

Podcast on how to plan and organise awareness raising workshops

During the podcast we will talk about how to prepare and deliver an awareness raising workshop using a Peer Education approach. This material was inspired and is using information available in the Tool-Kit for Quality in Peer Education created by the European Peer Training Organization, adapted and accesibilized for the use of persons with visual impairment for the Ambassadors of Change KA2 project and adapted for the scope of the Peers for Inclusion Open Learning Platform KA2 strategic partnership project.

Ofensiva Tinerilor is a youth organization based in Arad, Romania dedicated to offer young people project based educational opportunities by involving them in non-formal learning activities. Our mission is to support young people learning from each other how to embrace their differences and realize their unique potential.

The European Peer Training Organisation, who inspired us for this material, is dedicated to build the capacity of young people and youth serving organisations to implement quality peer education activities and offering progressive personal and professional development.

Due to the ever-growing demand of preparing groups of young people or activities to be inclusive for persons facing different types of disabilities we decided to take The Peers for inclusion methodology into the on-line space offering in this way opportunities to a larger number of beneficiaries to use this methodology to create accessible opportunities for their students, volunteers, employees, groups of participants etc.

What is Peer Education and why we suggest a peer education approach to be used when organizing an awareness raising workshop?

A peer is a person who belongs to the same social group as another person or group. Peers are individuals who share related values, experiences and lifestyles and who are approximately the same age. The connecting element or “peer factor” can also be based on other aspects of a person’s identity such as:

- ethnicity
- religious or philosophical belief
- gender
- sexual orientation
- occupation
- socio-economic and/or health status
- physical or personality traits

- history or origin

Peer also means “equal”: “meaning we all learn together and that all our contributions are of equal worth”.

Essentially, your “peer” will be someone “like you” in one or more aspects of your identity. Recognizing someone as a peer is often unconscious and intuitive. It doesn’t necessarily mean that this person is your friend.

Peer education happens when young people carry out informal or organised activities with their peers, over a period of time, to develop their knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes enabling them to be responsible for themselves and others and to create a space where they can feel safe and respected.

Peer education rests on the idea that “young people are the experts on their own lives and are therefore the best starting point in any learning process”. Peer education enables youth to deal effectively with problems that affect them.

As obvious as it may sound, the success of peer education initiatives lies first and foremost in one’s capability to truly consider youth as equal partners.

Peer education can take place in any setting where young people feel comfortable: in schools and universities, clubs, churches, community centres, workplaces, on the street, on the Internet... It can happen in small groups or just between two people.

Peer education can be as simple and informal as when your friend is teaching you how to use makeup, how to juggle, how to play an instrument, or how to fix your radiator. It can also be more “formalised”.

- Within schools: training a group of peer trainers who could raise the awareness of other youngsters on specific topics (for instance by organising a 2h workshop in a classroom, by participating in a thematic week/day in the school, by contributing to an external activity with classmates...).
- Within youth organisations/youth centres: training a group of peer trainers who could organise specific activities for the other members (for instance through workshops, sport, exhibitions, music, drama, street education...).

Now that we found out what Peer Education is, let’s see how to get started on preparing an awareness raising workshop using a Peer Education approach.

What is an awareness workshop and why do you want to do it?

Awareness raising is a fundamental component in tackling issues in your community. It is a two-way street: fostering communication and information exchange in order to improve mutual understanding as well as mobilising the community's individuals, to start acting on the topic your workshop is on.

Before starting on preparation of your workshop you have to find your motivation on why you are doing it, why you would like to get involved and make people aware of the topic you choose. Also setting a goal, long and short term for yourself and the activity is very important.

Once you've defined your aims, you have set your finish line. The next step involves planning your route to that finish line. The easiest way to do it is by answering the 5Ws and 1H questions.

1. Who are the young people you want to make a difference to?
2. What are you aiming for? What does your finish line look like?
3. Why is this an important topic?
4. What key activities, resources and people will help you reach your finish line?
5. How much time do you need? How much time do you have?
6. Where will your workshop take place?

Use the 5 Ws and 1H questions to map the route to your finish line. Planning is not a contest so if you think that something will take between 2 and 5 days, or will require between 2 and 4 people, always go with your mid-to-high estimate. It's always better to have plenty of time to do something than to skip some parts of your project due to running out of time.

Since this podcast is suggesting ways to develop awareness raising workshops using a peer education approach, your participants will most likely be young people who wish to engage on the topic you will be working on. There are a few questions that you want to clarify when it comes to your target group. While doing so, bear in mind that it is generally less efficient to just call for participants "out in the open" than finding ways for already existing peer groups to select among them several individuals to send to a workshop or a particular event. These individuals will then come back to the group with more legitimacy and impact: they will be more eager to diffuse what they have learned to their peers and to take action with their support.

When you work with people, it is important to think of the settings where they will gather.

The venue is the location where your workshop will take place.

