



THE EFFECT OF NONFORMAL LEARNING ON THE DISABLED PEOPLE AND EDUCATORS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

The aim of this research was to classify the opinions of the disabled participants and educators on Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Project on non-formal learning regarding whether they knew the meaning of non-formal learning, through which non-formal learning activities happening during the Project workshop, and whether this learning had a contribution to their personal and professional development. The research is a qualitative study with a multiple holistic case study design. Data were collected from interviews using semi-structured interview forms. At the end of the research, conclusions were classified under five themes. The first theme was that they did not know the exact meaning of non-formal learning. The second theme was that there were some non-formal learning activities which the participants were engaged in during the Project workshop. The third and fourth themes were that the non-formal learning had a positive effect on their personal and professional development. The fifth theme was metaphors they produced for non-formal learning.

Keywords: non-formal learning, professional development, Erasmus+ project, disabled people, educational theatre

1. Introduction

In 2015, the European Union celebrated a quarter of a century of implementation of EU youth programmes empowered by EU youth policy. In that period, vast changes have occurred: the formal education became more informal and non-formal education became more formalised – in part due to Europe's long-term commitment to reduce the

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mismatch in employability skills of its citizens by supporting, among other equally important efforts, youth work and non-formal learning projects (European Commission, 2015)

Regardless of these efforts, a huge shadow looms over the field of non-formal education – peoples' understanding and agreeing on its meaning. While debates among scholars about the definition of non-formal learning might be more or less settled, there remains a fact that Europe is a more-or-less expanding conglomerate of compatible, yet different nations and cultures. To provide an example of these differences, a publication by the European association for non-formal and informal education (EAICY) examined the meanings of, among other educational terms, non-formal education in countries ranging from Belarus, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Ukraine and even Russia (Clarijs, 2005). Obviously, vast structural differences (economic, legal, educational, cultural etc.). The "Non-formal and Informal Education in Europe" publication was commissioned by the EAICY as they, as scholars, found that it is imperative to understand what "non-formal education", "Informal education", "leisure time", "after school learning" and other related terms really *mean* in various countries of Europe and "when (why) how are these conceptions implemented, what is the concerned policy in the different European countries? (Clarijs, 2005). Obviously, educational policies are the logical point in which Europe's educational approaches can recognise their differences and work toward a uniform (or uniformly recognized) education, be it formal or non-formal. But even with European policies becoming closer and more entwined over time (toward which end programmes such as Erasmus+ are striving for), there remains an issue of misunderstanding on the basic level – the level of the individuals engaged in an international communication or educational process.

Non-formal education term was started to be used through the end of 1960s because of the different needs and demands learning out of school. According to Cooms and Ahmed (1974), non-formal education is "*any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children*", and they defined formal education as "*institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system, spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university*" (p.8). La Belle (1981) stated that the major difference between formal and non-formal education often rests with the influence of the government on the sponsorship of the two types of educational programs.

If we move away from (often) abstract and complex policies and scholar discussions, the very basic misunderstandings of terms among those involved in international communication or education in Europe stem from the fact that during an international encounter between people who speak different language, the communicational gap is bridged primarily through the use of English language. However, by communicating in a foreign language often brings misunderstandings that sometimes go undetected by those involved until a later time. What often happens in these kinds of interactions is that both sides prejudice that the other side is attaching the same meanings to their words, sentences and messages – and this often is not the case.

The same English word can have different meanings or connotations in different languages. Hence, we found that it is equally important to research the meaning that individuals place to the term “non-formal education” as it is to research the different educational policies.

