TRAINING MANUAL

InnovatorsLab: Gen Z's Game-Based Peace Building

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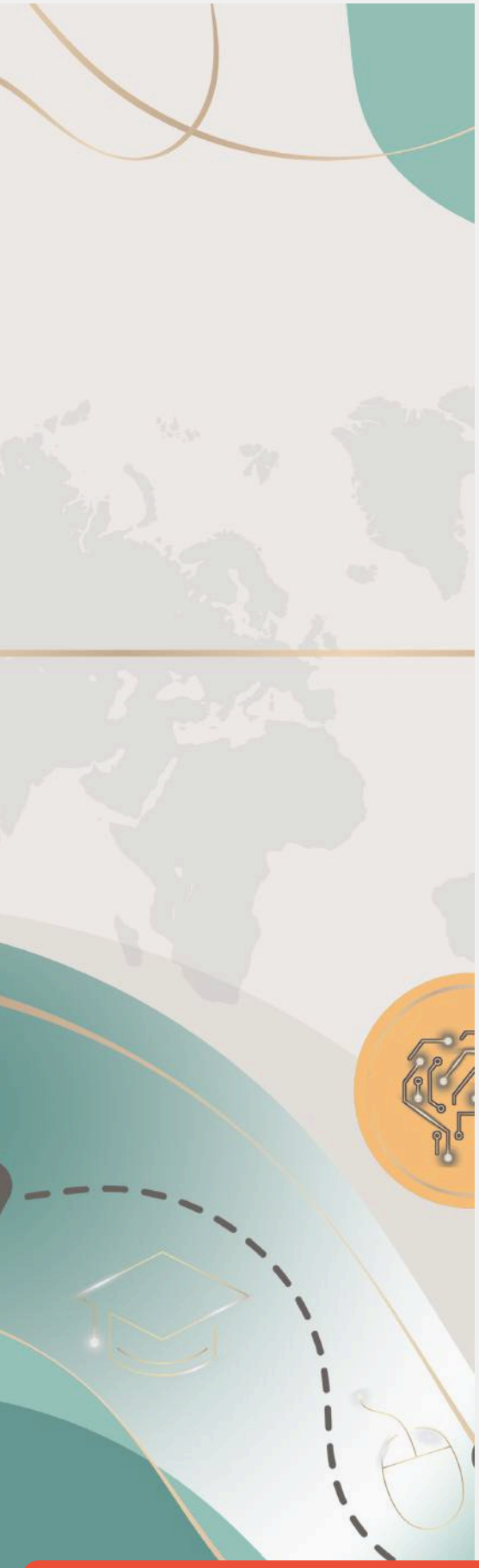

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Why Peacebuilding Needs Innovation

In today's rapidly changing world, young people are growing up in increasingly complex social environments shaped by digitalisation, migration, political polarisation, and constant exposure to global narratives. These dynamics often lead to misunderstandings, reduced dialogue, and increased tension at both interpersonal and community levels.

Today, peacebuilding requires more than theoretical understanding; it requires the development of practical skills such as empathy, active listening, cooperation, and constructive conflict management. However, many youth work practices continue on passive, lecture-based methods that fail to create meaningful engagement. This is a gap and it calls for innovative and participatory approaches that allow young people to actively explore, experience, and reflect on conflict dynamics in safe environments.

In this context, innovation in peacebuilding is necessary. By integrating creative methodologies, youth work can move from abstract discussions of conflict toward lived, interactive experiences that foster real behavioural change.

1.2 Why Gen Z? Learning Styles and Challenges

Generation Z represents the first generation to grow up fully immersed in digital environments. They are familiar with fast-paced information, interactive platforms, and visual communication.
Gen Z learners tend to prefer:

- Experiential and interactive learning
- Immediate feedback and engagement
- Story-driven and immersive environments
- Opportunities for participation and co-creation

At the same time, this generation faces unique challenges. Constant digital exposure can reduce focus,, increase emotional reactivity, and limit opportunities for deep, face-to-face dialogue. In conflict situations, this can result in quick escalation, misunderstanding, or withdrawal rather than constructive communication.

For this reason, youth work must adapt both its content and methodology. Learning environments need to reflect the realities of young people's lives while supporting the development of emotional intelligence, empathy, and critical thinking.

1.3 The Role of Game - Based Learning in Youth Work

Game-based learning has emerged as a powerful tool in non-formal education, particularly for engaging young people in complex topics such as conflict, identity, and cooperation. Unlike traditional teaching methods, games create interactive environments where participants take part in activities, make decisions, and see the results of their actions in a safe and controlled setting.

Within the Innovators Lab framework, game-based learning is used not as entertainment, but as a structured pedagogical approach. It enables participants to:

- Experience conflict dynamics in a safe, fictional context
- Practice communication and cooperation under pressure
- Reflect on their own behaviours and emotional responses
- Learn through action rather than passive observation

Escape Rooms, in particular, represent a unique form of game-based learning. They combine storytelling, problem-solving, and teamwork in time-limited scenarios, creating a sense of urgency and engagement. This format aligns strongly with the learning preferences of Gen Z.

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1.4 From Games to Change: The Vision of Educational Escape Rooms

The Innovators Lab project introduces Educational Escape Rooms as innovative tools for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. These are not traditional escape games; they are carefully designed learning experiences where each puzzle, challenge, and interaction is linked to specific educational objectives such as empathy, self-awareness, cooperation, and dialogue.

As outlined in the project concept, these escape rooms simulate real-life situations in which participants must navigate misunderstandings, negotiate perspectives, and work together to achieve a common goal . The fictional nature of the scenarios allows participants to experiment with different behaviours without real-world consequences, creating a safe space for learning and reflection.

The real impact of these activities lies not only in the gameplay itself but in the reflection that follows. Through structured debriefing, participants connect their experience to real-life situations, gaining insights into their own behaviour, communication patterns, and role in group dynamics.

The vision of Educational Escape Rooms is to transform learning into experience and experience into awareness. By combining creativity, interaction, and reflection, these tools empower young people to become more conscious, empathetic, and active contributors to peace within their communities.

CHAPTER 2

PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

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Peacebuilding is often spoken about as something large, distant, and political. Many people imagine official negotiations, international organisations, or agreements signed after war. These things matter, but peacebuilding also begins much closer to daily life. It begins in the way people speak to each other, how they deal with disagreement, how they react to fear, and how they create space for dignity and participation. For youth workers, peacebuilding is not an abstract concept. It is part of educational practice, group facilitation, community work, and everyday human relations.

Young people today grow up in a world marked by many visible and invisible conflicts. Some of these conflicts are direct and easy to recognise, such as violence, bullying, exclusion, or hate speech. Others are slower and less visible, such as social inequality, discrimination, pressure created by online spaces, mistrust between groups, or a lack of opportunities to take part in decision-making. In many communities, young people live with the consequences of polarisation, historical trauma, political tension, and cultural division, even when they are not directly involved in open conflict. This means that youth work cannot ignore peacebuilding. It needs to engage with it in a practical, thoughtful, and educational way.

Conflict itself is not always negative. In fact, conflict is a normal part of human life. People have different needs, values, identities, experiences, and goals. When these differences meet, disagreement appears. The problem is not the existence of conflict. The problem is how conflict is handled. Conflict can be ignored, suppressed, personalised, or turned into harm. But it can also be explored, transformed, and used as a moment for learning, change, and relationship-building. This is where conflict transformation becomes especially important.

Conflict transformation goes beyond the idea of simply solving a problem. Sometimes a conflict cannot be quickly solved. Sometimes the issue is deeper than one event or one misunderstanding. Conflict transformation asks a wider question: what needs to change in relationships, structures, communication patterns, and attitudes so that the conflict does not continue in destructive ways? This approach is especially relevant in youth work because educational spaces are not courts, military institutions, or formal diplomatic arenas. They are spaces where people learn how to live with difference, how to listen, how to challenge injustice, and how to act responsibly in a group.

In Erasmus+ and non-formal education contexts, peacebuilding and conflict transformation are closely linked to participation, inclusion, active citizenship, empathy, critical thinking, and democratic culture. Youth workers are often among the first adults who create spaces where young people can speak openly, test ideas safely, express disagreement respectfully, and reflect on the impact of their words and actions. This gives youth work a powerful role. It does not replace formal institutions, but it prepares young people to take part in peaceful societies with more confidence and awareness.

This chapter is designed for youth workers, facilitators, trainers, and educators who want to understand peacebuilding in an accessible and practical way. It connects key concepts with methods that can be used in real learning environments, especially in activities based on participation, creativity, and experience. The chapter pays particular attention to methods that are meaningful for Generation Z and other young learners who often respond better to active learning than to lectures alone. These include role play, simulation, problem-solving tasks, storytelling, visual methods, and game-based learning approaches such as escape rooms.

The aim of this section is not only to explain what peacebuilding is, but also to help youth workers use it. The following pages will move from theory to practice. They will show how peacebuilding relates to young people's realities, how different kinds of conflict can be understood, what tools can support transformation, and why non-formal education is a valuable environment for this work. The chapter will also explore how creative and game-based methods can open dialogue in a way that feels engaging, meaningful, and safe.

Peacebuilding is not a single workshop, one tool, or one moment of inspiration. It is a long process. It asks for patience, reflection, consistency, and courage. Youth workers are not expected to solve all conflicts in society. Their role is different, but it is still important. They can create spaces where young people practise peaceful communication, question prejudice, recognise power, develop empathy, and imagine alternatives. In this sense, youth work becomes more than activity planning. It becomes a contribution to social change.

2.1 Understanding Peacebuilding: From Theory to Practice

Peacebuilding can be understood as a set of actions, relationships, and processes that help prevent violence, reduce the causes of conflict, and support more just and peaceful ways of living together. It is not limited to the period after war. Peacebuilding is relevant before, during, and after conflict, because it focuses on the conditions that shape how people relate to one another and how societies respond to tension.

To understand peacebuilding clearly, it helps to begin with a simple distinction. There is a difference between the absence of violence and the presence of peace. A place may look calm on the surface, but still be marked by fear, exclusion, discrimination, silence, and unequal power. In such a case, open violence may be absent, yet peace is weak. Peacebuilding therefore is not only about stopping visible conflict. It is also about building fairer relationships, stronger trust, and better conditions for participation, dignity, and safety.

In theory, peacebuilding is often linked to the idea of positive peace. Positive peace means more than no fighting. It means that people have access to rights, voice, inclusion, and systems that allow them to live with security and respect. This broader understanding is useful for youth workers because many of the conflicts they see are not about war, but about unfair treatment, exclusion from groups, bullying, hate speech, silence, humiliation, or pressure. These issues may seem small when compared to armed conflict, but they are deeply connected to the culture of peace or the culture of violence.

Peacebuilding also involves prevention. In many cases, it is easier and healthier to build trust early than to repair deep harm later. Prevention does not mean avoiding all disagreement. It means strengthening the skills and relationships that help people deal with disagreement without turning it into violence. For youth workers, preventive peacebuilding can include building group agreements, encouraging active listening, discussing stereotypes, creating inclusive participation, responding early to harmful behaviour, and helping young people name emotions before they become aggression.

Another important idea is that peacebuilding works at different levels. There is the personal level, where individuals reflect on their emotions, attitudes, and behaviour. There is the relational level, where people learn how to communicate and handle tension with others. There is the group and community level, where inclusion, trust, cooperation, and collective norms are shaped. There is also the structural level, where wider systems such as education, politics, economy, media, and institutions influence the possibility of peace. Good peacebuilding practice recognises that these levels are connected.

For example, a youth group may experience repeated arguments between participants from different backgrounds. On the surface, this may look like a personal issue between individuals. But deeper observation may show stereotypes, unequal participation, language barriers, or social tensions brought from outside the group. A practical peacebuilding approach does not stop at telling participants to "be nice." It asks what is happening beneath the surface. Are some young people always interrupted? Are some identities being treated as normal and others as strange? Is there unresolved tension in the group culture? Are there wider community narratives shaping the conflict? Practice becomes stronger when it is informed by this deeper way of seeing.

In youth work, theory matters because it helps practitioners understand what they are doing and why. But theory becomes meaningful only when it is translated into practice. This means turning broad concepts into concrete educational choices. If a youth worker understands that peace is linked to dignity and participation, this will influence how they facilitate discussion. If they understand that conflict can reveal deeper unmet needs, they will respond with more curiosity and less punishment. If they see that identities matter, they will be more careful about how groups are formed, whose voices are heard, and what examples are used.

A practical peacebuilding approach in youth work usually includes several core elements. The first is creating safe enough spaces. This does not mean spaces without discomfort. In peacebuilding, some discomfort is natural because difficult questions need to be explored. But participants should feel that they will not be mocked, attacked, or ignored when they speak. The second element is reflection. Peacebuilding is not only about activities; it is about what participants understand from them. The third is participation. Young people should not only receive messages about peace; they should actively shape the learning process. The fourth is relevance. Activities should connect to real life. Peacebuilding becomes meaningful when young people can recognise its connection to school, friendship, family, community, digital spaces, and society.

