-cultural shifts.

For prison learners to reintegrate on release, the ability to work constructively with others – for example: through care support services, parole officers, employers and support networks – is vital to maximise the chance of successful desistance.

Recognising its importance, team-working was one of the most popular competences to test during the VALMOPRIS pilot activities. Pilot activities included choirs, football groups, art workshops and employability classes.

**Six pilots measured team-working, making it the most popular competence chosen for the prison pilots. Our Dutch partners, Changes and Chances, are involved in two particularly innovative and ambitious arts projects which saw them work with learners to develop their competence in team working:**

## Visual and Augmented Reality

Ed Santman & Monique Baan, Netherlands

**Duration:** 8 weeks, 50 hours in total

**Competences Targeted:** Teamworking and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Sittard Prison, short- and long-term prisoners of mixed ability

Quite unique for prison education in Europe, this project saw a group of prisoners and prison officers (at times even the prison Governor) working collaboratively on a short video documentary about their lives behind the prison wall.

This project focuses on collaboration and team-work at every level as a project like this can only be realised if all involved work very closely together.

The prisoners and officers started by exploring the overall theme and discussing possible content to reflect daily life in prison. This led on to scenario building. When the scenarios were planned, discussed, edited and finalised, prisoners and officers elected to undertake different aspects of the project: like filming, sound recording, or editing. They created everything themselves, even down to the clipboard. For all participants, this was a new and challenging undertaking.

The validation took account of the planning, scenario-building and filming stages of the project. However, the next stage of the project is more innovative still.

**Ed took some time to tell us about the plans for the next stage of development:**

*“This project has not only challenged convention by combining prisoners and prison officers in creative arts projects. But it brings the prison and the experiences of prisoners to life for family and friends beyond the prison walls.*

*All visitors to the prison who have a specialised, freely downloadable app on their phone will be able to see the clip in augmented reality on the wall of the prison. This is a spectacular and really cutting-edge technique, which we hope and believe will help to break down the ‘barriers’ between the prison and the outside world by increasing understanding.*

*The process will be documented by a brochure which will be given to participants and the prison itself, to be shared with others, such as partners of the prison and families of the prisoners. The photographs and process will also be presented in an exhibition.*

*It’s been a really exciting project.”*

Ed Santman

Visual and Augmented Reality

## Stowaways

Ed Santman, Mirthe Wacki & Peer de Rijk, Netherlands

**Duration:** 1 month, 10 hours per week

**Competences Targeted:** Teamworking and Learning to learn

**Location and learners:** Den Bosch, prisoners at the final stage of sentence and with addiction issues



Erica from Changes and Chances told us about the validation process and the impact on the learners:

*“The Bosch parade was watched by approximately 20,000 visitors; this gave participants a sense of pride in their collective achievements and confidence that they can take part a large-scale project, working in collaboration with other participants to develop new competences and undertake new challenges. The ultimate goal was to inspire increased motivation and self-confidence and I am confident we achieved this.*

*The learners felt that their ideas had been heard and appreciated; it was so important that they were supported in making those ideas a reality wherever possible.*

*Tutor and self-evaluation was embedded in the activity and defined targets (targeted progress, engagement levels, increased competency) were set – together – at the outset of the activity. We reflected upon these during and after the process through informal discussion.*

*At the end of the process, in order to validate the learning and to evaluate our own practice, we organised an informal barbeque to meet for a final time with the learners. This allowed us not only to celebrate our collective successes but also to gain valuable feedback from the learners about the impact of the project for them, for example how they felt about engaging in a process of further learning.”*

Erica Kubic  
Changes and Chances

In the city of den Bosch the annual festival Bosch Parade takes place between 16 and 19 June so all artworks were inspired by works of the famous painter. During this time, there is a parade of floating works of art on the river Dommel that flows through the city. This year is the 500th anniversary of the death of famous painter Hieronymus Bosch.

With a group of prisoners in the last stage of their detention Changes and Chances made a contribution to this parade. The group worked on a large-scale floating object, around eight metres long, inspired by the painting, the Arc of Noah. In the installation, the boat is stranded on the Mountain Ararat after all animals have left the Arc. Well, not all animals... two woodworms, two longhorn beetles and two termites refuse to leave the ship; they enjoy eating the wood of the ship that is now full of holes!

The group built the Arc and made small puppets representing the insects. Some of the prisoners conducted the raft and acted as puppeteers.

