ANALYSIS REPORT ON INNOVATION OF CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

JUNE 2020

CLEAR

Voices of educators

"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun."
Mary Lou Cook

CONTENT

**Written by Rūta Kronberga and Gabi Steinprinz – June 2020.**

INTRO

Young people are curious and creative, and as the world is changing, they need new ways of support from educators. Educators are ready to make the challenging but needed changes.

This report is a summary of the **voices of European educators** on how they see the process of change in their educational settings, and the support they need from all of us to achieve their goals to innovate their practices. It contains outcomes, quotes and conclusions. This analysis report has been written by Rūta Kronberga (Promesas, Spain) and Gabi Steinprinz (Youth Exchange Service [YES], The Netherlands) as part of the CLEAR KA2 Strategic Partnership project within the European educational programme Erasmus+. Neither one of them are professional researchers, but both are youth workers and trainers in non-formal education, and they have experience in collecting and analysing data to identify the needs of the field.

Sometimes, educators can feel alone, or that their needs are not taken seriously. If you are an educator, **reading this document** can show you that you do not stand alone with **your dreams.** This report also **presents questions and dilemmas** when it comes to innovating your practice. If you are a policymaker, a colleague, board member of an NGO or school, etc., this document can give you an insight into **the bottlenecks of educators' willingness and needs** in order to make changes in your educational environment. The team believes this report shows that **educators are ready and willing to make changes** to improve their practices. It contains interesting outcomes for all stakeholders that have an interest in establishing healthy, inviting and contemporary learning environments that support **young people in becoming social, inclusive and self-confident adults**. We wish you good reading!

CONTEXT
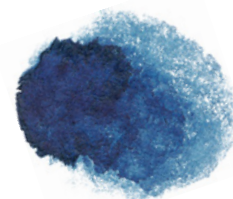
A. AIM OF THE REPORT

The aim of the report is to share and give an insight into the **needs of educators** in both formal and non-formal education fields, to be able to innovate their practices and to create modern and quality creative learning environments that fit the needs of young people today.

A special focus will be given to the **topic of inclusion** within the learning environment. With the outcomes of this report, the partners of the CLEAR project would like to **further develop the concepts of Creative Learning Environments (CLE's)** and innovate the practices of a broad range of educators in Europe. This report will be used as relevant evidence for **needs analysis** in future projects.

B. BACKGROUND OF THE REPORT

The Erasmus+ programme is a 7 year-long educational programme of the European Commission which supports the development of young people. One of the Key actions of the Erasmus+

programme, is the KA2 Strategic Partnership project, a long-term cooperation programme to build the capacity of organisations, schools and institutes and their professionals in working with young people.

CLEAR (Creative Learning Environments, Adapted and Renewed) is an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership (SP) project, a follow-up of the SP-project called Looking at Learning (L@L) – www.looking@learning.eu. CLEAR project took place from July 2019 to May 2020 as a long-term cooperation on the topic of Creative Learning Environments between Jaunpils Municipality (LV) and three non-governmental organizations: Youth Exchange Service (NL), Associación Promesas (ES), Cooperativa Stranaidea (IT).

The CLEAR project aims to bring innovation to existing and new learning environments in both the field of youth work (non-formal education) and of school education (formal education) by exchanging good practices and experimenting on various adaptations. When sharing and discussing these developments, colleague educators from all over Europe shared their interest in innovating their practices, but they also expressed their fears and hesitations in doing so.

During the further development of Creative Learning Environments (CLE's), the team recognised the educators' lack of knowledge and understanding about CLE's and, therefore, saw the need to develop an analysis to understand what exactly the needs of both learners and educators are. The team decided to conduct an analysis and collect relevant data about the innovative transformation of educational settings into creative learning environments. This analysis is a collection of visions, needs and obstacles of learning environments by educators, which are encountered when it comes to innovating their practices and creating contemporary creative learning environments.

C. WHY CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS?

The world is changing constantly, but that change sped up when the internet came into people's lives. This implies that the approach to education is in need of revision, as information is nowadays available in everybody's back pocket. On an academic level, it is proven that the paradigm of education needs to shift towards being more holistic and learner-centred. In practice, this shift is not taking place as fast as it should. Learning environments do not seem to fully support the needs of learners; they don't seem to be holistic enough and they are often not built on people's creativity,

Educators who were involved in the L@L and CLEAR projects are convinced that "Creative Learning Environments" are a must in education today. In the L@L project, Creative Learning Environments were identified as an **organic, holistic concept – an ecosystem** that includes the activity and the outcomes of the learning.[1] When it comes to learning, learning environments and **creative learning environments specifically**, the interpretation could differ considerably for cultural and personal reasons. Educators have been experimenting often with different Creative Learning Environments, which has led to very interesting and encouraging results. Learners develop many competences, become **engaged in the learning process,** and develop skills and good attitudes that help them in their future.

[1] OECD (2013), Innovative Learning Enviroments, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, p216

In the Looking at Learning (L@L) project, one of the Intellectual Outputs was an analysis on the topic of Creative Learning Environments **"The Key Elements of Creative Learning Environments: A Case Study from Latvia, Spain and the Netherlands".** For this research, many observations, diaries and interviews with practitioners were collected and analysed. The practitioners had **different understandings** of what a creative learning environment is, and it varied based on the country, the educational field, the type of educator and the educational approach of educators. The team gathered the data and made some conclusions. The infographics – visual summary of the research– can be found in 4 languages on the "Looking at Learning" webpage: **https:// lookingatlearning.eu/long-term-research-2/**

Figure 1: 5 Key elements of Creative Learning environments, from '**A Case Study from Latvia, Spain and the Netherlands",** Intellectual Output of Looking at Learning (L@L) project.