Practice also requires realism. Peacebuilding work is not always neat. Young people may resist certain topics. Some may bring strong opinions or painful experiences. Some may use humour to avoid serious discussion. Some may reproduce harmful language they hear around them. This does not mean the work has failed. It means the work is real. A youth worker involved in peacebuilding needs patience, emotional awareness, and strong facilitation skills.

They need to know when to challenge, when to pause, when to ask questions, and when to protect the group from harm.

It is also important to avoid a moralistic approach. Young people often notice quickly when adults are offering simple slogans instead of honest dialogue. Telling participants to "respect everyone" is not enough if they are never invited to examine prejudice, power, fear, or social pressure. Peacebuilding education should not become a list of good behaviours. It should be a process in which participants think critically, reflect personally, and practise new ways of relating.

One of the strongest ways to move from theory to practice is through experience. This is why non-formal education methods are so useful in peacebuilding. Activities such as simulation, role play, cooperative tasks, forum theatre, storytelling, and escape rooms make abstract themes visible. They allow participants to feel tension, make choices, face consequences, and reflect together. For example, a lecture on exclusion may be forgotten quickly. But a well-designed activity in which some participants are given fewer resources, less information, or less voice can help them feel the dynamics of inequality in a way that opens stronger reflection.

Still, experience alone is not enough. A game or exercise becomes peacebuilding only when it is facilitated with care. The debrief matters. Participants need support to name what happened, analyse it, and connect it to real situations. Without reflection, an activity can remain only entertainment. With reflection, it becomes learning.

From theory to practice, peacebuilding asks youth workers to do three things at the same time: understand the deeper meaning of peace, recognise how conflict functions in real life, and choose educational methods that help young people practise transformation. This is demanding work, but it is also deeply valuable. It helps shift peacebuilding from a distant idea into a lived experience.

2.2 The Role of Youth in Conflict Transformation

Young people are often described in two very different ways. In some public narratives, they are presented as a risk: emotional, impulsive, easily influenced, politically passive, or vulnerable to manipulation. In other narratives, they are seen as hope: creative, energetic, courageous, open to change, and able to build a better future. Both images are incomplete when used alone. Young people are not automatically a problem, and they are not automatically a solution. They are social actors shaped by the environments around them, but they also have the ability to influence those environments. This is why their role in conflict transformation is so important.

Conflict transformation is not only the responsibility of leaders, institutions, or experts. It depends on the everyday actions of people in families, schools, communities, online spaces, and civic life. Young people are present in all of these areas. They shape peer culture, social media discourse, group belonging, and local initiatives. They also carry the effects of conflict in direct ways. When communities are divided, it is young people who often grow up inside those divisions. When there is mistrust, exclusion, or violence, it affects their identity, choices, and sense of future. Because of this, youth should not be treated only as receivers of peace messages. They should be recognised as participants in peace processes.

One reason youth matter in conflict transformation is that adolescence and early adulthood are periods when values, identities, and social attitudes are still developing. This can create vulnerability, but it also creates possibility. Young people may be more ready than older generations to question inherited narratives, cross social boundaries, experiment with new forms of participation, and imagine alternatives. In divided contexts, this can be especially important. Youth can challenge normalised hostility by creating new patterns of contact and communication.

At the same time, it is necessary to avoid romanticising youth participation. Young people are capable of empathy and innovation, but they can also reproduce prejudice, aggression, and exclusion. They are influenced by family narratives, social pressure, media content, education systems, and political discourse.

If these influences support polarisation, young people may become active carriers of conflict rather than transformers of it. This is why youth work has a crucial role. It can provide spaces where young people examine these influences instead of repeating them without reflection.

The role of youth in conflict transformation includes several dimensions. The first is personal awareness. Before young people can contribute positively to peacebuilding, they need opportunities to understand themselves. They need to recognise how emotions work, how fear shapes reactions, how stereotypes are learned, and how identity affects perception. Self-awareness is not a soft or secondary skill. It is a foundation for responsible action.

The second dimension is relational capacity. Young people need practice in how to disagree without humiliating, how to listen without immediately defending themselves, how to ask questions, and how to respond to harm. These are not automatic abilities. They are learned through repeated experience. Youth workers can support this by creating structured activities where participants negotiate, cooperate, solve problems, and reflect on communication patterns.

The third dimension is civic and social engagement. Conflict transformation is not limited to private behaviour. Young people can become active in schools, youth centres, local communities, campaigns, intercultural initiatives, creative projects, and online spaces. They can speak against exclusion, build bridges between groups, organise dialogue, and raise awareness about injustice. Even small initiatives can shift social norms. A youth-led campaign against hate speech, a mixed-group community event, or a peer mediation club can all contribute to transformation when supported well.

The digital world is a major space where youth now experience and shape conflict. Social media gives young people opportunities to connect, organise, and express themselves, but it also increases exposure to misinformation, online harassment, polarisation, and performative outrage. Conflict transformation today must include digital citizenship. Young people need to understand how algorithms affect visibility, how false information spreads, how dehumanising language becomes normal, and how online behaviour has offline consequences. Youth workers cannot ignore this area. Peacebuilding with young people must include reflection on the digital environments they live in.

Another important issue is voice. In many contexts, adults talk about young people without including them in real decisions. They may invite youth to events, but not to planning. They may ask for opinions, but not share power. Meaningful youth participation in conflict transformation requires more than symbolic inclusion. Young people need genuine opportunities to co-create, make choices, and influence direction. This matters not only because it is democratic, but because it builds ownership. Young people are more likely to invest in peaceful change when they feel the process belongs to them too.

Youth also have a strong role in changing peer norms. Much behaviour among adolescents and young adults is shaped by what seems accepted in the group. If humiliation, intolerance, or silence are normal, individuals often adapt to them. But if empathy, courage, and respectful challenge become visible in peer spaces, group culture can shift. Youth-led initiatives are especially powerful here because messages often carry more weight when they come from peers rather than authority figures.

Intercultural learning is another area where youth can play a transformative role. In mixed groups, young people often enter with assumptions about nationality, religion, language, ethnicity, gender roles, or social class. Through structured encounters, these assumptions can be challenged. This does not happen automatically just because people are together in one room. Contact alone is not enough. It must be supported by facilitation, equality of participation, meaningful tasks, and reflection. When this is done well, young people often become more able to see complexity instead of stereotypes.

Youth participation in conflict transformation also has a long-term dimension. The habits and attitudes developed in youth do not remain only in youth spaces. They influence future workplaces, families, institutions, political participation, and civic culture. A young person who learns how to listen, mediate, question unfairness, and stay in dialogue across difference is carrying important capacities into adult life. In this way, youth work contributes not only to the present group, but also to the wider future.

However, young people should not carry the whole burden of peacebuilding. Adults and institutions must also take responsibility. It is unfair to ask youth to transform conflict while surrounding systems continue to produce inequality, exclusion, corruption, or violence. Good youth work recognises this clearly. It supports young people's agency without pretending they are responsible for fixing structural problems alone. Instead, it helps them understand both personal responsibility and structural reality.

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2.3 Types of Conflict: Personal, Social, and Cultural Dimensions

Conflict appears in many forms, and one of the most common mistakes in educational practice is to treat all conflict as if it were the same. In reality, conflicts differ in cause, scale, meaning, and impact. Some begin with misunderstandings, some with unmet needs, some with unequal treatment, and some with long histories of exclusion or mistrust. For youth workers, it is important to recognise these differences. The better a conflict is understood, the more appropriate the response can be.

A useful way to explore conflict is through three connected dimensions: personal, social, and cultural. These dimensions are not separate boxes. In practice, they often overlap. But they provide a helpful structure for reflection and facilitation.

Personal conflict

Personal conflict takes place at the level of individuals. It may involve differences in communication style, emotional reactions, expectations, needs, boundaries, or personal history. In youth groups, personal conflict can emerge when one participant feels ignored, when someone reacts strongly to criticism, when different working styles clash, or when unresolved emotions affect group interaction.

Personal conflict is often the easiest type to notice because it appears through visible tension: arguments, silence, avoidance, sarcasm, or emotional outbursts. However, even personal conflict should not be treated too simply. What looks like a disagreement about a task may be connected to a deeper issue such as insecurity, lack of trust, fear of embarrassment, or earlier negative experiences.

In youth work, personal conflict is not necessarily harmful. It can become a powerful learning moment when participants are supported to express themselves honestly, listen actively, and look for mutual understanding. The role of the facilitator is not always to stop the conflict immediately, but to understand whether it can be held safely and transformed into reflection. At the same time, the facilitator must recognise when personal conflict is becoming harmful or when one person is being targeted or overwhelmed.

Social conflict

Social conflict goes beyond individuals and involves relationships between groups, communities, or positions within society. It is often connected to unequal access to resources, opportunities, power, representation, or rights. Social conflict may appear around class, education, unemployment, migration, discrimination, neighbourhood tensions, political identity, or exclusion from decision-making.

Young people are deeply affected by social conflict even when they do not name it directly. A participant who feels anger about unfair treatment in school, who experiences prejudice because of their background, or who distrusts institutions because of corruption is not only facing a personal issue. They are responding to a social environment shaped by inequality and power.

In group settings, social conflict can appear through stereotypes, defensive attitudes, rivalry between subgroups, or frustration directed at those seen as "different." It may also appear through silence, especially if some participants do not feel safe enough to speak. Social conflict is often harder to address than personal conflict because it touches on systems and identities, not just behaviour.

Youth workers need to be especially careful not to reduce social conflict to individual manners. For example, if a participant repeatedly interrupts another because of bias, this is not only a communication problem. It may reflect learned patterns of whose voice is valued and whose is dismissed. In such cases, peacebuilding requires more than encouraging politeness. It requires addressing fairness, power, and inclusion.

Cultural conflict

Cultural conflict relates to values, beliefs, symbols, traditions, norms, and ways of understanding the world. It may involve religion, ethnicity, language, customs, gender expectations, family roles, memory, identity, or historical narratives. Cultural conflict is especially sensitive because people often experience it as a challenge to who they are, not only to what they think.

In intercultural youth work, cultural conflict can appear when participants interpret behaviour differently. Direct communication may be seen as honest by some and rude by others. Silence may be understood as respectful in one context and as disengagement in another. Time, leadership, humour, personal space, emotional expression, and gender interaction can all be shaped by culture. Misunderstandings may therefore emerge without bad intention.

However, cultural conflict is not only about misunderstanding. Sometimes it is linked to painful histories, collective trauma, or power inequalities between cultural groups. In these cases, it is not enough to celebrate diversity on the surface. Real dialogue requires space to discuss memory, prejudice, hierarchy, and fear. Youth workers need to balance openness with care, especially when topics are emotionally charged.

The overlap between dimensions

In practice, personal, social, and cultural conflict are usually connected. A simple example can show this. Imagine two participants in an international youth exchange argue during a group task. On the personal level, one feels disrespected and the other feels unfairly criticised. On the cultural level, they may have different ideas about communication and leadership. On the social level, there may also be bias in the group about nationality or language ability. If the facilitator responds only at the personal level, important parts of the conflict remain hidden.

This is why conflict analysis is a valuable skill for youth workers. Before acting, it helps to ask several questions. What is visible here? What may be underneath? Is this mainly a misunderstanding, a value clash, a power issue, or a sign of wider exclusion? Who feels safe? Who does not? Whose voice is present? Whose voice is missing? What does the group need in this moment: dialogue, boundaries, reflection, time, or mediation?

Visible and invisible conflict

Another useful distinction is between visible and invisible conflict. Visible conflict includes open disagreement, tension, confrontation, or resistance. Invisible conflict includes fear, silence, withdrawal, hidden resentment, passive exclusion, or normalised unfairness. Invisible conflict is dangerous because it can look like peace. A quiet group is not always a healthy group. Sometimes silence means harmony. Sometimes it means that participants have learned not to speak.

Youth workers should therefore pay attention not only to what is said, but also to what is avoided. Who never speaks? Who is always joking when serious issues come up? Who is isolated? Who apologises too much? Who dominates every discussion? These signs may point to conflict dynamics that need attention.

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Healthy and harmful conflict

It is also important to distinguish between healthy conflict and harmful conflict. Healthy conflict can involve disagreement, critical debate, emotional tension, and difference of opinion, but it remains within a space of dignity and mutual recognition. Harmful conflict moves into humiliation, intimidation, exclusion, dehumanisation, or violence. Youth workers should not rush to remove all tension from a group, because some tension is part of real learning. But they must protect participants from harm and be ready to intervene when boundaries are crossed.

Conflict as a source of learning

When youth workers understand the different dimensions of conflict, they become better able to use conflict as a source of learning rather than seeing it only as a disruption. Personal conflict can teach emotional awareness and communication. Social conflict can open discussion on power, justice, and participation. Cultural conflict can deepen intercultural understanding and challenge assumptions. This learning does not happen automatically, but it can happen when conflict is approached with reflection instead of fear.

Understanding the type and level of conflict does not mean putting people into categories. It means seeing complexity more clearly. In peacebuilding work, this clarity is essential. It helps facilitators respond with more precision, more care, and more honesty.

