

Essential Creativity: The relationship between creativity and the process of learning essential skills

Case Study
Erasmus+ KA2 Project:
“Paving the way for
essential skills houses”

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1. Motivation

In 2017 Nieuwe Veste had talks with more than 20 (potential) partners inside and outside the cultural sector about the added value of collaboration. The reason for this was for drawing up a new strategic policy, in which Breda library, Centrum voor de Kunsten Breda (Breda arts centre) and Cultuurwinkel Breda were converted into one integral service. Parallel to the talks with partners, theoretical research was done into the common ground in the service of the various aspects of the organisation.

Language, Creativity and Art

The outcome of the conversations and the theoretical research were closely linked. While the library had been considered for a longer period as a major player for offering language as a basic skill, the need for anticipating creative skills was now also repeatedly being put forward. The substantiation for this demand for creativity was given in the context of the rapidly changing society in which the issues are becoming increasingly complex. The ability to act in a problem-solving way and the ability to think convergent are becoming essential, and creative skills are offering a considerable contribution to this. Art is taking a complementary position. Art shows that there are different ways of looking at the world around us and expressing this, which is why it acts as a means of reflection in society. Nieuwe Veste took the conversations and the theoretical research as a starting point for the further design of the services. Language and creativity form the basis of personal development, art bridges the (living) environment and the world (of experiences).

Literacy House & creative activities

As part of the service of Nieuwe Veste the Literacy House is taking a central role in the area of language and basic skills. The Literacy House aims to reduce functional illiteracy among adults. Originally, the Literacy House mainly focused on offering language skills for this, but this has now been extended to, among others, digital skills and the e-government.

In keeping with the developments of Nieuwe Veste, the Literacy House started with adding creative activities to the existing learning and teaching methods in the form of Zomertaal (Summerlanguage) in Breda in the summer of 2017. The Zomertaal programme consists of activities geared towards the playful, creative, interactive and social way of practising language. The programme has a dual objective: during the lesson-free summer recess Zomertaal contributes to mutual meetings and keeps up by practising language on the level of the participants.

Skills

The route Nieuwe Veste has taken with its service fits in the image of the time. Educational organizations are exploring what the curriculum should look like in 2030 to educate creative and self-sufficient pupils. As part of care, the health of people is set against physical and social factors in six positive pillars, including doing fun and useful things together with others and continuing to learn. What someone should be able to know or do is therefore not limited to language and maths skills, but is increasingly seen as a package of essential skills that enable participation in current society. In this study we define essential skills as 'the skills that are required for living, learning and working'. Exploring this, UNESCO, WHO and UNICEF worded this in 10 so-called 'Life skill strategies and techniques: problem-solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, developing self-awareness, empathy and dealing with stress and emotions'.

Towards a substantiation and sustainability

The list of UNESCO, developments in education and care and the experience of Nieuwe Veste with Zomertaal strengthen the thought that the role of creativity is becoming increasingly important. There is, however, still a lack of proper substantiation to be able to propagate and preserve the contribution of creativity to the development of essential skills. This is why it is important to gain insight into the connection between acquiring skills on the one hand, and the influence of creativity on learning processes and applying skills on the other. With this motivation, Nieuwe Veste joined the Erasmus+ KA2 project "Paving the way for essential skills houses".

Nieuwe Veste is a cultural organisation situated in Breda. The organisation consisted of a library, an arts centre and a cultural education agency. Originally, these aspects came directly under the municipality of Breda, but through a corporatisation they were accommodated into one foundation in 2012.

Since the corporatisation, there is a focus on integrating the aspects of the organisation and the various forms of service to reach the residents of Breda as optimally as possible. The strategic course that was drawn up in 2017 also bridges partners from various areas such as welfare, care and culture. Together with these partners, Nieuwe Veste wants to offer children a broad basis, help youngsters broaden their view of the world and enable adults to be able to participate in society. The starting point is always that language and creativity are part of basic development, and that art serves as a means of reflection on and expression of the outside world.

Target groups that do not automatically focus on culture or show a (imminent) disadvantage in their basic development, get extra attention at Nieuwe Veste. The Literacy House is an example of this. With a large network of partners there is a focus on signalling, preventing and combatting (digital) language disadvantages and other skills. In doing this, Nieuwe Veste is keeping up with the municipality of Breda, so the Literacy House is always keeping up with the ambitions of the municipal Language Plan and national developments.

2. Research question & guide

Various parties have collaborated in this Erasmus+ project. Of these parties, Nieuwe Veste together with Cubiss formulated the project's main question:

MAIN QUESTION

How can we extend our current Literacy Houses concept to include all essential skills and transform it into a centre of development?

Output

Partner Reading and Writing Foundation has focused in the project on the further development of a Toolkit for Literacy Houses that contains various instruments that support the design, daily implementation and quality improvement of a Literacy House (including teaching materials).

Cubiss and Nieuwe Veste provide a case study that must answer the aforementioned research question. The objective is facilitating participation of adults in society as optimum as possible. This concerns creating awareness for learning as an integral and social process. Two themes were selected for this that are relatively new in the Netherlands: creativity and employment². In the study, Cubiss focused on employment.

In this case study Nieuwe Veste zooms in on the role of creativity in the learning environment of the Literacy House. The focus here lies on the following sub-question:

SUB-QUESTION

In what way can creativity contribute to personal development for achieving goals in life?

Approach & Guide

In 2018 and 2019 three international work visits took place with a delegation of organisations from West-Brabant, Wales, Norway and Flanders that focus on adult education³. In the participating countries knowledge was exchanged about the influence of programmes for the development of essential skills on the social and employment participation of adults. For this reason, projects, activities and organisations were visited with varying backgrounds: from educational institutes to companies and from governments to cultural or social institutes.

When visiting practical examples, the underlying objectives, the approach and obstructing and success factors were considered. The findings of this are summarised in chapter 3. Chapter 4 focuses on the relationship between creativity and the findings of chapter 3 from a theoretical study, substantiated with practical examples. In chapter 5 the sub-question is answered on the basis of the study, and chapter 6 focuses on the relationship between creativity and the main question. In chapter 7 the insights are converted into the practice of the Literacy House, including a flow chart that can serve as a guide for employees and volunteers. Chapter 8 concludes with a number of recommendations to be able to put this study into practice.

This research serves as a guide for various organizations that focus on providing essential skills as well for cultural organizations that want to put creativity at the service of other domains.

¹ Cubiss in the Provincial Support Organisation for organisations in North Brabant that focus on questions on reading, learning and informing

² Research of Cubiss: The inseparable link between essential skills and employability

³ Libraries West-Brabant, Bergen Public Library, Blenders – organisation for socioeconomic innovation, Cubiss, Municipality of Breda, Learning & Work Institute, Nieuwe Veste, ROC, Reading & Writing Foundation, Literacy House

3. Essential skills: from (inciting) learning to applying

The work visits explicitly revealed that what participants need for participation consists of a mix of situation and context independent skills. An employer offers an educational programme for language and maths which are related to the ability to carry out the daily activities better or safer. A social organisation, for instance, focuses on digital and language skills to promote the return to the labour market. Those involved are however all convinced that a mix of skills and competences doesn't get any meaning unless they are related to everyday practice. Here the term essential skills comes up: it's not about offering a list of skills and competences, but about the sophisticated sum of skills that are essential for increasing participation of specific target groups in specific situations.

