

**LEARNING
PARTICIPATION
IMPROVING
QUALITY, ACCESS
AND OUTREACH**

**LLLPLATFORM POSITION PAPER
MARCH 2016**



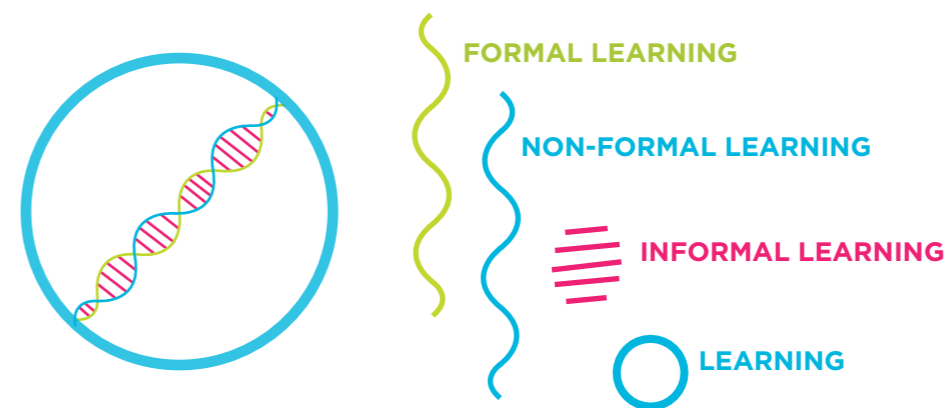
LEARNING PARTICIPATION: IMPROVING QUALITY, ACCESS AND OUTREACH

A clear and urgent challenge for our educational systems is to better adapt to the needs of modern societies. Today's learners expect "complimentary chains" between formal, non-formal and informal learning, which involves better-designed innovative and collaborative learning methodologies and assessment procedures, going beyond the traditional "one-size-fits-all" approach. These can contribute to improving learning participation, well-being and educational attainment. Moreover, by improving resilience and outcomes, they have the potential to re-engage individuals who are at risk of failure and dropout, and therefore contribute to the objectives of the "ET2020" agenda of European cooperation in the field of education and training. That is how more inclusive and participatory approaches in the design of learning environments can contribute to modernising the way we teach and learn in all education subsystems across Europe.

Bearing in mind learner diversity and promoting well-being

Educational institutions and their staff should better acknowledge learning diversity in order to provide opportunities for all individuals to learn and succeed. There is a great variety of learning styles and there is no doubt that understanding the individuality of each learner is an important step in effective teaching/learning processes. Nevertheless, uniformity continues to dominate educational practices. Most educational institutions use the same curriculum, the same teaching materials, work at the same pace and use the same assessment methods. Educators need to reflect on the fact that their own assumptions, affected by societal values and own experiences, can influence how they interact with and what they expect from learners². It is high time for shift towards a learner-centred approach³ in order to address the imbalance between uniformity and diversity, damaging for many learners and educators⁴.

Apart from that, well-being should be promoted by providing learners with a learning environment that is open, respectful, caring and safe. Namely, children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school well-being have higher levels of achievement and they are more engaged in their school, both concurrently and in later years⁵.



Pedagogy that enhances well-being builds positive relationships between educators and learners and is responsive to their individual needs, because "education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process"⁶. A learner needs to be considered as an equal partner and given a voice in the educational settings as well as in the management of the institution itself, in an inclusive, learner-centred approach. That is also how they can themselves be encouraged to take active steps in tackling bullying, prejudice and other behaviours negatively impacting well-being.

Improving educational attainment by increasing collaboration

There are still barriers for many people in Europe to engage in learning, while certain groups are particularly at risk of being excluded from it: disadvantaged groups such as people with low family income or migrants, persons who dropped out of school before obtaining a secondary education diploma or other forms of certification for completion of an educational cycle, people with learning difficulties, disabled persons and persons with mental health problems. Collaboration and peer learning are crucial to reduce disparities in learning outcomes affecting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and increase their participation⁷. Indeed, learners in collaborative learning

environments tend to perform significantly better than those in competitive and individualistic ones and that is why a truly holistic approach to learning has to include the principle of collaboration.