1. OECD (2013), Innovative Learning Environments, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264203488

The project team understands the 5 Key Elements of CLE as a tool, and as a **system of mutually interconnected elements**. These 5 elements can be used as criteria or guidance for educators and support the creation of learning environments that give ownership to learners, allow learners to develop their full potential, and satisfy the needs of the modern educational system and society. This analysis document is based on data that is classified into these 5 Key Elements. The

team intended to acquire more knowledge of what people specifically know and understand about CLE's. Furthermore, an educator's lack of knowledge, skills and competences about CLE would reveal their needs to make the changes they want and need to make in their practices. Creative Learning Environments support educators in their relationship with learners, where they find a balance together in ownership and responsibility of learning, and creativity and curiosity guide young people in their development. It is a more joyful and often more rewarding experience, which usually results in self-confident learners and more recognition for the educators. Many educators want to work more with CLE, but need support in doing that. This Analysis attempts to identify and clarify which support is needed to bring the paradigm shift of learning into classrooms, activity or seminar rooms.

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

In the past few years, the team members of the CLEAR project have had many conversations, Interviews and informal talks with youth workers, teachers, social workers, and policymakers — in other words, professionals in formal and non-formal education and those who teach or train them in their professional development. The team had content discussions and dialogues in local schools and youth centres, and in events like the Youth Academy in Slovenia, the Bridges for Trainers, Toolfair, ETS conference, Innovation in Youth work event, SALTO Training of Trainers etc. The data coming from the content of these interviews and informal talks has not been used for the analysis, but it has been taken as 'guiding trends'. It gave directions to the development of the questionnaire and diary.
The analysis has collected data from the target group in various forms. For this analysis, 2 type of methods have been used.

ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey was sent out between February to April of 2020 through the networks and social media channels of the CLEAR project team, and participants of the seminar 'More CLEAR' that took place in February, 2020. The target group were educators: youth workers, (youth work) trainers, social workers, youth leaders, youth institute workers, pedagogues, coaches, mentors, teachers, school directors, and other people working professionally with young people directly. Of course, **the word 'educator'** has a cultural connotation, and can be understood in different ways. As non-native English speakers, the writers use 'educator' as a collective term for people supporting young people in their personal, social, emotional and/or cognitive development. The survey was composed of 3 classifying questions (kind of educator, target group, country) and 7 descriptive content questions. **(The template of the survey will be added as Annex 1.)**

"The educator is the bridge between worlds."

In total, 79 educators from both formal and non-formal education, social work, etc. from 11 EU and 2 non-EU countries responded quite extensively. The features of the respondent group are as follows:

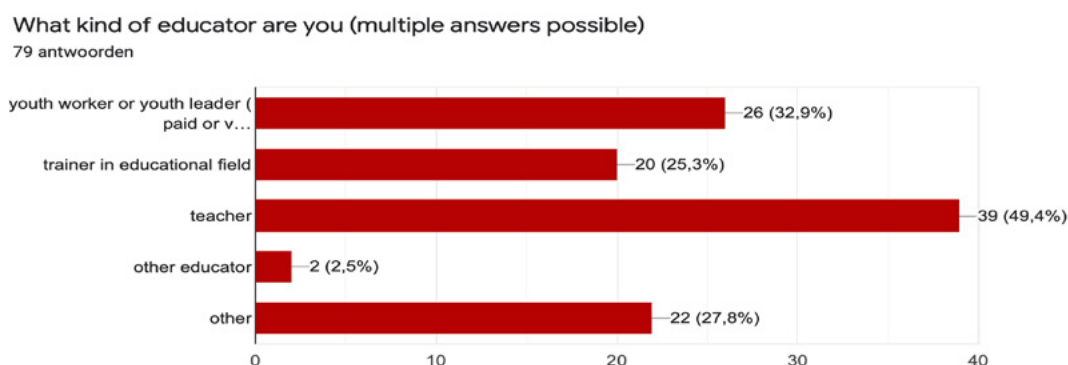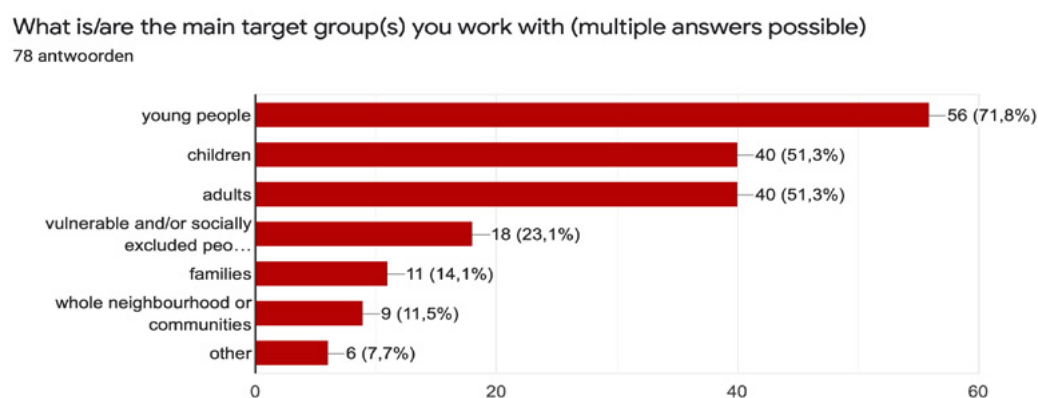Figure 2. The kind of educator the respondents are (79 answers).