More information is available at [www.boschparade.nl](http://www.boschparade.nl) and [changeschances.com](http://changeschances.com)

Team-work was a key feature of a number of other pilots, encompassing sport, music, art and employability. Here’s a brief insight into the types of activity from our own practices that we felt were particularly relevant to the team-work competence:

## Expressive Mask Making

Anastasija Radevica & Daira Apine, Latvia

**Duration:** 3 months, weekly three-hour sessions

**Competences Targeted:** Teamworking and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Daugavgrivas Prison, Grivas Department, young offenders

During these sessions, learners created original papier-mâché masks that expressed an emotion: in order to do this, the learners focused on the exploration of feelings, empathy and reading emotional cues.

These sessions give learners a great opportunity not only to develop their creative competences, but also allowed them to expand upon their learning processes and technical art skills: their knowledge of representing the human, their abilities in sculpture and in acrylic painting.

After the creative process, learners were asked to consider what emotions the masks expressed and whether they could attach it to a story. Learners had to communicate and share these feelings and processes together; so these sessions also required confidence and communication to work collaboratively in a team-setting.

In their validation approach, Anastasija and Daira considered how well the learners were able to show evidence of originality and creative thought and took note of how carefully learners engaged with the process of making.

## Football

Codrin Rosu, Romania

**Duration:** 2 months, twice weekly sessions of 2 hours

**Competences Targeted:** Teamworking and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Centrul Educativ Buzias, male young offenders (mixed ability)

The impact of football is related with positive development from both a psychological and behavioural point of view.

**The beneficial effects of football for young people include:**

- A focus on the team more than himself
- Peer-encouragement and a feeling of mutual joy
- Self-control and aggression management
- Development of self-esteem
- Increased communication skills
- Increased capacity for effort
- Courage and the capacity to take decisions
- Creativity
- Initiative
- Self-confidence

These sessions used a fun team-sport to engage the learners in their own competence development. The validation process involved self-reflection and peer discussion through ‘team talks’.

## Choir I&II

Hanneke Hermkens and Pris Tatipikalawan, Netherlands

**Duration:** 8 weeks, 25 hours total

**Competences Targeted:** Teamworking and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Zutphen Prison, short- and long-term male prisoners



Following the formation of a choir of prisoners, we started with well-known songs to relax the learners.

After the group became united and started to trust each other, and the range of voices was known, the participants were challenged to contribute compositions, and lyrics of their own. The participants also had input into the musical arrangements.

The sessions concluded with a performance for prison personnel and family members, which was recorded. As part of the activities, the prisoners were asked to design a CD cover to reflect their experiences. All participants received a CD with these recordings.

For validation purposes, the project leader used a blend of observation and discussion as validation methodologies to help measure progress and engagement within the team. Learners undertook self- and peer-evaluation at key stages of the activity through informal discussion. We found that learners really benefited from increased empathy as part of their working in a team, they all had to expose their feelings to write lyrics and compositions; also the team dynamic helped the learners to develop patience and staying power.

Following on from Choir I, continuing and experienced learners developed their skills and competences in musical settings. This involved instruments and more complex arrangements. This helped learners to push themselves and really challenged them to work as a team and build on their progress and competences to date.

## Employability

Daira Apine & Anastasija Radevica, Latvia

**Duration:** 3 months, weekly session of 3 hours

**Competences Targeted:** Teamworking and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Daugavgrivas Prison, Daugavpils Department, young offenders

**Daira and Anastasija told us about the driving force of the project:**

*“These sessions focused on the key elements of preparing for the job market – specifically finding work. In Latvia, when we analyse prisoners’ reasons for offending, one can see that unemployment is one of the most common factors.*

*Employability skills and personal values are the critical tools and traits you need to succeed in the workplace – and they are all elements that a person can learn, cultivate, develop and maintain. It is so important for prisons to support job seekers, particularly those who are young and feel disconnected from the job market, to build capacity and confidence in areas that can improve their skills through learning and personal development.*

*Once you understand the skills and characteristics that most employers seek, you can tailor your job search communications (your resume, cover letter, etc) to show them how you can meet their requirements. These sessions give them the tools to do this, but also the improved confidence required to help them to ‘sell’ themselves to employers. It’s a difficult challenge for lots of people; and especially difficult for prison learners to overcome the stigma of being in prison.*

*We want to help them with this.”*

Daira and Anastasija  
Employability

The project seeks to develop a range of personal competences – which include teamwork, self-reflection, communication, autonomy – all of which can help learners in their job search.

