

VALMOPRIS

Validation of and motivation for informal and non-formal
learning in prisons

IO4: A guidebook for validation: non-formal and informal learning

For facilitators, educators and professionals working in prisons and closed environments



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What is this document and who is it for?

As part of the VALMOPRIS project over 30 experienced practitioners from 5 European countries designed non-formal learning activities for delivery in prisons and criminal justice settings. These practitioners work in a range of prison settings – as teachers, workshop leaders, psychologists, and probation workers. These competence-oriented learning activities were designed to allow these practitioners to apply a validation methodology to measure the competence progress of their learners.

The learning activities presented in this abridged guidebook shows the kind of work being carried out in prisons or criminal justice settings within your own country. However, a full synopsis of all the learning pilots from all five countries is available in English at valmopris.org.

The guidebook offers insights from participating professionals and learners, and is designed to help you think about the possible benefits of validation for your own learners. Alongside this document we have produced a **competence framework** tailored for prison settings and a **training course** (available online through EPEA and the VALMOPRIS website) which provide the 'tools' and information necessary to undertake competence-oriented learning and its validation in prisons and closed environments.

Why validate non-formal learning in prisons?

Non-formal learning opportunities, and their validation, can have a demonstrable benefit – building motivation through the visible development of competences, allowing learners to enter the process at their own level and progress at their own pace.

Validation can foster more efficacious, self-aware, and critical learners; learners who have the competences, self-knowledge, and capacities to engage in further learning. When a prison learner chooses to engage in a 'learning future' it can further improve their chances of social reintegration, through enhanced social capital and a sense of agency. This is the key goal of our work in prison education – to help our learners to build their capacity to desist from crime.

Yet, valuable competences, so frequently developed through informal and non-formal learning, are rarely validated and certified by learning providers. This leaves a huge amount of progress and development that cannot be demonstrated or proven to potential stakeholders beyond the prison context. Furthermore, beyond prison, there are huge obstacles to overcome. Lack of housing, low employment prospects, familial and community instability, and lack of post-prison support can all act as barriers making desistance from crime more difficult. Therefore, validation represents a tremendous opportunity for those working within a range of prison learning environments.

The VALMOPRIS partnership believe that the validation of informal and non-formal learning can help former prisoners to cope with the challenges beyond prison. Through validation, we can demonstrate learners' competence development in areas such as communication, critical thinking, self-reflection and autonomy, to name but a few. This, in turn, can help build a learner's confidence in presenting evidence of their personal development to agencies such as employers, educational institutions, etc. Our hope, is that this will help learners to develop a pro-social identity, which is so critical post-release.

A brief introduction to the terms and concepts

Formal, informal and non-formal learning

Formal learning tends to be teacher-directed and organised by some form of curriculum. Formal learning follows a clear set of goals and objectives. It is intentional from the learner's point of view; it is generally assessed, and it typically leads to certification.

Non-formal learning is also organised, but it typically does not lead to certification and is less likely to be linked to the national qualifications frameworks. Non-formal learning can be intentional but this type of learning tends to focus on aspects crucial to personal development.

Informal Learning tends to occur through the experiences of day-to-day situations; 'life lessons'. However, this type of experiential learning is often unintentional learning but can occur as a by-product of more organised learning. There may, therefore, be a time when this learning would benefit from validation.

What is the difference between evaluation, assessment, validation, & certification?

Evaluation is the process of observing and measuring a thing for the purpose of judging it and determining its 'value' or 'worth', generally by comparison to an agreed standard.

Assessment involves a process of observing or measuring the effectiveness of something. '**Summative**' assessment measures the end-point: *how well* the learner has done or *how much* the learner has achieved. A '**formative**' assessment is measured for the purpose of improving something. It is learner-centred, course-based and not graded.

Validation is the process where a competent person formally recognises the progress of others: it establishes if the assessment is correct. When validation is embedded in an educational framework, e.g., the European Qualifications Framework, it will allow the production of a certificate, and thus **Certification** of the person's attainment.

