

Global how? – Linking practice to theory: A competency model for training global learning facilitators

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Abstract

Global learning facilitators from civil society organizations (CSOs) design and enrich educational processes in formal and non-formal educational settings. They need to be empowered through adequate training opportunities in global learning (GL) contexts. The project Facilitating Global Learning – Key Competences from Members of European CSOs (FGL) answered the need for state-of-the-art training about the theory and practice of GL by developing a training curriculum for GL training contexts based on a jointly developed competency model for GL facilitators. This article describes crucial elements of GL facilitator training and the competency model for a training curriculum tested in three European countries (Germany, Portugal and Romania). Coming from, and having been created for, GL practice, the model is reflected on critically in the article, regarding its potential for further development in both academic and practical contexts.

Keywords: global learning competencies; competency model; civil society organizations (CSO); global facilitator; training

Introduction

Global learning and interlinked transformative educations have long been looking into ways of dealing with the complexity of global issues and global change in a way that empowers people to reflect critically and act, enter into dialogue with each other and deepen their knowledge about themselves and the world in which they live (Lang-Wojtasik and Klemm, 2017).

In order to recognize and assume personal responsibility as members of a global society, and to feel encouraged to participate actively in shaping both their immediate and wider surroundings, people need learning opportunities that foster their abilities to think and act as informed and critically analysing global citizens (Whitehead, 2015). In a subject-oriented educational setting, GL offers contextualized learning that links global and local realities and responsibilities. In analysing and reflecting on global issues in relation to local contexts, GL is a pedagogical approach that empowers people to engage with 'complex global systems, their implications for the lives of individuals, and the sustainability of the earth' (Whitehead, 2015: 6). Thus, GL 'pursues to transform and change global circumstances through the empowerment of critical learning and thinking' (Büker and Schell-Straub, 2014: 4). It contributes to the transformation of societies towards a fair, peaceful and environmentally friendly world.

According to the different historical, political and educational contexts of each culture, country or region, the practice of GL needs to be shaped and dynamically specified to be appropriate to personal, collective or national circumstances. Hence, the normative, critical and dynamic pedagogical framing of GL enables a context-oriented realization of learning processes in different individual contexts.

The people who facilitate GL processes in both formal and non-formal education play an important role in providing learners with opportunities to engage meaningfully with such processes. In their pedagogical work, they foster global learning competencies such as those subsumed under 'global competence' by the OECD (2016) in the context of PISA 2018, or those outlined by UNESCO (2014; 2015) in the context of global citizenship education (GCE). Beyond those educators engaging in GL on all levels of formal education, there is a large number of facilitators active in GL who come from, and work in, non-formal settings in the context of civil society organizations (Bourn, 2015). These facilitators have very diverse backgrounds. Often, a biographical link to the global south, experience in specific fields of expertise relevant to global learning (for example, development cooperation, migration, environmental policy and peace education) or a broad practical knowledge of ways of acting for social change shape their motivation to engage in GL. Their personal experiences are a vital component of their acting as GL facilitators.

While we observe a notable effort to foster GL competencies in formal education, there remains a substantial need for training GL facilitators from non-formal educational contexts (who also often enrich formal education). They need adequate training and qualifications that enable them to engage learners in meaningful learning processes that foster a holistic learning approach and the autonomy of the learner (Hyland, 1997).

This article is based on the insights gained regarding educational processes and competencies of GL facilitators and the design of training for the project Facilitating Global Learning (FGL). The project outcomes are published in *Global How? Facilitating Global Learning: A trainer's manual* (Bölker and Schell-Straub, 2014; Bölker, 2016). First, we give a brief outline of the set-up and context of the project. Then, we focus on the competency model developed during the project, concluding with thoughts on the limitations and possibilities of this model, and its relevance for further scientific research and practical application.