In this chapter, the findings from the practical examples are summarized in a number of principles and challenges, leading to a model. The thread in the examples seen in the work visits indicate that the relationship between acquiring essential skills on the one hand and the increase of participation in society on the other is complex. This is because offering educational programmes presents several challenges:

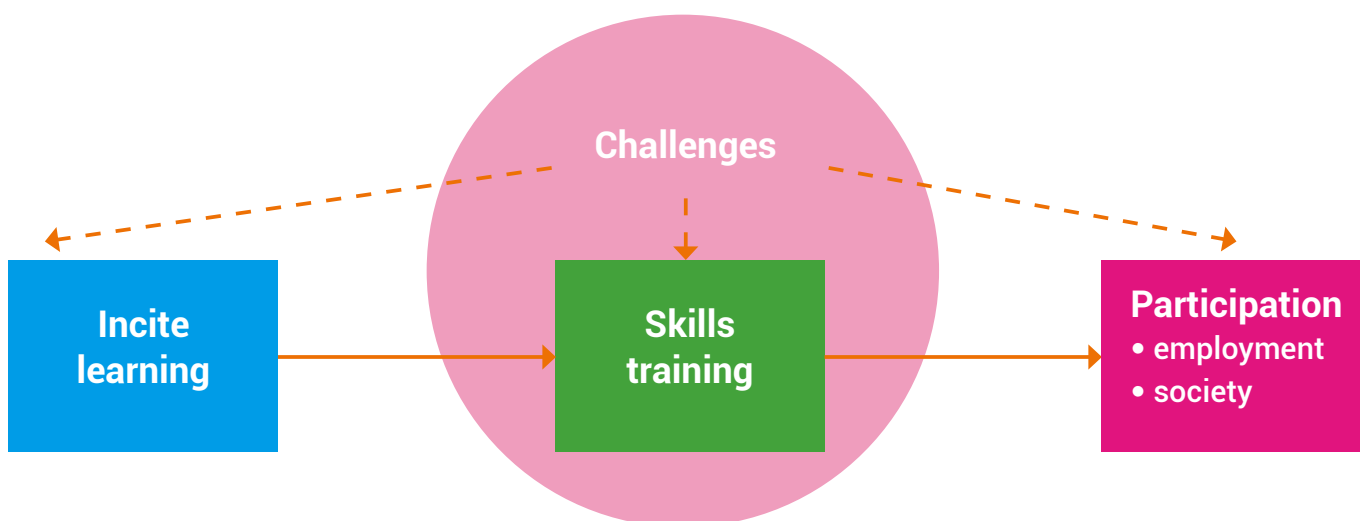


Figure 1: Challenges: from (incite) learning to applying

Best practice for incite learning: knitting courses

In the Vale Learning Centre at Barry Library in Wales a very specific angle is used to urge women to take part in an educational programme. Here women are invited to join a knitting course. The underlying thought is that knitting is often a well-known activity in the target group and there is a need to exchange information about this and to learn from one another. During the activities the participating women are also shown the options for further mastering language, maths or the use of digital means. As these possible follow-up courses take place in the library where the knitting club is also situated, the women realise that they are welcome, and that learning doesn't have to be scary.

Best practice for skills training: Welsh Water/ Dwr Cymru

Welsh Water/ Dwr Cymru is a non for profit water company that works on the skills development of employees together with trade unions through a Wales Union Learning Fund programme. The objective is to boost the essential skills of the workforce and enable staff to participate more actively at work, in the community and in family life. The approach is consciously low-threshold. This is expressed in courses at the workplace, per person at an adapted pace, by an external teacher, without feedback to a manager. Skills training gives the participants the motivation and the self-confidence to develop further. For the employer, trained employees eventually result in better communication with customers, an improved safety situation and an increase of efficiency because employees can better deal with forms. In addition, there is less absenteeism and the employees remain in service for longer.

Best practice for participation: Goddeeris Academy

Goddeeris is a Belgian company specialised in process and utility piping. The company is developing a new way of working so it is future-proof. This is why the Goddeeris Academy was established; an internal training institute that focuses more on attitude and behaviour when offering technical and language skills than on certificates. The underlying thought is that exploring and problem-solving employees demonstrate the flexibility of dealing with change. By continuously investing in guidance, (re)training and education, the Goddeeris team is generally growing and further developing themselves and their talents. What's striking is that employees of Goddeeris not only show greater involvement with the organisation, but that participation in a variety of activities that are being organised in their spare time is also increasing. The investment in the staff has contributed to the formation of actively participating employees.

Inciting learning

The first challenge is in reaching the intended target group. The target group the programmes mainly focus on – adults with (impending) disadvantages or absenteeism – experience starting a learning process as a threshold. The cause for experiencing this threshold can vary from anxiety or shame to uncertainty about one's own abilities. This is often based on a negative learning experience in the past. Potential participants do not identify with learning in a learning environment and do not see sufficient direct usefulness to actually start learning.

Skills training

Once participants have been stimulated to start learning, this is immediately followed by the next challenge. The traditional forms of learning are often not in keeping with the needs of the participants, and there is also regularly a lack of motivation and self-confidence that is required to complete a learning trajectory. Here too negative experiences from the past seem to be a major cause, in combination with not being able to directly relate the subject matter with the daily lives of the participants.

From learning to participating: applying the subject matter

The eventual objective for all projects and programmes is to enable participants with the acquired skills to participate in society, the work environment⁴ or further education within formal education. The skills learned need to be adapted to this in a real situation. However, this often seems to be a difficult step, because the interaction with the outside world still requires lessons for the participants. In addition, the threshold to actually doing is often high, because mistakes outside the learning environment can have consequences.

⁴ For more information, see the research of Cubiss: *The inseparable link between essential skills and employability*

The various challenges in acquiring skills are succeeding one another, but experiencing this is not that evident for the participant. To promote the transition between the various challenges, thresholds need to be removed. For this the participants require baggage, which the learning environment can provide. Three considerations can be derived from various best practices that were visited or discussed during the work visits, which seem to be related:

Goesting

The Flemish word *goesting* that was mentioned during one of the work visits expresses the first condition for participation in the learning process. In the context of skills training, *goesting* means an interest linked to a longing or the need to get started with this new interest. Those involved believe that this *goesting* concerns a key to the will to start learning, particularly because the approach is positive and not focused on a lack of knowledge or present skills.

Motivation

Goesting leads to intrinsic motivation. Goesting ensures that the participant starts because he wants something and sees that he can improve his knowledge and insights on a certain interest. This gives learning a personal use and, according to those involved, is experienced less as something that is 'enforced' from the outside. This leads the focus off more negative learning experiences and nourishes the wish to achieve a result.

Self-confidence

Eventually, goesting and motivation lead to an increase of self-confidence of the participant. The wish to achieve a result for personal use results in pride and satisfaction if these results also become visible. The participant seems to experience this as conquering himself. All persons involved state that self-confidence is the most stimulating factor for the participant to persevere and want to continue to learn or develop themselves.

The sum of *goesting*, motivation and self-confidence lowers the threshold to the next challenge that awaits the participant in the learning trajectory. This is thus not limited to appealing to goesting to get the participant on board, but repeats itself in every step that is taken.

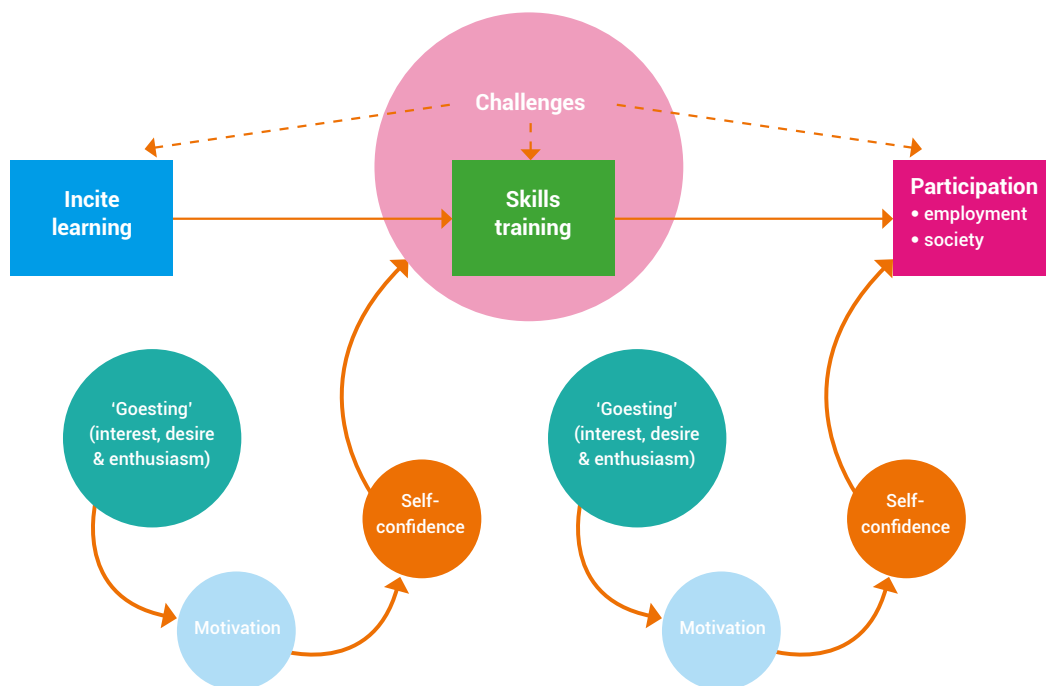


Figure 2: The stimulating role of goesting, motivation and self-confidence in the learning process

The chain of the first impetus to learning through actually gaining skills towards participation forms a constructive learning process. Learning skills via this process where goesting, motivation and self-confidence provide the advancement, simplifies acquiring and applying skills.