What are competences? And how do we measure them?

A **Competence** refers to someone's ability to do something successfully; competences blend **knowledge, skills and attitudes in a particular situation**. These are generally considered to be transversal – i.e. they can be learned and developed in one context and used in many other social and employment contexts

The VALMOPRIS competence validation process involved three key stages:

→ **Selecting and constructing competences:** The VALMOPRIS project has developed a competence framework, which target the kinds of competences considered most relevant to learners within prisons. These competences are generic. This is the starting point for facilitators – to 'personalise' this framework for their own group of learners and the learning content of a project or activity.

→ **Observation, assessment and reflection:** A wide range of assessment methodologies can be utilised to measure the competence-development of learners, such as peer discussion, self-reflection, observation, and visual mapping. One or more assessment approaches can be used during the process.

→ **Interpretation and validation:** As a result of the process of **observation, assessment and reflection**, the competence-development of each learner can be measured and officially validated. This is done through a process of reasoning and rating, which uses the 'personalised' competence framework to map the learners' progress in any selected competences.

PILOT LEARNING ACTIVITIES FROM FRANCE

PILOT 1

From 'Which links to grow'

Anne Jouanjean, France

Duration: 7 weeks (twice weekly sessions of 50 minutes)

Competences validated: **Learning to Learn** and **Civic & Social Competences**

Location and Learners: Centre éducatif fermé de Beauvais, young offenders

An important part of the work we do as professionals and practitioners working in prisons and with young offenders – whether consciously or sub-consciously – is to encourage learners to develop self-awareness, confidence, empathy, and to engage in the expression of emotions. These types of pro-social behaviour are considered an integral precursor to desistance from crime, rehabilitation, and re-engagement with society.

In these workshops, Anne worked with a group of 3 young people, engaged in practical 'tutorials' developed as a result of the experiments of Michèle Bannay (school psychologist) and Anne Bordage (therapist), presented in their book 'Which Links to Grow'. Each week, in two 'tutorials' the learners, with Anne as facilitator, used a 'Head-Heart-Body' approach to focus on relationships (with self, others, and group). These reflective questions structured the sessions:

Who am I?

I feel, I live

My big questions, my fears

Being and doing together

Where do I come from?

My difficulties, my requests

Ourselves in everyday life

Anne explains: *"It can be difficult for the young learners to begin their learning. It can be difficult to mobilise the interest of not only the learners but also the staff team, but once you get going you see learners become curious to get involved. It can help to develop positive teacher/learner relationships. That's great and it's really important for validation."*

PILOT 2

Visual mapping

Anne Jouanjean, France

Duration: 3 months (weekly sessions of 3 hours)

Competences targeted: **Autonomy** and **Learning to Learn**

Location and learners: Centre éducatif fermé de Beauvais, young offenders

Young people coming from chaotic educational backgrounds, require an individualised approach to teaching and learning, often with adapted tools, which will enable young people to regain confidence and mobilise again.

In these workshops we will take the time to experiment with visual thinking, utilising tools from the corporate world in order to support learners in critical thinking and metacognitive reflection. The workshops will include lots of creative elements, such as: role play; pooling; discussion and questioning; and memory games.

These workshops can help to improve thinking processes, organisational skills and memory. The sessions are not overly complicated but focus on practical tools and approaches.

Our hope is that these methodologies will help with future training and employment opportunities, providing practical strategies for application throughout their professional lives.

We asked Anne how this activity helped with competence development:

“Visual mind-mapping is based on the thinking that mental management helps learners to find the best way to learn to suit their own learning profile. This is a person-centred approach and asks learners to consider and reflect, as well as involving the learner in asking questions that will allow learners to respond to what they need to acquire or learn. The aim is that the student is able to work on this approach individually and in a systematic way.

