

Dear reader,

With this letter we'll finish REFLECT's framework of principles and guidelines. Whereas the previous principles and guidelines can be understood as the actual building blocks that have to be put one on top of and/or next to the other, the last principle is different. Let's say it's about the colour that unites all building blocks. Or actually it's about two colours. But before starting to write about them, we would like to summarise all the principles once more. Remember that they are meant to create a reflective atmosphere, experienced and shared by educator and all learners in the learning group:

1. Raising awareness within learners to 'own' their learning in personally meaningful way (it is not about taking over the expertise of the educator!)
2. Developing a relationship between educators and learners based on trust, openness, empathy, transparency, dialogue and feedback
3. Co-creating the reflective process
4. Managing to keep up the steering paradox of intrinsic learning processes
5. Directing the reflective attention of learners
6. Slowing down and valuing moments of not-knowing
7. Deepening your questions progressively
8. Recalling that reflection can never be imposed, only kindly invited.
9. Always considering reflection as a broadening, deepening and holistic process
10. Being careful how to assess reflection (or not at all).

Have you ever heard about Catharism, a movement of Christian mysticism appearing mostly in southern France in 12th and 13th century? As the Roman Catholic Church considered them as a heretic threat to their one and only true faith, they started in 1208 a crusade against this alternative Christian movement. This was done with success, as somewhere around the year 1250, Catharism was considered eradicated. However, what's really interesting about Catharism is the fact that it was not organised like Roman Catholicism as a hierarchical pyramid, but quite contrary in a much more 'vertical' structure, more precisely in autonomous dioceses. So it happened regularly that the presiding kathar bishops did not agree on certain matters of faith. Interestingly enough they did not seem to bother too much about these disagreements. They did not issue a "one and true credo" as Roman Catholicism had done nor did they want to convince other kathars. They simply allowed different explanations and practices. Why was this? Because they valued the particularity of the individual experience of their faith as being the most important. Or to put it differently: they allowed space for 'owing up' the mystical Christianity that they were talking about.

Similarly, it's important for you as an educator to own up REFLECT's principles and guidelines. Don't consider them as the one and only true explanation of the bible on reflection to be followed word by word, but rather look carefully into them, reflect on what makes sense to you (and what not) and how you can put them into practice within your professional context. As every educator has a different personality and works in a different professional context (formal versus non-formal to start with), we strongly believe that a certain kind of creative adaptation needs to be done in order for the principle and guidelines to be of use. So try to grasp, as it were, the 'spirit' of REFLECT and express it into your facilitation of reflection process. Engaging yourself personally in this way is maybe even the most important factor for creating a reflective atmosphere as a fertile learning environment for reflection to grow and flourish naturally. And at the end there will be no two facilitators alike!

Next to creativity comes playfulness as the second crucial 'colouring' of all principles and guidelines. At first hand it may seem very simple, very basic and maybe even tricky when it comes down to just being the easy going, funny educator. But this is not what we mean. Rather it's about balancing the seriousness of learning with some kind of playfulness on part of both educator and learners. In this line the Belgian experiential educators Johan Hovelinck and Luk Peeters are arguing in "Laughter, Smiles and Grins: The Role of Humor in Learning and Facilitating" how for example humour helps develop relationships among educators and learners and hence the relational safety needed for deep personal learning. Secondly, they state how humour can also play a role in creating a workable distance to more sensitive learning issues and offer new and unexpected perspectives on certain topics. We'd like to add one more reason to this: when enjoying being in the learning course, it helps learners to tune into their intrinsic pleasure of learning. Learning will no longer be exclusively associated with seriousness. They'll simply just like to be there.

Sincerely yours

Your REFLECT correspondent

This letter was informed by the following writings:

Hovelinck, Johan and Peeters, Luk.(2003). Laughter, smiles and grins: The role of humor in learning and facilitating. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 3: 2, 171 – 183.