In this article, we understand the term 'global learning' as embracing a wide range of theories and concepts, including global education, education for sustainable development, development education and global citizenship education (Fricke et al., 2015). Their anticipated pedagogical contributions to transforming our societies towards a fair, peaceful and environmentally friendly world overlap and intertwine. Our choice of 'global learning' as a generic term relates to the specific context of the FGL project.

The Facilitating Global Learning project: Unity in diversity

The FGL project came into being as a response to the need for quality training for global learning facilitators in the context of civil society organizations (CSOs). Its main objective was to develop, promote and provide state-of-the-art training, building skills, knowledge and understanding about the theory and practice of GL and thereby contributing to an overall improved quality of GL, especially within

non-formal education. A preliminary study carried out in three European countries revealed a substantial need for the training of facilitators from CSOs in the field of global learning. A significant number of responses reported a lack of facilitator training regarding GL theories, concepts and competencies (Büker and Schell-Straub, 2014). FGL therefore focused on the development of training courses, providing participants with opportunities for self-reflexive learning processes and fostering their capabilities and competencies as global facilitators.

Six project partners from three European countries (Germany, Portugal and Romania) developed a training course curriculum, which both provided a common curriculum framework and was adapted to each specific national context. In order to create a basis for cooperation, the project team developed a dynamic framing of what they deemed to be essential aspects of a joint approach to GL, out of which 'unity and diversity' evolved as the guiding principle, running through the project like a red thread. Our common understanding contained jointly developed views on (sustainable) development, underlying values, the team's understanding of (transformative) learning, adult education and principles of training in the context of the project.

Together, we identified key elements of designing training for GL facilitators (see Figure 1). With regard to GL facilitator training, we highlighted several key aspects regarding the implementation of the project that would allow for context-oriented use and adaptation. To this end, we defined the following elements to guide the design:

- *Finding a common understanding*
At the beginning of the planning process, it is essential for the team of trainers and their organizations to lay the ground for working together effectively, and to discuss and agree on all issues relevant to the training.
- *Learning-needs analysis*
A thorough analysis of the learners' wants and needs (LNA) ensures that their individual training requirements are met. This participant-oriented perspective provides a framework for investigating where learners are starting from, where they wish to be, what gaps in learning remain and how best to bridge these gaps throughout the learning process (Büker and Schell-Straub, 2014).
- *Developing a contextualized competency model*
Based on the common understanding and the outcomes of the LNA, a set of desired learning goals is developed that identifies capabilities, knowledges and competencies, depending on the specific educational GL context.
- *Empowering adult learners*
Important aspects in adult and lifelong learning embrace a personal approach that offers and creates opportunities for individual support, linking theoretical approaches to GL with the learners' previous experiences and practices.
- *Devising a training structure*
A training structure is planned and devised with the aim of empowering adult learners, being attentive to their wants and needs (LNA) and in coherence with principles agreed upon in the common understanding, and based on jointly developed aims and objectives.