Mind-mapping helps to deepen the work begun with mental management (planning, organisation and memorisation), since it involves using something visual and the brain more easily retains images. Learners who experiment in this learning approach can be reluctant but they very often quickly realise the benefits for their own autonomous learning.

It is wonderful to see learners’ pride when they are able to memories and restore information.”

PILOT 3

Authoring for illiterate adults

Eric Pruvot, France

Duration: 3 months (twice a week for 90 minutes)

Competences targeted: **Autonomy (Project Management)** and **Learning to Learn**

Location and learners: Centre pénitentiaire, short- and long-term adult male prisoners

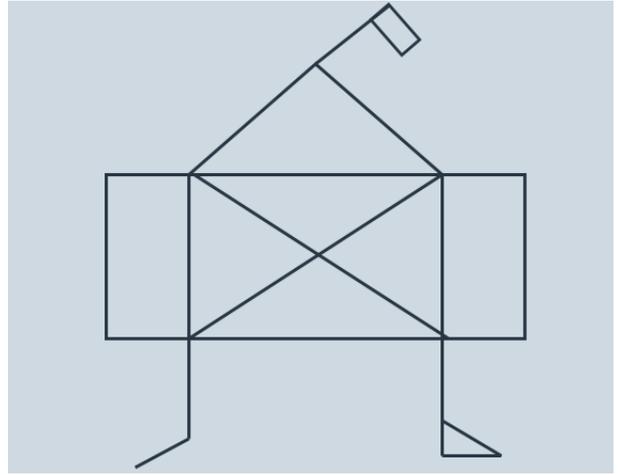
This activity involved a small group of illiterate adults who worked together to make a short book. The process uses oral story-telling traditions to help learners to achieve a sense of autonomy and control over the ‘writing’ process.

The first step of the project found the prisoners briefly imagining a story and discussing the different themes they have come up with, within the group context.

Then, the distinct stories are combined to create a new collaborative one – again discussion plays a crucial role here to help learners gain a sense of collective ownership.

The prison learners then select the literary form of the narrative (short story, comics, novel) and the writing and the illustrating process then began. The script is dictated as a starting point, with a teacher, facilitator, peer tutor scribing the content. The group then reflect and edit on the version before making revisions, finalising the content, and working on illustrations.

The focus is of course also to stimulate a desire to read. The book which comes out of those writing workshops are issued and used by other adult groups in the future.

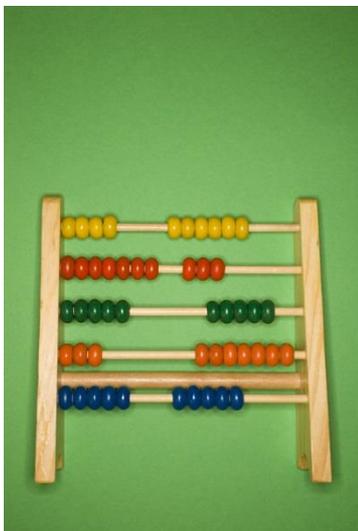


PILOT 4
Maths Debates
Eric Pruvot, France

Duration: 30 hours over 12 weeks

Competences validated: **Problem solving** and **Learning to Learn**

Location and learners: Centre Pénitentiare, short- and long-term adult male prisoners



This non-formal activity has been developed as an innovative working habit during Eric's mathematics classes. Eric realised the opportunity for much broader competence development within the more traditional subject area of maths.

When working on operations or problem solving, the learners are invited to share their thoughts and results; then work together to 'uncover' the correct solution. If unable to come to an agreement, learners will have to present arguments to justify and prove the correct answer. In class, 'debate' springs from disagreement and, together, we work to try and derive the appropriate mathematics rules to solve the problems.

Brief problem-solving questions were posed to the learners as a fun and engaging way both to develop their mathematical knowledge and to tackle competence development in problem-solving.

The rules, problems and exercises mentioned during classes are all recorded and turned into a collection for future prison learners to ponder during the classes to come.