What kind of educator are you (multiple answers possible)
79 antwoorden

youth worker or youth leader (paid or v…	26 (32,9%)
trainer in educational field	20 (25,3%)
teacher	39 (49,4%)
other educator	2 (2,5%)
other	22 (27,8%)

Figure 3. The main target group respondents work with (78 answers).

What is/are the main target group(s) you work with (multiple answers possible)
78 antwoorden

young people	56 (71,8%)
children	40 (51,3%)
adults	40 (51,3%)
vulnerable and/or socially excluded peo…	18 (23,1%)
families	11 (14,1%)
whole neighbourhood or communities	9 (11,5%)
other	6 (7,7%)

DESCRIPTIVE DIARIES:

A specific group that is represented in this analysis are educators from 4 EU countries who have worked and adapted methods that are good examples of CLE and participated in the CLEAR project's learning mobilities and local activities for young people from September 2019 to February 2020.

They collected data during the development of their CLEAR local experiments. They have done specific analysis and in-depth observations on various aspects of CLE's in their practices during the project. They have taken directly into account the needs of their young learners.

In the diaries, they share a deep reflection on different aspects of CLE, the challenges they face and specific aspects of inclusion. 22 diaries have been completed by educators that participated in the CLEAR project. They collected their observations, insights and outcomes in the form of a 2 to 4-page diary. The data has been classified and implemented in this analysis. **(The template of the diary will be added as Annex 2.)**

DATA RESULTS
REGARDING KEY ELEMENTS OF CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The results of this analysis have been organized according to the 5 Key Elements of Creative Learning Environments:

A. THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

B. (DIVISION OF) RESPONSIBILITIES

C. INTERACTION AND SYNERGY

D. LEARNING SPACE AND MATERIALS

E. TIME LIMIT
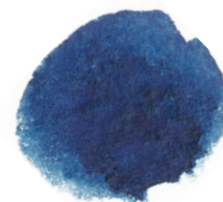
A. THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

The role of the educator is crucial in CLE's. It is an important element that stimulates and **allows the creative learning process** to take place. Educators are the ones that can nourish the learning process:

"The methods, space, attitudes, time, everything that we plan and use will make it a good quality learning (or not)."

The majority of educators have described the need or willingness for the role of educator to change and adapt to the tendencies of modern education. They see their roles as guides, supporters and facilitators of the learning process. They are the ones who can **inspire and trigger** an emotional reaction towards the learning process. Educators should be empathetic, understanding the needs, abilities and limits of learners who are involved in the process and trying to look broadly to learning, taking into consideration the context of the local community. Keeping these elements in mind, learning methods and approaches should be adapted to circumstances, as well as individual and group needs. Many respondents have highlighted that CLE includes **a learner-centred approach** and ability to embrace and **deal with diversity** of the group:

"Be creative in managing to transmit what you want in many different ways, based on the previous knowledge of students and being flexible to adapt teaching methods. All students don't learn in the same way. You have to know how to reach each student".

Educators consider CLE to require having a base of knowledge and variety of resources and methods that can be applied and adjusted to various situations. Educators provide the base for the learning environment — **creating the mindset and atmosphere where the learning takes place**, setting the relationship with the class or the group and supporting the creation of mutual agreements. An educator's role consists of providing a supportive environment in which learners can grow and develop themselves.

Throughout the questionnaires and diaries, educators have frequently mentioned the need and importance of creating a safe learning environment or atmosphere. Regarding this, various edu-

cators see their role as an important element that supports the creation of such a learning environment. This should be a space where participants **feel safe to express themselves and don't feel judged, and mistakes are allowed,** which is an important condition that helps to bring forward the best in everyone. They have also emphasized the need to establish relationships between educators and learners which creates a space for understanding and empathy, and can help to better understand the needs of the learner.

In the safe creative learning environment, **educators are allowed to be vulnerable**. Educators are taught to be self-confident, and assert that they are able to provide all needed answers, but many educators and teachers have proven that when they show their **vulnerability and imperfection and do not know** all answers immediately, this can actually support learners by opening up and connecting at a deeper level:

"If the teacher or trainer allows its own vulnerability and honesty in the group, you will encourage people to do the same. Take these people with you on the journey you want to take them on. Use your own experiences and interesting stories and examples to make people feel more comfortable."

"My vulnerability made people around me crack open and participate on a more profound level".