At some point in the preparation process, you will have to choose a venue that fits your activity. When you gather a group of people somewhere, it's important to think of their well-being. What kind of place would be appropriate for your target group? We encourage you to think from their perspective and identify a venue they would feel connected with. A proper environment will help the group feel more comfortable and willing to engage.

Next, I will list a couple of parameters that you need to take into consideration when choosing the venue:

The Space

You will likely need a room for your project activities. Its size depends on the nature of the activities and the number of persons involved.

Is the space large enough for the size of your group?

How many chairs and tables will you need?

Is the space accessible for you and your participants?

Is there a possibility of doing an orientation session and putting markers to help participants' mobility?

You might also need to think about extra space if you plan to break into smaller groups or a separate space for free time. This might sound obvious, but make sure the room is equipped with windows that can be opened. If a certain number of people are coming together in the same space for a certain amount of time, it is necessary to have fresh air from time to time.

Likewise, natural light will be much more agreeable than neon lighting and no outside view.

These are the practical and important supportive factors for a learning process.

Accessibility

Before taking the final decision, make sure you find out how to get there. Is it easily accessible by public transport? You need to inform participants in time about the location and also make sure they have all necessary information on the venue before. Moreover, is the place equipped for people with disabilities? Peer education is about inclusion and in the context of this specific project we are talking about awareness raising workshops on the topic of inclusion; keep this in mind when searching for a venue. Ideally, the venue needs to be checked in person before the event to make sure that it supports people's well-being and that it fits your purpose.

How to sustain learning?

This part of the podcast is dedicated to another important aspect of your workshop: the methods.

What distinguishes peer education from other teaching methods is that learning doesn't happen in isolation; it is a mutual process based on a peer factor. Peer factor is a magnet which brings people together, be it a similar characteristic such as age, background, gender or culture or as shared perspective, such as an interest, concern or even identity.

When you deliver peer education activities, you are responsible for creating an environment where people can learn from each other. In addition to choosing a convenient venue in terms of space and accessibility, this includes the following aspects:

Choosing the right facilitator(s) is important.

This means someone who can connect with the participants and is able to demonstrate the necessary knowledge, experience and skills to manage the group process. Good facilitation helps everyone feel valued and understood and encourages participants to be involved in their own ways.

The role of the facilitator within a group is:

- To keep the group focused on the task
- To remain as neutral as possible
- To involve and encourage everyone in the group
- To listen and contribute
- To remind the group what has been discussed.

Creating a safe space for participants to connect and get to know each other is a first and essential step in peer education activities such as awareness raising workshops.

A supportive environment encourages learners to take responsibility for the activities they are involved in. If you and/or your participants haven't met before, including one or several "getting to know each other" and/or "icebreaker" activities is the right way to go. You may also start with an energizer to pump up the good energy in the room. You will find several such exercises on-line and some are also suggested in the additional training module created by this project or the Ambassadors of Change project through which a number of awareness raising activities in favour of persons with visual impairment were developed.

Despite sharing a peer factor, your participants are essentially a group of individuals with their unique personality traits, experiences and values. It is important to bear this in mind when working with others and be open to individual differences. Instead of relying on hidden expectations, allow your participants to create a set of guiding principles for their work and find common ground. When people own the rules, they are more likely to feel a sense of

ownership. Establishing ground rules may also come handy should the group run into conflict.

Experiential learning is the process of “learning through experience”, or “learning through reflection on doing”. It is an approach that involves all aspects of the person, and focuses on the learning process for the individual. It is distinct from didactic learning in which the learner is more passive. It means using methods that give people the opportunity to live meaningful experiences on a specific issue, topic or situation. When participants experience these aspects themselves, they are more likely to empathise and relate. When organising your awareness raising workshop, we suggest you think of methods and activities that create learning experiences for your participants.

People who learn how to recognise and embrace their own approach to learning – those who develop metacognitive abilities – can identify what makes learning meaningful for them resulting in a profound sense of empowerment and improved engagement with your activity. It is not always easy to propose such a frame for people to fully explore the way one learns, communicates and processes information, but it is recommended that you diversify as much as possible the formats of the activities, so that everyone truly connects at one point or another. So, try alternating classic presentations, small group discussions, creative exercises (drawing, collage...), role plays, visualisations, meditation, activities involving movement (warm-ups, dance, mime...), use of digital media, etc.

In peer education it is essential to leave space for participants’ ideas and to be responsive to the group’s needs. Sometimes, a planned activity doesn’t work the way it was supposed to because the group is not in the “right mood” to engage with it, or because the format is not adapted to the learning patterns of the participants. This means you have to be flexible with your agenda.

You can exchange or skip activities to keep people focused without losing sight of your goals. You can be transparent about it and have a direct conversation with the group, asking them what they would like to change in the process to be able to contribute better.