**Practical self-management outputs will include:**

- Ability to write a curriculum vitae
- Ability to write a cover letter
- Job interview skills
- Developed verbal and non-verbal communication skills

**What do the learners say?**

*“I have experienced very positive emotions taking part in this project. It is good to have attention for me as a person not as an inmate. And it is positive having contact with people from outside the prison.”*

*“I can make up for my previous mistakes and do the best for me and my family after release with new skills, new contacts as well as self-confidence. I am fully satisfied with the learning activity program, it gave me new ideas what to do after release.”*

# CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is a vital competence for helping us to take a proactive role in society and the world around us.

Competence validation in critical thinking measures a learner's ability to engage in critical and open-minded questioning and reasoning. It links with someone's ability to examine issues and ideas from a range of perspectives and to identify positive and negative reasoning and assumptions. It teaches individuals to be curious, to question the world around them, to challenge injustice, and ultimately find their place in the world.

## Connects to the following Key European Competences:

- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Learning to learn



Cooperative and dialogic learning supports learners to develop the capacity to take account of others' points of view, to consider their own perspectives – defending them or adapting them – according to the input of others. The type of activity which fosters critical thinking, also encourages learners – ipso facto – to uncover problems, define needs and uncover new possibilities, through active reflection.

Critical thinking is an important competence for prison learners. The associated competences of communication, team-working, reflection and problem solving all help to build a learner's capacity to learn and can help with the pro-social behaviours which are so crucial in encouraging desistance.

**Three pilot activities measured learners' progress in critical thinking. We're going to look at two magazine classes in a little more depth:**



## Making a Magazine

Sanne Willemsen & Saskia Kettelerij,  
Netherlands

**Duration:** 1 month (4 days per week, 1.5 hourly sessions)

**Competences Measured:** Critical Thinking and Learning to Learn

**Location and Learners:** JP Heye - De onderwijsspecialisten - Arnhem, young people with slight mental health issues and behavioural problems

### Sanne and Saskia told us about their pilot activity in more depth:

“With Making the Magazine we aimed to motivate these young people to contribute actively towards a common goal. We worked with photography, drawing, painting, writing and interviewing.

When starting the process, we formed a team and determined a common theme. In the first week all participants began to research – they reported on what they like to do and what their talents are. This naturally led to the development of an editorial team and further division of tasks.

Then the team got creative! They started to collect materials. They wrote. Created.

In the last weeks, all material was gathered and made into one magazine with lay-out and graphic design. The final result was put together by the editorial team and was printed in a limited edition so that the participants, teachers and the hosting organisation could disseminate them within their networks.

During these sessions, in order to motivate the young participants and to broaden the scope of the project, we went on excursions. At the start of the project, we went to Maga(zine) library for inspiration. Later in the process, we went to a creative workspace where they could make and print the physical magazine.

This type of activity is amazing for giving young people who are at risk the chance to gain insight into their own development and potential through a creative process. It allows them to turn insecurities into positive possibilities; to do that with a certificate is the cherry on the cake. Honestly, the growth and struggles of the participants were very moving and the pride with which the certificate and the magazine were received was heart-warming.”

### What do the learners say?

“I have discovered that I can be creative. And I’m happy that now, for the first time I earned a certificate.”

“The Magazine has become very beautiful and I’m happy that I have my own page with DJ Starlight. Sanne helped me very well. And I’m happy with my certificate.”

“More often an outing, like we did at the start of the project. That was real fun because with the school or the group we rarely do such things.”



## STIR Magazine Iñigo Garrido, Scotland

**Duration:** 30 hours over 6 weeks  
**Competences validated:** Critical Thinking and Communication  
**Location and learners:** HMP Shotts, long-term adult male prisoners

The project took place in the Learning Centre of HMP Shotts, a maximum-security prison. The learners are long-term adult male prisoners who participate in project-based learning, which is not part of a summative assessment or external monitoring for grading or qualifications. The group has a mixed level of skills and previous experience in magazine production, computer use and art/design.



Magazine cover

The learners produce a widely distributed quarterly magazine to a set deadline, which involves learning about desktop publishing, image manipulation, taking creative editorial decisions, production skills and working with others. The focus of the project is experiential learning which is intended to enhance collaboration and provide a valuable and practical learning experience for the learners.

This specific project focused on the production and design of a new issue of a magazine. Inigo took a snapshot of the learners’ progress to look at how the learners benefit from this non-formal experiential learning approach.

### Stages of the activity

- Stage 1** Students select artwork by individual and group markings
- Stage 2** Magazine design and creative discussions
- Stage 3** Each student designs their own magazine spread
- Stage 4** Group reviews design content
- Stage 5** Outputting magazine for publication



Poster page and inside spread example

### Inigo gave us an insight into the benefits of the validation process:

“The learners recognised the value of using this specific validation process for their learning. They also understood the benefits it could bring to other learners in prisons across Europe. This helped to motivate each student in the group.