B. (DIVISION OF) RESPONSIBILITIES

The division of responsibilities and the decision-making process are crucial aspects in CLE. Educators have stated that a CLE is one that learners **have co-created together with other teammates and educators,** which means both taking and sharing responsibility of the CLE. This learning environment should be appealing to the learners and support their diverse needs. It should provide them **freedom to express themselves** and their opinions — a **freedom to make mistakes without judgement**. This is an environment where learners are invited and encouraged to develop their (creative) capacities and to find their own ways of learning and creating. Therefore, it is important that CLE supports a learning process that leads to a better understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Throughout the questionnaires and diaries, the importance of an active role of both educators and the learners in the learning process became apparent. Educators' role consists of supporting the creative learning environment while learners' role is **to take responsibility for their own learning process**:

"It's not challenging for me to give responsibility to learners. It's challenging for learners to take it because they aren't used to it."

Many CLE methods give people the opportunity and freedom to gather their own takeaways and insights. In this case, responsibility for the learning process and outcomes lies mainly in the hands of learners. Questions that emerge are: Do they take the opportunity? How much can educators prepare learners to take the opportunity and **embrace the learning process and their insecurities**? CLE requires a change of mindset for educators, learners and other involved stakeholders.

C. LEARNING SPACE AND MATERIALS

When it comes to the actual physical learning space and the resources, a broad range of aspects have been mentioned. As a starting point, the physical learning space can be taken **as broad as possible**, from a desk, rooms, and buildings, to whole communities and large nature areas. **The needs of learners should be prioritized,** and not the needs of schools or organisations. When designing and developing these physical environments, **space should be given to co-creation and support self-directed learning**, which means including young people to shape their own learning. To have learners involved is key.

Learners should feel **safe and welcomed** in the space. **Any space** could and should be transformed in a good creative learning space. It should invite learners to step out of their comfort zone, which means that **unusual and inspiring physical spaces** could work well. It should invite learners to try new things, to experiment, discover and to be prepared to take risks. It should provoke and enhance curiosity and use of imagination. It should **be organic and bring learners into a journey and create stories** that inspire learners. To support learning, there should be space for reflection.

According to the respondents, a good physical learning environment is **spacious and light, colourful, dynamic, playful, creative**, and it should contain a broad range of materials and resources; not only books, pens and paper, but also musical instruments, artistic materials and games and innovative technical equipment. This would also require technical support, which is something that educators lack, and the schools lack resources to have good quality technical equipment. **Nature and outdoors** have been mentioned several times as a possible physical learning space that is **not used and valued enough**.

D. INTERACTION AND SYNERGY

Interaction and synergy include various crucial elements of CLE: **teamwork, the possibility to have options to be on a team or independent, and involvement of family and community in the learning process**. Some educators stated that CLE for them is more than just the educator and learners, it includes stakeholders and community:

"CLE means exciting, unordinary place, methods and learning tools for groups, community, society."

Some of the CLE methods that were implemented during the CLEAR project involved close cooperation with the local community. These activities were highly valued by educators and participants. Besides that, some organizations of the project proposed CLE methods that were supporting learners to find their own way of participating following their feelings and needs, giving choice between being independent and interacting with a group. These methods gave insights in how to create supportive interaction and synergy:

"Each participant has an individual understanding and expression, but at the same time cooperating with others. We think this double level, of both individual and collective, and finding your way in the group works. It's giving expressions in a creative way and without words, to what participants feel and need."

While analysing the received questionnaires and diaries, the project team realized that there were not many comments and responses regarding the element of "Interaction and synergy". It can be explained that formal and non-formal education organizations see their practises as cooperative and interactive.

E. TIME LIMIT

An interesting observation that was made after analysing the questionnaires is that when educators were asked about how they see a creative learning environment and what it means for them, they **never mentioned the "time" element**. On the other hand, when they were asked about obstacles they face working with CLE the "time" was one of the main obstacles. The **element of "time" is a crucial part** of CLE.

Educators who took part in the project by implementing various CLE activities and reflecting on them in diaries identified time as one of the main challenges. In CLE, there is a need for more time to plan, prepare and implement creative learning activities. Educators recognize that more time must be scheduled for creative learning activities, as they require some time for emotional "ice-breaking," for the activity itself and for reflection. In order to create a learning environment where people feel safe to make mistakes, be creative and take responsibility for their own learning, there is a necessity to dedicate more "time" for such a learning process. For activities to be successful, none of these phases can be skipped; therefore, educators recommend planning a rather small amount of activities and aim for quality. Furthermore, there is a **need to adjust and "play" with time** to adapt CLE activities to the diverse needs of participants:

"It's sometimes challenging to adapt time to different working rhythms and needs. Some learners work very well under the time pressure while others need more time and space to create. Therefore, time needs to be adapted for different needs in order to create an inclusive and creative learning environment."

Time is a challenge as our **educational programs are filled** with different activities and often are expected to be full by our participants and other stakeholders. The element of time particularly opens up space for questions and dilemmas: How much can we play with time? How do we deal with different notions of time for learners? What if after 2 hours one learner is already bored and another has just started? These questions show that "time" is an element that always needs to be considered before different learning activities and that also during the learning activity it is important to be flexible and adapt time to possible changes.