The experiences of Nieuwe Veste in the Literacy House and of a number of best practices suggest that creative activities have a positive influence on the learning process. Although the intention of these activities is often instinctive, creativity seems to give an impulse to the challenges as well as the advancement. This is why the influence of creativity on the learning process will be dealt with in more depth in the next chapter.

Best practice for goesting: Talent bank municipality of Aarschot

In Belgium, the municipality of Aarschot can be regarded as an inspiring example for looking at the region not departing from problems but from opportunities. Here, Wout Plasmans develops projects that are given shape in the centre of society. He addresses the inhabitants on how they can use their talents - such as carpentry, painting or graphic design – to make their borough or village more attractive and sociable. He consciously seeks something that is close to the people, to their 'goesting' and talent, to get a (learning) process started. The result of his efforts has led to a wide range of local and sociocultural events.

Best practice for promoting the advancement in a learning process: Blenders – Digidak

Blenders in Turnhout introduces people to the options of new media via the programme of Digidak in small-scale and low-threshold public computer areas. Here the first introduction of the participants to Digidak does not necessarily begin with the need for improving digital skills. The starting point is looking for a situation that is recognisable for the participants that fits in with their goesting – such as cooking or sewing – after which the option of working with computers and internet is linked. If the participant enjoys this, he can further develop other digital skills. Here again, a subject is sought that fits in with the interests of the participant and a working method that puts the knowledge gained in a practical context. Examples of this are learning to use social media or making a PowerPoint presentation on a subject related to the goesting.

4. Learning process and creativity

During the work visits a number of best practices were visited that clearly focused on the use of creative activities. The nature of these best practices varied strongly, as well as the objective. While in one example creativity is used as a means for recruiting participants, in another example creativity was used to give learning essential skills a more playful character. We also visited and discussed best practices where creativity was not just a means for skills training, but also an objective in itself.

On the basis of a theoretical study, the link between creativity and skills training was sought. Supported by practical examples, this chapter goes into where and why creativity can contribute to the learning process.

Goesting, motivation and self-confidence: flow

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) examined the circumstances a person requires to be able to carry out an activity to the best of his ability or to be able to learn. First of all, Csikszentmihalyi mentions that the will to learn and work on personal objectives is a major precondition for undergoing a learning process. If the will to learn is present, Csikszentmihalyi states that the learning process has to also be focused on keeping the participant motivated. This is why it is important for a participant to work on an assignment that departs from what the participant can do to link this to a challenge. If the challenge is addressable and feasible, this subsequently leads to satisfaction and experiencing growth, according to Csikszentmihalyi. The self-confidence the participant gains through this contributes to concentration and perseverance.

Csikszentmihalyi calls this succession of linking the will to learn with personal objectives, preserving motivation and acquiring self-confidence the 'flow theory'. This theory shows strong resemblances with the advancement based on goesting, motivation and self-confidence, which is described in the experiences mentioned in chapter 3.

Best practice for creativity & incite learning: Kirkens Bymisjon-Re-tro workshop

In Norway in the city of Bergen there is an initiative that stimulates the further development of essential skills of participants via creativity. Under the label Re-tro, Kirkens Bymisjon initiated a workshop where new products are made of used wool. In the workshop, people with a difficulty finding work start making simple items, after which they start a fashion items and accessories collection as they see fit. For this, they need to appeal to their creativity. If this leads to results the participants feel they have contributed to, their self-confidence increases together with their essential skills. Kirkens Bymisjon anticipates this increase of self-confidence by inviting participants to sell their own items in a pop-up setting. Here account is taken of what a participant needs to be able to take the step in the learning process.

Best practice for creativity & skills training: Het Gevolg

Het Gevolg in Turnhout is an interesting player in the cultural field when it concerns skills training. In the 'Hartenprojecten' (Heartprojects) of this professional theatre, quality comes first, but not without paying attention to the broad development their participants experience. On the contrary: as inspiring leader of the theatre, Stefan Perceval uses the creative process to realise a production where he appeals to a multitude of skills. The theatre works with target groups who are distanced from society or are regarded by society as outsiders, such as foreign-speaking newcomers, young refugees and people living in poverty. Stefan gets these target groups to provide subjects that lead to a storyline. Together with the target group this is developed into a production in which the target group themselves are the participating actors. In an intensive project words, expressions, movements and interaction are sought to convey the story on stage. Through their participation, the participants indicate that they have developed their use of language and vocabulary, but also gained self-confidence and have increased understanding of the significance of their individual development in a broader context.

1. The relationship between creativity and achieving flow

In his flow theory, Csikszentmihalyi describes that several factors can have a negative influence on the learning process: experiencing indifference and a lack of interest in the environment, relapsing into negative attention for problems that gets in the way of finding solutions, a high reaction to stimuli from the environment, the absence of excitement and relapsing into automatisms. Several studies indicate that a positive link to creativity can be made here.

According to Richards (2007), taking part in creative activities ensures that someone is open to new experiences. Creative activities result in surprise and let participants actively observe, because of which the willingness to discover new things increases. A study of DeMoss and Morris (2002) also reveals these findings. They conclude that combining (forms of) art with other disciplines results in a positive influence on the learning culture, as art rouses enjoyment in life. Research of TNO (2015) also indicates that creative activities lead to acquiring curiosity, resourcefulness, perseverance, daring to be different, interacting with others, being output-oriented and being proud of the work carried out.

Creative activities therefore seem to rouse interest in the participants for the environment, contribute to an active work attitude and stimulate seeking for solutions. By offering creative activities, participants are helped to get into the flow they need to go through the learning process successfully. This reduces the barriers in a learning process and learning is seen as a positive challenge.

Best practice for creativity & developing creative skills: De Ruimte

In Turnhout, De Ruimte uses artistry to contribute to challenging groups with a distance to society, such as people with a disability or detainees. In a graphic workshop, two-dimensional print work and three-dimensional installations are created for designs that came about through collaboration between an artist and the target group. This example distinguishes itself from other best practices because tapping into the creativity of the participants is the aim of the activities. This way, De Ruimte wants to create awareness for the position of the target group in society. Through the activities, participants of projects in De Ruimte learn that their qualities are valued, which regularly leads to the need for a subsequent process inside or outside the world of art.