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2.4 Tools and Approaches for Transforming Conflict

Conflict transformation requires more than good intentions. Youth workers need practical tools and thoughtful approaches that help participants move from reaction to reflection, from tension to dialogue, and from division to understanding. No single method fits every group or every situation. The most useful approach is flexible, context-sensitive, and guided by clear educational purpose.
Below are several tools and approaches that are especially relevant in youth work.

Active listening
Active listening is one of the most basic and most powerful tools in conflict transformation. Many conflicts become worse because people listen only to answer, defend themselves, or prove they are right. Active listening asks something different. It asks participants to listen to understand what another person is trying to say, what they may be feeling, and what matters to them. In practice, active listening includes eye contact where appropriate, attention, paraphrasing, asking open questions, and checking understanding before responding. It does not mean agreeing with everything. It means recognising the other person as worth hearing. In youth groups, active listening can be taught through paired exercises, reflection circles, and role play.

Nonviolent communication
Nonviolent communication offers a useful structure for expressing difficult issues without blame. In a simple form, it invites people to distinguish between observation, feeling, need, and request. Instead of saying, "You are always disrespectful," a participant can be guided toward something like, "When I was interrupted several times, I felt frustrated because I need space to finish my thought. Can I ask to speak without interruption?" This language does not remove tension, but it reduces escalation and opens clearer dialogue.
Youth workers do not need to teach this as a strict formula. What matters is helping young people move away from accusation and toward expression that is specific, honest, and responsible.

Dialogue circles

Dialogue circles create structured space for participants to speak and listen in turn. They are useful when groups need shared reflection, especially after a difficult activity or conflict moment. A simple talking object can help ensure that one person speaks at a time. Questions can move from personal experience to wider reflection, for example: What happened? How did you feel? What did you notice? What made communication difficult? What could help next time?

Circles are effective because they slow the pace. They reduce interruption and create a shared rhythm. However, they must be facilitated carefully. Not every participant will feel ready to speak in a circle, and silence should not always be forced.

Mediation

Mediation is a more focused process used when conflict between individuals or small groups has become difficult to manage directly. In mediation, a neutral facilitator supports the conflicting sides to speak, listen, clarify issues, and look for possible steps forward. The mediator does not decide who is right. Their role is to support communication and fairness in the process.

In youth settings, mediation can be informal or structured. It can happen between two participants after a conflict in a group, or through peer mediation programmes where trained young people support others. Mediation works best when both sides are willing to take part and when safety can be maintained.

Restorative approaches

Restorative approaches are based on the idea that when harm happens, the response should not focus only on punishment, but also on understanding impact, taking responsibility, and repairing relationships where possible. Restorative questions can be very useful in youth work. For example: What happened? What were you thinking at the time? Who has been affected? How have they been affected? What needs to happen now to make things better?

This approach is especially helpful when conflict includes hurt, exclusion, or harmful behaviour inside a group. It does not remove accountability. In fact, it can deepen accountability by asking participants to face the impact of their actions rather than simply receiving a consequence from above.

Perspective-taking exercises

Conflict often becomes rigid when people see only their own side. Perspective-taking exercises help participants step into another position and explore how events may look from there. This can be done through role play, storytelling, image theatre, case studies, or written reflection from another person's point of view.

These methods should not be used carelessly. Participants should never be forced to act out identities in disrespectful ways. But when facilitated well, perspective-taking can reduce simplification and build empathy.

Cooperative problem-solving

Many group conflicts become less sharp when participants are asked to solve a meaningful challenge together. Cooperative tasks shift attention from opposition to shared purpose. They can include physical tasks, puzzle-solving, design challenges, simulations, or project planning. What matters is that success depends on communication, listening, and contribution from different group members.

This is one reason why game-based methods work well in peacebuilding. They allow participants to experience directly how exclusion, pressure, leadership, trust, and cooperation affect outcomes.

Critical reflection and debriefing

No method is complete without reflection. Debriefing is where transformation begins to take shape. After an activity, youth workers should help participants connect experience to meaning. Useful debrief questions include: What happened in the group? What emotions came up? Who had influence? Who felt left out? What helped cooperation? What created tension? Where do we see this in real life? What can we do differently?

A good debrief does not rush to a moral lesson. It allows complexity. Sometimes participants need time to sit with contradiction. That is acceptable. Reflection is not about giving the "correct" answer. It is about deepening awareness.

Creative expression

Not all participants are ready to explore conflict through direct discussion. Creative expression can open different doors. Drawing, collage, creative writing, theatre, movement, and visual metaphor allow participants to express difficult themes in ways that may feel less exposed. For example, a group can draw what conflict looks like as a landscape, build a "bridge" sculpture from simple materials, or write short dialogues between opposing voices. Creative work can make invisible feelings visible.

Trauma-aware facilitation

Some conflict-related topics may connect to painful personal or collective experiences. Youth workers are not therapists, but they should facilitate with awareness. This means not forcing disclosure, giving participants the right to step back, avoiding unnecessary emotional pressure, and being careful with activities that simulate exclusion, powerlessness, or fear. Trauma-aware practice also means checking whether participants have enough support after difficult discussions.

Choosing the right tool

The usefulness of any method depends on context. A deeply divided group may need trust-building before direct dialogue. A highly energetic group may need embodied methods before sitting reflection. A conflict based on misunderstanding may need clarification, while a conflict based on harm may need accountability. Good facilitation is not about using impressive tools. It is about choosing methods that fit the group's reality.

Conflict transformation in youth work is strongest when tools are combined with clear values: dignity, inclusion, participation, reflection, and responsibility. Methods do not create peace by themselves. People do. But good methods can help people practise peace in concrete ways.

2.5 Linking Peacebuilding with Non-Formal Education

Peacebuilding and non-formal education are closely connected because both focus on human development, participation, reflection, and social learning. Non-formal education does not depend mainly on lectures, memorisation, or one-way delivery of information. Instead, it creates learning through experience, dialogue, group process, and active involvement. This makes it especially suitable for peacebuilding, where attitudes, behaviour, relationships, and critical awareness matter just as much as knowledge.

In formal education settings, peace-related topics may be included in subjects such as history, citizenship, or social studies. This can be valuable, but knowledge alone rarely changes behaviour. A young person may know the definition of discrimination and still repeat stereotypes in daily life. They may understand the importance of dialogue and still react defensively in conflict. Non-formal education responds to this gap by creating spaces where learning is lived, not only discussed.

One of the strengths of non-formal education is that it involves the whole person. Participants think, feel, act, reflect, and interact. Peacebuilding requires exactly this kind of whole-person learning. It asks young people not only to understand conflict intellectually, but to notice their emotions, communication habits, assumptions, and social responsibilities. Non-formal methods allow these dimensions to be explored together.

Another important advantage is participation. In non-formal education, learners are usually invited to contribute actively. They are not passive receivers of expert knowledge. This is important for peacebuilding because peace cannot be taught only as a message from above. It must be co-created.

When young people shape discussions, lead activities, solve problems, and reflect on their own experiences, they begin to take ownership of the learning process. Ownership increases commitment.

Non-formal education also creates room for experimentation. Participants can try new behaviours in a lower-risk environment. They can practise listening, mediation, cooperation, or public speaking without the pressure of grades. They can make mistakes, reflect, and try again. This is especially useful in conflict transformation because peaceful communication is a skill built through practice, not only through explanation.

The group dimension is also essential. Many forms of non-formal education happen in groups, and groups are powerful learning environments. They reveal leadership patterns, inclusion and exclusion, trust, competition, fear, support, and misunderstanding. In other words, they bring social dynamics into the room. This allows peacebuilding themes to become visible in real time. A facilitator can then use these dynamics as material for reflection. For example, if certain participants dominate a discussion while others remain silent, this can become part of a learning moment about voice, confidence, and participation.

At the same time, linking peacebuilding with non-formal education requires intentionality. Not every group game is peace education, and not every creative workshop supports conflict transformation. Activities become meaningful when they are chosen with purpose and connected through reflection.

A simple energiser may support trust and group cohesion, but on its own it does not yet build peace. A role play may create tension, but without debriefing it may reinforce stereotypes instead of challenging them. The educational design matters.

Non-formal education is especially valuable in diverse groups. It can create shared experiences among participants from different backgrounds and provide structures for interaction that go beyond surface-level contact. This is important because diversity alone does not automatically lead to understanding. In fact, without facilitation, diversity can increase misunderstanding or discomfort. Non-formal methods help channel difference into learning by creating tasks, reflection, and dialogue frameworks.
The flexibility of non-formal education is another strength. Youth workers can adapt content to age, context, energy level, language ability, and group history. They can use local examples, current issues, visual materials, movement, or storytelling depending on what fits the participants. This flexibility helps make peacebuilding feel relevant instead of distant.

For Generation Z and younger participants, non-formal education often feels more natural than long theoretical input. Many young people are used to fast-moving, interactive environments. This does not mean they cannot engage with serious ideas. It means that the path into those ideas may need to be more active, visual, and participatory. Games, simulations, collaborative challenges, and media-based methods can help open discussion on difficult issues in ways that feel accessible.

However, accessibility should not mean oversimplification. Peacebuilding topics can be challenging. They involve power, identity, injustice, memory, and responsibility. Non-formal education should make these topics more approachable, not more shallow. The role of the facilitator is to guide participants toward depth without making the process heavy or unreachable.

A strong peacebuilding session in non-formal education often follows a simple rhythm. First, it creates engagement through an activity or problem. Second, it allows participants to experience tension, choice, or interaction. Third, it opens structured reflection. Fourth, it connects the learning to real life. This rhythm can be seen in many methods, from theatre to debate to escape rooms.

For example, an escape room on social conflict might ask participants to solve tasks related to misinformation, unequal access to resources, or cooperation across difference. The activity creates energy and engagement. The challenge makes group dynamics visible. The debrief then helps participants examine what happened: Who took leadership? Who was ignored? What happened when information was not shared equally? How did pressure affect communication? Where do we see similar dynamics in real communities? In this way, non-formal education becomes a bridge between experience and social awareness.

Peacebuilding through non-formal education also supports democratic culture. It encourages voice, listening, shared responsibility, and respect for different perspectives. These are not only workshop skills. They are democratic habits. When youth workers create educational spaces based on participation and reflection, they are also modelling the kind of social life that peacebuilding requires.

This connection becomes especially important in contexts where young people may have limited trust in institutions or few opportunities to participate meaningfully. Non-formal education can offer an alternative learning culture, one in which young people are taken seriously, challenged constructively, and invited to act. In this sense, it does not only teach peacebuilding. It practises it.

For peacebuilding to be linked effectively with non-formal education, facilitators need to prepare carefully. They need clear aims, thoughtful sequencing, sensitivity to group dynamics, and realistic expectations. One workshop will not transform every conflict pattern. But repeated, well-facilitated experiences can strengthen empathy, awareness, responsibility, and confidence.
Non-formal education is not a soft alternative to "real" learning. In peacebuilding work, it is often the most direct way for learning to become real.

2.6 Using Creative and Game-Based Methods to Promote Dialogue

Creative and game-based methods have become increasingly important in youth work because they offer ways to engage participants actively, emotionally, and intellectually at the same time. For peacebuilding and conflict transformation, this is especially useful. Dialogue on difficult topics can sometimes feel heavy, abstract, or threatening. Young people may fear saying the wrong thing, becoming judged, or being asked to speak in ways that feel too exposed. Creative and game-based approaches can lower this barrier. They do not remove seriousness, but they change the entry point.

These methods are particularly relevant when working with young people who learn best through experience. Instead of starting with theory, a facilitator can begin with action. Instead of asking a group immediately to discuss discrimination, exclusion, or conflict, they can create a task in which these issues become visible through interaction. This often leads to more honest and memorable learning.

Why creative methods matter

Creative methods include storytelling, drawing, collage, theatre, image work, role play, music, movement, metaphor, and other forms of expression that go beyond standard discussion. Their strength lies in the fact that they make space for complexity. Not every participant can easily explain a feeling or idea in direct words. Some need images, symbols, characters, or scenarios to express what they mean.

For example, asking participants to draw “what peace looks like” and “what conflict feels like” may reveal insights that would not come out in a direct question. One participant may draw walls, another may draw noise, another may draw a broken bridge. These symbols can open powerful conversation. Creative expression often allows participants to speak indirectly first, which can feel safer.

Theatre-based methods are especially useful for dialogue. Through role play or forum theatre, participants can explore situations of conflict, experiment with different responses, and observe how choices affect outcomes. Because the situation is fictional or semi-fictional, participants often feel more freedom to engage. Yet the emotions and power dynamics can still feel real enough to create learning.

Why game-based methods matter

Game-based methods bring structure, challenge, motivation, and interaction into the learning process. They often include goals, rules, time pressure, cooperation, and problem-solving. These elements can make participation more dynamic, especially for groups who lose focus in long discussions.