In order to implement participative methodologies, a cultural shift that emphasises the importance of collaboration in and for learning needs to be encouraged. This leads to an upward spiral, as higher achievements in education result in a higher motivation to learn and therefore prolong the learning pathway. By leading to higher participation rates in learning, collaboration can contribute to achieving the EU2020 benchmarks in education and training⁸.

Last but not least, collaborative approaches can contribute to recognising and validating the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of learners in the context of increasing migration and mobility within and into the EU.



Fostering the acquisition of transversal skills by engaging learners

Both learners and educators should be able to engage in the democratic life of the educational institutions themselves. Namely, a Eurydice report highlights the fact that “all countries have introduced some form of regulation to promote student participation in school governance”. However, it is not prioritised and it usually comes after the transfer of knowledge and skills⁹. Increasing such collaboration in the management and governance of institutions is a meaningful and practical way for learners, educational staff, parents and communities to experience democracy and become (more) active citizens.

The use of collaborative methodologies, such as project-based learning and teamwork, contributes to the development of transversal skills including critical and creative thinking, civic and social competences and entrepreneurial attitudes. The report of the high level group on “Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe’s higher education institutions” from June 2013¹⁰ stresses the need to include the principle of collaboration in education: “Efforts need to be concentrated on developing transversal skills, or soft skills, such as the ability to think critically, take initiatives, solve problems and work collaboratively, that will prepare individuals for today’s varied and unpredictable career paths”.

Moreover, collaboration supports efforts towards quality and excellence, contributing to the modernisation of education. One way to achieve this is to open educational institutions to the “outside world”, including families, communities, NGOs and companies, which can increase wholesome collaboration both inside and outside of traditional educational settings.

Added value of digital technologies

The massive scale emergence of Internet and digital technologies that support online collaboration has reinforced a cultural shift in views of both the importance of social interaction for learning and the collective intelligence for innovation. However, between 50% and 80% of students in the EU never use digital textbooks, exercise software, broadcasts/podcasts, simulations or learning games¹¹. This indicates a clear need to tackle the challenge of our education systems lagging behind rapid modern changes. The EU lacks a critical mass of good quality digital educational content and applications in specific subjects and multiple languages, as well as connected devices for all learners and educators. Namely, digital tools such as digital textbooks, exercise software, broadcasts/podcasts, simulations and learning games, supporting a playful approach to learning, can increase inner motivation to learn and thereby (active) learning participation. It is essential to enable educators to develop the use of technologies in an age-adapted and transversal way (e.g. when learning languages, math or literature).

Learning supported by these tools can take place anywhere, and that is why they consequently contribute to removing barriers to education for hard-to-reach groups of society and disabled persons. Access to it should be particularly widened and made affordable for disadvantaged groups. For instance, in collaborative learning games (e.g. Quest to learn, Khan Academy, SCVNGR, Superbetter, Fitocracy) learners work together to reach certain goals, which are at the same time also important points in their learning process. These games give ‘players’ continuous feedback and ensure they can apply newly acquired knowledge and skills. Simultaneously, these games foster learning participation and self-regulated learning since ‘players’ can steer the learning process and its pace according to their needs.

Mainstreaming successful outreach strategies

Outreach and awareness raising campaigns have proven to be very successful in increasing learning participation. Innovative learning methods such as collaborative learning make it more attractive to return to learning and participate in shaping educational programmes. Although there are good examples of curricula and targeted educational programmes (e.g. global citizenship education programmes) that promote greater learner participation, many teachers and educators are seldom trained to implement such methodologies, and do not have access to supporting tools and networks. Powerful outreach campaigns tackling a lack of general awareness very often miss the long-term financial support to continue their activities beyond project-based schemes. Therefore, a strong political will is needed to identify such successful initiatives on the ground, targeting people in their everyday settings and to mainstream them so that they can have a systemic impact.



