



---

There is a well-known Sufi teaching story, credited to the thirteenth century Persian poet Rumi. A group of blindfolded people is asked to touch an elephant, and describe what they feel. One reaches out and touches the ear and says, it's a fan. Another grabs its tail, and concludes that it's a rope. Yet another grips a leg, and proclaims it to be a tree. History does not record how long this went on for, but we can be sure that the elephant never forgot.

This story is sometimes used in training to illustrate a number of issues; perceptions and reality, intercultural learning, the nature of teamwork, the seeds of certain kinds of conflict. In a sense it can also illustrate the task facing a team of trainers, designing a course for a group of as yet unknown participants. And certainly it can describe the task facing a team of writers attempting to identify and discuss the *essentials of training*. When this team first met, we had long and detailed lists of important things, quite possibly many shared priorities, but *essentials*? This is not a disclaimer; anyone who has worked in international youth training for any period of time must have been confronted by a massive diversity of aims, targeted issues and groups, ethical frameworks and imperatives, ways of doing and seeing, facilitating, implementing and evaluating. Training is a big and complex elephant. Yet, at the same time, to continue the metaphor, there is an elephant, there are essentials – core considerations, tasks and reflections which undertaking a training activity demands. So this T-kit has attempted to define essential educational, logistical, ethical and experiential elements of training. At the same time, it attempts to leave and encourage space for critical reflection on the part of the reader, and ask, what is essential to your training? The aim of this introduction is to lay bare the choices we have made, the ideas and values on which this publication is based, and to provide some points of orientation for the reader.

An obvious starting point would be, why a T-Kit on training at all? Other volumes in this series tackle topics – intercultural learning, project management, and so forth. These are topics that are often the subject of training, the subject around which an educational process is constructed. This T-Kit exists to shift the focus momentarily, to ask how do we devise the educational processes for exploring and working with these various subjects? It makes the process visible, and tracks the questions that arise from this. If training involves a process, it involves a process between the subject, the trainers and the group, taking place within more general contexts. Each of these factors raise inter-related questions, with educational, personal, ethical and practical dimensions. Therefore while training is commonly seen as the way in which subjects are dealt with in international youth work, with a shift in focus it can be seen as a complex subject in its own right. And training is increasingly dealt with as a subject in its own right, as section 2.1 illustrates, the supply of and demand for training on an European level has never been higher.

Describing training solely as an educational process could be misleading however, as the kind of training dealt with here is neither a neutral process nor a general approach readily applicable to any situation. Training has become something of a generalised concept for ongoing learning in a range of contexts, but it is important to bear in mind that within this generality there exists a diversity of aims, educational approaches, relationships between actors and desired and actual results. In this publication, training is seen as a participant-centred learning process, team-based and within the framework of non-formal education. These terms and their relevance are discussed in detail in the relevant chapters, so suffice to say here that these emphases influence enormously what is included as essential, and what is omitted

They also emphasise the reality that training is not a neutral, invisible process that can be superimposed on any subject. Working in teams, nurturing participants as peer educators, favouring participative and experiential learning processes, and engaging with the demands of being a trainer in an intense and short-lived activity requires reflection on how we train and who we are as trainers. This Kit offers ways of developing skills and competencies, but does so within the larger framework of inviting trainers to consider the lifeworld they bring with them to training, the dynamism they will be a part of, and the learning that we all need to constantly engage in.



---

This T-Kit addresses itself to trainers working within a European framework. It proceeds by assuming that they will be working with a multicultural group and team, in an activity that demands careful planning and input from them, and in training situations which pose a range of personal and professional questions. While this is the imagined reader we have written for, it does not mean that trainers in other contexts are forbidden from even peeking between the covers. It suggests that they will have to carefully evaluate what is offered in relation to their needs and context, but this is something we hope all trainers will do anyway.