DATA RESULTS
CONCERNING INCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH

After finishing the L@L project and during the CLEAR project, it became obvious that one specific element of creative learning environments has been in the spotlight for many of the educators involved in the project and in the survey. From interviews and dialogues, the team identified that educators struggle with bringing into practice the topic of inclusion in relation with the CLE. The team decided to act on those needs, but required evidence to make sure that the conclusion was correct. Therefore, the team added specific questions about these topics to the questionnaire and diaries, as you can see in Annex 1 and Annex 2. From all data, the comments on inclusion have been condensed:

Respondents gave a broad range of challenges and needs concerning inclusion which should be tackled in order to create a good learning environment for all learners. Because educators and society are **trying to deal with diversity in educational settings**, it is quite a challenge to deal with the broad range of learning needs, learning styles, background and emotional states of learners. Most educators use an equal approach, but they lack time and space to transition from an equal approach to a diversity-based or tailor-made approach. Besides that, they find it challenging to balance out supporting both individual and group learning needs.

Respondents specifically mentioned the creation of a safe learning community as one of the ways to **create basic conditions for inclusion**, where learners and educators develop 'learning' agreements together. Creating safe learning communities takes time and needs support from the institutions, which is often missing and mentioned as an obstacle. Respondents expressed the need to find new ways to **build supportive relationships with their learners** in order to **create an inclusive atmosphere**, especially for learners with challenging socio-economic backgrounds or learning difficulties.

Two main challenges mentioned were **judgement and fear to freely express thoughts and opinions**. Learners need to have the freedom to be who they are, but they often do not have it, or do not act like they have it. This **leads to low self-confidence,** which is a significant step towards exclusion. The vast majority of respondents that explicitly mentioned this judgement and fear to try out new things were teachers. This was not only related to learners in their classrooms, but also to themselves when it concerns colleagues and heads of schools. They want to be and feel **included in the innovation process** within their practices.

 "I need more research every time. I need to know things better and better. And I need to be critical as well as be judged by trainers just to learn and improve. I need to be sure that I have explored every possibility before to run something new in the class."

Respondents mentioned the need to get opportunities to create **a learning atmosphere that is caring and allows differences in styles**, spaces, learning preferences, and is focused more on the learning process and less on the results. Educators would need more space for **allowing failure, making mistakes, experimenting, and trying out new things,** in order to support being vulnerable together and try to **explore limits in a healthy and safe way**. Many educators do not

innovate because of their fear of failure and the lack of self-confidence, which excludes them from being up-to-date and developing a corresponding approach for what young people need today. Educators are aware of this.

Some respondents mentioned one other aspect that desperately needs to change: **the existing institutional and societal superiority** of cognitive, academic learning over emotional, sensory, artistic, or physical learning. If all different types of learning were appreciated, not only the traditionally 'smart' kids would flourish, but **all young people could feel successful and enjoy learning** to the full. It would have a positive impact on inclusion and acceptance of all, and it would help to embrace diversity and appreciate being different. Time is needed to give space to diversity and diverse ways of learning, and to allow participants to overcome fears and get slowly into **collective learning**. To foster inclusion, a whole new approach to creating learning environments would probably be needed, especially concerning the element of time.

As an overall conclusion from all data, there seems to be a strong need for support in **developing inclusive learning spaces and inclusive classrooms**, with enough time and space, and with inclusive tools and inclusive educational approaches.

NEEDS ANALYSIS
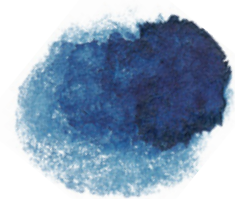
A. CHALLENGES OF EDUCATORS

Educators have provided a broad range of replies that tackle the main challenges and obstacles they face working on CLE's or challenges that hold them back from integrating CLE elements into their educational practises.

The main obstacle educators have mentioned is the **time** that is needed to prepare activities and extra time that implementation of these activities might take. Some educators from formal education particularly emphasized various time-related challenges they face such as **short lessons that do not allow them** to completely integrate various creative or alternative methods in the lessons. Furthermore, **teachers need to follow curriculum** and make sure that students study all required content, and curriculum and other school activities are tightly planned and allow little space for flexibility. **Formal evaluation system** was also mentioned as one of the obstacles:

"Mainly time and curriculum restrictions. Some of the creative activities I have tried take too long to get the same results when students face a standardised test. That's another problem, evaluation."

Working on CLE in formal and non-formal education requires creating a **safe environment where learners can open up and be creative and vulnerable** within a group which takes time and a process to be established. Some of the educators have mentioned time in this context because **time is needed to create trust**:

"If I truly want to trigger that creative impulse, I need to build up trust. If it is a lesson I have to give to strangers in one hour, it feels rushed and plastic".

Another challenge that most of the respondents revealed is **lack of resources, methods and best practises** that can be used as inspiration and would help to start experimenting in their own educational practises. Teachers emphasize the **need for training** that allows them to approach the curriculum from a more **active and creative perspective**.

Various educators have mentioned the **attitude of various involved groups** as a significant challenge — other colleagues, youngsters, learners, the school system, and society. Some of the educators stated that **society and parents sometimes aren't ready to accept new and alternative ways** of education, and want to **follow the traditional** and formal system. They also feel a **lack of support** from other colleagues and the school system itself, feeling a low level of motivation to do things better or differently. Educators often feel insecure to try out new ideas, methods and materials, being afraid that people won't be triggered enough by the activity or lesson or that people will judge who was sharing information and leading the activity.

"What holds me back is that I don't have enough support and understanding from people I work with. I spend a lot of time proving that projects I have and methods I use aren't just some games."