1. The concept of participation in learning explores the involvement of individuals, groups and communities in the learning process and their interaction with the learning environment;
2. Educating Everybody’s Children: Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners, Revised and Expanded 2nd Edition, Edited by Robert W. Cole, June 2008;
3. Comparison of Teacher-centered and Learner-centered paradigms, Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses, Huba and Freed, 2000 and Student Centered Learning An Insight Into Theory And Practice, ESU and EI, 2010;
4. Diversity, Learning Style and Culture, Pat Burke Guild, New Horizons for Learning, Johns Hopkins School of Education, October 2001.
5. The Impact of Pupil Behaviour and Well-being on Educational Outcomes, Leslie Morrison Gutman & John Vorhaus, Institute of Education, University of London Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, November 2012;
6. Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, John Dewey, 1916;
7. Supporting collaborative learning environments, from Initial Teacher Education to professional school practice, Francesca Caena, European Commission, 2014;
8. The rate of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 should be below 10%, while at least 40% of people aged 30-34 having completed some form of higher education;
9. Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe’s higher education institutions, Report of the High Level Group, European Commission, June 2013;
10. ICCS 2009 European Report, Civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower-secondary students in 24 European countries, IEA, 2009;
11. Communication on “Opening up Education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through new Technologies and Open Educational Resources”, European Commission, 2013.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE QUALITY, ACCESS AND OUTREACH FOR LEARNING PARTICIPATION

In light of the needs and possibilities in learning participation, the LLLPlatform has developed a series of policy recommendations in order to improve the quality, access and outreach of learning.

Adopting a comprehensive approach

Participation is a three-sided issue: firstly, it concerns the learner and her/his possibilities and will to engage in learning, secondly, the educators who are in charge of content, methodologies and evaluation, and thirdly, the educational institutions that provide the learning space and environment. All sides – learners, educators and providers of education – are closely connected to the regional and national structures and policies that regulate education and training.

Collaboration in learning can be conceptualised along three dimensions:

1. Learners

Collaborative approaches to teaching and learning such as peer learning have proved effective in improving students' engagement and achievement, particularly for early school leavers, disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups of society, and disabled persons. Learners can participate in shaping their learning process in many ways, e.g. by working together to achieve their educational goals, by engaging in student councils and influencing education policies, and by collaboratively deciding on their priorities in learning. Participation can take place face-to-face as well as through online and digital learning. Collaborative technologies have indeed underlined benefits of collective approaches to learning and problem solving. It is about collaborative and personalised learning, reusable learning content and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

2. Educators

Research highlights the benefits of collaboration among trainers/trainers and between teachers/trainers and professional and non-professional educators including parents, both for their own professional development and for the development of a "school" culture based on shared responsibilities and values. The OECD background report to the International Summit of the Teaching Profession highlights the importance of enhanced teacher-student relations stemming from a collaborative school climate. Finally, the importance of collaborative governance and leadership in schools is confirmed by the TALIS findings, which highlight the relevance of teachers' relationships with their school leaders and other members of the school community.

3. Educational institutions

Learning does not only take place in classrooms. More links are needed between formal, non-formal and informal learning environments. Opening educational institutions to the "outside world" and their collaboration with local communities and non-formal education providers is particularly important. Parents and families should be proactively included in their children's schooling, via for example after-school programmes. At the same time they can themselves participate in learning – not only as learners themselves, but also as stakeholders in a collaborative process to shape the learning environment, together with learners, educational providers and decision-makers in education. To be able to give support and participate, guidance of parents and partners in form of counselling and incentives for employers to give their employees the possibility to take part in learning are important.

Identifying and overcoming obstacles

Educational institutions shall identify the strengths and weaknesses as regards the three above-mentioned dimensions. Educational leaders (e.g. head masters, school heads), can organise for example focus groups within their educational institutions in order to identify bottlenecks and ways forward.

Typical barriers to change for educators/educational institutions include:

- Overcrowded curricula - in other words, too much material educators/trainers need to get through and little time for learner collaboration/teamwork
- High-stakes assessments particularly for secondary school students that encourage «teaching for the test»
- Lack of acknowledgement of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning
- Few assessment methodologies on learners' skills for collaboration as well as on other transversal competences such as sense of initiative, risk-taking and constructive management of emotions
- Lack of professional development opportunities for educators and insufficient time to integrate new methods and aim to change mindsets
- Lack of guidelines and support for new collaborative methods
- Few opportunities for teacher collaboration (an important professional development approach) and lifelong professional development
- Insufficient investment in other types of capacity building and peer learning networks
- Difficulty of tailoring learning to meet diverse learners' needs

- A focus on transmission of knowledge rather than skills and attitudes
- Lack of opportunities for learner and parent participation in "school" governance

Collaborative learning among educators and policy-makers can also reinforce efforts to achieve higher learning participation rates. In many EU countries, evidence-based policy making remains an important principle for the formulation and implementation of inclusive learning strategies. Understanding the nature and quality of evidence underpinning existing tools, practices and strategies is particularly important if they are to be considered for implementation elsewhere or feed into European strategies as this is likely to increase their acceptability. For a better policy impact, it is of paramount importance to involve learners, educators and communities in a meaningful way in identifying problems and solutions as well as in monitoring policy implementation.