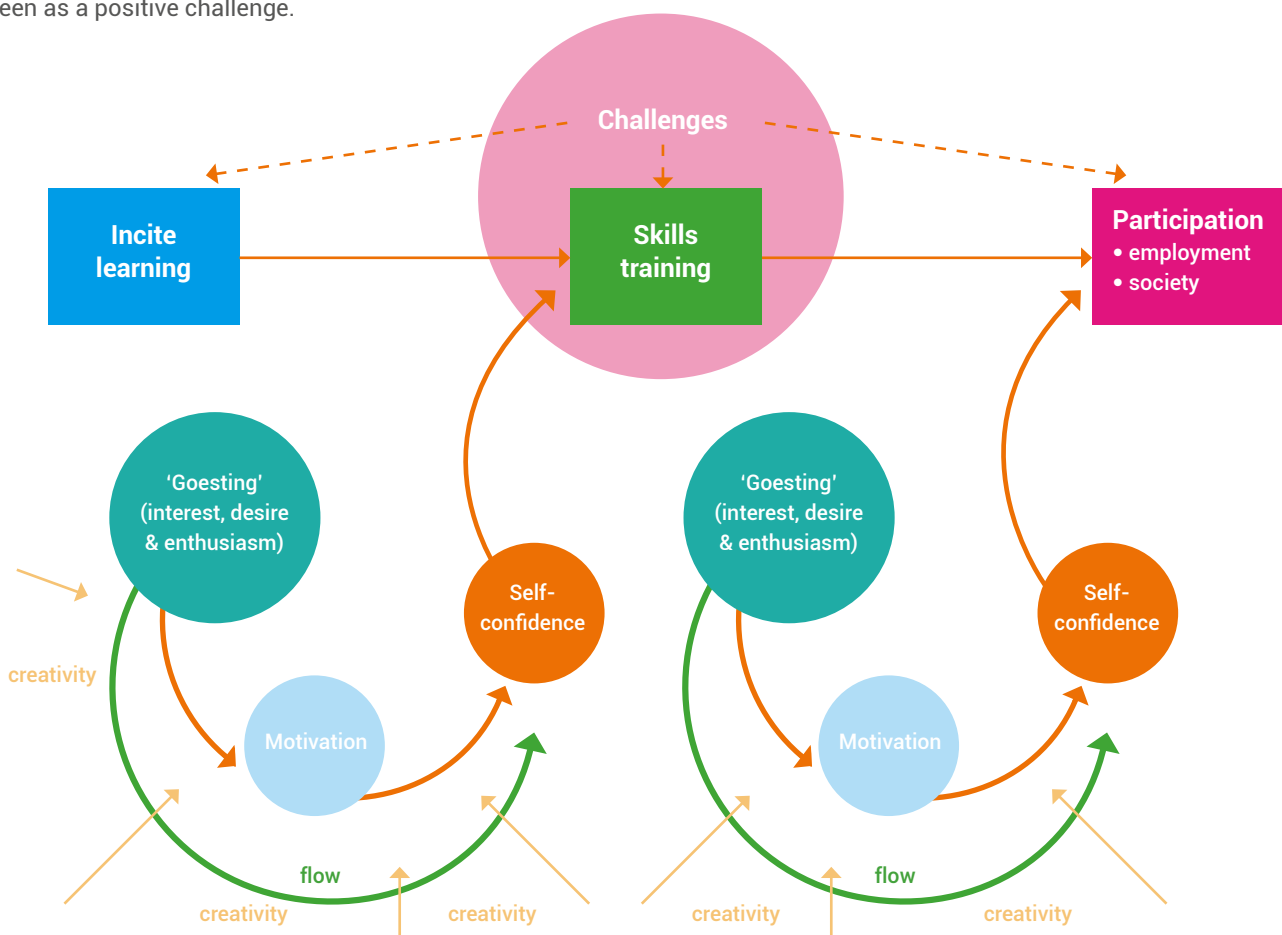


Figure 3: Creativity promotes the advancement in a learning process via goesting, motivation and self-confidence

2. The relationship between creativity, creative working methods and skills training

Apart from achieving flow, creativity also plays a major role in skills training.

Mark Mieras (2009) links using creative working methods and the development of the human brain. While the left half of the brain is focused on control, structures, making connections and purposefulness, the right half of the brain is used for association and experiment. By using creative working methods in a learning process, both halves of the brain are addressed, because of which the brain is able to think divergently and weigh up options. This is required to be able to bring structure and to make choices.

DeMoss and Morris (2002) also list the reinforcing effect of using (forms of) art. They conclude that when a combination of art and other fields of education are offered, this results in genuine comprehension of the subject matter that goes beyond remembering facts.

Marzano (2009) describes the effect of 'non-verbal representation'. Here he states that knowledge is stored in the brain linguistically (verbal/lingual) as well as visually (non-verbal). If both ways are applied in coherence, as is often the case for creative activities, there can be deeper thinking about information and what has been learned can be remembered better.

Barend van Heusden (2010) also links creativity to learning. He describes that creativity consists of combining and using new ways of perception (memories, knowledge and experiences) to get to new interpretations and realities. In a learning process this helps to develop ourselves. TNO subscribes to this reasoning: Creatief Vermogen - de ontwikkeling van een meetinstrument voor leerlingen op

Best practice for creativity & skills training: Word Factory

The Bergen Public Library in Norway offers children the possibility of developing language skills through a creative working method in their Word Factory Workshop. Participating children are challenged to form new words and name meanings based on visual objects. Through the use of creativity, the library wants to promote fun and increase associative thinking. Children respond enthusiastically to this workshop, demonstrate an active work attitude and use new and other words more easily than they would if these had been offered by a teacher.

school (2015) describes that creative forms of working and learning contribute to the participant developing the creative ability.

The studies of Mieras, DeMoss and Morris, Marzano, Van Heusden and TNO reveal that creativity relates to skills training in two ways. First of all, creative working methods have a supportive function, as they let the two sides of the brain cooperate and they stimulate new connections in the brain. This promotes the learning process as it makes learning interesting and increases understanding regardless of the subject matter. Simultaneously, creative working methods train the brain to think in a problem-solving way. In our rapidly changing society this creative ability is an increasingly important skill. When learning skills, creativity is thus both means and goal.

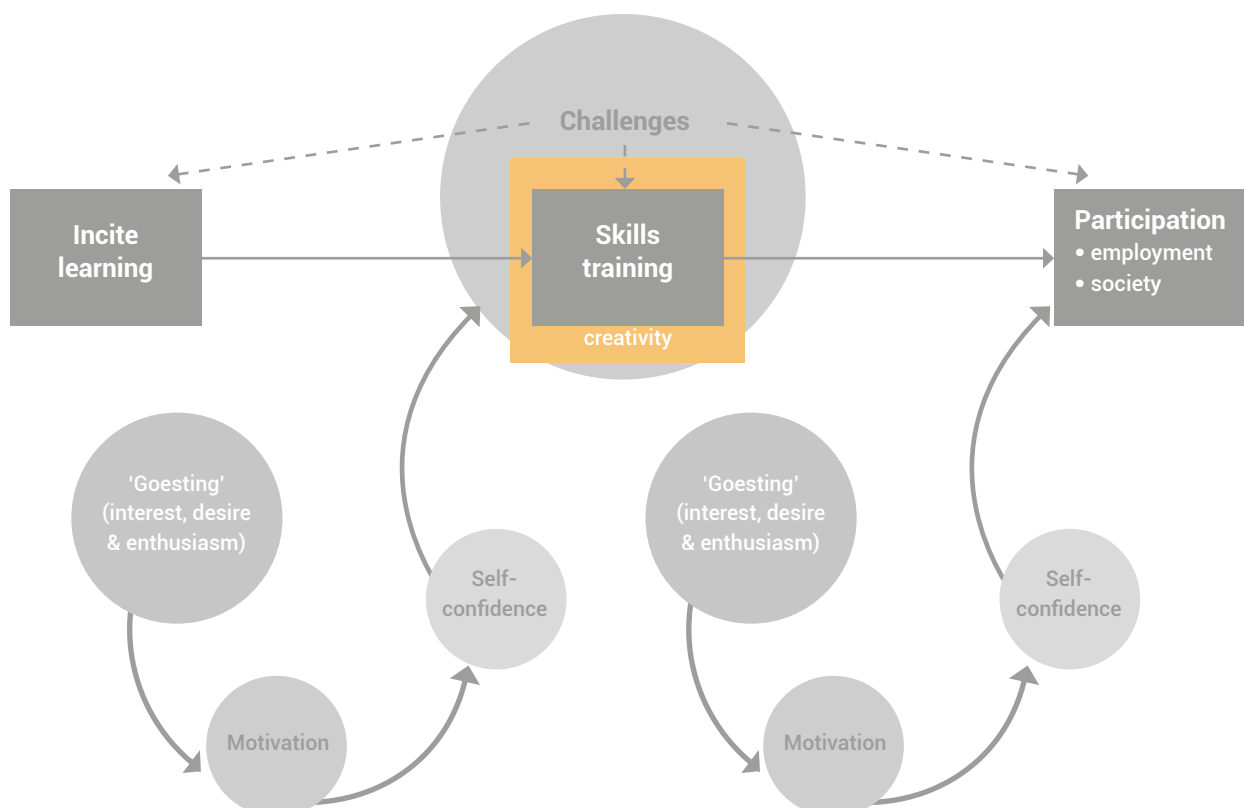


Figure 4: Creativity gives an impulse to skills training while stimulating the development of creative skills

3. The relationship between creativity and stimulating participation in society

A third relationship between creativity and the learning process is expressed in learning to apply the subject matter in everyday life. Elliot W. Eisner (2012) clarifies this need with a biological explanation. He describes that education is the process in which we learn how to create ourselves and our lives. As man is programmed to react to the environment from his urge to survive, a learning process isn't complete without input from outside. We need it to make contact with others so we can share the culture we live in and can extend our consciousness. For the interaction with the outside world, Eisner refers at first to involving (forms of) art in the learning process, because the creative process with which art is created can be seen as an expression of norms and values.

Mieras⁵ also links learning and the environment. From the development of the brain, he says that learning is like an interactive game of expectation and surprise. Our brain does not process individual subject matter, but the expectation of the meaning of this subject matter in the outside world. This is why he believes learning requires interaction, context and an environment in which mistakes are allowed to be made. Using art in education offers these conditions, as creativity encourages playful discovering and developing emotional intelligence.

The findings of Mieras together with those of Eisner show that creativity plays a major role in reducing the step to actually applying the subject matter in practice. And by decreasing this step there is a greater chance that learning essential skills actually leads to increasing participation.