An interesting aspect that appears in various questionnaires as a challenge for educators is **the attitude of students**. Respondents mentioned that students prefer to be in fully-guided learning environments. It seems that some students don't want to take initiative or responsibility for their own learning:

"Students are not trained to work creatively, self-organized, in groups, based on the principles of active learning. It often takes time - step by step to develop active learning processes for students and teachers".

On the other hand, the research "The Key Elements of Creative Learning Environments" emphasized a high level of satisfaction among students who have taken part in the activities that were created considering CLE elements, increasing their ability to take initiative, improved skills to work in a team and other significant skills and learning outcomes. Therefore, students' attitudes might be tackled by changing existing educational approaches and experimenting with new methods. Besides that, it's clear that establishing the CLE process required active involvement and change of mindset of both educators and learners.

A lack of a proper learning space where to develop creative learning processes is mentioned as another obstacle that several educators face. Another challenge is **dealing with diversity in a group**: how to adapt activities for different learning styles, rhythms and experiences, and how to create a tailor-made educational approach. In order to support dealing with diversity and have a student-centred approach, educators have stated that it's needed to have **reduced group sizes** to work with.

Educators who have implemented various CLE activities during the CLEAR project identified **dealing with ambiguity and change** as one of the challenges. Many educators feel stressed

when they don't see the results or do not know which results to expect. Often there is pressure from themselves, and sometimes from participants, colleagues, bosses, parents or other stake-holders to perform and bring "good marks" and other concrete results. Working with CLE means for educators to **develop the competence** of 'let go and let come' and trust the learning process, and be confident that learners will take as much ownership and responsibility as they need and want at that certain moment.

"We don't know the outcome and how people will react, or what they will take out of it. We have to let go and trust the learners."

B. NEEDS OF EDUCATORS:

Educators' questionnaires, diaries and working groups have revealed various needs that educators have in order to work on CLE and integrate various CLE elements in their educational practices.

As the main need, educators have emphasized the necessity for professional development through **local or international learning mobilities** like training, good practise exchanges, and practical workshops that allow one to approach the curriculum or content from a more creative perspective.

A vast majority of educators have emphasized the need to **gain more knowledge about CLE, such as theory, concepts and tools** that can be used in their local realities and best practises that could serve as an inspiration:

"I need the latest theoretical and research aspects of 21st century learning, anthropological and psychological knowledge of human (self) nature, awareness, well-being. New methods / activities. Inspiration from the world and people. Opportunity to learn quality content."

As mentioned, some of the educators have **specified their professional learning needs**. They are willing to have more knowledge and experience about the psychological aspect of CLE, neuroscience evidence in learning processes and how to deal with emotions and conflict management.

Practise is a crucial element; therefore, educators have stressed the need to put learnings into practise in their educational realities. They want to **learn by doing, practising, experimenting and taking risks**. This can happen if there is a **safe learning environment** and **a support system for educators**. A support system includes various elements: **a positive climate** where it's possible to exchange ideas, tools, good practises and **creating innovative learning processes**. It's an environment where everyone feels fine and safe to contribute and make mistakes. An essential element of the support system is a team — educators have emphasized the importance **of having a team with a common vision** that is motivated and **willing to embrace changes**. Educators who have experimented and carried out various new CLE methods want to receive constructive feedback from other educators that helps them to grow. Support and feedback from experts is also needed:

"Feedback from other teachers and instructors who attend my lessons. So I can improve the teaching method. I want more experienced people to attend my workshops or read my lessons and help me create a better way of giving a lesson."

In order to work on CLE, educators need **support from educational institutions, parents and society** that they are open, ready to be involved and support the creative learning process and embrace positive changes in society.

A crucial element in work with CLE is a **learning space and materials.** This one of the main needs that educators have mentioned. While respondents are quite able to identify certain specific elements of the physical learning space as **important and relevant for innovation**, they seem to **struggle** at the same time with how to make the transformation and **put their 'dream or vision' into practice**. A considerable number of educators expressed their **lack of courage and self-confidence** to make the first changes.
Some of them mentioned that they don't know where to start and that they would need training in it, or **use the experiences of experts in the field.** Also, the **development of a book or booklet** was mentioned that would be a good support to educators in taking steps towards changing their spaces and innovating in their educational practices.

The **element of "time" is a considerable challenge** to deal with while working on CLE, and it opens up a wide range of questions and dilemmas. One of the main needs that educators have identified is how to deal with "time" when working with groups that are formed of different individuals, working rhythms, speeds and learning styles.

Educators were asked about competences they need to develop further in order to improve themselves as creators of learning environments and supporters of learning. Besides the above-mentioned need to have more knowledge about CLE and experience working with it, educators mentioned other major competences they are willing to develop.

Various educators expressed that one of the main competences they need to improve is **dealing with uncertainty and the unexpected** – the ability to trust the process, being able to gather and assess the learning needs of participants while they are in the learning process and being capable of turning learning results into something valuable for students that allows them to design their own way of learning. While dealing with the unexpected, another important attitude that educators need is **accepting mistakes as part of the learning process:**

"Attitude of celebrating failure and courage to try out something different."

In order to enhance creative learning and be able to deal with uncertainty, many educators expressed the need to lift their **self-confidence** — believing in themselves and trusting their abilities to provide a good learning environment for the groups their work with:

"But over anything I need to be sure that I'm doing the best that could be done for the group which I'm working with".