The opportunity to conduct such qualitative research arose during the “Educathe+ as the place of raising inclusion and employability of people with disability” (Educathe+) project. It was a two-year partnership in the field of education for adults, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2015-2017). Its main focus was on developing skills of people with disability and other professionals who work with that population (assistants, educators etc.) by the use of drama-action model of work. Drama-action model is an educational approach that combines advantages of a scientific research (namely participatory action research, and theatre in order to achieve emancipatory and non-formal educational impact for those directly involved (usually members of some marginalized group and those who oppose them in some way) and to promote positive, inclusive and locally sustainable actions to those indirectly involved – the audience that witnesses the final theatre performance of drama-action model based educational process. Basically, the process of drama-action model always involves all sides of the researched issue (in this case: people with disability and those who feel they are not disabled) and follows the three stages of rites of passage (separation-exploration-reincorporation), that anthropologist Victor Turner placed in a theatre setting (Turner, 1982), with a difference being that Turner’s theatre exploration (or liminoid) stage has been imbued with the spiral steps of Kurt Lewin’s action research learning through reflection, planning, acting, reflection (Lewin, 1946). The whole process ends with a public performance in which both sides present to the public the issue that is dividing them for some reason, presented in a form of negative actions, and the vision of a positive action that could help overcome their issue (Hromatko, 2008).

This educational and advocacy process was used by partners in during the Educathe+ non-formal education project since it allowed them not only to educate the participants but also to raise awareness and to promote equality and inclusion of people with disability in seven countries of Europe (Croatia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Belgium, Italy, Greece and Latvia). Educathe+ partnership was coordinated by a non-governmental organisation UPSET (Association for Prevention of Stigmatization and Education Through Theatre) from Zagreb, Croatia who was joined by partners: Akdeniz University from Antalya, Turkey; Teatar Tsvete from Sofia, Bulgaria; Gemeenschap De Zeyp from Brussels, Belgium; Integrācijas Inkubators from Ventspils, Latvia; O.C.E.A.N Organization of culture, education and advice in networks NGO from Athens, Greece; Associazione Diversamente from Syracuse, Italy; and A.R.A.T.O.S. Politistiko Somateio Proothisis Theatrikis kai Kinimatografikis Texnis Aratos o Soleus from Thessaloniki, Greece. Each partner organised their own 5-day educational theatre workshop based on drama-action model and their workshops ended with a public performance and publication of a free educational manual sharing their methods, knowledge exercises and experiences.

Authors of this article found that this international educational process is a great opportunity for researching the differences in meanings non-formal learning for culturally different participants from Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Belgium and Latvia, as well as to research if the non-formal education that utilises theatre and drama practices contributed to their personal and/or professional development. This is a second research conducted during this partnership, as we also conducted a case study research on “The opinions of the disabled participants and educators on Erasmus+ KA2 project” in which we focused on researching whether or not the often disputed theatre educational process (personified in one of its variations, the drama-action model) has educational impact or not (Hromatko, Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016). In this second research, the participants were interviewed on five subjects:

1. What is participants’ definition of non-formal learning in the Erasmus+ KA2 strategic partnership project?
2. What is the description of the non-formal learning that participants gained during the workshop?
3. What is the description of the contribution of the non-formal learning to participants’ personal development?
4. What is the contribution of this non-formal learning to participants’ professional development?
5. What do participants think the non-formal learning is like?

2. Research Design

Based on the research nature, a case study with a holistic single case design of qualitative research was employed to explore the opinions of the disabled participants and educators on Erasmus+ KA2 project.

2.1 Sampling

This study was conducted at Greece from January 31st, 2016 to February 4th, 2016. 23 participants from 6 countries including 9 disabled people and 14 educators participated in the Erasmus KA2 Strategic Partnership Project Theatre Workshop. A non-probability sample technique based on the purposive sampling method (Palys, 2008) was used because ‘the sample derives from the researcher targeting a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population, it simply represent itself. This is frequently the case in small scale research, for example, as with one or two organizations, two or three groups of participants, or a particular group of participants, where no attempt to generalize is desired; this is frequently the case for qualitative researches such as action ethnographic or case (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Table 1: Participant status and accompanying data collection

Code	Position	Age	Interview
A	Educator	51	Yes
B	Disabled Participant	42	Yes
C	Disabled Participant	52	Yes
D	Disabled Participant	50	Yes
E	Educator	52	Yes
F	Educator	45	Yes
G	Disabled Participant	31	Yes
H	Educator	41	Yes

As seen in Table 1, the informants in this study were disabled people and educators. Face-to-face interviews were done with 8 participants (4 of them are disabled people and 4 of them are educators) from 6 countries who participated at Theatre Workshop held by OCEAN NGO in Athens. The participants were volunteers, and there were no restrictions on the ages and seniority.