In peacebuilding, games are useful because they create situations where social behaviour becomes visible. Participants must negotiate, share information, make decisions, respond to pressure, and deal with success or failure. This gives facilitators rich material for reflection. A game may show who dominates, who withdraws, who mediates, who excludes, who encourages, and how the group reacts when resources are limited or communication breaks down.

However, the value of game-based learning does not lie only in fun. In fact, a game can be fun and still educational, but the educational value depends on design and debriefing. A game that only entertains will not automatically promote dialogue. A game becomes a peacebuilding tool when it is built around meaningful dynamics and followed by reflective discussion.

Escape rooms as peacebuilding tools

Escape rooms are one of the most promising game-based methods for peacebuilding with youth. They combine narrative, challenge, cooperation, critical thinking, and time pressure. Participants solve a sequence of puzzles or tasks in order to achieve a goal. This format is engaging, but it also creates a strong social environment where conflict-related dynamics naturally appear.

An escape room can be designed around themes such as misinformation, trust, prejudice, human rights, social division, or community problem-solving. The tasks do not need to explain these issues directly at every moment. Instead, they can make participants experience patterns connected to them. For instance, one group may receive incomplete information and need to cooperate with another group to succeed. A task may require participants to challenge assumptions, interpret different perspectives, or notice hidden inequality in the clues they receive.

This method is especially effective because it turns dialogue into action. Participants do not only talk about cooperation; they need to cooperate. They do not only talk about pressure; they feel it. They do not only discuss exclusion; they may notice how quickly some members are left out when time is short. These lived moments create strong material for reflection afterward.

To function well as a peacebuilding tool, an escape room needs careful educational design. The storyline should have a clear connection to the learning aim. The puzzles should encourage collaboration rather than reward domination by one or two strong participants. The tasks should be accessible enough that all members can contribute. And the debrief should be long enough to unpack both the experience and its social meaning.

Promoting dialogue through indirect entry points

One reason creative and game-based methods support dialogue is that they allow indirect entry into difficult themes. A participant may resist direct conversation about prejudice, but engage fully in a simulation about unfair distribution of resources. After the activity, they may be more ready to discuss justice because they have felt frustration or confusion themselves.

This indirect route is often more effective than immediate confrontation. It respects that young people may need time to build trust and awareness. It also avoids turning dialogue into a test of correct opinions. When participants reflect on something they have just experienced together, the discussion often becomes more grounded and less performative.

Building empathy and perspective

Creative and game-based methods can also strengthen empathy. Storytelling, role-based tasks, and perspective-taking scenarios invite participants to imagine how a situation looks from another side. This is especially valuable in conflict transformation because many destructive conflicts are sustained by one-sided narratives. When participants encounter multiple perspectives, they become more able to hold complexity.

For example, a role-based simulation about a community disagreement can assign participants different positions: local youth, residents, school representatives, local government, migrants, or media actors. By trying to act from these positions, participants begin to see that conflict is rarely as simple as "good side" and "bad side." They notice competing needs, fears, and priorities. This does not mean all positions are equally just, but it deepens understanding.

Conditions for success

Creative and game-based dialogue methods work best under several conditions.

First, participants need clear framing. They should understand the purpose of the activity, at least in broad terms. If the learning aim is completely hidden, reflection may remain superficial.

Second, the space must be safe enough for participation. Some challenge is good, but humiliation is not. Activities should not expose participants in ways they cannot manage.

Third, the facilitator must observe group process closely. The activity itself may look lively and successful, but underneath there may be exclusion, confusion, or frustration that needs to be addressed during the debrief.

Fourth, reflection must not be rushed. In many workshops, most of the time is spent on the game and too little on the meaning. This weakens the educational value. The debrief should help participants move from "what we did" to "what we learned" to "where this matters in real life."

Risks to avoid

These methods also carry risks if used carelessly. A game can become so competitive that cooperation disappears. A role play can reinforce stereotypes if not well framed. A creative exercise can feel childish if it is not presented respectfully. An escape room can become only puzzle-solving if the social meaning is never explored. Facilitators therefore need to match the method to the group and keep the educational purpose clear.

Another risk is forcing emotional depth too quickly. Creative methods sometimes open feelings unexpectedly. Youth workers should be prepared for this and avoid pushing participants into personal disclosure. Dialogue can be meaningful without requiring everyone to share intimate experiences.

From engagement to transformation

The real value of creative and game-based methods is that they move participants from passive attendance to active meaning-making. They invite curiosity. They lower resistance. They make group dynamics visible. They allow participants to test choices and reflect on consequences. When used well, they do not replace dialogue; they prepare it and deepen it.

For youth workers, these methods are not only a way to make sessions more interesting. They are a way to make peacebuilding more lived, more concrete, and more accessible. In a time when many young people are tired of formal speeches and empty messages, this matters. They want to experience, question, and engage. Creative and game-based methods meet them there.

Dialogue grows stronger when people feel involved. Peacebuilding grows stronger when dialogue is connected to experience. This is why creative and game-based learning can play such an important role in conflict transformation.

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2.7 Practical Recommendations for Youth Workers

Peacebuilding and conflict transformation become more effective when facilitators connect values with method. The following practical recommendations can support implementation in youth work settings.

- Start with the group, not only with the topic. Before introducing conflict-related content, pay attention to trust, energy, inclusion, and communication patterns in the group. A divided or anxious group may need relationship-building before more demanding dialogue.
- Use clear agreements. Group agreements are not a formality. They help create shared expectations around listening, respect, confidentiality, speaking time, and how disagreement will be handled.
- Do not rush to remove all conflict. Tension is not always a sign of failure. Sometimes it shows that real issues are being touched. The key question is whether the tension remains within a safe and respectful process.
- Move from experience to reflection. Activities become educational when participants have time to analyse what happened and why it matters.
- Link personal and structural levels. Help young people see how individual experiences connect to wider social patterns such as discrimination, power, exclusion, and media influence.
- Use varied methods. Some participants engage best through speech, others through movement, visuals, writing, or problem-solving. A mixed approach increases accessibility.
- Be careful with sensitive topics. Peacebuilding may touch identity, memory, trauma, and injustice. Facilitate with care, avoid forcing disclosure, and know the limits of your role.
- Include young people in design where possible. Their ideas can make activities more relevant and increase ownership.
- Pay attention to debrief quality. Good reflection questions are often more important than complicated materials.
- Focus on process, not perfection. Peacebuilding education is not about producing ideal behaviour in one session. It is about developing awareness, responsibility, and practice over time.

CHAPTER 3

ESCAPE ROOMS IN YOUTH WORK & PEACEBUILDING

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In recent years, Escape Rooms have moved beyond entertainment and become valuable tools in education and youth work. Their interactive and immersive structure makes them especially suitable for engaging young people in meaningful learning experiences. Instead of receiving information passively, participants are invited to act, reflect, cooperate, and solve problems together. This makes Escape Rooms particularly effective in non-formal education, where learning is often based on participation, experience, and group interaction.

Within youth work, Escape Rooms offer much more than fun or motivation. When designed with clear educational aims, they can support the development of empathy, communication, critical thinking, and teamwork. They create a space where young people can experience tension, uncertainty, and collaboration in a safe and structured way. In this sense, they are highly relevant for peacebuilding, which depends not only on knowledge, but also on the ability to listen, understand different perspectives, manage conflict, and work constructively with others.

In the context of peacebuilding, Escape Rooms can help transform abstract concepts into lived experiences. Rather than only talking about dialogue, trust, inclusion, or cooperation, participants are placed in situations where they must practice these skills together. The fictional and time-bound nature of the activity encourages engagement while also providing enough distance for participants to explore sensitive themes safely. For youth workers, this makes Escape Rooms a powerful method for connecting reflection with action.

Another important strength of Escape Rooms lies in their ability to bring together different learning styles within one shared experience. Some participants may prefer analytical thinking, others creative expression, and others communication-based roles. Well-designed escape room scenarios naturally integrate all these approaches, allowing each participant to contribute in their own way while still depending on the group as a whole. This diversity of roles not only increases engagement but also mirrors real-life cooperation, where different perspectives and skills must come together to solve complex challenges.

This chapter explores how Escape Rooms can be used intentionally in youth work and peacebuilding practice. It introduces their educational value, explains their main elements, and shows how they can be designed to support meaningful learning outcomes for young people. In doing so, it presents Escape Rooms not simply as games, but as practical tools for building empathy, strengthening cooperation, and encouraging peaceful interaction.

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3.1 What is an Educational Escape Room?

An Educational Escape Room is a structured, game-based learning experience in which participants work together to solve a series of challenges within a limited time in order to achieve a shared objective. While traditional escape rooms are primarily designed for entertainment, educational escape rooms are intentionally developed to support specific learning outcomes. Every element of the experience, including the narrative, puzzles, group roles, and interactions, is carefully designed to foster skills such as communication, cooperation, critical thinking, problem-solving, and reflection.

At its core, an educational escape room combines storytelling, experiential learning, and collaborative problem-solving within a non-formal education framework. Participants are placed in a fictional but meaningful scenario that requires them to navigate uncertainty, interpret clues, and make decisions together. This environment encourages active participation, as learners are not passive recipients of information but active contributors to the process. The learning emerges through doing, experiencing, and interacting with others, rather than through instruction alone.

A defining feature of educational escape rooms is the integration of learning objectives into the design of the game. Unlike entertainment-focused escape rooms, where the goal is simply to “escape,” educational versions are built around specific themes such as empathy, conflict resolution, cooperation, or self-awareness. The puzzles and tasks are not random; they are intentionally linked to these themes. For example, a challenge might require participants to listen carefully to one another, combine different perspectives, or reflect on emotional responses in order to progress. In this way, the learning is embedded directly into the gameplay.

Another important characteristic is the emphasis on interdependence. Educational escape rooms are designed so that no single participant can complete the activity alone. Each person brings different knowledge, skills, or perspectives that are necessary for solving the challenges. This creates a natural need for communication, trust, and collaboration. Participants must share information, negotiate ideas, and support one another in order to succeed. This mirrors real-life situations, where complex problems often require collective effort and mutual understanding.

The time-bound nature of escape rooms also plays a significant role in the learning process. Time pressure introduces a level of tension that encourages quick thinking and decision-making. It can reveal natural behaviours within a group, such as leadership styles, communication patterns, or responses to stress. In a well-facilitated environment, these moments become valuable learning opportunities. Participants can observe how they react under pressure and reflect on how their behaviour impacts others.

In youth work contexts, educational escape rooms are particularly effective because they align with the principles of non-formal learning. They are participatory, learner-centred, and based on experience. They also allow for flexibility and adaptation, meaning they can be adjusted to different group sizes, cultural contexts, and learning objectives. This makes them accessible tools for youth workers working with diverse groups of young people.

A crucial component that distinguishes educational escape rooms from purely recreational ones is the inclusion of a structured reflection or debriefing phase. After the game, participants are guided through a discussion that helps them make sense of their experience. They are encouraged to reflect on questions such as: How did we communicate as a group? What challenges did we face? How did we deal with disagreements? What helped us succeed? This process allows participants to connect their in-game experience to real-life situations, making the learning transferable and meaningful.

In the context of peacebuilding, educational escape rooms offer a unique and powerful approach. Peacebuilding requires more than theoretical knowledge; it requires the development of practical skills such as empathy, dialogue, cooperation, and the ability to navigate conflict constructively. Escape rooms create a safe, fictional space where participants can practice these skills without real-world consequences. By engaging in scenarios that involve negotiation, misunderstanding, or shared problem-solving, participants experience firsthand the importance of listening, inclusion, and mutual respect.

Educational escape rooms can make abstract concepts more accessible. Ideas such as trust, conflict transformation, or social responsibility can sometimes feel distant or theoretical. Through gameplay, these concepts become tangible and visible. Participants do not just talk about cooperation—they experience what happens when cooperation breaks down or succeeds. This experiential dimension makes learning more impactful and memorable.

Another strength of educational escape rooms is their ability to engage different types of learners simultaneously. Some participants may approach challenges analytically, others creatively, and others through communication and facilitation. A well-designed escape room allows space for all these approaches, encouraging participants to recognise and value different contributions within the group. This not only increases engagement but also supports inclusivity and mutual respect.

In conclusion, an educational escape room is not simply a game with learning added to it, but a carefully designed learning environment where experience, interaction, and reflection come together. It transforms participants from passive learners into active problem-solvers and collaborators. When used intentionally in youth work and peacebuilding contexts, it becomes a powerful tool for developing not only knowledge, but also attitudes, behaviours, and skills that contribute to more understanding, cooperative, and peaceful communities.

3.2 Main Elements of an Educational Escape Room

Educational Escape Rooms are not random collections of puzzles or activities; they are carefully structured learning environments in which each element plays a specific role in achieving educational outcomes. Their effectiveness in youth work and peacebuilding depends largely on how intentionally these elements are designed and interconnected. A well-designed escape room creates a balance between engagement, challenge, cooperation, and reflection, ensuring that participants are not only active but also meaningfully involved in the learning process.