Another important competence that educators have emphasised is **creativity** - creativity to approach learning environments from different perspectives, being able to design and create their own methods and activities, and having insight and taste for art in its various forms.

"In the first place, you need to be creative yourself. That does not mean super-creative, because students usually need just a little push to unleash their own creativity, but it is a good foundation."

Various educators have mentioned the need **to improve foreign language skills, particularly English in** order to have access to resources that are available in the international level about CLE, new tendencies in education and being able to take part in various international learning events and meetings. As the majority of information and opportunities are available in English, this is a crucial competence that educators want to improve.

Some educators expressed the need to improve **their skills to work with new technologies** in order to reveal opportunities that exist and can be used working with young people.

C. DILEMMAS AND QUESTIONS OF EDUCATORS

Educators were asked about the main dilemmas and questions that they have regarding CLE. The responses are classified according thematic frames and organized according to the frequency they were mentioned.
The dilemmas and questions that were mentioned can be divided in five main areas:

1. A vast majority of dilemmas are related to **integration of CLE into formal education**:
   - Is it possible for this learning to actually fit the formal school system? Is the educational community ready to embrace changes? Do teachers and principals value the creative learning process enough and are they ready to change their educational practices?
   - Can the educational policies and curricula accept creativity as part of school programs or educational approach?
   - How can one balance the creative learning approach with following curriculum and preparing children / youngsters for exams?
   - How can physical learning spaces be made more creative, appealing and supporting the learning process of young people? This question is asked not only by teachers but also by educators who work in non-formal education.

2. A considerable number of educators from formal and non-formal education who are interested in **exploring CLE** have asked the question:
   - Where to start, how to find information about CLE? Meaning that there is a lack of specific resources, methods, tools and courses available.

3. From educators' perspective, various dilemmas are linked with the **preparation and facilitation of the creative learning process**:
   - Will the people involved actually appreciate the effort educators have made to prepare the creative learning process? Will invested time and effort pay off in the end? This question reveals that some educators have an impression that the preparation of a creative learning process is time consuming and demanding; therefore, it might be unrecognized.

- Several dilemmas are linked with how the element of time has to be considered while preparing and facilitating the creative learning process: What is the correct time for the specific exercise? How do we deal with different learning and working rhythms within a group? How much can we play with the time?

- How can we get people to become vulnerable and safe at the same time? When everybody is safe and vulnerable, magic happens.

- How can we deal with an emotional learning experience for a young person, once ended, and the guidance or mentor-ship becomes limited?

4. Several interesting questions and dilemmas are linked with the **creativity and CLE elements**:

- Is it possible to be too creative?

- When does creativity make processes of learning less effective?

- Does creative learning help people to work on their areas of improvement?

- Is 'learning to learn' actually an **effective way of learning**?

- Are educators responsible for the learning outcomes?

- Will students actually be touched and triggered by the creative learning process? Will **the impact last**?

- Does a perfect CLE exist?

5. Another crucial area of questions & dilemmas that educators have revealed, is related to **dealing with diversity and inclusion**:

- Is it possible to create a CLE totally inclusive for everyone, and with total freedom?

- How can we involve people with diversabilities and ensure they receive proper attention?

- How can we stimulate all participants to develop their potential?

Educators who took part in this analysis were able to clearly identify the challenges they face, and needs and dilemmas regarding CLE. Many ideas came out of this analysis that the CLEAR project team will take into account to develop future projects and actions.

CONCLUSIONS

It was quite challenging to collect and analyse all the data because of the many personal stories, different realities, different understandings of CLE and different needs of the field. Whereas analysing and clustering data was not always straightforward, the conclusion of the data collection is clear. Educators need support and self-confidence to implement new elements into their educational approach and their setting. They are convinced that innovation and creation of CLE is needed, but they fear and don't know how to start. The general conclusions of this analysis are the following:

- The majority of educators envision making radical steps in the development of their learning environments, and state that they want to innovate their practices, but don't know how and where to start. It also became clear that many educators (especially teachers) lack the confidence to take first steps in this.

- Educators ask for opportunities to learn and are prepared to go to training about the topic of (learner-centred or other ways) of learning, especially in CLE. They would like to learn from experts that share their expertise on the topic of learning and CLE.

- Educators would like to have specific practical written material about CLE, like a toolkit or information booklet that they can implement in their practices.

- Educators would like to have opportunities to share practices and learn from each other, at both the national and international levels.

- Teachers doubt whether CLE fits their practices and that causes some fears to start innovating (measures, size of the class, curriculum, formal evaluation system, inspection ,etc.).

- Educators need more and better support from their heads/ boards/ colleagues, parents and society as a whole. The lack of support has been especially mentioned by teachers. There is a clear invitation to educational settings (schools, youth centres, youth organisations, etc.) to critically look at the conditions and quality of support for educators to innovate their practices to CLE, especially providing a safe learning environment. Supporters could have a good influence on educators daring to take the first step in making the needed changes in their practices.

- There is a clear need for more inclusive tools and approach. Dealing with diversity and supporting different learning needs and styles of learners could result in more inclusive classrooms or learning spaces.

- The physical learning space has been mentioned in general as a challenging but interesting element. Also, in relation to Covid 19 crisis and how to use the learning space that is available at our homes creatively and effectively. Further development of this specific key element is needed.