2.2 Method

The method of this research is qualitative study. The research is a case study with a holistic single case. Data were collected via face-to-face interviews by using semi-structured interview forms. Qualitative study is a study which uses a process to present perceptions and events in a holistic and realistic way in their natural environment. Data collection methods such as observation, interviews and document analyses are used in qualitative study. The case study present results by observing them in their real context which determines the reasons and results. In qualitative research design, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, school performance, and interpersonal relations in real contexts (Cohen et al, 2007; Yin, 2017).

2.3 Data Collection

In order to classify the opinions of disabled people and educators participating Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership Project Theatre Workshop as the definition of non-formal learning, the non-formal learning that they gained during the workshop, and the contribution of the Project to their personal and professional development, semi-structured individual interviews were used because this would provide an in-depth exploration of the topic. It would also allow the flexibility, for example, to change the order of questions, simplify the questions, and to probe the interviews (Cohen et al, 2007). Data were collected from January 31st, 2016 to February 4th, 2016. Face-to-face interviews were used and informants' experiences, thoughts and feelings were recorded in a taped diary.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis began with repeated readings of interview transcripts from conversations with disabled people and educators. The purpose was to determine the essence of the phenomenon and structures of experiences of the disabled people and educators who participated in the Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership Project Theatre Workshop. During data analysis, the data were organized categorically and chronologically, reviewed repeatedly and continually coded. Interview transcripts were regularly reviewed. In addition, the data analysis process was aided by the use of a qualitative data analysis computer program called NVIVO 10. These kinds of computer programs do not actually perform the analysis but facilitate and assist it. That is to say, NVIVO 10 does not perform the analysis but only supports the researcher doing the analysis by organizing data and recodes, nodes etc. (Kelle, 1995; Cohen et al, 2007).

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Participants were briefed about the aims of the research, kept informed at all stages and offered anonymity. A consent form was signed between researcher and each participant about the use of the data in terms of how its analysis would be reported and disseminated. Care was also taken not to impose the researcher's beliefs on others since researcher's beliefs were secondary, and it was the participants thinking which was required.

2.6 Interview Process and Mapping

The purpose of this study was to classify the opinions of the disabled participants and educators who were participating Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership Project Theatre Workshop. Thus, the mapping of interview questions was carried out on five levels. Firstly, the disabled people and educators were asked if they knew the meaning of non-formal learning, secondly what non-formal learning they gained during the Project, thirdly what the contributions of the Project to their personal development were, fourthly what the contributions of the Project to their professional development were and finally what they thought of the Project and why.

2.7 Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the study, some steps were followed: (i) data were collected from various sources such as interviews (individual) and documents in terms of triangulation (ii) data were used as direct quotations from the interviews without making any comments on them, (iii) a purposive sampling method based on voluntarism was used in order to get the opinions and experiences of disabled people and educators participating Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership Project Theatre Workshop (iv) data were coded by two independent researchers and Cohen's kappa coefficient was calculated to determine inter-rater reliability of themes coded - 0.91 perfect agreement- for inner reliability (Landis & Koach, 1977) and (v) records of interviews, documents and participant observations were kept for outer reliability.

3. Findings

In this study, we tried to present the effect of non-formal learning on disabled people and educators participating Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership Project Theatre Workshop. The opinions of disabled people and educators were classified according to their definition of non-formal learning, the non-formal learning that they gained during the workshop, and the contribution of the Project to their personal and professional development. During the research process, participants were offered anonymity.