So, designing and implementing a qualitative awareness raising workshop requires making such learning outcomes explicit and sustaining it with young people involved.

Defining such learning outcomes of your peer education activities requires taking into consideration where young people start from (BEFORE), what they will actually learn (DURING), how they will transfer their learning (AFTER) and how they will continue learning (LATER). At each stage, it is important to think about ways to help young people become aware of and/or demonstrate their competences.

Peer education is not the same as working with young people. It is a method which values diversity and enables people to connect and learn from each other.

What you will do during your workshops is, you will simulate an experience and expect that magically participants will learn from it. But besides having the experience, what actually makes the whole difference in the experiential learning/non-formal education is the DEBRIEFING, the reflection on the experience that you have just created during the workshop.

The debriefing is a structure to help participants analyze and integrate their experiences and may take a variety of forms, such as checklists, informal discussions, structured discussions, or written commentaries.

One such model, the **EIAG model**, asks participants to experience, identify, analyze and generalize the results and procedures used in the simulation.

E. Experience

The group is experiencing a structured common activity, designed by the workshop facilitator with the aim of generating specific learning objectives.

In this phase the facilitator would normally not interfere with questions, unless the group is facing blockages, has some resistance of engaging in the activity.

In such case there are questions that aim to:

- overcome the opposition in such way that the resistance is included in the activity,
- learn from these blockages in case they cannot be overcome.

For instance:

- What is happening? What do you feel related to this?
- Would you like to give it a try?
- What do you need to know in order to...?
- Can you be more precise or give an example?
- What would you prefer? Do you have a suggestion?
- What are your suspicions?
- What is the worst and best thing that can happen?
- If you could guess the answer, what would that be?

- Can you phrase this differently?
- What else? Would you say more about this?

Identify

Important facts that happened during the experience and are relevant for the evolution of the task/group. **WHAT?**

This is the sharing phase when the participants have ended the experience.

The questions are oriented towards generating data, being descriptive about what happened from the different perspectives of the people within the group.

- Who would like to share about his/her experience? Who else?
- What did you think was the most significant thing that happened?
- Who had a similar experience?
- Who had a different experience? Who reacted in a different way?
- What did you notice?
- What made you feel good or bad during the experience?
- What did you become aware of?

Analyze

The evolution of the task, seek the source of the behaviours and their effects.

SO WHAT?

Now the participants share common information about the group and individual experiences.

The questions are oriented towards analyzing and giving meaning to this information to the group and individuals.

- What did you feel/think/notice when...?
- In what way did that behaviour influence you?
- What does this mean to you?
- What makes you think this was good/bad?
- What problems did you face and how did you attempt to meet them?

- What did you try to do that worked good for you? In what way?
- What did you try that did not work for you? In what way?
- How could it be different?
- What do you understand better about yourself/the group?

Generalize

Help participants to draw conclusions and find the learning points for their lives.

In this phase participants are working on bringing the learning from the simulated experience into their daily life and see what makes sense to each.

NOW WHAT?

The questions are oriented towards drawing conclusions.

- What was your intention?
- What did you learn comparing your intention to what you heard from the group?
- Does this experience remind you about something in particular?
- What does this experience help you clarify?
- What principle/law is operating?
- What did you learn/relearn?
- What did you learn from this game that you did not know?
- Did you learn anything that you could use in your life?
- How does this help you in your life?

At the end of the debriefing, it is important to validate the conclusions.

Sequential steps for validating conclusions are:

1. List conclusions: identify conclusions drawn from the game experience.
2. Game Data: identify the specific happenings in the game that brought you to this particular conclusion.
3. Judgment: is the conclusion drawn from the game experience true or untrue in the real world.

4. Life Data: identify specific happenings from real life that support your contention that the conclusion is realistic or unrealistic. This last step can often lead to a search for data that supports or disproves the conclusion.

An option is also to validate/reinforce the conclusions with theoretical background, presenting concepts, studies, research.

We have seen that a peer education workshop is a path, a cycle in which young people can grow and develop their unique potential. To be meaningful, such activity requires the active commitment of participants throughout the process. Of course, this commitment depends first on each participant's willingness to engage.

Participation is more than just being present in the same room with other people. To participate means to be involved actively. So, to ensure that your workshop is successful you would need to motivate and sustain the active participation and involvement of your participants.

A peer education project can be seen as a living system. No matter how well you will have planned everything, a lot of parameters (such as your participants and the different people involved) will require you to be flexible. Spending too much energy in sticking to your initial plan might reduce the quality of your activity and prevent you to go with the flow creatively.

In this part of the podcast, you will learn more about what you can do to adapt your plans according to the workshop's development, your participants' needs and your objectives.

This was our podcast on how to organise awareness raising workshops using peer education.

We hope you enjoyed it!

You can get back to it as many times you need and for further learning on the topic, please feel free to contact us anytime!

Ofensiva Tinerilor is wishing you a pleasant peer learning activity!