- Some educators who are already involved or familiar with the topic of CLE feel the need to improve their practices and their support to learners by further exploring the topic of learning and learning spaces and the possibilities that CLE gives.

ANNEX 1

Analysis for (creative) learning environments

This analysis is part of the CLEAR - Spaces for Learning project on Creative Learning Environments. This is a KA2 Strategic Partnership project, on exchanging good practices of creative learning environments. In this project we would also like to include the analysis of how educators in the school education, in the youth field, in the social and pedagogical care,...anybody who works with young people on their learning and development, not only cognitive, but also emotional, social, physical, etc.

In order to have a good understanding of how educators in general see creative learning environments, and what your needs are to develop better learning environments, we would like to ask you to invest 15 - 30 minutes to fill in this questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of 3 basic questions about your educational context and 7 questions about your vision on and needs concerning creative learning environments..

We need AT LEAST 80 PEOPLE to answer this questionnaire before 18TH OF APRIL. Are you one of them? If so, we want to express our appreciation for your cooperation with us.
*Vereist

1. Which country are you from? *

   _____

2. What kind of educator are you (multiple answers possible) *

   Vink alle toepasselijke opties aan.

   ☐ youth worker or youth leader (paid or voluntary)
   ☐ trainer in educational field
   ☐ teacher
   ☐ other educator

3. What is/are the main target group(s) you work with (multiple answers possible) *

   Vink alle toepasselijke opties aan.

   ☐ young people
   ☐ children
   ☐ adults
   ☐ vulnerable and/or socially excluded people or groups
   ☐ families
   ☐ whole neighbourhood or communities
   ☐ other

4. How do you see a (creative) learning environment. What does it mean for you?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. What role does/ should creativity play in the creation of quality learning environments? What do/ would you need to create these environments?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. What are the main challenges and obstacles for you as educator when it comes to establishing (creative) learning environments? (conditions, attitudes, resources, space, time, etc.)

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

7. How do you see the role of educator in good quality (creative) learning environments? (relationship to learners, responsibility, educational approach, etc)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. What are your needs, in order to design and implement (creative) learning environments in your practice? (concepts, theories, practices, exchanges, experimentations, spaces, etc....)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Which competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) would you need to develop further in order to improve yourself as a creator of learning environments and or supporter of learning?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Which relevant questions/ dilemma's do you have concerning (creative) learning environments?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. Thank you for your time and energy!!

_____

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ANNEX 2

Descriptive diary for educators in CLEAR Project (SP project)
Local CLEAR-workshops and experiments in formal and non-formal education field.

This diary is meant to gather information about the effect of using creative learning environments and gather the needs of the field for making these learning environments more inclusive.

The diary should be written right after the workshop(s):
1. *If you work with a certain group on a regular basis (every time when you use a new method or activity);*
2. *Every time when you work with a new group;*
3. *Every time when you want something to share with others.*

- -

1. General description of the Creative Learning Environment (CLE) workshop:

Name(s) of the educator(s):

Title of the workshop:

Date and Place of the workshop:

Name of the original workshop:

Name of organization/NGO:

It was a ☐ singular activity ☐ (part of a) series of activities *(tick one of the boxes)*

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2. Description of the Creative Learning Environment:

Short description of used activities/methods:

Description of the (creative) learning environment where above-mentioned activities took place (equipment, number of participants, technologies, materials, space, role of educator, etc.). Do you evaluate it as creative and inclusive?:

To which extend was it inclusive? How did you make it as inclusive as possible? When you designed the learning space, did you think about how to make it inclusive?:

3. Outcomes of the Creative Learning Environment workshop:

Was this activity successful enough? Did you reach your aims and were they clear for everybody? What was the feedback from participants? Why do you consider it successful or why not?:

Why do you consider it was a Creative Learning Environment?

What makes it challenging to work on Creative Learning Environments?

What holds you back from implementing the 5 elements of Creative Learning Environments (Role of educator, Responsibilities, Interaction & synergy, time, Learning space and materials)?

About role of educator, was it challenging to give a space and responsibility to learners? What would you need to make it less challenging?

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4. Increasing inclusiveness of the Creative Learning Environment:

To which extend was it inclusive? How did you make it as inclusive as possible? When you designed the learning space, did you think about how to make it inclusive?

Inclusiveness for educators: Did you consciously plan to make it inclusive for all young people? What holds you back to make it (more) inclusive? What holds you back to make it accessible for all young people?

Inclusiveness for participants: Did you observe any people who didn't participate fully? What was holding them back? How could you increase inclusion for them? What would need to change in the Creative Learning Environment in order to have everybody fully participating?

AFTERWORD

Young people are the future adults and decision makers. Let's prepare them in the best way we can.

Educators have spoken. They are ready for change and they need support from everybody around them. Hopefully, this analysis will contribute to better support for educators to innovate their practices by boards, school directors, by Erasmus+ Programme, by local and national governments and society. We invite educators and their networks to critically look at the obstacles that prevent them from making those changes and find ways to support them in supporting young people in becoming responsible and self-confident citizens.

CONTACT

You can contact us through our Facebook group:

https://www.facebook.com/lookingatlearning

If you are interested in more detailed information about CLE and the long-term research that has been conducted, you can find it on the "Looking at Learning" website:

https://lookingatlearning.eu/

CLEAR
Voices of educators