Each component—from the narrative structure to the puzzles, group dynamics, time pressure, and reflection phase—contributes to shaping the overall experience. When these elements are aligned with clear learning objectives, the escape room becomes a powerful tool that supports not only knowledge acquisition but also behavioural change, emotional awareness, and social interaction. Understanding these core elements is essential for youth workers who aim to use escape rooms as educational tools in peacebuilding contexts.

Storyline & Context

The storyline is the foundation of any educational escape room. It provides meaning, direction, and emotional engagement to the experience. Rather than solving disconnected tasks, participants are placed within a narrative that gives purpose to their actions. In educational settings, the storyline is not only a creative element but also a pedagogical tool that frames the learning objectives.

A well-designed storyline creates a clear context that participants can relate to. In peacebuilding-focused escape rooms, this often involves scenarios such as community conflicts, misunderstandings between groups, resource-sharing challenges, or situations requiring negotiation and cooperation. The goal is not to replicate real conflicts in a sensitive or triggering way, but to create symbolic situations that reflect similar dynamics.

The context should be simple enough to understand quickly, yet rich enough to stimulate engagement and reflection. It should invite participants to take on roles, make decisions, and feel responsible for the outcome. When participants emotionally connect with the storyline, they are more likely to engage deeply with the activity and reflect on their actions.

Moreover, the storyline acts as a bridge between the game and real-life situations. It allows facilitators to guide participants toward recognising patterns, behaviours, and dynamics that exist outside the game. This connection is essential in peacebuilding, where the objective is not only to complete tasks but to develop awareness and transferable skills.

Puzzles and Problem-Solving

Puzzles are the structural core of an escape room. They provide the challenges that participants must overcome in order to progress. In educational escape rooms, puzzles are not designed solely to test logic or intelligence; they are intentionally created to support specific learning outcomes.

Each puzzle should have a clear purpose beyond simply "finding the answer." For example, a puzzle might require participants to share information, listen carefully, interpret emotions, or combine different perspectives. In this way, problem-solving becomes a social and collaborative process rather than an individual task.

Variety in puzzle design is also important. Different types of puzzles-logical, creative, physical, or communication-based-allow participants with different strengths to contribute. This inclusivity increases engagement and reinforces the idea that diverse skills and perspectives are valuable within a group.

Another important aspect is the level of difficulty. Puzzles should be challenging enough to require effort and cooperation, but not so difficult that they create frustration or disengagement. A balanced level of challenge encourages persistence, discussion, and shared problem solving, all of which are essential in peacebuilding contexts.

Puzzles can also be used to simulate real-life dynamics. For example, incomplete information can reflect miscommunication, conflicting clues can represent differing perspectives, and time-sensitive tasks can mimic decision-making under pressure. Through these mechanisms, participants experience how problem-solving is influenced by communication, trust, and cooperation.

Collaboration and Group Dynamics

Collaboration is at the heart of any educational escape room. Unlike individual learning activities, escape rooms rely on group interaction and collective effort. Participants must communicate, share ideas, listen to each other, and make decisions together in order to succeed.

Well-designed escape rooms create interdependence among participants. This means that each person holds part of the information or plays a specific role that contributes to the overall solution. No one can complete the game alone, which naturally encourages cooperation and mutual support.

Group dynamics often become visible during the activity. Participants may take on different roles such as leader, communicator, observer, or problem-solver. Some may dominate discussions, while others may hesitate to speak. These dynamics are not only part of the game but also valuable learning moments.

In peacebuilding contexts, observing and reflecting on these dynamics is particularly important. Participants can become aware of how power, communication styles, and inclusion affect group outcomes. They can experience firsthand how listening, respect, and collaboration lead to more effective solutions, while lack of cooperation can create obstacles.

For facilitators, this element provides an opportunity to guide participants toward more inclusive and balanced group interaction. Encouraging quieter voices, managing dominant behaviours, and supporting constructive dialogue are key aspects of using escape rooms as tools for social learning.

Time Pressure as Motivation

Time pressure is one of the defining features of escape rooms. Participants are usually given a limited amount of time to complete the challenges, which creates a sense of urgency and focus. This element significantly increases engagement and motivation, as participants feel the need to act, decide, and collaborate quickly.

From an educational perspective, time pressure serves several purposes. It encourages participants to prioritise, make decisions, and take action rather than overthinking. It can also reveal natural reactions to stress, such as how individuals communicate, whether they cooperate or compete, and how they handle uncertainty.

However, time pressure must be used carefully. While it can enhance engagement, excessive pressure may lead to frustration or reduced participation, especially for individuals who need more time to process information. For this reason, the level of time pressure should be adapted to the group's age, experience, and learning objectives.

In peacebuilding-focused activities, time pressure can simulate real-life situations where decisions must be made quickly and under stress. This allows participants to reflect on how pressure influences their behaviour and how they can maintain constructive communication even in challenging moments.

Debriefing and Reflection

The debriefing phase is the most critical element that transforms an escape room from a game into a learning experience. Without reflection, participants may enjoy the activity but miss the deeper meaning behind it. With structured debriefing, the experience becomes a powerful tool for learning, awareness, and personal growth.

During the debriefing, participants are guided to reflect on their experience, both individually and as a group. They are encouraged to discuss questions such as:
-What happened during the activity?
-How did we communicate?
-What challenges did we face?
-How did we make decisions?
-What helped us succeed or fail?
This process allows participants to analyse not only the outcome but also the process. They begin to recognise patterns in their behaviour, communication styles, and interactions with others. This awareness is essential in peacebuilding, where understanding oneself is a key step toward understanding others.

Reflection also creates a bridge between the game and real-life situations. Facilitators help participants connect their experience in the escape room to situations they may encounter in their daily lives, such as conflicts, misunderstandings, or teamwork challenges. This transfer of learning ensures that the experience has a lasting impact.

Debriefing provides a safe space for participants to express emotions, share perspectives, and listen to others. This reinforces empathy, mutual respect, and dialogue-core elements of peacebuilding.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of an educational escape room depends on the thoughtful integration of its core elements. Storyline, puzzles, collaboration, time pressure, and reflection are not separate components, but interconnected parts of a holistic learning experience. When designed intentionally, they create an environment where participants do not simply complete tasks, but engage in meaningful processes that support personal development, social awareness, and peaceful interaction.

3.3 Why Escape Rooms Work with Youth?

Escape Rooms have proven to be particularly effective tools in youth work because they closely align with the needs, expectations, and learning preferences of young people, especially those from Generation Z. In contrast to traditional educational approaches, which often rely on passive learning and one-way communication, escape rooms offer dynamic, participatory, and experience based environments. This shift from passive to active learning is one of the key reasons why they resonate so strongly with young people and why they are increasingly being used in non-formal education settings.

One of the main reasons escape rooms work well with youth is their ability to create high levels of engagement. Young people are naturally drawn to activities that are interactive, challenging, and goal-oriented. Escape rooms provide a clear objective, immediate feedback, and a sense of progression, all of which help maintain attention and motivation. The combination of storytelling, puzzles, and time pressure creates an immersive experience where participants feel involved and emotionally invested in the process. This type of engagement is especially important in peacebuilding education, where maintaining interest in complex or abstract topics can otherwise be difficult.

Another important factor is the strong alignment with the learning styles of Generation Z. As identified in the Innovators Lab project, there is a clear shift in how young people prefer to learn: they are more responsive to interactive, experiential, and visually engaging environments rather than traditional methods. Many youth workers involved in the project also highlighted a gap in tools and approaches that effectively engage Gen Z in peacebuilding and conflict transformation activities. Escape rooms directly respond to this need by offering a format that feels familiar, stimulating, and relevant to young participants.

Escape rooms also support learning through experience, which is a core principle of non formal education and a central pillar of the Innovators Lab approach. Instead of being told how to communicate, cooperate, or manage conflict, participants experience these processes directly.

They are placed in situations that require them to listen, negotiate, share ideas, and make decisions together. This experiential dimension allows learning to emerge naturally from interaction, making it more meaningful and easier to internalise. Within the project, this approach is intentionally used to help young people not only understand peacebuilding concepts but also practice them in action.

In addition, escape rooms create a safe environment for experimentation and learning from mistakes. The fictional context allows participants to try different behaviours without fear of real world consequences. They can explore different communication styles, take risks, and make decisions that they can later reflect on. This is particularly valuable in the context of the Innovators Lab project, where participants are encouraged to engage with themes such as empathy, self-awareness, cooperation, and conflict resolution. The game environment provides enough emotional distance to approach these topics safely, while still allowing meaningful reflection.

Another key strength of escape rooms is their ability to foster cooperation and social interaction. Young people often learn best when they work together toward a shared goal. Escape rooms are inherently collaborative; they require participants to communicate, share information, and support one another in order to succeed. This collaborative structure reflects one of the core objectives of the project: to strengthen cooperation and mutual understanding among young people from different backgrounds, including those from conflict-affected communities.

Escape rooms allow participants to take on different roles and contribute in diverse ways. Some may approach challenges analytically, others creatively, and others through communication or coordination. This diversity of roles is essential in both youth work and peacebuilding, where multiple perspectives and skills are needed to address complex issues. By experiencing this diversity in practice, participants begin to recognise the value of different contributions and the importance of inclusive participation.

The element of challenge also plays a significant role in youth engagement. Escape rooms present problems that are neither too easy nor too difficult, encouraging participants to stretch their abilities without becoming overwhelmed. This balance supports motivation and builds confidence, as participants experience a sense of achievement when they overcome challenges together. In the context of the project, this is particularly important for empowering young people to feel capable of contributing to peacebuilding processes in their own communities.

Another important dimension is the emotional engagement created by escape rooms. The combination of time pressure, collaboration, and problem-solving generates a range of emotions, including excitement, curiosity, frustration, and satisfaction. These emotional experiences are not separate from learning; they are part of it. They help participants connect more deeply with the activity and reflect more meaningfully on their behaviour and interactions. Within the Innovators Lab project, this emotional engagement is intentionally used to support the development of empathy and self-awareness, which are essential for constructive dialogue and conflict transformation.

Escape rooms are highly adaptable and scalable, making them suitable for a wide range of youth work contexts. They can be adjusted to different group sizes, cultural backgrounds, and learning objectives, and can be implemented in both physical and digital formats. This flexibility is a key advantage within the project, as it allows the developed methodologies to be tested, adapted, and applied across different countries and communities involved in Innovators Lab.

Escape rooms work effectively with youth because they combine engagement, interaction, challenge, and reflection within a single, coherent experience. They respond directly to the learning preferences of Gen Z while also supporting the development of essential competences such as empathy, cooperation, communication, and critical thinking. Within the Innovators Lab project, escape rooms are not only used as engaging activities, but as strategic tools to bridge the gap between young people and peacebuilding, transforming abstract concepts into lived experiences that can inspire real change.

In addition to their immediate impact on participants, escape rooms also contribute to the long-term development of youth work practices. By introducing innovative, game-based methodologies, youth workers expand their toolkit and gain new ways to engage young people in meaningful learning processes. Within the Innovators Lab project, this is particularly important, as one of the key aims is not only to work directly with young people, but also to strengthen the capacity of youth workers to design and facilitate impactful educational experiences. Through testing, adaptation, and exchange of practices, escape rooms become sustainable tools that can be replicated and further developed in different contexts.

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3.4 How to Set Up Educational Objectives?

Defining clear and meaningful educational objectives is one of the most critical steps in designing an effective educational escape room. Without well-structured objectives, even the most engaging and creative activity risks becoming an enjoyable experience with limited educational value. In youth work, and particularly in peacebuilding contexts, it is essential that activities are not only interactive but also intentional, structured, and aligned with specific learning outcomes that contribute to long-term personal and social development.

Educational objectives serve as the foundation of the entire design process. They guide the creation of the storyline, the structure of puzzles, the type of group interaction, and the reflection process. In the context of the Innovators Lab project, these objectives are closely connected to core competences such as empathy, self-awareness, cooperation, communication, critical thinking, and conflict transformation. This means that escape rooms are not designed simply to challenge participants cognitively, but to engage them emotionally and socially, creating opportunities for deeper understanding and behavioural change.

The first step in setting educational objectives is to clearly define the intended learning outcomes. These outcomes should go beyond knowledge acquisition and focus on what participants will be able to do, feel, and reflect on after the activity. In non-formal education, learning is often competence-based, meaning that it includes attitudes, skills, and behaviours. For example, instead of defining an objective as "participants will understand conflict," a more meaningful objective would be "participants will practice active listening, express their perspective respectfully, and recognise different viewpoints in a group setting." This shift ensures that the learning is practical, applicable, and relevant to real-life situations.

Another important aspect is ensuring that the objectives are specific, realistic, and appropriate for the target group. Factors such as age, prior experience, cultural background, and group dynamics must be carefully considered.

In the Innovators Lab project, where activities are implemented across different countries and contexts, including diverse communities in Europe and neighbouring regions, adaptability is particularly important. Objectives should be flexible enough to respond to different group needs while maintaining a consistent educational focus.