This point is worth bearing in mind while reading this T-kit, as the team of writers was united from the start in their almost grim determination not to produce a 'toolbox'. This is not a recipe book, or ready made do-it-yourself manual with a companion early morning TV show. Every training is different, and each section you will read here emphasises the need to consider and adapt models, theories and methods to your situation, group moment, environments, competencies and values. We suspect that this is something that most trainers do naturally, but we have stated it bluntly, as it is a core philosophy of this work. That said, this is not the *Zen of Training* either, it is a working document for working trainers, who need to be able to consult it on the run sometimes. To this end the text is cross-referenced continuously, making it possible to search for an exercise or refresh a certain area, while noting links and ideas to be revisited. We hope you will see it as a favoured café, where you can drop in for a takeaway, but sometimes stay a while longer for a proper conversation.

Relatedly, this text is cross-referenced to its companion volumes in the T-Kit series, but only to a point. While we have not assumed that every reader has access to the other volumes, this Kit does not replicate material already available. Space is limited, and the other T-Kits deal with training elements that would be at home in several different volumes. In such areas as learning styles, the design and management of a training, and of course intercultural learning, you will find some references and allusions to further or complementary reading in the other T-Kits. This has allowed us to provide a broader range of theoretical perspectives and models for certain issues.

In mentioning intercultural learning, we should make it explicit that this is more than an element in our overall discussion of training. If this T-Kit had a subtitle, it would be *Training Essentials (with an intercultural dimension)*. Intercultural learning provides an overall educational and ethical framework for this text, as we believe that every facet of life and work within activities of this nature possess intercultural dimensions. Intercultural learning is often dealt with as a training module, and is looked at in that way here too. However, training in our context thrives on a richness and diversity of ways of seeing the world, learning, valuing and being, and needs to consider this in every aspect of design and implementation.

A final aside from the authors of this T-Kit concerns theoretical material. While we shy away from simplistic divisions of theory and practice, we have approached theory as orientation, maps that may or may not help you to navigate your training landscape. Engaging with research and innovative material is part of the trainers learning path, but begs two questions; why do we innovate and what is the context of the material? We feel that sometimes there is a pressure on trainers to use something new, that the appearance of an iceberg model in the seminar room elicits the same reaction as from passengers on the Titanic. Each trainer has to evaluate what is presented here and in other publications, and judge for themselves the difference between innovation and novelty.

Relatedly, theoretical models presented here, for instance relating to group dynamics, learning styles, conflict transformation, are developed from applied research within particular disciplines and traditions. Occasionally these models surface in training activities, applied to contexts where at best they make no sense. Therefore we have emphasised the history and context of the materials included, again to allow the individual trainer to calibrate them for her group and situation. This has also influenced our decisions about whether to prefer innovative material to stuff that seems to have circulated the training scene since the middle ages. The result is a mixture of the possibly familiar and the possibly new, but the criteria were relevance, applicability and coherence in the overall design.



---

The T-Kit takes the format of a training considered from start to finish, admitting of course that certain elements can be considered at different moments, or simultaneously, or on several occasions. *Part 2: training in context* considers the field of training at the moment, and the context from which this publication has emerged. It moves from the environment to the trainers that work within it, and begins a reflection on the questions of roles, ethics and necessary competencies which, we argue, is always a work in progress. The section concludes with an initial consideration of intercultural learning, and how it permeates training as a whole.

*Part 3: training in teams* looks at the challenge of working not just in a team, but in a multicultural team of trainers. The aim of this section is to provide an overview of issues, with applied activities, which can help teams to build sustainable relationships and pre-empt difficulties by reflecting in different ways on how they work together. The largest section, *Part 4: training in motion*, deals with the often exhausting process of educational and logistical planning. This section works through the educational process from needs assessment to session design and evaluation, and tries to provide a framework for making the organisational side of things as painless as possible.

Once in motion we move to *Part 5: training in action*, a section that concentrates on the processes that emerge during an activity and what they mean for individuals, the group and the subject. It considers issues that require trainers to practice flexibility and ongoing assessment and adaptation, such as conflicts in the group and the need to re-design and plan a training program. *Part 6: after training* deals with the issues of transfer and multiplying, and how to prepare participants for life and work beyond the training course.

We hope you will enjoy using this T-Kit, and look forward to hearing your assessments of how it fares in the world of training. Above all, we hope it can make a contribution to training and trainers, the inspiration for writing it in the first place.