3.1 Participants' Definition of Non-Formal Learning in the Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership Project

Disabled people and educators were asked about their definition of non-formal learning. The data can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants' Definition of Non-Formal Learning

Definition of Non-Formal Learning	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	F	%
1. Half-Definition			√		√	√	√	√	5	62.5%
2. No Definition	√	√		√					3	37.5%

As can be understood from the frequency analysis of the participants' definition of non-formal learning in Table 2, no participant gave a full definition of non-formal learning. 62.5% of disabled people and educators gave a half definition. The definitions of the participants are as follows:

“Non-formal education aims to educate people in a specific subject like in formal education, but it is more flexible method-wise. I believe non-formal education is quite effective because it is more group focused and gives more freedom to the learner. Non-formal education is generally preferred for self-improvement subjects.” (C1, 1)

“Learning under a free type of expression and communication between the participants. The all environment is friendly and that helps to development of a direct change of knowledge and experiences. All this doesn't decrease the quality of learning. In contrast helps the human feelings and ideas to circulate in a better way.” (E1, 1)

“My definition for non-formal learning is the learning based on programs or different than usual methods developed by organisations in fields like culture, arts, and sports.” (F1, 1)

“For me non-formal learning is a different way of learning from the conventional way. You don't need to go to school or university and it can be for everyone or for those who don't want to follow the traditional way of learning.” (G1,1)

“Non-formal learning is learning outside the classroom.” (H1,1)

Next, 37.5% of disabled people and educators gave a false non-formal learning definition. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

“Non-formal education allows you to access every child with functional impairment. My view is that the more methods we have, the more likely we can engage childrens and young people with severe functional disorders in training and development activities in a way that is acceptable to them and understandable” (A1, 2)

“Is this learning which exists because its necessary to exist. We need it. There is no other way to learn this. And that’s why we create special training; we meet people who know more about this and together to share our ideas, thoughts about this which we want to know.” (B1,2)

“Everyone workshop in this project, I suppose every person is digging to play into his own soul and find interesting things. This thing can be pleasant, unpleasant and it is our task to understand who we are. I think that the most of human’s problem comes from the problems with peoples personalities. And those personalities go from childhood. And when the childhood problems rise historical problems in future.” (D1,2)

When the opinions of the disabled people and educators on the definition of non-formal learning generally were analyzed, three educators gave half definition and one educator did not know the meaning of non-formal learning. Moreover, two disabled people did not know the meaning of non-formal learning, and two of them gave a half definition. As a general conclusion, participants did not know the exact meaning of non-formal education they gained during the Project.

3.2 The Non-Formal Learning Gained During the Project

Disabled people and educators were asked about the non-formal learning they gained during the Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership Project Theatre Workshop. The data can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: The Non-Formal Learning Gained During the Project

Gained Non-Formal Learning	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	F	%
1. Learning new experiences and methods	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	7	87.5%
2. Improving communication skills			√						1	12,5%
3. No rules and borders		√		√					2	25%

As can be understood from the frequency analysis of the gained non-formal learnings during the Project in Table 3, 87.5% of disabled people and educators stated that they learnt new experiences and methods. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

"It was a unique opportunity for professionals and children and young people with severe functional disorders involved in the project to take over the experience and working methods of other countries." (A2,2)

"I knew that theatre trainings could contribute a lot to youth, but I have never imagined about theatre techniques being used as a non-formal education tool before. Now I think that every young person should be provided with these trainings, especially the ones with problems. This way, they can improve their communication skills, express themselves better, they can be more creative and confident and also they can be more aware about certain subjects." (C2,2)

"I found my illness in my childhood. And now I think that it's really influenced my future. Especially the lesson we singing opens my mind and I feel that I begin speaking English better than ... It removes some barriers, some borders. There were many aspects which were forbidden for me in my childhood and now I have, I can manage my emotions successfully. You know our people unlocked me very well, built into one solid form. And now I feel myself more freely, I am not frightened to ask inconvenient questions. I am not frightened to get unusual or strange answers. Because I understand that we are different people with difficult, historical personal life experience, and answers can be different. And every point of you can be ..., can be interesting and as more information I can get from the person, it gives me some information for thinking and understanding, what can we do in this different kind of situations. Even negative answers are answers, at least I know... This is more interesting which I find here." (D2,2)

"Great experience. So close to my character. It was a very nice surprise for me. I thought that everything would be more typical and that was a brake for me. I communicated with the best of my ideas. I learned to "read" eyes, smiles, silence." (E2,2)