At this stage, it is also useful to distinguish between different types of learning objectives. These can be broadly grouped into three categories: cognitive, emotional, and social objectives. Cognitive objectives relate to knowledge and problem solving skills, emotional objectives relate to self-awareness and empathy, and social objectives relate to communication, cooperation, and group interaction. Educational escape rooms are particularly powerful because they can address all three dimensions simultaneously. A well-designed activity intentionally integrates these layers, allowing participants to think, feel, and interact at the same time.

Once the objectives are clearly defined, the next step is to translate them into the design of the escape room. This is where intentionality becomes crucial. Every element of the activity should support the learning goals. The storyline should reflect the theme of the objectives, the puzzles should require behaviours linked to those objectives, and the group structure should create opportunities for participants to practice the targeted competences.

For example, if the objective is to develop empathy, the storyline might involve a situation where different perspectives must be understood in order to move forward. The puzzles could require participants to interpret emotional cues, listen carefully to others, or consider alternative viewpoints. If the objective is cooperation, the design should ensure that information is distributed among participants, requiring them to communicate and collaborate in order to succeed. In this way, the objectives are not explained directly but experienced through action.

A common mistake in designing educational escape rooms is focusing too heavily on the puzzles themselves without connecting them to the learning objectives. While engaging puzzles are important for maintaining motivation, they should always serve a deeper purpose. Each challenge should be seen as part of a learning pathway rather than a standalone task. This requires careful alignment between what participants are doing and what they are meant to learn from doing it.

Another key consideration is the sequencing of the experience. Educational objectives should be supported not only by individual tasks but also by the overall flow of the activity.

For instance, an escape room might begin with simpler tasks that build trust and familiarity, followed by more complex challenges that require deeper cooperation and communication. This progression allows participants to gradually develop confidence and engage more fully with the learning process.

It is important to design moments of reflection within the activity itself, not only at the end. Short pauses, decision points, or moments where participants must discuss their approach can reinforce the learning objectives during the gameplay. These embedded reflections help participants become more aware of their actions and decisions in real time.

Within the Innovators Lab framework, setting educational objectives also means aligning the activity with broader project goals. These include increasing youth participation in peacebuilding, enhancing the capacity of youth workers, and introducing innovative methodologies into non-formal education. Therefore, objectives should not only focus on individual development but also consider how the experience contributes to wider social impact. For example, participants may be encouraged to reflect on how the skills they practiced can be applied in their communities, relationships, or future initiatives.

Another important dimension of educational objectives is measurability. While non-formal learning outcomes are often qualitative and difficult to quantify, it is still essential to define indicators that help assess whether the objectives have been achieved. These indicators may include observable behaviours during the activity, feedback from participants, or insights expressed during the reflection phase. For example, facilitators might observe whether participants actively listen to each other, include different voices, or demonstrate collaborative problem-solving.

The role of the facilitator is central in ensuring that educational objectives are achieved. Even the most carefully designed escape room requires effective facilitation in order to guide the learning process. Facilitators need to be fully aware of the objectives and be able to observe, support, and intervene when necessary. Their role is not to provide solutions, but to create a supportive environment where participants can explore, experiment, and learn from their experience.

Facilitators also play a key role in connecting the experience to the intended learning outcomes during the debriefing phase. This phase is where the educational objectives become explicit. Through guided questions and discussion, participants are encouraged to

> reflect on what happened, why it happened, and what it means for their real-life experiences. For example, if the objective is to develop communication skills, the facilitator might ask how information was shared, whether everyone had the opportunity to speak, and how misunderstandings were handled.

At the same time, it is important to allow space for unexpected or emergent learning outcomes. While objectives provide structure, participants may gain insights that go beyond what was initially planned. These insights can be equally valuable and should be acknowledged during reflection. A flexible and responsive facilitation approach ensures that the learning experience remains open and meaningful.

Another important consideration is how educational objectives are communicated to participants. In many cases, it is more effective not to present them explicitly at the beginning of the activity. Instead, participants can be introduced to the scenario and allowed to discover the learning points through experience. This approach increases curiosity and engagement. The objectives can then be explored and clarified during the debriefing phase, where participants are more prepared to reflect on their experience.

Setting educational objectives should be seen as part of a continuous improvement process. Within the Innovators Lab project, activities are tested, evaluated, and refined based on feedback from participants and facilitators. This iterative approach allows youth workers to adjust objectives, improve design, and enhance the overall impact of the activity over time. It also supports the development of sustainable methodologies that can be adapted and reused in different contexts.

Setting educational objectives is not simply a preparatory step, but the core of the entire educational escape room design. It ensures that the activity is meaningful, purposeful, and aligned with the development of key competences. By clearly defining, integrating, and reflecting on these objectives, youth workers can create powerful learning experiences that go beyond engagement and lead to real personal and social transformation. Within the Innovators Lab project, this approach plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between innovative methodologies and meaningful peacebuilding education, empowering young people to actively contribute to more inclusive, cooperative, and peaceful communities.

3.5 Case Examples from Youth Work Practice

Understanding the theoretical value of educational escape rooms is important; however, their true impact becomes most visible when they are applied in real youth work contexts. Practical examples provide insight into how these methodologies function in different environments, how young people respond to them, and how learning outcomes emerge through experience.

Educational escape rooms have been increasingly used across Europe as innovative tools in youth work, non-formal education, and peacebuilding-related initiatives. Various Erasmus+ and international projects demonstrate how escape room methodologies can be adapted to different themes such as social entrepreneurship, inclusion, sustainability, and active citizenship. These real-life applications provide valuable insight into how escape rooms function as learning environments and how they support the development of key competences among young people.

One relevant example is the E**RSE Project (Escape Rooms for Social Entrepreneurship Education)**, which focuses on using escape rooms to develop entrepreneurial thinking with a strong emphasis on social impact. The project aims to promote innovation, responsibility, and active participation among young people by combining digital tools with experiential learning approaches . In this context, escape room scenarios are designed around real-life challenges related to social entrepreneurship, requiring participants to collaborate, think critically, and make decisions that consider both individual and societal needs. This demonstrates how escape rooms can go beyond soft skills and support the development of responsible and socially aware mindsets, which is also highly relevant for peacebuilding.

Another important example is the **E-SCAPE Project**, which introduces a digital escape room platform aimed at developing transferable skills among higher education students. The project combines storytelling, data driven content, and immersive digital environments to create engaging learning experiences.

Through game-based scenarios, participants are encouraged to develop skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and cooperation. This project highlights the potential of digital escape rooms, showing that educational escape room methodologies are not limited to physical spaces but can also be successfully implemented in virtual environments. For projects like Innovators Lab, this is particularly important, as it supports scalability and accessibility across different regions.

A third example can be found in the **Escape for Democracy Project**, which uses escape rooms as tools to promote active citizenship among young people. Through a combination of digital platforms and interactive scenarios, participants engage with themes such as democracy, participation, and social responsibility . The project demonstrates how escape rooms can be used to address complex societal topics in an engaging and accessible way. By placing participants in decision-making situations, it encourages them to reflect on their role in society and understand the importance of dialogue and participation—key elements also present in peacebuilding processes.

Similarly, the **School Break Project**, funded under Erasmus+, explores how escape rooms can be used in educational settings to address topics such as migration, gender identity, and social stereotypes. Within this project, multiple escape room scenarios were developed to help learners explore sensitive and complex issues through interactive gameplay . These scenarios allow participants to engage with topics that are often difficult to discuss in traditional settings, making escape rooms effective tools for raising awareness and fostering empathy.

Initiatives such as P**ortable Educational Escape Rooms (PEERs)** highlight the adaptability and accessibility of this methodology. Through international training activities, youth workers are trained to design and implement their own escape rooms in different contexts, reaching diverse groups of young people. These projects emphasise capacity building, showing that escape rooms are not only tools for participants but also powerful methodologies for empowering youth workers. This aligns closely with the objectives of Innovators Lab, where strengthening the competences of youth workers is a central priority.

Across these projects, several common patterns emerge. First, escape rooms are consistently used as tools for experiential learning, allowing participants to actively engage with content rather than passively receive information. Second, they are designed with clear educational objectives, ensuring that each activity contributes to the development of specific competences. Third, they emphasise collaboration and group interaction, reflecting real-life dynamics of communication, cooperation, and conflict.

Within the Innovators Lab project, these examples reinforce the value of escape rooms as innovative tools for youth work and peacebuilding. By learning from existing practices, the project builds on proven methodologies while adapting them to its specific focus on empathy, self-awareness, and conflict transformation. The integration of escape room design with peacebuilding objectives represents a step forward in making non-formal education more engaging, relevant, and impactful for young people.

In conclusion, case examples from youth work practice clearly demonstrate that educational escape rooms are not isolated innovations, but part of a broader movement toward experiential, game-based learning in Europe and beyond. Their flexibility, adaptability, and strong engagement potential make them highly effective tools for addressing complex topics and supporting the development of key competences. As shown through these projects, escape rooms can successfully bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering young people opportunities to experience, reflect, and grow in ways that contribute to more inclusive and peaceful societies.

CHAPTER 4

DESIGNING AN EDUCATIONAL ESCAPE ROOM

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Escape rooms are traditionally designed as entertainment experiences focused on speed, logic and competition. However, when adapted intentionally, they can become powerful educational environments. Within youth work and non-formal education, escape rooms can simulate conflict situations, power dynamics, misinformation, negotiation processes and collective problem-solving in a safe and structured setting.

Peacebuilding is not only about stopping violence. It is about transforming relationships, strengthening dialogue, addressing root causes of tension, and building sustainable cooperation. An educational escape room allows participants to experience conflict dynamics in real time, observe their own reactions under pressure, and experiment with alternative approaches to resolution.

This chapter provides step-by-step guidance on how to design, implement and debrief an escape room specifically aimed at peacebuilding and conflict transformation in youth work settings.

4.1 Defining Peacebuilding Objectives

Every educational escape room must begin with clarity of intention. Without clearly defined objectives, the activity risks becoming a game without meaningful learning outcomes.

Peacebuilding objectives should be rooted in competences rather than abstract ideals. It is not enough to say that participants should "learn about peace." Instead, define what attitudes, skills and knowledge should be strengthened through the experience.

Peacebuilding in youth contexts usually includes three dimensions:
-Personal awareness (self-reflection, emotional regulation, bias awareness)
-Interpersonal skills (communication, mediation, cooperation)
-Structural understanding (power, inequality, systemic causes of conflict)

When designing your escape room, choose a limited number of objectives. Too many learning goals will dilute the experience. A well-designed activity can realistically focus on two or three core competences.

For example, you might aim to:
-Strengthen active listening skills during conflict
-Develop awareness of how misinformation escalates tension
-Practice collaborative decision-making under time pressure
-Increase empathy toward opposing perspectives

It is recommended to phrase objectives in observable terms. Instead of stating that participants "understand empathy," you might define that they "demonstrate perspective-taking during negotiation tasks."

Clear objectives guide every other design decision: narrative, puzzles, roles and debrief questions. Before creating any puzzles, story or props, you must answer one question:
What transformation do you want participants to experience?

An educational escape room is not about winning. It is about learning through experience. Identify the core peacebuilding competence, choose 1–3 core objectives only. Do not overload. Examples:
-Understanding root causes of conflict
-Practicing nonviolent communication
-Recognising stereotypes and bias
-Developing empathy
-Collaborative decision-making
-Active listening
-De-escalation strategies
-Shared responsibility
-Trust building

For each objective ask:
1. Is this measurable in behaviour?
2. Can it be practiced inside the escape room?
3. Can it be reflected upon during debrief?

If the answer is NO → remove or refine it.

Link Objectives to Conflict Transformation Levels
Use this simple model:
– Individual level (attitudes, emotions)
– Interpersonal level (communication)
– Structural level (power, inequality)
Make sure your escape room touches at least 2 levels.

4.2 Building a Narrative Around Conflict & Resolution

An educational escape room becomes meaningful when it tells a story. The narrative provides emotional engagement and context for the tasks. In peacebuilding work, the story should reflect realistic conflict dynamics without reproducing harmful stereotypes.
The narrative should include:

- A clearly defined context
- At least two perspectives
- A shared challenge or threat
- A time-sensitive objective

For example, the story may revolve around two neighbouring communities competing over limited water resources. Participants might represent different stakeholders and must negotiate an agreement before tensions escalate into violence.

When building the narrative, consider the emotional journey. Conflict transformation involves movement from misunderstanding and mistrust toward dialogue and cooperation. The storyline should reflect this arc.

The beginning often includes confusion, incomplete information or mistrust. As participants solve puzzles and uncover hidden pieces of the story, they gradually recognise shared interests and mutual dependence. The final stage should require cooperation to "unlock" the resolution.

It is important that the narrative does not present peace as a simplistic "happy ending." Instead, it should emphasise compromise, complexity and collective responsibility.

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4.3 Designing Puzzles with Purpose

In entertainment escape rooms, puzzles are often purely logical. In educational escape rooms for peacebuilding, every puzzle must be pedagogically intentional. Each task should:
-Reflect a real-life conflict dynamic
-Require communication or collaboration
-Encourage perspective-taking
-Illustrate consequences of miscommunication or bias

For example, a puzzle may distribute pieces of crucial information among different participants. Unless they share their information openly, the group cannot move forward. This directly mirrors how lack of transparency escalates real conflicts. Another puzzle may include misleading information that reinforces stereotypes. Participants must critically analyse the source before accepting it as truth. This simulates misinformation in social conflict.