Implementing inclusive learning strategies

In order to address those challenges, the Lifelong Learning Platform calls for adoption of national/regional/European learning strategies that include the following key elements:

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| <p>1) Investments in professional and non-professional educators' initial and continuing training and professional development that should include a strong methodological dimension and should be competence based (i.e. use of digital technologies and interactive methodologies as well as dealing with intercultural dialogue, conflict management and controversial issues in learning environments).</p> <p>2) Ensuring that educators have access to professional learning communities at local, national, regional and EU level including participation in European networks and learning mobility programmes.</p> <p>3) Support collaboration and peer learning among educators and with other stakeholders within and across educational institutions: include a strong "partnership" dimension with concrete actions (opening educational settings to external interventions, collaboration with families/communities, etc.).</p> <p>4) Develop specific outreach programmes to increase the learning participation in general and particularly of disadvantaged groups by taking into account learning diversity.</p> | <p>5) Investments in tools and exemplars to support and encourage learner collaboration and encourage publishers to develop pedagogical content that is interactive.</p> <p>6) Revisit assessment methods and improve the capacity of teachers/educators in formative assessment methods.</p> <p>7) Improve the governance of educational institutions by meaningful participation of learners, families and communities in their management.</p> <p>8) Develop more evidence on learning participation and supporting "action research" with results applicable to both policy-makers and practitioners.</p> <p>9) Mainstream good practices, for instance by using the opportunities of KA3 policy support actions to support policy experimentation.</p> <p>10) Provide sustainable funding to successful initiatives that increase participation and retention in educational programmes.</p> |
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These different elements are a shared responsibility between decision-makers, practitioners and families. The Lifelong Learning Platform is calling for a genuine and deep change of our learning culture in order to build a more cohesive and democratic learning society.

Invest in professional and non-professional educators' initial and continuing **training and professional development**

Support **collaboration and peer learning** among educators and with other stakeholders

Invest in tools and exemplars

Improve **governance of educational institutions**

Mainstream good practices



Ensure that educators have access to **professional learning communities**

Develop specific **outreach programmes**

Revisit assessment tools

Develop more evidence on learning participation and support "action-research"

Provide **sustainable funding** for successful initiatives

10 Recommendations to Implement Inclusive Learning Strategies

ABOUT THE LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

The Lifelong Learning Platform (previously EUCIS-LLL) was born in 2005 as a response from civil society organisations to the definition and implementation of a European policy in the field of education and training in the so-called “Open Method of Coordination”.

In 2001 already, several educational networks had come together to share their experience and expertise around a Europe-wide consultation on the EU “Lifelong Learning Memorandum”. This cooperation became systematic when the Platform was established as a permanent organisation in 2005. For 10 years now, the Lifelong Learning Platform has played a key role in structuring and increasing the input of civil society on the “Education and Training 2020” and “Europe 2020” strategies and their predecessors.

The Lifelong Learning Platform was acknowledged by the European Commission in 2009 as a “unique representation” of lifelong learning of the various education and training actors organised at EU level, and in 2011 as “in a unique position to support European networks in education and training to work collectively at European, national and local levels and to contribute to a structured policy dialogue within the open method of coordination in education and training”.

Gathering 39 organisations, the Lifelong Learning Platform is today the most legitimate interlocutor of the EU institutions in the field of lifelong learning. It continuously defends the need to implement a dialogue across educational sectors and between stakeholders and public institutions at all levels, regional, national and European.