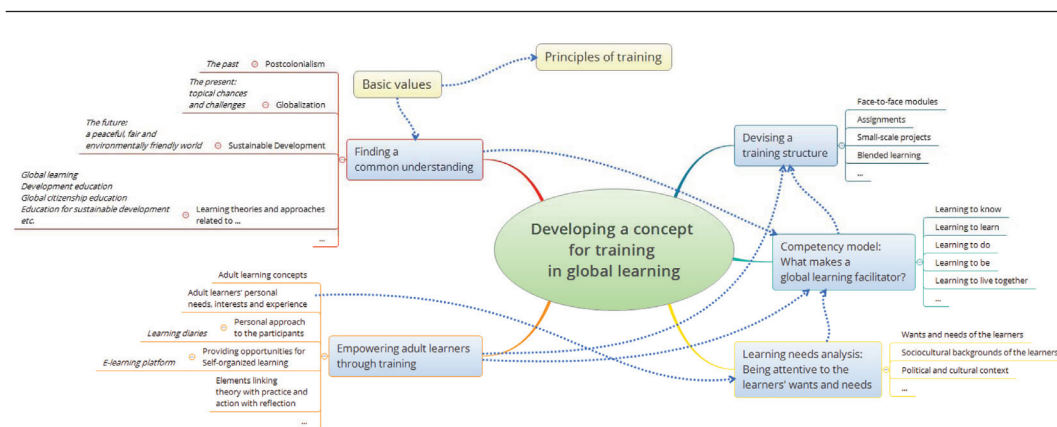


Figure 1: Elements for designing training for global learning facilitators, as developed in the context of the Facilitating Global Learning project

The competency model

In the process of defining a common framework for the training, we developed a competency-based model underlying the training course curriculum.

Looking at various existing competency-based models in the field of global learning (for example, Cabezudo *et al.*, 2012; UNESCO, 2014; Schreiber and Siege, 2016; de Haan, 2008; Rieckmann, 2010) geared towards competencies for learners, the project team identified the need for a model specifically addressing holistic learning processes for the training of GL facilitators. We also identified the need to have a model that would be compatible with educational concepts and debates in the three partner countries and beyond.

The publication *Learning for the Future: Competences in education for sustainable development* by the UNECE Expert Group (2012) offers a model of competencies in education for sustainable development built on the four pillars of learning as outlined by UNESCO (1996) in the Delors report. It builds on a holistic approach to learning and the emphasis on integrated thinking and practice in line with FGL's common understanding. As such, we deemed the UNECE competency model a suitable base that we could further develop and specify for GL facilitator training contexts in accordance with our understanding of global learning and our approach to competency-based education.

Critical discourses on competency review competency strategies as the assessment of performance, and of a constitution of a series of tasks in focusing on measurable outcomes, marginalizing an intrinsically behaviouristic approach (Hyland, 1997; Hager and Gonczy, 1996). From this point of view, the wide-ranging knowledge, understanding and values of individuals are ignored in terms of competencies (Hyland, 1997). According to Smith (1987), competency strategies comprise a technicist feature that separates skills from persons, rendering individual performances independent of personal learning and education.

In contrast to controlling performance in educational development, and in opposition to a 'reductionist view of human agency' (Hyland, 1997: 195), the model underlying GL facilitator training highlights holistic and individual learning development in line with Mayo's argument:

If we are serious about a person's right to education, then we must develop a broader notion of 'competences'. We need a more holistic model of 'competences' if we are to use this hegemonic term and recast it to suit more expansive democratic purposes ... Adopting this alternative model would allow us to develop a repertoire of competences that are open and flexible enough and which would allow persons to develop as subjects exerting an active control over themselves, their existence and their choices in life. (Mayo, 2009: 8)

Thus, our model may be seen as a means of outlining essential aspects of a dynamic and reflexive learning process.

Based on an integrated approach to competence, Hager and Gonczi (1996: 2) state that 'competence is conceptualized in terms of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes'. They highlight that concepts of competencies are relational in linking 'abilities or capabilities of people and the satisfactory completion of appropriate task(s)' (3). The aim and purpose of the FGL competency model for facilitator training is to provide learners with a framework that enables them to reflect on their development as facilitators, thus placing the responsibility for their learning processes in their own hands. Furthermore, the model provides a framework for trainers that makes it possible to develop and facilitate training courses adapted to the needs (and wants) of each context, allowing this to be done in cooperation with the learners (Heron, 1989). Thus, the model is very much in keeping with our commonly agreed basis.

In line with this subject- and process-oriented approach, competency is understood as being relational as regards the development of competencies as a global facilitator, comprising individual and dynamic learning processes (Hyland, 1997). Rather than focusing on measurable outcomes and performance, it follows 'a holist model ... in keeping with the German and Austrian traditions in this area' (Mayo, 2009: 8), stating aims and perspectives that all facilitators in GL might and could strive for in their educational practice. In emphasizing the relational approach of integrative thinking and practice regarding the particular competencies, it comprises the following competency areas.