Eric gave us an insight into how he got on with this new process and its validation:

"This kind of activity and its validation can be difficult, because it's quite unusual to use debate in a maths class. The learners are more often used to proposing a solution and to receive an answer from the teacher whether it's right or wrong. The debate forces students to argue. The main challenge is to avoid the learners changing their minds about an answer just because the others say it's not correct. Learning to argue when you're the only one...is difficult.

But this way of working has two advantages:

Firstly, by using "cold" subjects such as mathematics, the debate can be held without it becoming an ideological confrontation such as when we debate a question of society.

Second, for the majority of learners, it was not a habit to defend a point of view by arguing to try to convince others. This is great for helping to develop their problem-solving competence."

IS THE SQUARE A RECTANGLE?

The debate on this question was very intense. Most learners felt that the square was not a rectangle. Others believed that the square was a rectangle!

So, the debate began in earnest. We were obliged to use and compare the geometric properties of the two figures. At the end of the process, the majority of learners have changed their mind on the issue during the debate even though some never wanted to admit that YES the square is a rectangle!

What do the learners say?

"I was eager to see how the debate was going to unfold and especially how the professor would do when it degenerated. In fact the teacher hardly ever needed to intervene because we remained calm and we were able to self-regulate."

"I was able to listen carefully to other points of view and change my mind when I'm wrong. I did not wait for the results to come from the teacher, but I can think for myself."

"I really discovered the power of reasoning together. The question is whether we would be able to debate like this outside the prison – I think it would be difficult. It would be nice if on TV politicians who were debating agreed to recognise their mistakes"

"I was not expecting much, I was just curious to see what was going to happen. I was surprised that we were able to debate without getting angry."

"I realised that we could talk and listen even when we disagree – I learned not to get annoyed. The main difficulty was going back to the learning after the debates. It would be good if school is always like this."

PILOT 5

Crossing Lives

Deborah Edwards, France

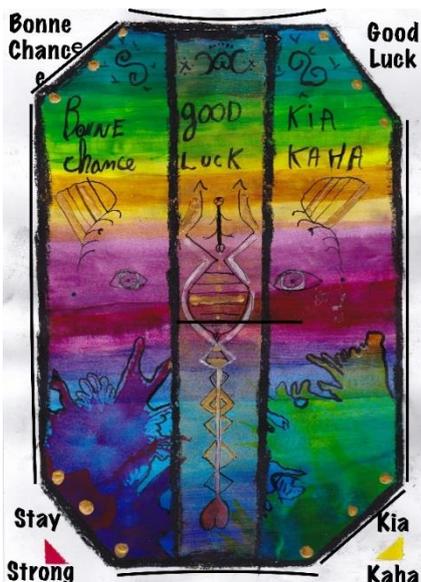
Duration: 3 months (16 hours)

Competences Targeted: Communication and Learning to Learn

Location and learners: Centre Pénitentiaire de Liancourt, Adult male prisoners (refugees)

Working together, the group of learners – many of whom hadn't engaged in art since they were young children – devised a set of postcards that had messages for 'change', 'hope', 'love', and 'courage'.

Deborah told us about her concept for the project: *"The idea behind these postcards was to send them to families, friends, younger prisoners, and refugees. The emphasis was on finding shared or universal messages that could reach out to others in vulnerable situations as prisoners often communicate the need to communicate outside the negative constraints of 'prison talk'."*





The project combined art with language and cultural workshops. The group of participants embarked on an informal exploration of English, French and Arabic through discussion, poetry, hip hop, and fables, which helped them to develop personal messages, connected to their own experiences and cultural identities.

The project sought to help prisoners develop their communicative and creative competences through informal discussion and experimentation with techniques and processes. Deborah worked hard to create a space where the learners could explore their feelings and express them through language and art in a creative way; promoting cross cultural understandings whilst learning.

Competence development was measured in this activity through peer reflection and discussion.