Values

The platform fosters a vision of lifelong learning that promotes equity, social cohesion and active citizenship. It believes that the objectives of education and training should not only be described in terms of employability or economic growth but also as a framework for personal development. It is essential to raise awareness on the fact that lifelong learning should include a large range of learning settings and create more complementarity and continuity between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

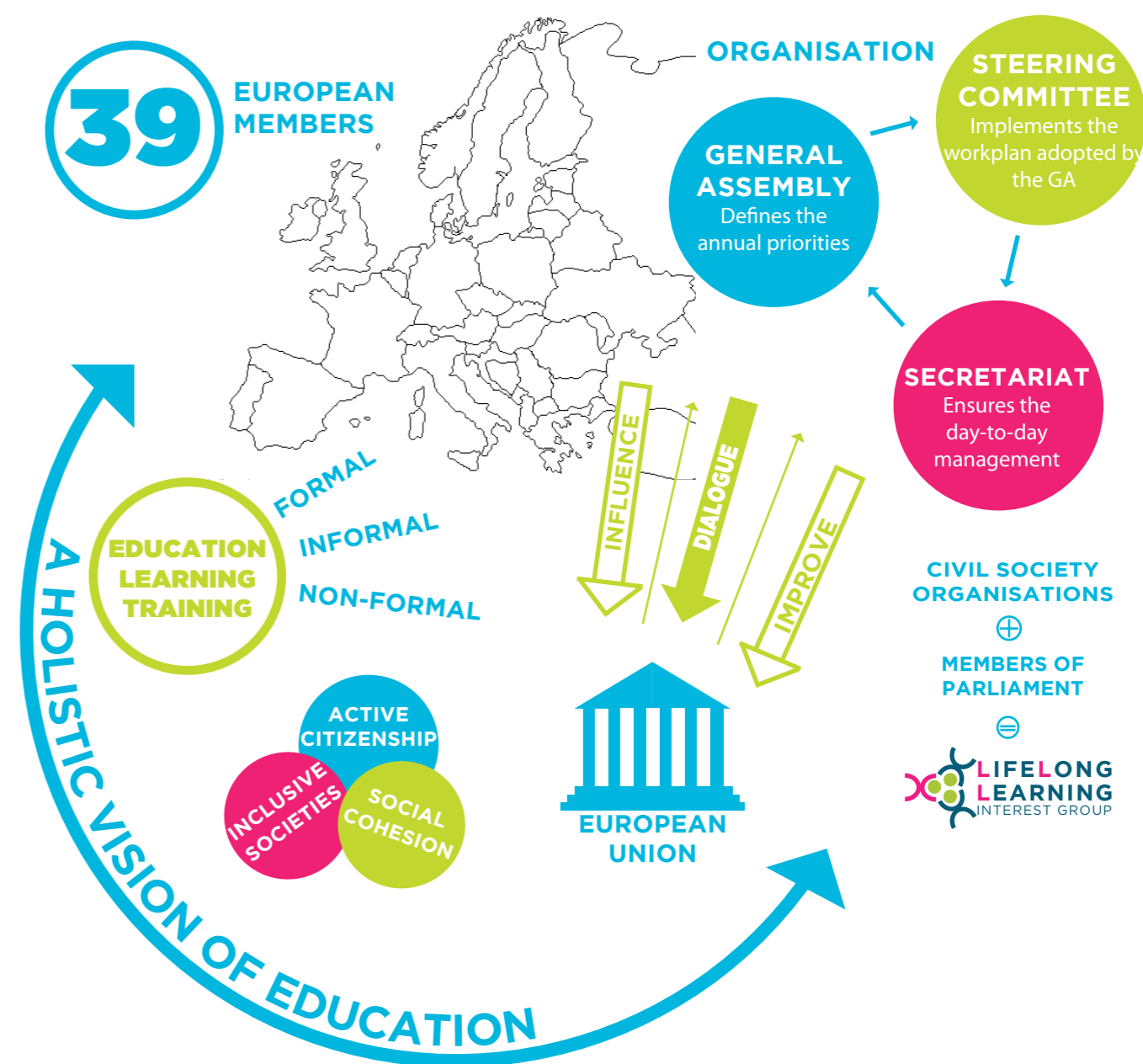
Vision

The Lifelong Learning Platform promotes a holistic vision of lifelong learning, from cradle to grave, that is not limited to formal education but integrates non-formal and informal learning. By bringing together actors from all sectors and levels of education and training, The platform contributes to an increased flexibility between systems. By encouraging an exchange of knowledge, it aims to build a citizen’s voice on education and training issues but also to propose concrete solutions to make lifelong learning a reality for all.

Objectives

- Pursuing an active dialogue with European institutions
- Enabling exchanges of best practice, experiences and expertise
- Disseminating information on key issues in the lifelong learning sector

Building the future of education!



LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

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