"I think i have developed my skills by increasing knowledge about the level of discrimination to PWD and the way that PWD could express themselves in theater; saying no to social differences." (F2,2)

"I can say for sure that i learned new theater Technics and ways to use my body, voice and speech on stage." (G2,2)

"The non-formal learning that I gained during this workshop was based on the experience and theatre methods." (H2,2)

Next, 25% of disabled people and educators stated that they learnt there is no rules and borders for disabled people. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

“I’m not sure that this is only by this workshop but also it comes from our meeting. I think that the main thing which I meant here is that non formal education has no rules and borders because it comes by heart.” (B2,3)

“I found my illness in my childhood. And now I think that it’s really influenced my future. Especially the lesson we singing opens my mind and I feel that I begin speaking English more better than ...It removes some barriers, some borders.” (D2,3)

12.5% of disabled people and educators stated that the non-formal learning they gained is the improved communication skills. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

“I knew that theatre trainings could contribute a lot to youth, but I have never imagined about theatre techniques being used as a non-formal education tool before. Now I think that every young person should be provided with these trainings, especially the ones with problems. This way, they can improve their communication skills, express themselves better, they can be more creative and confident and also they can be more aware about certain subjects.” (C2,1)

It is understood from participants’ views that they learnt new experiences and methods, improved their communications skills, and understood that there are no borders and rules via non-formal learning.

3.3 The Contribution of Non-Formal Learning to Participants’ Personal Development

Disabled people and educators were asked about the contribution of non-formal learning to their personal development. The data can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Contribution of Non-Formal Learning to Personal Development

Contribution to Personal Development	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	f	%
1. Becoming better person				√	√		√	√	4	50%
2. Self-confidence		√	√	√		√			4	50%
3. Contact with disabled people			√				√		2	25%
4. Contact with new people	√					√			2	25%
5. Going out of routine			√						1	12.5%

As can be understood from the frequency analysis of the contribution of non-formal learning to their personal development in Table 4, 50 % of disabled people and educators stated that the main contributions were becoming better person and having self-confidence. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

“This kind of education helped me to re-open some interesting things about myself which sometimes very pleasant sometimes not so pleasant and it give me aim to do something in direction to improve myself, my behavior, my mind, my..... I am very grateful to

this people who has patience and knowledge to help too many people, not mattering disabled or not disabled to understand themselves better. (D3,1)

"I became a better person. Unique experience. Under the very specific circumstances that took place. My human sensor has been sharpened." (E3,1)

I can say that all this experience really made me a better person. (G3,1)

"The contribution of this non formal learning is the emotional sphere and in the theatre skills sphere" (H3,1)

"Oh, Here I understand that I am a beautiful woman. They told me, I'm quiet ... to hear this and it was unexpected for me so I am very happy to hear it because they told me I have very impressive eyes. I don't know. But it is so nice, I don't know is it true or not but it's so nice at this age to hear these things. And also they told me that by coming from... I am acting very well. It is very important for me to hear this because they told me that I am acting very well. I have not another possibility to work, I am in a wheelchair, I could use only one of my hands and this is very important for me and it's so nice delighted to hear this. And I still continue to act. So this is very nice." (B3,5)

"I have been working as a teacher for approximately 25 years. Thus, speaking in front of a crowd is not a thing that I am not used to. But I realized that this was a very different experience the day I started the trainings. Because this time, they were watching me instead of the things I was telling. Being watched was not a thing that I was really comfortable with. But approaches of instructors and my friends helped me overcome this discomfort very quickly." (C3,5)

"This kind of education helped me to re-open some interesting things about myself which sometimes very pleasant sometimes not so pleasant and it give me aim to do something in direction to improve myself, my behavior, my mind, I am very grateful to this people who has patience and knowledge to help too many people, not mattering disabled or not disabled to understand themselves better." (D3,5)

"Today I feel like a representative in my country. Someone who is ready to offer to the society. The experience i had gave me emotional rewards. I want to share that." (F3,5)