A: Learning to know

The facilitator is familiar with, understands and reflects on issues related to (sustainable) development and cultural diversity in dimensions of time (past, present, future) and space (local, global).

- A.1 The facilitator understands the basics of, as well as different perspectives on, globalization, development and sustainable development, as well as postcolonialism. He/she engages reflexively with different perspectives (including his/her own) and is able to think in alternatives.
- A.2 The facilitator understands the basics of systems thinking and ways in which complex and interrelated natural, social and economic systems function. He/she identifies transformational ideas and their educational implications, aiming at a more fair, sustainable and peaceful world.
- A.3 The facilitator understands that all knowledge is partial and incomplete and conceives of him/herself as a lifelong learner.

B: Learning to learn

The facilitator is familiar with, understands and reflects on global learning concepts, competencies and methods, as well as related approaches to learning (for example, education for sustainable development).

- B.1 The facilitator understands learning theories and approaches relevant to global learning (for example, transformative learning, social learning, cooperative learning and critical pedagogy).
- B.2 The facilitator understands learning principles, styles and methods relevant to global learning.
- B.3 The facilitator understands competency models and frameworks regarding global learning/education for sustainable development (context-related: country-specific, regional, European, global).
- B.4 The facilitator understands the basics and principles of facilitating group learning processes in accordance with global learning principles (for example, concerning conflict management).

C: Learning to do

The facilitator is able to apply his/her specialist and educational knowledge to successfully planning and implementing educational events in the context of global learning.

- C.1 The facilitator is able to plan, implement and evaluate educational events so as to facilitate meaningful educational interaction with learners.
- C.2 The facilitator is able to start from, and build on, the wants and needs of participants and utilize the learners' natural, social and cultural environment, including their own institution, as a context and source of learning.
- C.3 The facilitator is able to employ a variety of interactive, participatory, action-oriented methods, and to use media in a responsible way in educational settings.

D: Learning to be

The facilitator is an individual who reflects on his/her personal social and political conduct in accordance with the objectives of sustainable development, relating this to his/her role as a facilitator.

- D.1 The facilitator is someone who is able to gather, select, share and compare information, while at the same time being open-minded and able to think outside the box.
- D.2 The facilitator is someone who is critically thinking and self-reflecting, especially concerning values (such as solidarity, justice, freedom, independence, and responsibility) and attitudes in his/her role as a facilitator.
- D.3 The facilitator is someone who acts as an inspiring example, striving to act for a more just, equal, peaceful and environmentally friendly world.

E: Learning to live together

The facilitator cooperates, communicates and networks with others regarding global learning values and processes.

- E.1 The facilitator cooperates with others while being mindful of, recognizing and celebrating diversity (different disciplines, cultures, perspectives and world views).

- E.2 The facilitator is able to challenge stereotypes and prejudices concerning different cultures and attitudes.
- E.3 The facilitator is able to communicate with people from different backgrounds by actively listening to, learning from and respecting others.
- E.4 The facilitator is aware of his/her own powerful role. He/she supports participants in critically reflecting on, and overcoming, power relations in educational settings induced by unequal sociocultural, historical and individual conditions.

In the following, we will give an outline of each competency area and its implications regarding GL training.

A: Learning to know

In facilitator training, learners need to deal with knowledge in a way that renders it meaningful for GL learning processes. Moreover, an integrative educational approach linking knowledge and practice forms the basis of empowering (future) facilitators in a dynamic learning process. In this context, the competencies outlined in the model provide the possibility for learners to orient and self-reflect their own learning process. The competency model developed for our training courses identified the knowledge of basic facts of, and perspectives on, globalization, (sustainable) development and postcolonialism as elements of an essential knowledge base for facilitators (competency model A.1).