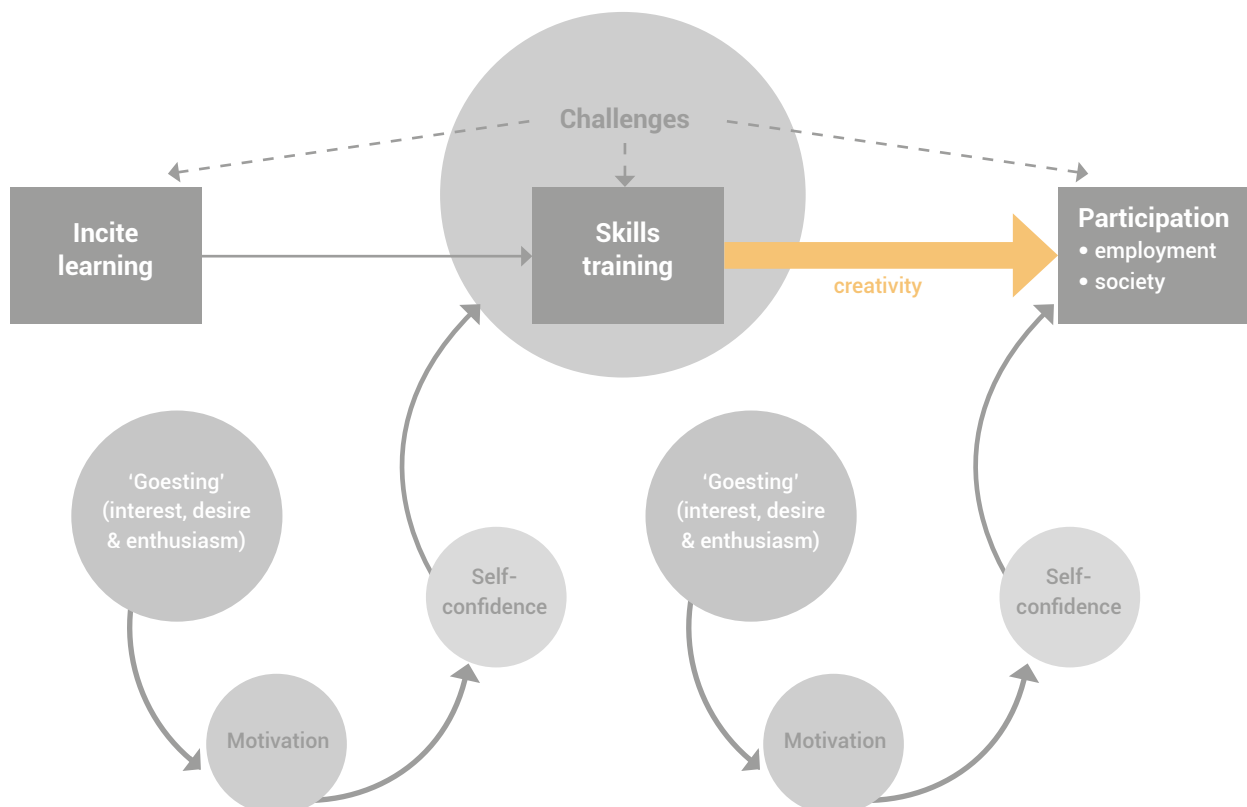


Figure 5: Creativity lowers the threshold towards participation by learning to apply skills

⁵ On his website <https://www.mieras.nl/themas/> Consulted on 3 October 2019

Best practice for creativity & self-confidence for participation: Citizen's Curriculum and Family learning

Both in Wales as in England, as part of adult education, conscious efforts are made on activating participation in society.

In their development work across Wales and England, Learning and Work Institute have been piloting models of Citizen's Curriculum. Pilots have been running across England. In Citizen's Curriculum, the participants are submerged in the culture of the environment.

As part of the Citizen's Curriculum in England, Leicester College set up a pilot project in which participants had a discussion on the basis of a subject, after which they sought background information on the internet and in the city. As the results of this had to be presented on the basis of a short film via Prezi, involving the environment became part of training digital and language skills. A similar pilot project was set up by the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council. Here the participants were challenged to link training of their digital and language skills to citizenship development, through the preparation and performance of a community production based on the film Frozen.

For the Citizen's Curriculum, Learn Devon collaborated with, among others, a housing corporation on developing cooking workshops, where maths skills were linked to finances and health. The link with digital and language skills and participation in society here consisted of sharing recipes through blogs and social media.

Thanks to the varying aspects in the Citizen's Curriculum the participants discovered the (cultural) possibilities in the local environment. The participants stated that this enabled them to get to know their environment better and mentioned the added value via a shared experience with the group. After this introduction, participants also make regular use of the local offer of activities.

Another Learning and Work programme is 'Family Learning' which features the linking of art with skills development. In these projects parents are learning together with their children. The courses help adults develop their skills and at the same time their capacity to support their children. For instance through a range of courses that embed essential skills in a creative way – through photography,

Best practice for creativity & self-confidence for participation: Theatertaal

To bridge the break in language lessons during the summer holiday, Nieuwe Veste in Breda started Zomertaal (Summerlanguage) in 2017. Zomertaal is a programme with varying activities, where practising language skills takes centre stage. Theatertaal (Theatrelanguage) is one of these activities.

At Theatertaal the participants re-enact daily situations with each other in theatre classes, such as going to the hairdresser or doctor or making a phone call. In the lessons the participants themselves come up with a story, how to behave or move and what they can say. This way, they experience what they can already do and what they require to function in an ordinary setting.

The feedback of the participants indicates that they consider Theatertaal very useful. While they experience the joy of playing in the interaction with others and can briefly let go of their problems, the participants use language in a safe setting. In the theatre lessons they have to talk and listen, practise words they already learned and get to know new words in a context. This leads to more guts and self-confidence to talk Dutch and to address others, also in daily life.

5. Answer to the sub-question: The three contributions of creativity to personal development and achieving goals in life

Chapter 1 indicated that the activities as part of the Zomertaal (Summerlanguage) programme formed the motivation to explore the relationship between creativity and skills training. In order to explain the role of creativity the following sub-question was formulated:

In what way can creativity contribute to personal development for achieving goals in life?

In the study, personal development was related to offering educational programmes for skills to adults with a (imminent) disadvantage. Achieving goals in life relates to the ability to fully participate in society.

The study indicated that the target group faces several challenges in skills training. Intended participants must first be incited to learn, which is followed by specific learning of the intended skills, and finally, the step needs to be taken towards applying what has been learned to everyday life.

The challenges a participant is confronted with succeed one another, but are not necessarily faced. First of all the 'goesting' of a participant needs to be addressed to realise the personal significance of learning. This leads to the motivation to persevere and continue to learn. When the results of the participant's efforts subsequently become clear, this provides the self-confidence that is needed to take on a new challenge. The succession of goesting, motivation and self-confidence repeats during each challenge the participant faces, so a continuing learning process starts. When the learning process has run through there is a greater chance that personal development leads to participation as an objective.

In relation to the question how creativity can contribute to the learning process, the study revealed three angles:

1. Creativity is a motor for inciting the learning of skills

Creativity has a positive influence on learning as a process, by offering an important contribution to getting the participant involved and keeping it this way. Creative activities rouse interest, provide a positive and explorative attitude and contribute to self-confidence.

2. Creativity offers attractive working methods for skills training

Using creative activities stimulates the making of new connections in the brain and gives meaning and context to the subject matter. This not only reinforces the ability to learn skills, but also directly contributes to the development of creativity as a skill in itself.

3. Creativity is a means to gain self-confidence in order to take part in society

Involving (forms of) art in the learning process stimulates going through a creative process in which cultural norms and values from daily life play a major role. In a learning environment in which practising and making mistakes is allowed, this reduces the step towards actually applying the subject matter and increasing participation.