Next, 25% of disabled people and educators stated that the contribution of non-formal learning to their personal development were having contact with new people and disabled people. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

"Another contribution for my personal development is about disabled people. I never really had a disabled friend before. I think when you live with people who don't realise your needs and who doesn't know what you have been through before for a long time, you

also start to neglect your needs. You force yourself to behave like a non-disabled person. Working with people with different disabilities and trainers who have worked with them made me realise this, and it made me more self-aware. Instead of pushing myself too much, I put my needs forward easily. Also, this type of training is a fun method of physical activity for physically handicapped people.” (C3,2)

“Learning about myself, my limits, how theater is a place and a wonderful way to connect with all people, how i used to see people with disability and how i see them now, travel and learn about new places and cultures and all that is because i was so lucky to participate in this workshop” (G3,2)

“The personal benefit of the project during the project is the creation of contacts with representatives from different European countries, whose work relates to children and adults with functional disorders. At the same time studying the available methods and specialists in this area in Latvia. We will definitely strive to continue the project activities in Latvia and Ventspils in order to increase the possibilities for integration of people with disabilities both in society, in employment, and in other fields.” (A3,3)

“Today I feel like a representative in my country. Someone who is ready to offer to the society. The experience i had gave me emotional rewards. I want to share that.” (F3.3)

12.5% of disabled people and educators stated that the contribution of non-formal learning to their personal development was going out of routine. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

“During these workshops, I do lots of physical things. Also, I feel myself relieved both physically and mentally because I am occupied with something outside my normal life.” (C3,4)

When the contribution of nonformal learning to participants’ personal development is interpreted generally, it can be said that they become better persons and their self-confidence improved. They also had a chance to contact new people via nonformal learning environment.

3.4 The Contribution of Non-Formal Learning to Participants’ Professional Development

Disabled people and educators were asked about the the contribution of non-formal learning to their professional development. The data can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Contribution of Non-Formal Learning to Professional Development

Contribution to Professional Development	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	f	%
1. Collaborating and sharing experiences	√	√					√		3	37,5%
2. Having future aim to act			√	√					2	25%
3. Implementing new methods	√					√			2	25%
4. Learning more about disabled people			√					√	2	25%
5. Realising improvements			√		√				2	25%

As can be understood from the frequency analysis of the contribution of non-formal learning to their professional development in Table 5, 37,5 % of disabled people and educators stated that the main contributions were collaborating and sharing experiences. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

“One of the key benefits is the ability to collaborate and attract highly skilled professionals and share experiences using their expertise, skills and education” (A4,1).

“I was very impressed by the abilities which people with diagnosis could cover the level of their potential. It’s so high level they, I don’t know they learn they develop their potential so much with the help of this ... I made now. In some way this people with diagnosis are more high level than me to be honest I am very impressed of the results, of their work so I would like to contact to this people, this organization to continue” (B4,1)

“Through this experience i believe i have grown a lot in a way that will definitely help me in the future to collaborate with people.” (G4,1)

Next, 25% of disabled people and educators stated that the contribution of non-formal learning to their professional development were having future aim to act, implementing new methods, learning more about disabled people, and realising improvements. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

“Getting together with disabled people from different countries made us realise the lacking things in our country. I have seen that with special interest and training, every disability/obstacle can be overcome. Seeing what it can do with people with mental disabilities surprised me a lot.” (C4,2)

“A good, sensitive human mind and soul is a better professional. Everything operates under another prism. (E4,2)

“We look forward to launching theater art therapy classes in our organization in the future, which will give more plenty of opportunities to well-known children and young people with speech, hearing and intellectual development disorders.” (A4,3)

“I already use technics and methods about the entrance of PWD in theatre.” (F4,3)

“During these workshops my awareness about disabled people expanded too. I am trying to get more knowledgeable about these subjects. I share my experiences with my friends too. Therefore, they became more aware about people with disabilities” (C4,4)

“It changed my point of view and enabled me to deal better with different people.” (H4,4)

“Getting together with disabled people from different countries made us realise the lacking things in our country. I have seen that with special interest and training, every disability/obstacle can be overcome. Seeing what it can do with people with mental disabilities surprised me a lot.” (C4,5)

“A good, sensitive human mind and soul is a better professional. Everything operates under another prism.” (E4,5)

When the contribution of nonformal learning to participants’ professional development is interpreted generally, it can be said that they had a chance to collaborate and share experiences. They also had a chance to learn new methods and more about disabled people.