GL practice should strive to raise awareness of the interconnectedness of issues in a global system regarding dimensions of economy, politics, environment, society and culture. In engaging critically with specific issues and topics in the context of their learning, facilitators are encouraged to take into account the 'glocal' dimension characterized by looking at how local contexts are interwoven with global contexts, and acknowledge the multitude of information and perspectives that they are confronted with in today's world (Lang-Wojtasik and Scheunpflug, 2005; Lang-Wojtasik and Klemm, 2017). In addition to this, it is crucial to address the time-related dimension of linking past, present and future (A.2).

In the face of the interconnectedness and complexity of issues, it is essential for facilitators to learn to deal with information and its contextualization in a way that does not immobilize learners. Rather, learners need to be enabled to comprehend, interpret and assess complex issues and their background, express their points of view and act on them on this basis. In this context, the challenge of learning processes lies in an adequate pedagogical reduction, that is in finding a way of processing the complexity of an issue according to the learners' contexts (for example, their level of knowledge) in a manner that makes it more accessible and understandable. In doing so, it is crucial to avoid distortions of the issue in question that could lead towards a biased or oversimplified representation. Essential aspects must remain valid, and facilitators should provide learners with opportunities and competencies to explore issues further and in depth.

Furthermore, dealing with complex issues makes it clear that one's knowledge – as a trainer, a facilitator, a learner – is always partial and context-related. Becoming aware of one's desire for security and linear, clear-cut knowledges, and aware of one's non-knowledge, may well be challenging (Thomas, 2005). Therefore, GL training may help (future) facilitators to be aware of the partiality of their knowledge, offering spaces to reflect on what they do not know (and what they might not be able to know), and to find ways to deal with this (Scheunpflug, 2004) (A.3).

B: Learning to learn

Participants in training courses may be encouraged to explore and reflect on those theories or approaches that are relevant to their own regional/national contexts (such as development education, global learning, global education, education for sustainable development and global citizenship education), as well as their common 'roots', such as critical pedagogy, Freire's (1972) ideas about education and participation, and transformative learning (Bourn, 2015). They may be encouraged to describe their own approach in their future work as facilitators (B.1).

The integrated, subject- and process-oriented approach of global learning concepts demand that the intended message of a GL educational event also be implicitly conveyed through the learning principles, styles and methods employed (for example, cooperative peer-to-peer methods and participative learning) (B.2). It is therefore key for facilitators to know and reflect on different types of facilitation and their own role, confrontations and strategies as a facilitator, relating this to a GL context (Thomas, 2004; Brookfield, 1986).

Diversifying learning processes is another approach in keeping with competency-based GL principles. Outside periods of face-to-face learning, elements of e-learning provide participants with the opportunity for asynchronous learning, enquiry and exchange, putting them in control of the time, place, path and/or pace of their learning.

In addition to transparently communicating the competency model underlying the training course, it may be rewarding during training to explore further global learning competency models in relation to competency models relevant to other contexts (B.3). An analysis of commonalities and differences between selected competency models might help learners to determine or identify specific competencies that they will be able to develop further in their own work as facilitators. In this context, the competency model provides an open orientation for individual self-reflection and educational empowerment with regard to the individual learning processes in GL.

C: Learning to do

People active in educational work in CSOs often come from fields of expertise other than education. In order to enable and empower (future) global learning facilitators for their educational practice, they need to possess knowledge and avail themselves of tools for planning, implementing and evaluating their educational events in line with global learning principles, be it for short-term interventions or for projects of longer duration (C.1; C.2).

In the FGL context, the term 'facilitator' refers to a culture of learning that addresses issues of power relations and fosters reflection on 'how people learn, and how to bring about this purpose' (Heron, 1989: 5). This is closely in line with concepts of person-centred and critical facilitator education (Thomas, 2004). A 'critical analysis of self and society', and the interaction between facilitators and learners, is a crucial part of the learning process in the context of educational practice (Brookfield, 1986: viii). To reflect on their roles as a facilitator, and to get to know and develop their own GL facilitation strategies, forms an important part of their training (Thomas, 2010).