PILOT 6

Sculptural Totem

Deborah Edwards, France

Duration: 8 weeks (2 hours per week)

Competences Measured: Creativity and Learning to Learn

Location and Learners: Centre Pénitentiaire de Liancourt, young offenders

One of the aims of this project is to develop an awareness of the importance of the creative process. Young offenders often want results instantly and are often not prepared to take risks and try new ideas out. Engaging in an art activity that demands imagination, creativity, reflection and modification can be a life-long skill that crosses over into all aspects of social life and can be used to encourage entrepreneurial thinking, decision making and problem solving through creative choice and can prevent re-offending and support social inclusion.

Deborah talked with us about her pilot learning activity:

"In my experience with young offenders, I've found that they are less and less able to sustain a level of concentration and desire images to reflect an idea of 'perfection'.

The project began by exploring innovative ways to create, draw and paint. It started with direct observation (participants used each other as models), recording what they saw and not what they thought they saw. I actively encouraged all mistakes to be left visible to enrich the quality of the portrait as a process.

The learners were then given an introduction to the expressive emotional qualities of colours through the medium of acrylic. These two activities served to inform the development of design idea through to a 3-dimensional plaster mask and plaster cast hands using the selected colours to express moods and expressions."



Starting point - FR5 COLLAGE
TESTING CREATIVITY

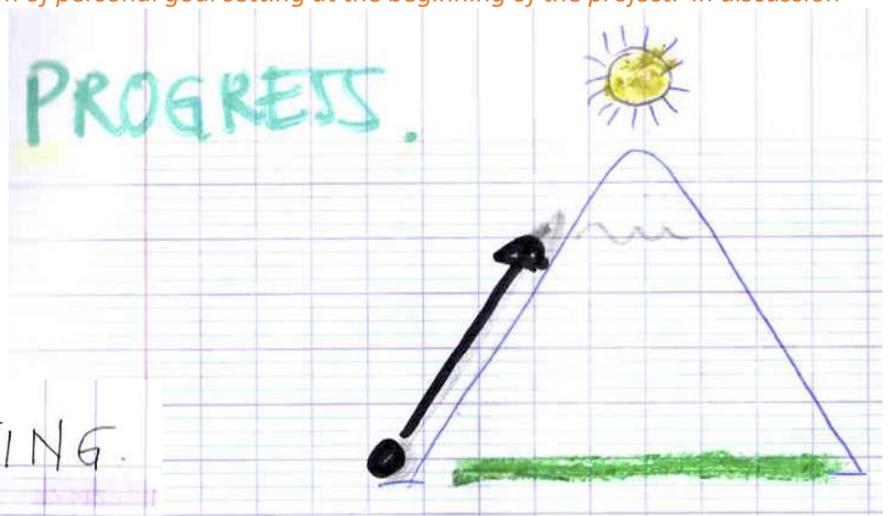


The sessions culminated in the creation of a free-standing 3D Totem Pole made up of cast faces and hands to create an exciting and multi-faceted sculpture that represents the participants and their learning journey.

Deborah gave us an insight into the validation process:

“Throughout the process I worked with learners to measure their competence development in creativity and learning to learn. The learners and I monitored their creativity on regular bases. We discussed their idea development, their confidence in engaging in new techniques, how they felt about the results, and next stages. All of these questions feed in to a learner’s creative capacities. So too does the process of exploring, discussing and reflection.”

With learning to learn, I felt it was more important to look at personal goals – the things that my learners felt really mattered to them. This took the form of personal goal setting at the beginning of the project. In discussion between myself and the group of learners we all set out our personal goals, what we wanted to improve upon. We came back to these goals at the end of the process and considered how well we felt we had progressed. This process used a blend of self-, peer-, and tutor-reflection. All of which was designed to be positive and reinforce progress.”



- GOAL SETTING.
- ③ Critical thinking
 - ② choices / conflict solutions
 - ① Confidence.