One of the most immediate benefits to the learners was to gain awareness of the learning they do by acknowledging critical thinking as a competence and to explore its different dimensions during the process of creating this arts magazine, called STIR.

Ultimately, this activity expanded the view of themselves as learners and helped them to gain confidence by acquiring transferable skills with real practical use.

Also, as a teacher, I have acquired a new skill in the validation of non-formal learning. As most of my teaching practice in prison is in this field, it has offered me a viable resource for future teaching, as I think transferable skills could be of critical importance to some of my learners on release.”

Iñigo Garrido  
STIR Magazine

Of course, magazine production isn't the only avenue to critical thinking. Another innovative project which measured this competence development was a philosophical discussion group in Scotland:

## Philosophy Group

Anna Mackenzie, Scotland

**Duration:** 10 weeks (4 hours per week)

**Competences validated:** Critical Thinking and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** HMP Low Moss, adult male prisoners

The use of philosophy in prison education has become increasingly popular in recent years. The group in the Learning Centre of HMP Low Moss has seen ever-increasing numbers since its establishment a few years ago. The learners come to learn not only about famous philosophers and their theories but also to develop, among other things, their social interaction and discussion skills.

This project saw a group of mixed ability learners take part in a philosophy-based discussion group for 8-10 weeks. They learned about specific philosophical theories and how these connect to their own lives and beliefs systems.

The learners had opportunities for in-depth class discussion and interaction with their peers. Throughout this group project, the philosophy discussion was established through tutor-led prompts and questions drawn up by the learners themselves – enhancing their abilities to listen to their peers, express opinions and explore philosophical ideas.

### What do the learners say?

*“The other pupils in the class can contribute to the success or failure of a task but it helps you to gain knowledge and confidence in group discussion. It gives me the opportunity to voice my opinions”*

*“I expected an insight into other people's philosophies on life. It lets you open your minds, see other people's perspectives. And the class is fun and laid back”*

# CREATIVITY

Competence development in creativity focuses on coming up with new or different ideas. It focuses on our ability to create and identify novel approaches to address challenging situations and problems. This is particularly useful for employment prospects.

But creative learning activities also allow for freedom of expression and can be a positive way to improve wellbeing. A whole host of creative activities facilitate active involvement in creative and non-literal modes of thinking and – as learners develop their competences – they will become more innovative and their ideas and approaches can be increasingly motivating for others.

### Connects to the following Key European Competences:

- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Learning to learn
- Cultural awareness and expression



Creativity is a strong feature of prison-based learning. Artistic and cultural activities are well-known to produce a fun and inspiring environment for learning to take place, particularly where learners are held within the confines of the prison walls.

Experienced practitioners across Europe are developing creative and non-traditional approaches to motivate learners and maximise learning possibilities. These types of activity can have a demonstrable benefit on self as well as relationships with others: between peers and with prison workers.

Also, creative outputs such as art, poetry, or theatre performances can also be a fantastic testament to the work learners do – a tangible demonstration of their competence development!

**Developing creativity was a learning objective for many of our pilot practitioners. Three of our pilot activities measured the competence for validation:**



## Sculptural Totem

DE, France

**Duration:** 8 weeks (2 hours per week)

**Competences Measured:** Creativity and Learning to Learn

**Location and Learners:** Centre Pénitentiaire, young offenders

One of the aims of this project is to develop an awareness of the importance of the creative process. Young offenders often want results instantly and are often not prepared to take risks and try new ideas out. Engaging in an art activity that demands imagination, creativity, reflection and modification can be a life-long skill that crosses over into all aspects of social life and can be used to encourage entrepreneurial thinking, decision-making and problem solving through creative choice and can prevent re-offending and support social inclusion.

**Deborah talked with us about her pilot learning activity:**

*“In my experience with young offenders, I’ve found that they are less and less able to sustain a level of concentration and desire images to reflect an idea of ‘perfection’.*

*The project began by exploring innovative ways to create, draw and paint. It started with direct observation (participants used each other as models), recording what they saw and not what they thought they saw. I actively encouraged all mistakes to be left visible to enrich the quality of the portrait as a process.*

*The learners were then given an introduction to the expressive emotional qualities of colours through the medium of acrylic. These two activities served to inform the development of the design idea through to a 3-dimensional plaster mask and plaster cast hands using the selected colours to express moods and expressions.”*

DE

Sculptural Totem



The sessions culminated in the creation of a free-standing 3D Totem Pole made up of cast faces and hands to create an exciting and multi-faceted sculpture that represents the participants and their learning journey.