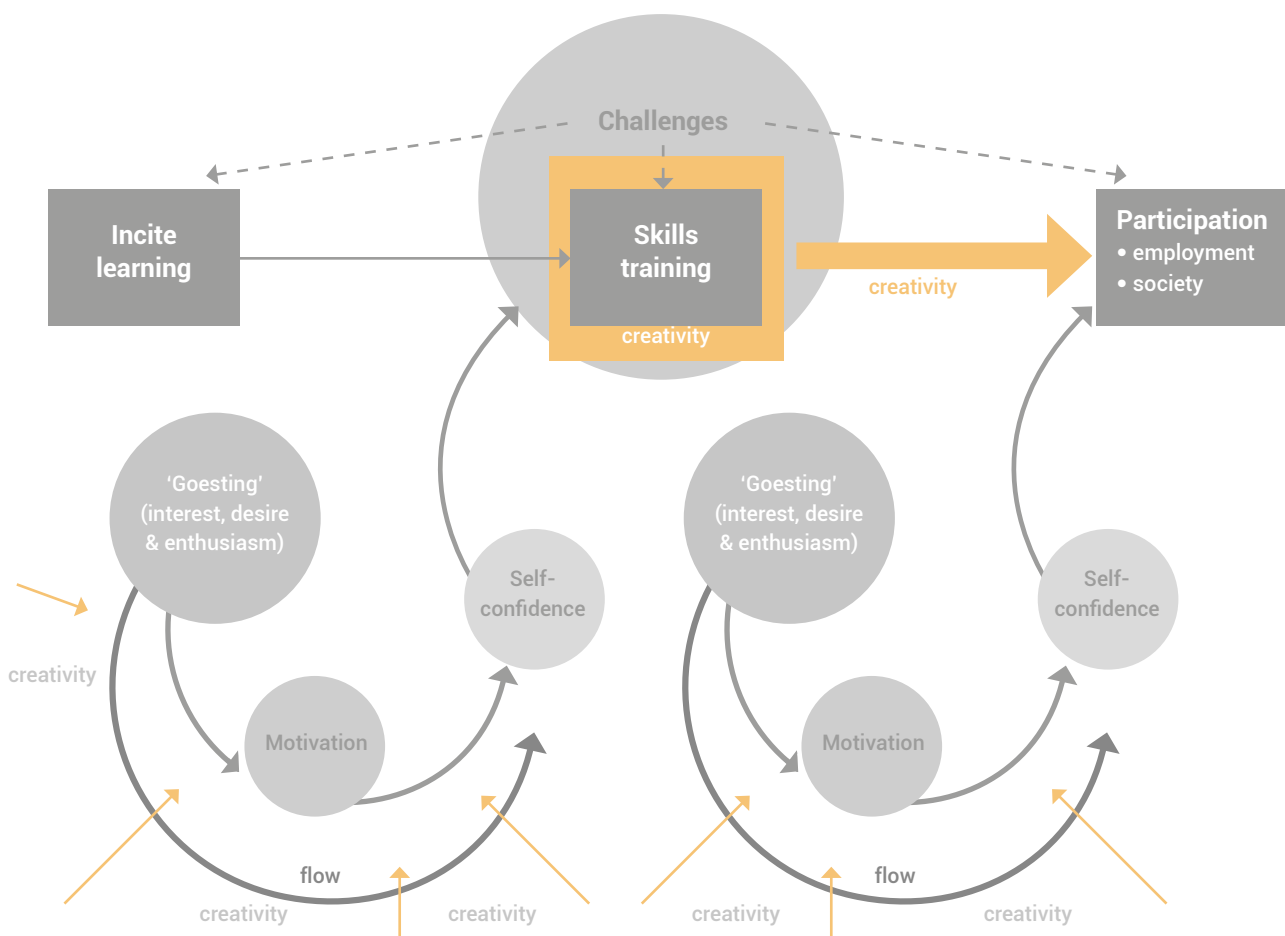


Figure 6: The three ways in which creativity can contribute to personal development and achieving goals in life

6. The contribution of creativity to the transformation of the Literacy House towards a centre of development

Chapter 5 answered the sub-question of this study. This chapter deals with the relationship between the sub-question and the formulated main question:

How can we transform the current concept of the Literacy House into a centre for development in which all essential skills are included?

The main question departed from all essential skills. Based on the findings of chapter 3 it can be substantiated that such a centre of development should not focus on a list of skills and competences, but on a sophisticated sum of skills that are essential for increasing participation of specific target groups in specific situations. This is recognisable for the Literacy House in Breda, because the current offer goes beyond digital and language skills.

The research done indicates that using creative working methods in Literacy Houses can contribute to developing the creative skills of the participant. With the increasing interest in creativity to be able to function flexibly in a changing society, this is a first way of relating creativity to a transformation into a centre for development. However, this is not the only way this came forward in this study. The positive influence of creativity on the total learning process offers angles to contribute to profiling as a centre for development which the Literacy Houses aims for.


Several reports mentioned challenges and areas of concern within the learning processes that underlines the opportunities of using creativity for the learning process in a centre of development.

Tubbing & Matthijsse (2018) state that encouraging learning for NT1⁶ is a hard process, where embarrassment, lack of motivation and selfconfidence, and negative images about oneself as well as about learning play a significant role. They call for defining sub-groups with corresponding recruitment profiles. Reading & Writing Foundation (2018) notes that having limited (language) skills is often seen as an unsolvable problem, while attention should be paid to what someone can do by developing this independently. With this angle the focus is put on being able to participate, which leads to self-confidence and happiness in life. With the use of creativity in these processes the Literacy House can further develop into a centre of development because it helps cross thresholds alongside the specific learning of skills other than language, which in any case starts a learning process.

In 2017 Habermehl, Segers and de Greef studied the influencing factors during a language trajectory for adults. They conclude that the quality of the teaching material in combination with the corresponding activities is a major element for eventually obtaining a better place in society. In their study they also mention the importance of stimulating and facilitating interaction between the participants. Their findings fit in with the importance of offering appealing and challenging forms of acquiring essential skills, because of which a learning process to new skills is facilitated.

Several studies by Maurice de Greef reveal the importance of offering participants of language trajectories so called transfer options. With this he means a learning environment that enables the safe practising of how the subject matter can be applied in daily life, so the learning process helps to reduce the steps towards participation. Furthermore, Brouillette, Grove and Hinga (2015) conclude that using theatre, visual art and dance gives an impulse to developing language skills. They substantiate this by stating that using art ignites the participant's use of the language learned in the learning environment.


⁶ This term indicates the educational approach of Dutch for participants whose first language or mother tongue is Dutch



These conclusions subscribe to the fact that in the learning process should be attention for learning to apply acquired skills, to reduce the step towards participation. Besides that, the learning of language skills itself should be turned into development in a broader context.

The challenges that occur in a learning process are recognisable in the context of the Literacy House. This means that the three angles for using creativity can offer a significant contribution to the development the Literacy House offers the participants. By using creativity to incite learning, learning essential skills in an attractive way and learning to apply skills in practice, creativity also contributes to the transformation of the Literacy House into a centre of development.

The next chapter converts the experiences and knowledge gained into a practical guide for practical use.



7. The significance of the research results for the practice of the Literacy House

The potential of creativity has been indicated from the research into and answering of the sub and main question in this study. This, however, does not ensure that creativity easily finds its way to the practice of the Literacy House. This chapter therefore gives an impetus for the practical conversion. Together with the recommendations of chapter 8 this impetus is intended to start using creativity permanently in the Literacy House.

Creativity as a motor for inciting the learning of essential skills in the Literacy House

If a targeted participant does not consider himself as belonging to the target group or experiences obstacles to start a learning process, the interest can be sparked through creative activities. These activities need to have a so-called camouflage function: they should appeal to an interest without emphasising the learning as a goal. An example of such an activity is a creative lesson in which something needs to be looked up or created online or digitally. Both managing to reach the target group and finding a subject or angle that fits in with the perception are conditions for stimulating the learning of essential skills through creativity.

Creativity as a method for learning essential skills in the Literacy House

If the participant is open to learning but experiences limitations in acquiring skills in a formal educational trajectory, the role of creative working methods in the Literacy House comes into focus. By making learning essential skills part of a creative process, this stimulates the functioning of the brain and gives more meaning to the subject matter. Using creative working methods also contributes to the development of the participant's creative skills. An example of such a working method is writing a poem or designing a poster. It should be noted here that the subject-orientated practicing of art and creativity goes beyond the scope of the Literacy House. Participants interested in this can be referred for a continued course or training.

Creativity as a means of gaining self-confidence in the Literacy House for participation in society

If the participant has acquired skills in the learning process but still has insufficient self-confidence to apply this to everyday life, creative activities can help lower the threshold. This concerns so-called simulation activities: activities where situations of everyday life are re-enacted in a safe environment. An example of such an activity is performing roleplay or presenting work (for fellow participants and

externals). It's important that mistakes are not disapproved of, but are regarded as necessary for learning to understand the (culture in) society.