3.5 Metaphors for Non-Formal Learning

Metaphors formulated by the 8 participants can be categorized under five themes as in Table 6: activity, nature, people, and things. Three of the participants formulated people metaphors in defining the non-formal learning. A described the non-formal learning as a client: *“Non-formal education provides the opportunity to find each client’s access to motivate, develop and strengthen his / her skills, using the strengths of a particular client”*. Similarly, E used a human behaviour metaphor for describing non-formal learning: *“Look me straight to the eyes. Talk to me directly. Smile to me. Feel me. I am here”*. As for F, she defined non-formal learning as a family: *“The same way a father and a mother try to teach to their child how to make the first steps in life.”*

Table 6: Metaphors for Non-Formal Learning

Metaphors	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	f	%
1. People	√				√	√			3	37.5%
2. Things		√					√		2	25.0%
3. Activity			√						1	12.5%
4. Nature								√	1	12.5%
5. Animal				√					1	12.5%

Two other participants used things metaphors in defining non-formal learning. Participant G described non-formal learning as a journey. Participant B described non-formal learning as a perfume: *“Like perfume. Because it comes from the smell but it attacks all the heart all the senses. So, it’s from theatre, I don’t know, but we all are in this theatre, all our senses and the feelings through theatre it completes theatre.”*

Finally, three other participants used different metaphors in defining non-formal learning. D defined non-formal learning as an animal family: *"This is like, what has happened now is like animal baby children. When those different kinds of babies play together, they can live together without damaging each other. And all those things of lion bear and tiger, which go up together and still now they are friends. They think that it's like this one."* Participant H used a nature metaphor and described non-formal learning as a breeze: *"It's like a gentle breeze - you can fly by the wind, but only if you have the proper means"*. On the other hand, participant C formulated an activity metaphor and described workshop as a game: *"Non-formal education is like a game. Both fun and educational"*. As can be understood from the frequency analysis of metaphors defined by participants in Table 5, the non-formal learning was perceived as a relaxing, enjoying, educational and generally positive phenomenon.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was done to understand and classify the opinions of the disabled people and educators participating in Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership Project on non-formal learning regarding whether they knew the meaning of non-formal learning, through which non-formal learning activities happening during the Project workshop, and whether this learning had a contribution to their personal and professional development. Accordingly, data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews.

When the opinions of the disabled people and educators on the definition of non-formal learning generally were analyzed, three educators gave half definition and one educator did not know the meaning of non-formal learning. Moreover, two disabled people did not know the meaning of non-formal learning, and two of them gave a half definition. As a general conclusion, participants did not know the exact meaning of non-formal education they gained during the Project.

It was understood that participants learnt new experiences and methods, improved their communications skills, and understood that there are no borders and rules via non-formal learning. As Etling (1993) stated nonformal education is more learner centered than most formal education and nonformal learning focuses on practical skills and knowledge while schools often focus on information which may have delayed application.

When the contribution of nonformal learning to participants' personal development is interpreted generally, it can be said that participants became better persons and their self-confidence improved. They also had a chance to contact new people via nonformal learning environment. When the contribution of nonformal learning to participants' professional development is interpreted generally, it can be said that they had a chance to collaborate and share experiences. They also had a chance to learn new methods and more about disabled people. According to La Belle (1982), the main contributions of nonformal education are gaining insight into oneself, enhancing

interpersonal relations, creating social structures for community action, improving one's ability to function satisfactorily in a chosen career.

According to the findings of this study, the following idea is suggested by the researchers: Educators and disabled people do not know the exact meaning of non-formal education. Therefore, non-formal education should be more introduced and used in the public and additional nonformal learning opportunities and researches would be beneficial to educators and people with disability alike.

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A CASE STUDY

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