Resource distribution tasks can represent structural inequality. If one group receives more materials than another, negotiation becomes necessary. The learning objective is not to "win" but to observe how power dynamics influence behaviour.

Difficulty balance is important. If puzzles are too complex, frustration overshadows learning. If too easy, the experience lacks engagement. Testing the escape room with colleagues before implementation is highly recommended.

Accessibility must also be considered. Tasks should not disadvantage participants with different learning styles, language abilities or physical needs.

The Golden Rule of Educational Escape Rooms
In an entertainment escape room, puzzles exist to challenge logic and create excitement. But in an educational escape room for peacebuilding, puzzles exist to transform behaviour. Every puzzle must serve a clearly defined learning goal. If a task is fun but does not reinforce a peacebuilding competence, it should be removed or redesigned.

A puzzle is not just a mechanism to open a lock. It is a simulation of a real-life conflict dynamic. It should allow participants to experience communication barriers, bias, inequality, negotiation, trust or ethical tension in a safe and structured environment. Before creating any puzzle, ask yourself: What will participants practice through this task?
If the answer is unclear, the puzzle is not ready.

Designing for Experience, Not for Complexity

Educational puzzles do not need to be complicated. In fact, overly complex logic tasks often distract from the learning objective.
In peacebuilding escape rooms, the most powerful puzzles are usually:

- Require interdependence
- Expose miscommunication
- Create mild tension
- Demand collective decision-making
- Mirror real social dynamics

The focus should be on interaction, not intellectual difficulty.

Types of Educational Puzzles

Below are several puzzle types particularly effective in peacebuilding and conflict transformation contexts. Each type includes deeper explanation and practical examples.

a) Information Gap Puzzle

Core Principle: No single participant has all the information necessary to solve the task.
Each person (or subgroup) holds a piece of the puzzle. Progress is impossible unless they share openly and listen carefully.
Why This Matters in Peacebuilding?
Many real conflicts escalate because:
-Information is withheld
-Groups operate with partial narratives
-People assume they know the full story
-Communication is fragmented
This puzzle directly simulates those dynamics.

Practical Example:
Divide participants into three groups. Each group receives a different document describing a conflict situation from a different perspective.

Each document includes some correct facts, some missing information and emotional framing. The solution to the puzzle (for example, decoding a number or identifying the missing clause of a peace agreement) can only be reached if they:
-Share their documents
-Listen without interruption
-Compare perspectives

Learning Outcomes
Participants experience:
-The frustration of incomplete information
-The necessity of active listening
-The value of transparency
-The danger of assumptions

Facilitation Note: During debrief, ask a few questions such as: 'When did you realise you needed each other?, Did anyone assume their version was "the truth"?, What happened when someone was not heard?'

b) Bias Puzzle
Core Principle: Participants receive information that appears credible but contains stereotypes, misleading framing, or incomplete data. They must identify the bias before progressing.
Why This Matters in Peacebuilding?
Conflict often escalates due to:
-Stereotypes
-Prejudice
-Selective media
-Emotional narratives
-Confirmation bias
This puzzle creates a safe opportunity to confront bias.

Practical Example:
Provide a "news article" about a fictional community conflict. The article includes:
-Emotionally loaded language
-Generalisations
-Selective statistics
Participants must analyse what language is neutral, what language is biased and what information is missing. Only after identifying the bias do they receive the next clue.

Learning Outcomes
Participants practice:
-Critical reading
-Identifying manipulation
-Slowing down emotional reactions
-Questioning assumptions
Important Warning: Avoid using real-life sensitive groups in ways that could reinforce harm. Always debrief thoroughly to avoid leaving participants with reinforced stereotypes.

c) Trust Puzzle
Core Principle: One participant is temporarily dependent on others. This can involve blindfolding, restricted speech, or limited movement.
Why This Matters in Peacebuilding?
Trust is foundational to conflict transformation. Without trust dialogue collapses, negotiations fail and cooperation weakens. This puzzle makes vulnerability visible.
Practical Example:
One participant is blindfolded. The group must guide them through a simple obstacle (physical or symbolic). Rules may include; only one person can speak, ,nstructions must be short and/or no physical contact allowed.

Learning Outcomes
Participants experience:
-Vulnerability
-Responsibility
-Clarity in communication
-Emotional regulation under pressure
Accessibility Consideration: Always ensure physical safety and consent. Blindfolding should never be mandatory. Alternative versions (e.g., information restriction instead of physical restriction) can be used.

d) Resource Distribution Puzzle

Core Principle: Resources are distributed unequally. Participants must negotiate to move forward.

Why This Matters in Peacebuilding?

Structural inequality is often at the root of conflict.

This puzzle demonstrates power imbalance, frustration, perceived injustice and negotiation dynamics.

Practical Example:

Two teams are tasked with building a symbolic "bridge" (using paper, sticks, etc.). One team receives abundant materials. The other receives limited materials. The final structure requires cooperation.

Participants must:

-Negotiate sharing

-Decide fairness criteria

-Reflect on power use

Learning Outcomes

Participants observe:

-Who dominates negotiations

-How privilege influences decisions

-How fairness is defined

-Whether empathy is applied

e) Moral Dilemma Puzzle

Core Principle: There is no perfect solution. Participants must choose between two imperfect options.

Why This Matters in Peacebuilding?

Peacebuilding is rarely about "right vs wrong." It often involves compromise and ethical complexity.

Practical Example:

Participants must decide:

Option A: Save limited resources but exclude one community group.

Option B: Include everyone but reduce total benefit.

The choice unlocks different consequences in the game.

Learning Outcomes

Participants practice:

-Ethical reasoning

-Collective responsibility

-Managing disagreement

-Accepting imperfect solutions

Puzzle Design Checklist

Before finalising a puzzle, reflect deeply on the following:

1. What specific peacebuilding competence is being practiced?
2. Does this puzzle require interdependence?
3. Will participants need to communicate meaningfully?
4. Does it simulate a real conflict dynamic?
5. Is the difficulty level appropriate?
6. Is it inclusive and accessible?
7. Can it be meaningfully debriefed?
8. Does it emotionally engage without overwhelming?

If a puzzle cannot generate reflective discussion afterward, it is not strong enough.

Final Reflection on Puzzle Design

In peacebuilding escape rooms, puzzles are not obstacles. They are mirrors. They reflect:

-How we communicate
-How we respond to pressure
-How we treat others
-How we handle inequality
-How we define fairness

When designed with intention, each puzzle becomes a small laboratory for conflict transformation.

Golden Rules and Essential Principles for Educational Escape Rooms in Peacebuilding

Designing puzzles is only one part of the methodology. What makes an educational escape room effective in peacebuilding is not the mechanics, but the educational architecture behind it. The following principles are essential for youth workers, educators and trainers using this methodology.

Golden Rule 1: Learning Before Entertainment

An educational escape room is not primarily a game. It is an experiential learning environment. Entertainment is a tool, not the objective. Before finalising any design, ask:

-If participants "win" but learn nothing, is this acceptable?
-If they do not finish but reflect deeply, is this still successful?

In peacebuilding work, deep reflection is always more important than completing the final lock.

Golden Rule 2: Psychological Safety Is Non-Negotiable

Conflict simulation can trigger strong emotions. Participants may feel:

- Frustration
- Exclusion
- Powerlessness
- Anger
- Pressure

Before starting gameplay:

- Establish clear behavioural agreements.
- Clarify that conflict inside the game is fictional.
- Introduce the right to pause or step out.
- Ensure participants know they are safe.

Never simulate trauma. Never recreate real violence. Never target personal identities. Peacebuilding must not reproduce harm.

Golden Rule 3: The Debrief Is the Real Intervention

The escape room itself is only 40% of the methodology. The debrief is 60%.
Without structured reflection, the experience remains superficial. Facilitators must allocate sufficient time for:
-Emotional processing
-Behaviour analysis
-Linking to real-life situations
-Action planning
Never rush the debrief.

Golden Rule 4: Simulate Systems, Not Individuals

Avoid designing escape rooms that frame conflict as “good vs bad person.” Instead, focus on:

- Systems
- Structures
- Power dynamics
- Communication breakdowns
- Resource inequality

Peacebuilding is about transforming systems, not blaming individuals.

Golden Rule 5: Conflict Is a Learning Tool, Not a Threat

Many facilitators fear tension during gameplay. But mild tension is productive.
What matters is:
-Monitoring escalation
-Preventing personal attacks
-Keeping emotional intensity constructive
Conflict inside the escape room is not failure. It is data for debrief.

Golden Rule 6: Simplicity Creates Depth

Overcomplicated puzzles reduce learning. Simple mechanics allow more space for:
-Dialogue
-Emotional experience
-Behaviour observation
In peacebuilding education, clarity is more powerful than complexity.

Golden Rule 7: Time Pressure Should Be Intentional

Time pressure creates stress, impulsivity, hierarchies and quick decision-making. Use time strategically. Ask yourself: What behaviour does time pressure activate? Is that behaviour useful for learning? Sometimes removing time pressure creates deeper cooperation.

Golden Rule 8: Accessibility Is Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding must be inclusive.
Ensure about clear language, physical accessibility, cognitive accessibility, emotional safety and cultural sensitivity. Adapt puzzles for different learning styles. If one participant cannot engage fully, the methodology fails its own values.

Golden Rule 9: Facilitation Requires Neutrality

Facilitators must not:
-Take sides
-Reveal personal opinions during gameplay
-Reward certain behaviours openly
Your role is to observe patterns, not influence outcomes.
Neutral facilitation creates authentic learning.

Golden Rule 10: Always Connect Back to Real Life

After gameplay, explicitly ask:
-Where do we see similar dynamics in our communities?
-When have we experienced something similar?
-What could we apply in youth work?
Without this bridge, the experience remains abstract.

Additional Essential Considerations

Ethical Design

Avoid: Reproducing harmful stereotypes, Simulating real trauma scenarios, Using identities (religion, ethnicity, disability) carelessly, If sensitive themes are included, provide context and support.

Emotional Regulation Strategy

Before intense activities, teach: Short breathing techniques, Active listening basics, "Pause before reacting" principle. This increases safety during gameplay.

Group Size Management

Ideal size is 4–8 participants per escape room.
Too large → some disengage
Too small → insufficient dynamics
For larger groups, create parallel rooms.

Energy Management

Escape rooms are intense. Plan short breaks, water access and clear physical movement space. Cognitive fatigue reduces learning quality.

Measuring Impact

After session, consider: short self-assessment questionnaire, reflection journals, behaviour observation checklist, follow-up discussion after one week. Peacebuilding learning should not end with the activity.

4.4 Preparing the Physical or Digital Space

The learning environment directly influences behaviour, communication and emotional safety. In educational escape rooms for peacebuilding, space preparation is not decoration but it is part of the pedagogy.

Preparing the Physical Space

Clarify the Function of the Space:
Before arranging anything, ask:
What kind of interaction do I want to encourage?
Dialogue? → Circular seating.
Competition? → Separate tables.
Negotiation? → Facing groups.
Mediation? → Triangular structure.
Space influences behaviour.

Visibility and Transparency

Ensure:

-Timer is visible
-Instructions are readable
-Clues are accessible
-Nothing is hidden unfairly

Hidden materials should serve learning, not confusion.

Emotional Safety Preparation

Prepare the space for potential escalation:

-Clear pathway to exit
-Drinking water available
-Calm debrief seating area separate from gameplay
-Flipchart ready for reflection

Physically changing seating for debrief (e.g., circle formation) signals transition from "game" to "reflection."

Accessibility Checklist (Physical Space)

Before session, you should check:

-Can all participants move freely?
-Is text readable from distance?
-Are instructions available in simple language?
-Are chairs comfortable for long sitting?
-Is lighting sufficient?
-Are there quiet areas if someone needs emotional break?

Accessibility is not optional in peacebuilding.