**Deborah gave us an insight into the validation process:**

*“Throughout the process I worked with learners to measure their competence development in creativity and learning to learn. The learners and I monitored their creativity on regular bases. We discussed their idea development, their confidence in engaging in new techniques, how they felt about the results, and next stages. All of these questions feed in to a learner’s creative capacities. So too does the process of exploring, discussing and reflection.*

*With learning to learn, I felt it was more important to look at personal goals – the things that my learners felt really mattered to them. This took the form of personal goal setting at the beginning of the project. In discussion between myself and the group of learners we all set out our personal goals, what we wanted to improve upon. We came back to these goals at the end of the process and considered how well we felt we had progressed. This process used a blend of self-, peer-, and tutor-reflection. All of which was designed to be positive and reinforce progress.”*

DE

Sculptural Totem

## Giving New Life to Old Musical Instruments

Zanna Busargina, Latvia

**Duration:** 2 months (3 hours per week)

**Competences validated:** Creativity and Learning to Learn

**Location and learners:** Daugavgrivas Prison (Daugavpils Department), life-term prisoners

Daugavgrivas Prison staff have collected some old musical instruments.

The idea of the activity is to give the new life to these old musical instruments by decorating them. The learners within the group will develop their designs using their surroundings and personal experiences to express ideas and feelings visually.

Participants will carry out a variety of activities and exercises, which help to create a positive group dynamic and effective support within the team.

The exhibition of decorated musical instruments, organised at the end of the course, will allow participants to present the works for prison staff and members of society.



## What do the learners say?

*“It helps with creative work and calm. There must be more informal education in the prison and more possibilities for creative work. It is very good that it is organised. It helps people a lot.”*

*“I liked this activity. It was very positive for me just to do something very nice.”*

*“It was organised the exhibition of our work outside the prison. I love that someone will see our works.”*

*“It is very positive that we have the possibility to do something in the prison. There are a lot of very creative people, so it is important to us to give possibility to produce something, to show your thoughts through art.”*



## Film-making: Story About Myself

Aina Vilcane, Latvia

**Duration:** 4 months (2 hours per week)**Competences validated:** Creativity and Learning to Learn**Location and learners:** Daugavgrivas Prison (Grivas Department), young offenders

These sessions were designed to allow young prisoners to draft, storyboard, shoot, edit and direct the film – making different kinds of presentations of themselves as part of an outreach campaign to bring the film to the education sector.

The activity aimed to take steps towards rehabilitation; in order to allow group members to slowly acknowledge their involvement in the decisions that put them in prison, accepting that they, and no-one else, are to blame for what they have done.

In the process of making short presentations for film, the participant really got to explore the effect of his actions on those around him and those closest to him: perfect for creativity and self-reflection.

## What do the learners say?

*“I like to do something new that could help people, especially young people, to prevent them from crime. We have made good stories about our lives. Maybe someone will stop at the necessary moment and will not do stupid things.”*

*“Actually you can tell your story with different things, very simple and when you do it you start to criticise some of your acts, your behaviour, you can define problems. I am also happy to receive the objective validation of my involvement in the project.”*

## TO DISCOVER...

## Duncy Scotland

*Long-term prisoner  
on the importance  
of learning*

To turn on a light.  
For the darkness of space to go  
to bright  
the moment a star is born.  
To realise I have a voice  
and to carry myself with pride.  
Do a thing I would never dream  
that I could.

To play a part in life  
with a true course  
through time  
like a comet that nothing can stop.

I used to be the rock  
banging about in space  
with no true purpose.  
Now I have discovered  
my purpose –  
to live my life to its full,  
to be a star –  
if only in my own eyes.

I cannot be the rock  
banging without a plan,  
crashing through life.

Now my purpose  
is to keep that true course  
and keep discovering  
that I can achieve  
almost anything  
as long as I keep my voice  
and tell my story  
to one who cares.

If my story means anything to you,  
maybe we are bound  
to take this voyage  
together  
through our time here  
to the stars,  
discovering how to live our lives  
with true meaning.

New College  
Lanarkshire



dieBerater

blinc  
Lernbegleiter



CHANGES  
& CHANCES



# VALMOPRIS

*“I was part of the team and it was a positive and useful activity for me and my family. I will take part in more projects like this and will tell my cellmate.”*

A learner in a book illustration project in Latvia

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