Facilitator education provides several opportunities for trainers to share learning techniques and methods with participants. This conceptual framing allows participants to experience different forms of learning, and can contribute to the dynamics of an educational event as well as to creating a sustainable learning experience. Providing room to get to know, try out and reflect on different methods is key to fostering

competencies in the context of sustainable learning (Heron, 1989). It also helps facilitators to develop a repertoire of methods for different GL contexts and groups of learners, and to find out for themselves which methods they feel comfortable with. The training can help participants to choose methods and media in an informed and responsible manner by addressing criteria of method selection in accordance with key aspects of GL (C.3).

Phases of practical training supported by coaching by both trainers and peers can assist in a facilitator's personal and professional development. Evaluation skills may foster and encourage critical reflection on knowledge and skills. Advocating a constructive, appreciative attitude towards evaluation, and highlighting concepts that emphasize ownership of the evaluation process by those involved in the learning process, such as empowerment evaluation (Wandersman *et al.*, 2005) help (future) facilitators to seize the potential for self-improvement.

D: Learning to be

Facilitators have committed themselves to engaging in educational practice in the conviction that GL educational goals and values, and the vision behind them, matter. They want to engage learners with GL in meaningful ways, transmit values and enter into interaction with participants, while being simultaneously aware that they themselves are also learners, and always will be (Thomas, 2005). This striving to be sincere, to become more self-aware, engage in critical reflection on self, others, and one's relationships and context, and to think outside the box, calls for developing competencies that help to deal both with the opportunities and with the challenges this involves.

Training needs to provide space for participants' critical thinking and self-reflection, especially concerning their own values and attitudes regarding GL issues, fostering participants' personal development and creating opportunities for them to reflect on identity and their pursuit of consistency between their values and actions.

(Future) facilitators will need to think about how they can facilitate GL educational events based on their own normative conceptions, and at the same time stay open to the personal opinions, values and attitudes of their participants (D.2) (Thomas, 2005). This also includes thinking about the way that knowledge is selected, dealt with and presented in their educational practice, and how they can pedagogically reduce complexity while maintaining an open-minded, multi-perspective approach (D.1).

GL educators often perceive themselves as not being perfect, feeling powerless in the face of global challenges, or overwhelmed in their role as an educator. Training can help to encourage facilitators in their role of acting as an inspiring example. This means doing what is within one's capacity for a more just, peaceful and environmentally friendly world, and regarding oneself as a (lifelong) learner and a fallible human being, rather than a person having all the answers (D.3).

Educationalists in the field of GL also sometimes voice discontent over the fact that the impact of their work in normative terms of changing the world to be a better place can be neither measured nor evaluated. They do not always see the successful pedagogical results of their educational work. Sometimes they are also frustrated because they cannot be as good as they believe they need to be in order to provide an example to the people they work with. Trainers are obliged to address these feelings and to support (future) facilitators in exploring how their commitment to the objectives of sustainable development is reflected in their social and political conduct, and in relating this to their role as a facilitator. They should try to foster in facilitators an

attitude of critical optimism and resilience regarding the impact of their educational work, even though the fruits of their work might not always be immediately apparent.

E: Learning to live together

Global solidarity and mutual understanding through dialogue lie at the core of GL. In this context, looking at the ways that others, and we ourselves, interact with each other in our immediate surroundings can also teach us a lot about how individuals and groups of people relate to each other in broader contexts. From this point of view, it is important to reflect on the way that relationships are shaped by underlying historical and sociocultural conditions that go beyond the individual sphere, and how existing structures of inequality and entrenched stereotypes and prejudices may influence our dealing with others. A reflexive approach to these issues also helps a facilitator to challenge them in his/her educational practice (E.2).