Creativity in relation to the network of the Literacy House

An important feature of the Literacy House is that it forms a hub in a network of involved organisations. Using creativity should also be seen as part of this network. Organisations that act close to the target group and fulfil a signalling or recruitment function as well as organisations that provide educational activities and guide the step towards participation should be involved in the use of creativity. In addition, collaboration with the cultural and creative sector is required to link expertise in the field of creativity to the network.

Creativity in the structure of the offer in the Literacy House

The programmes offered by the Literacy House have various forms. While one activity may benefit from a central organisation, it's desirable for another activity to be able to offer this in decentral form closer to the target group. The setting where the activities take place is also variable and ranges from formal to informal, often in keeping with the aim of the activity and its place in the offer. These variables are also relevant for the use of creativity in the Literacy House. For each activity it should be viewed which conditions are required for maximum implementation in the programme.

A flexible guide for creativity in the Literacy House

Acquiring skills is a process, with the beginning of the learning as a starting point and the actual increase of participation in society as the end point. This, however, does not mean that each (potential) participant joins this process at the same time, or comes out of the learning process with the same baggage. It is important to have a good view of the learning need or request of the participant, so the right form of creativity can be employed. This requires a flexible guide for employees and volunteers in the Literacy House, which already involves creativity during the intake of participants. This is why the use of creativity in the Literacy House is summarised in a flow chart in figure 7.

To work more and more consciously on creativity to promote essential skills, a Literacy House employee or -coordinator has to look to learning concepts more out of the box. Innovation of learning methods through the expansion of existing concepts with creativity, requires new, other collaborations with creative parties or structural embedding of creativity in own methods.

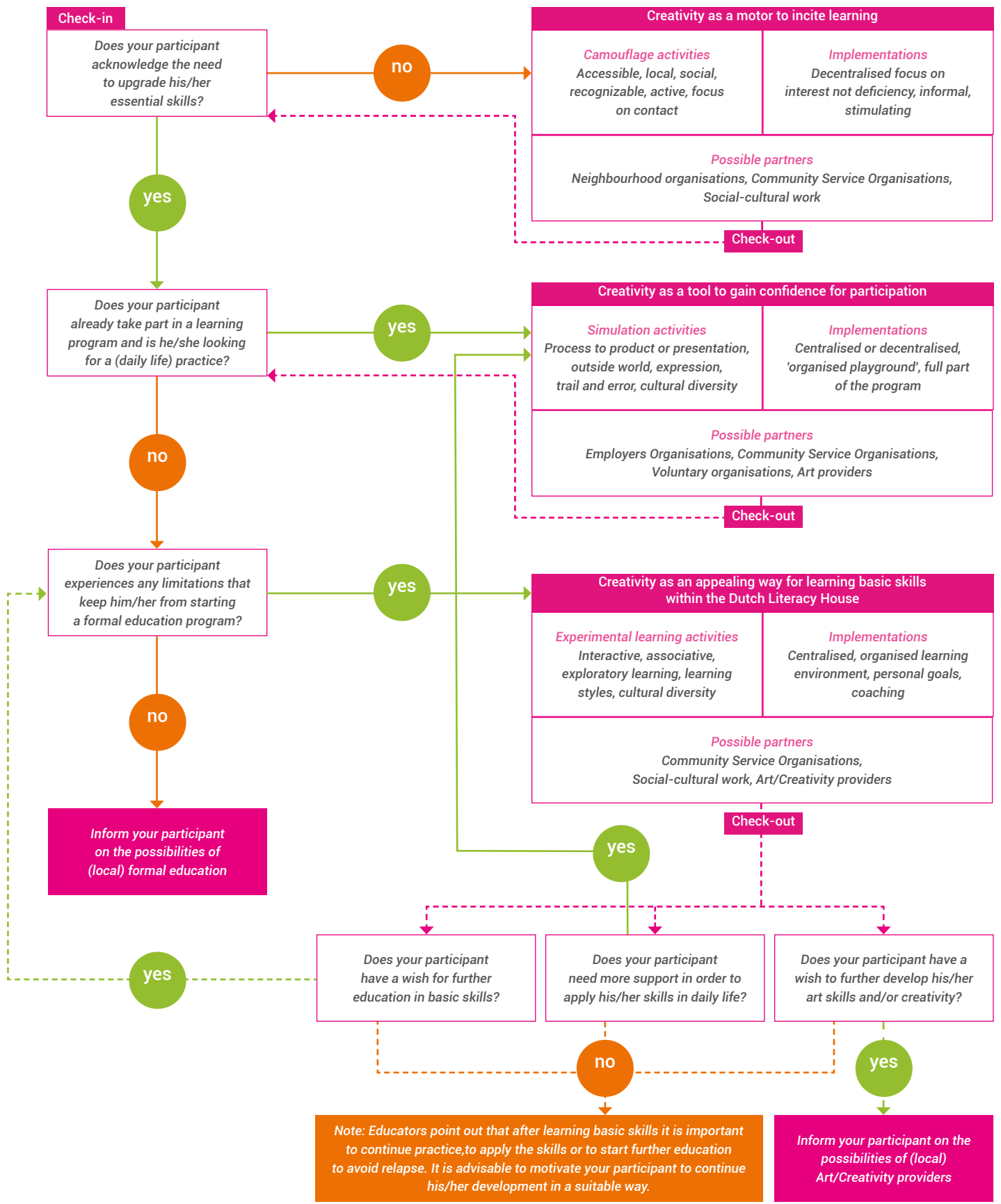


Figure 7: Flow chart for creativity in the daily work of the Literacy House

8. Recommendations

Extend the front of the Literacy House for better recruitment on the basis of creativity

The Literacy House is currently a platform that unites participants and those offering language courses. What is a precondition is that the participant recognises his learning or development need. As creativity can serve as a motor for inciting learning here, it is recommended to extend the 'front' of the Literacy House through collaboration with sociocultural work. This can, for instance, lead to camouflage activities taking place in a partner organisation that works close to the target group instead of in the Literacy House. This promotes the focus on an interest instead of a shortcoming. The partner organisation can subsequently act as a 'supplier' for the Literacy House.

Use intakes to find out the (language) level as well as the 'goesting' to determine the approach

In contact with a potential participant there are various angles that lead to an approach with a fitting use of creativity (see flow chart on page 16). In case of (new) contact it is thus important to determine the level and learning objective of the participant through an intake interview. In addition, it is important for the effectiveness of a creative intervention to also discuss the 'goesting'. The creative activities that fit in with the approach will then be more appealing for the participant and increase the efficiency of learning. To find out the learning needs, next to an intake through a personal interview, a tool is available via www.ikwilleren.nl

Prevent an overlap with social, and/or cultural work

By enquiring about the 'goesting', interests, needs and objectives, there is a chance that the participant lists problems or even solutions that are outside the scope of the Literacy House. In these situations, it is necessary to have a good insight into the network of social, but probably also cultural organisations, so the Literacy House can help the participants through a suitable referral.

Make creativity a structural part of the programme

Make the creative forms of learning a structural part of the programme. Also always determine the objective for these forms of learning and activities and discuss this with the participants. This is to prevent it from being seen as 'crafting' and the learning objective being overlooked. Also always evaluate whether the objective has been reached after an activity. In addition, take the context into account when explaining the learning objective; cultural background can play a role in understanding forms of learning, it is fairly normal in Western society to experiment with forms of learning, but less normal in other cultures. Within the promotion of expertise of employees and volunteers it is also desirable to enrich with creativity, which increases awareness of the use of creativity both in and alongside regular lessons.

Seek collaboration with creative experts

Seek collaboration with parties with expertise on a cultural/creative level. They are more familiar with the functioning of a creative process and know how to tap into the participant's creativity and which activities fit the intended objectives. By linking the expertise of the Literacy House to expertise on a cultural/creative level, the learning programme can be developed in an optimal way.

Always refer or address back after completing steps

It's important to keep the participants in the learning process and thus in the flow. Continuity results in advancement in the process. Also always evaluate the achieved goals after a step and refer or address back to a programme or partner.

Put the use of creativity on the agenda in various places

Using creativity affects various clients and collaboration partners-in the formulated objectives of the Literacy House as well as in the execution. For a broad implementation it is important that all parties (client, Literacy House, social and cultural partners) are familiar with the arguments to include creativity in the programme. It helps point out the information about the social use of creativity in a learning environment from various angles. If the creative process is not only seen as 'some fun', a client can help steer to promote the permanency.