Cooperation, communication and dialogue may be reflected on in training by enabling a change of perspective, fostering empathy and creating spaces for meaningful and deep exchange. These are spaces in which people can listen, question and explore the partiality of their knowledge, change their minds and disagree with each other without conflicts (E.3), spaces in which emotional reactions are possible and can be overcome in order to let true transformational processes take place. Such processes of critical engagement can be exciting and uplifting, or difficult and irritating. It is crucial for fruitful learning experiences to strive for a common basis that embraces and celebrates diversity (E.1). The open spaces for dialogue and enquiry (OSDE) methodology offers a set of ground rules that provide a basis for such exchange. These principles state that all knowledge that learners have is constructed in their own contexts, and is thus partial. In order to 'see/imagine' beyond this partiality, we need to understand 'where perspectives are coming from and where they are leading to', attempting to 'broaden and sharpen our vision' without silencing or delegitimizing others' perspectives (Andreotti, 2011; CSSGJ, n.d.).

It is paramount for GL training that this culture of dialogue and understanding underlies the content and structure of all educational activity, not least because it is closely linked to global issues in the context of the vision of a peaceful and just future. It is important that learners become aware of how they communicate and cooperate with others, and how their views of the world might be challenged, enriched and broadened through dialogue (Thomas, 2005) (E.3). Thus, it is crucial to prepare facilitators to engage different groups in meaningful and respectful dialogue, and facilitate communicative and cooperative processes in their educational practice that help the understanding and appreciation of alternative world views and frameworks (Thomas, 2005). In these learning processes, facilitators need to be aware of their dominant role vis-à-vis the learners, striving to use approaches and methods that help to foster cooperation and communication among learners, rather than emphasizing the power of the facilitator (E.4).

Critical self-reflection and possibilities for further debate

During and beyond the project, it became clear that the training concept and related competency model would have further repercussions. In particular, the positive reception of the training by the course participants, who themselves greatly enriched and contributed to the project, as well as by CSOs in Germany, Portugal and Romania,

encouraged further developments. In Portugal and Romania, aspects of the training concept were further developed for higher education. In Germany, the competency model was adapted for teacher training, and currently flows into the process of developing standard criteria for GL training for facilitators in CSOs.

The positive feedback we received, and the wish to develop the competency model further, also made us aware of the limitations of the model, which was initially designed to feed into GL facilitator education and training practice. Being firmly grounded and tested in GL practice, the scientific side of the model has not yet been sufficiently developed. We see great potential here to explore debates further, for example revolving around the concepts of competence/competency-based education and training (see, for example, Hellwig, 2008), and the concept of a GL facilitator (see, for example, Thomas, 2004).

One challenge lies in drawing on existing research and debate in developing standards for facilitator education specifically framed for a GL context. When talking about standards, the question of comparability arises, which, as stated above, has not been of paramount priority for the given context. However, by using a competency model as the basis for training, we acknowledge the fact that it is necessary, and of practical use for learning processes, to outline key features in the form of competencies (Mayo, 2009). This leaves room for looking more closely at what the advantages as well as the shortcomings of such an approach are.

Another challenge lies in the intended universality to which our model aspires, which is closely linked to the context in which it arose. Different concepts due to different scientific and academic traditions in the FGL partner countries made us focus on finding a common understanding that allowed finding a viable working basis. While we succeeded in doing so for our purposes, a next step from this could be to look more deeply into specific underlying concepts and existing research in specific (regional and national) academic contexts. This would allow, among other things, the discussion and development of competency models and standard criteria for GL training for facilitators, be it in formal or non-formal education, for other national and regional contexts.

Concluding remarks

In the FGL project, we developed, tested and critically reflected on a GL facilitator training course curriculum, principles and a competency model for GL facilitators from CSOs. We acknowledge the importance of further advances in the area of developing standards for facilitator education and training linking theory and practice in this field, inviting both researchers and practitioners in the field of GL to join in the debate.

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