Map out the impact for participants (and their environment)

This study assessed the impact for participants on the basis of talks with initiators and the literature. To get even more scope it is recommended to focus on the impact of creative forms of learning on both the acquisition of essential skills and the influence on the wellbeing and degree of participation of participants in a follow-up study. If this is mapped out quantitatively and qualitatively there is more insight into what it actually provides the participants, and programmes can be adapted to this.

Use existing structures for sharing knowledge about creativity in the Literacy House

The Toolkit Taalhuizen of Reading & Writing Foundation provides an exchange of knowledge and information about language skills, but also about other essential skills. As parties with an interest in or working on the improvement of essential skills are welcome here, this is a logical place to also accommodate background information, best practices and learning points in the field of creativity. For more information, see:

- www.readingandwriting.eu/dutch-projects-and-tools (ENG)
- www.taalhuis.nl/instrumenten (NL)

Link this study and the study of Cubiss into the relationship between essential skills and employment

Employers benefit from employees who have essential skills. As creativity plays a role in inciting learning as well as in learning and applying skills and the Literacy House is capable of offering a combination of this, it's important to also create awareness for this subject among employers. Cubiss has developed the theme of employment as part of this Erasmus+ project ('The inseparable link between essential skills and employability'). It therefore seems logical to put creativity and employment into practice together.

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 - The LSE Project (2017) Report on Life Skills Approach in Europe. Geraadpleegd op 3 oktober 2019 van <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/report-life-skills-approach-europe>
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Appendix I

Project Background

The project 'Paving the way for essential skills houses' is a direct result of our previous KA1 project 'Extending the literacy houses approach' and focuses on the further development and embedding of the Literacy Houses concept as implemented in the Dutch region West-Brabant.

I. Main question and themes

We want to make sure that everyone can successfully participate in our society. In order to be able to do so, they need to be equipped with certain essential skills (see definitions below). The proposed activities are directly related to the main challenge of the consortium in West-Brabant to extend its current Literacy Houses concept (see definition below) to include not only language skills but all essential skills. In doing so, it can become the centre of development that our society so desperately needs (a centre of lifelong learning).

Our main research question is: "How can we extend our current Literacy houses concept to include all essential skills and transform it into a centre of development?" We focussed on participation in its broadest sense. In doing so, we have selected two main themes which - in the field of essential skills - are relatively new to the Netherlands.

Creation/creativity

Besides the more classical methods for the transfer of knowledge, we intend to research other - more creative - methods of acquiring language and essential skills or methods that lead to a better embedding of lessons learned. For this part of the project we use the research question:

In what way can creativity contribute to personal development for achieving goals in life?

Employment/employability

Over 50% of the people in the Netherlands with low essential skills is employed. Consequently, employers are a very important partner in the improvement of essential skills. In practice, however, they are hardly ever involved in our current Literacy houses concept. Secondly, Literacy houses can play an important role in helping people with low essential skills find a job.

II. Definitions

Literacy house

A Literacy house is a place for everyone who wants to work on (the improvement of) his or her language skills. Besides a physical location, it is a partnership between local stakeholders and a catalyst for (further) local and regional cooperation. Literacy houses are mostly located in libraries or community centres. A literacy house provides an overview of all formal and non-formal language courses on offer in the region as well as educational advice and materials for volunteers. In the majority of cases, the library coordinates the daily activities and Curio (formerly known as ROC West-Brabant) provides professional support to the volunteers.

Essential skills

Essential skills are the skills needed for life, learning and work. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to participate in society and work. Essential skills include the skills associated with literacy (i.e. reading, writing, document use and numeracy) but goes beyond to also include thinking skills (problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, task planning and organizing, use of memory, finding information), oral communication, computer use/digital skills, working with others and the skills associated with continuous learning. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to better participate in society and work.

Life skills

UNESCO, WHO and Unicef have expressed 10 so-called "Life skill strategies and techniques": problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, building self-awareness, empathy and dealing with stress and emotions.

Next to these life skill strategies and techniques, the KA2 report 'The life skills approach in Europe' (2017), mentions: "Life skills are a constituent part of capabilities for life and work in a particular social, cultural and environmental context. The types of life skills emerge as a response to the needs of the individual in real life situations. This KA2 report appoints 8 life capabilities: health, financial, environmental, digital, literacy, numeracy, civic and personal & interpersonal capabilities.

In this project we make use of the definition: essential skills are the skills needed for life, learning and work

III. Project partners

The following partners take part in the project: Cubiss Brabant, Nieuwe Veste, Curio (formerly known as ROC West-Brabant), Reading & Writing Foundation (Stichting Lezen & Schrijven), Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek, Learning and Work Institute Wales and Blenders (formerly known as SPK vzw).

IV. Long term sustainability

Our project strongly focuses on the long-term sustainability of our current Literacy houses concept. All partners within the project are solid organizations with long-term funding. They will all incorporate the insights and results obtained within this project in their structures, approaches and instruments.

Appendix II

Example Projects

Learning essential skills

- Digidak (Turnhout)- Digital skills
- Learning&work institute (Wales)- Managing Money (financial literacy)
- Citizen's Curriculum (Pilots in England and Wales)
- Vale Learning centre (Barry) - hub for essential skills
- Bergen Public Library- Essential Skills house: (digital) Literacy reading room, Language cafe, Digital first aid, Digital arena, Language buddy,

Learning essential skills through creativity

- De Ruimte (Turnhout, Belgium)
 - o <http://deruimte.art/>
 - o <https://www.facebook.com/deruimte.art>
 - o Project Vanzelfzaamheid: https://youtu.be/EQFbkr15x_c
- HetGevolg (Turnhout, Belgium)
 - o <https://www.hetgevolg.be/hartenprojecten/>
 - o <https://nl-nl.facebook.com/HETGEVOLG/>
 - o Project Groot Familie: <https://youtu.be/uodBP40aR68>, <https://youtu.be/FgM0CPM4htA>
- Bergen Public Library- (Bergen, Norway)
 - o <https://bergenbibliotek.no/>
 - o Learning centre: <https://bergenbibliotek.no/laering/laeringssenter>
 - o Creative learning packages: <https://bergenbibliotek.no/laering/pakker>
 - o GrØnn fun (green awareness & creative thinking)
 - o Word Factory
- Kirkens Bymisjon (Bergen, Norway)
 - o <https://kirkensbymisjon.no/about-us/what-we-do/>
 - o <https://www.facebook.com/bymisjon>
 - o Re:tro workshop: <https://www.facebook.com/retroullverksted/>
- Digidak (Belgium)
 - o <https://www.facebook.com/digidak/>
 - o <http://www.digidak.be/>
 - o Cooking > making cookbook (digital skills)

- Taalhuis Breda (Literacy House)
 - o 'Theatertaal' (theatre language): theatre project with immigrants to practice language in a creative way and at the same time gain self-confidence
 - o 'Smartlappencafe'
 - o Project 'Thuis' (at home): painting & talking (putting emotion into language)
 - o 'Taalweek' (language week) with refugees
 - Djembe-language workshops
 - theatre language
 - city tour (Breda Culture)
 - o 'Presenteer jezelf' (present yourself)
 - o Presenting through film in search for a job
 - o 'Taalgroepen' (language groups) creative learning assignments: games, poems, reading packages, mind maps, nature map about themselves, elevator pitch, writing recipes
 - o 'Meidenavond' & Taal: Girls night at community centre: language, spoken word & poems
- Talentenbank Aarschot (Belgium)
 - o <https://www.talentedbankaarschot.be/>
- New Amigo's boardgames (Norway)
 - o Playful learning language
 - o playful integration <http://newamigos.com/index.php/en/>
- Citizens Curriculum (Wales)
- Koken met Letters (<https://schunck.nl/agenda/koken-met-letters-2019-2020>)
- Broodje Aap en Linke Soep (<http://www.broodjeaaplinkesoep.nl/>)

Social participation

- Talentenbank Aarschot
- Kirkens Bymission (Bergen)-woolwork, bicycle workshop, cafe

Labour market participation

- Cardiff Council (Wales)-essential skills projects for adults
- Welsh Water/ Dwr Cymru (Wales) -strengthening essential skills employees
- Goddeeris Academy (Roeselare, Belgium) -strengthening (essential) skills employees
- Den Travoo (Balen, Belgium)-service centre for employability
- Folkeuniversitetet (Bergen, Norway)- basic skills and employability
- ALF (Bergen, Norway)- reintegration in work for addicted gamers
- Fretex (Bergen, Norway) - workplace training
- Etablerersenteret (Bergen, Norway)- skills for start-ups