A. Before Participants Arrive Checklist (Logistics & Setup)

1. Learning & Structure

□ Objectives are clearly defined and written for facilitator reference
□ Narrative flow is reviewed and logical
□ All puzzles are tested and working
□ Puzzle sequence is clear
□ Success conditions are defined
□ Debrief questions prepared in advance

2. Physical Room Layout
□ Seating arrangement matches learning objective (cooperation / negotiation / stakeholder separation)
□ Tables are stable and not overcrowded
□ Materials are organised and clearly placed
□ Nothing essential is accidentally hidden
□ Timer is visible to all participants
□ Wall space available for notes or mapping

3. Materials Check
□ All envelopes sealed and labelled
□ Locks tested and reset
□ Keys placed correctly
□ Printed materials readable and clean
□ Pens/markers available
□ Flipcharts prepared
□ Extra copies of instructions printed
□ Backup materials ready

4. Accessibility & Inclusion
□ Font size readable from distance
□ Lighting sufficient
□ Clear pathways to move around
□ Tasks adaptable if needed
□ No culturally insensitive or harmful content
□ Alternative version prepared for participants with different needs

5. Emotional Safety Preparation
□ Group agreements written on flipchart
□ Safety reminder prepared
□ Facilitator prepared to manage tension
□ Water available
□ Quiet corner or break space available
□ Clear explanation prepared that conflict is simulated

B. During Participant Arrival Checklist
□ Welcome atmosphere created
□ Instructions clearly explained
□ Time limit clarified
□ Rules explained simply
□ Participants know how to ask for help
□ Consent confirmed for any physical interaction tasks

C. During Gameplay Checklist (Facilitator Checkpoints)

□ Observe participation balance
□ Monitor emotional intensity
□ Track dominant vs silent participants
□ Note key behavioural moments
□ Avoid over-intervention
□ Provide hints only when necessary

D. Transition to Debrief Checklist

□ Timer stopped clearly
□ Physical space rearranged (circle recommended)
□ Game materials removed or set aside
□ Emotional check-in conducted
□ Reflection questions ready
□ Observations prepared to share

E. After Session Checklist (Follow-Up)

□ Quick evaluation collected
□ Key insights documented
□ Photos/materials stored
□ Puzzle materials reset
□ Reflection on facilitation done
□ Notes for improvement written

Emergency Readiness Check

□ Emergency exit accessible
□ First aid accessible
□ Clear plan if emotional escalation occurs
□ Clear plan if technical failure occurs (digital version)

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4.5 Facilitation Tips During Gameplay

Facilitating an educational escape room is different from facilitating a standard workshop. During gameplay, the facilitator must balance three roles simultaneously: observer, safety monitor and learning guide. Unlike entertainment escape rooms, where facilitators mainly provide hints, educational escape rooms require careful observation of group dynamics and emotional processes.

The facilitator's primary task is not to help participants solve puzzles, but to observe how participants interact while solving them.
These observations later become the foundation of the debrief.

1. Observe Behaviour, Not Just Progress
While participants focus on solving tasks, the facilitator should focus on observing patterns such as:
-Who speaks most frequently
-Who remains silent or excluded
-How decisions are made
-Whether participants listen to each other
–How the group reacts to mistakes or disagreement
–Whether certain participants take leadership roles
These behaviours provide valuable insight into communication dynamics and power relations within the group. Facilitators may take brief notes during gameplay to support the debrief discussion later.

2. Avoid Over-Intervention
One of the most common mistakes is intervening too quickly when participants struggle. Struggle is an essential part of the learning process.

Facilitators should only intervene when:
-The group is completely stuck for an extended period
-Frustration becomes destructive
-Participants misunderstand instructions in a way that blocks the activity
Instead of giving direct solutions, facilitators should provide minimal hints that encourage further discussion.
For example: "Is everyone sharing the information they have?", "Have you considered looking at the problem from another perspective?", "Does someone else in the group have a different piece of the puzzle?"
Hints should stimulate communication rather than reveal answers.

3. Monitor Emotional Intensity

Escape rooms naturally create pressure through time limits and uncertainty. This pressure can generate valuable learning moments, but it must remain within safe boundaries. Facilitators should observe signs such as:

-Rising frustration or tension between participants
-Personal criticism or blaming language
-Withdrawal of quieter participants
-Visible stress or discomfort

If emotional intensity escalates too much, facilitators may briefly pause the activity or introduce a short reset moment.

4. Protect Inclusive Participation

In group problem-solving activities, dominant voices can easily overshadow others.
Facilitators should watch for:

-Participants who speak rarely or not at all
-Individuals whose ideas are repeatedly ignored
-Groups splitting into small subgroups that exclude others

If necessary, facilitators can gently redirect attention: "Before moving forward, does anyone who hasn't spoken yet want to share their idea?" This encourages more balanced participation without disrupting the flow of the game.

5. Resist the Temptation to Judge Behaviour

Facilitators should remain neutral observers during gameplay.
Avoid comments such as good teamwork, that's not the right approach, or you should cooperate more. Such remarks can influence behaviour artificially and reduce authenticity.
Instead, save observations for the debrief phase, where participants can reflect on their actions themselves.

6. Capture Key Moments for Reflection

Certain moments during gameplay often reveal important dynamics:

-When the group first experiences confusion
-When someone proposes an idea that others ignore
-When participants disagree strongly
-When cooperation suddenly improves

Facilitators should mentally mark these moments and later use them during reflection:
"Earlier, when the group had different pieces of information, what happened in your discussion?"
These moments often generate the deepest insights.

7. Balance Time Pressure and Learning

Time pressure can stimulate decision-making but can also create chaos.
If the group becomes overly stressed, facilitators may adjust slightly by:

-Offering a small hint
-Extending the time by a few minutes
-Encouraging participants to pause and reorganise

The goal is not to "beat the clock," but to maintain a productive learning environment.

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4.6 Debriefing Frameworks: From Conflict Experience to Peacebuilding Insight

The debrief is the most important stage of the educational escape room methodology. It is during reflection that participants transform the experience into learning about communication, conflict and cooperation.

For peacebuilding activities, the debrief should not only analyse what happened during the game, but also connect the experience to broader questions about conflict transformation in real life. Facilitators should plan at least 30–40 minutes for debriefing, depending on the length of the activity. The following four-phase framework can help structure the reflection process.

Phase 1: Emotional Reflection

The first step is to allow participants to express their emotions after the activity. Escape rooms often generate strong feelings such as excitement, frustration, confusion or relief.
Questions may include:

- How did you feel during the activity?
- What moment was the most stressful or challenging?
- When did you feel most confident or supported by the group?
- Did anyone feel unheard or frustrated at some point?

Allowing participants to express emotions helps them transition from the intensity of the game into a reflective mindset.

Phase 2: Reconstructing the Experience

Next, invite participants to recall what happened during the activity.
Possible questions:

- What strategies did your group try first?
- When did the group start cooperating effectively?
- What obstacles created the biggest difficulties?
- When did you realise you needed information from others?

The aim is to reconstruct the sequence of events and identify key turning points in the group's collaboration. Facilitators may also introduce observations from gameplay.

Phase 3: Understanding Conflict Dynamics

At this stage, the reflection moves deeper into analysing group behaviour.
The focus is on identifying patterns related to communication, power and misunderstanding.
Questions may include:

- How were decisions made in your group?
- Did everyone feel comfortable expressing their ideas?
- What happened when people had different opinions?
- Did any misunderstandings appear during the activity?
- How did time pressure influence your behaviour?

Facilitators may also ask participants to identify moments where conflict or tension emerged and how the group responded.

This phase helps participants recognise how everyday conflicts can arise from communication breakdowns, assumptions or unequal participation.

Phase 4: Connecting to Peacebuilding in Real Life

The final phase connects the experience to real-life conflict situations.
Participants are encouraged to reflect on how the dynamics they experienced during the escape room appear in their communities, organisations or youth work practice.
Possible questions include:

- Where do you see similar communication breakdowns in real life?
- How do misunderstandings escalate conflict in your community?
- What role does trust play when groups must cooperate?
- How can listening and perspective-taking reduce tension?

Facilitators can also ask participants to identify practical peacebuilding strategies:

- What behaviours helped cooperation during the activity?
- What could be done differently next time to prevent conflict escalation?
- How could these lessons be applied in youth work or community dialogue?

This final step ensures that the escape room experience becomes a meaningful learning moment for peacebuilding.

Closing the Reflection

To conclude the session, facilitators may invite participants to share:
-one insight they gained from the experience
-one communication strategy they would like to apply in real conflicts
This final round helps consolidate learning and provides a sense of closure.

CHAPTER 5

CREATIVE TOOLS IN YOUTH WORK & ESCAPE ROOMS

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Youth work today takes place in environments marked by diversity, rapid technological change, social polarization, and increased exposure to conflicting narratives. Young people navigate disagreement not only in physical spaces such as schools or youth centers, but also in digital environments where communication is often immediate, fragmented, and emotionally charged. In such contexts, misunderstandings can escalate quickly, and opportunities for reflective dialogue are limited. This reality requires youth workers to move beyond purely discussion-based methods and integrate approaches that allow young people to practice communication, empathy, and cooperation in structured and engaging ways.

Creative tools provide such opportunities. Rather than presenting peacebuilding as a theoretical topic, they embed skills within experiential processes. Experiential learning research demonstrates that individuals learn more effectively when they engage in meaningful action and subsequently reflect on that experience. This cycle strengthens retention and transferability of skills. In peace education, where emotional awareness and relational competence are central, experiential methods are particularly relevant.

Creative tools such as peace cards, conflict mapping exercises, symbolic constructions, role-based simulations, and escape rooms transform abstract principles into lived interaction. Participants encounter challenges that require listening, perspective-taking, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving. When facilitated intentionally, these activities create safe environments where mistakes become learning opportunities rather than sources of judgment.

Within the Innovators Lab framework, creative peacebuilding tools also strengthen innovation competences. Effective innovation depends on trust, psychological safety, adaptability, and the ability to manage disagreement constructively. Escape rooms and gamified collaborative activities simulate high-pressure teamwork environments. Participants must coordinate actions, share information, and regulate emotions in order to succeed. In doing so, they build both peacebuilding and entrepreneurial capacities.

Creative tools therefore operate at the intersection of dialogue, social cohesion, and innovation. They enable youth workers to foster democratic competences, resilience, and cooperative leadership in ways that resonate with contemporary youth culture.

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5.1 Creative Tools in Youth Work

Creative tools are structured participatory methods that engage learners cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Unlike lecture-based instruction, they invite participants to interact with content through action, metaphor, and collaboration. According to the Council of Europe, democratic competences are developed most effectively when learners actively participate in meaningful processes rather than passively receive information. Creative tools operationalize this principle by creating situations where participants must navigate complexity together.

In youth work, creative tools can include visual exercises, storytelling prompts, symbolic objects, role rotation, structured dialogue cards, simulation games, and escape room challenges. These methods support inclusion by allowing different forms of expression. Some participants may communicate more comfortably through drawing or symbolic representation, while others prefer verbal discussion. Creative diversity increases accessibility and engagement.

However, creative tools are not inherently transformative. Their educational value depends on clarity of purpose, appropriate facilitation, and structured reflection. Without these elements, activities risk becoming superficial or entertainment-focused.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning theory, articulated by Kolb, emphasizes that learning is a cyclical process involving experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Concrete experience provides raw material. Reflective observation allows participants to analyze what occurred. Abstract conceptualization links insights to broader principles. Active experimentation applies these insights in new situations.

In youth peacebuilding contexts, this cycle is crucial. For example, during an escape room challenge, participants may experience communication breakdown due to interruption or assumption. In reflection, they analyze what blocked progress. They then conceptualize the importance of listening or emotional regulation. Finally, they experiment with improved communication in subsequent tasks.

This cyclical learning deepens understanding and strengthens transferability beyond the activity itself. Youth workers should intentionally structure reflection to move participants through all four stages.

Gamification and Game-Based Learning

Gamification refers to integrating elements of game design, such as narrative structure, challenge, progression, feedback, and time constraints, into non-game settings. When aligned with clear objectives, gamification can enhance motivation and engagement. However, its effectiveness depends on fostering intrinsic motivation rather than overreliance on competition or rewards.

In youth peacebuilding, cooperative game structures are particularly effective. Johnson and Johnson demonstrate that cooperative learning environments, characterized by positive interdependence and shared goals, promote higher achievement and stronger relationships. Escape rooms designed around collaboration rather than competition embody these principles. Participants succeed only if they coordinate efforts and communicate effectively. Time pressure within gamified environments also reveals authentic communication patterns. Under stress, habits such as interruption or withdrawal become visible, creating opportunities for reflection and growth.

Peace Education and Conflict Transformation

Peace education seeks to develop capacities that enable individuals to address conflict constructively and promote justice and inclusion (Harris & Morrison, 2013). It integrates cognitive understanding of structural violence with interpersonal skills such as empathy, dialogue, and negotiation.

Conflict transformation, as described by Lederach, emphasizes changing relationships and interaction patterns rather than simply resolving specific disputes. For youth workers, this perspective encourages long-term skill development rather than short-term problem solving.

Creative tools contribute to conflict transformation by making invisible dynamics visible. Conflict mapping, for example, externalizes relational tensions. Perspective-switching exercises expose differing interpretations of the same event. Escape rooms that require consensus illustrate how sustainable solutions depend on shared understanding.

Reflection and Debriefing

Reflection is essential for meaningful learning. Kolb underscores that experience alone does not guarantee understanding. Structured debriefing helps participants articulate emotional responses, identify communication patterns, and connect insights to everyday situations.

Effective debriefing includes descriptive, analytical, and application-focused questions. For example:

- What happened during the activity?
- Why did certain challenges emerge
- How does this relate to real-life group situations

Facilitators should create psychologically safe environments where participants can speak openly without fear of ridicule. Reflection consolidates learning and supports long-term behavioural change.

5.2 Link to Innovators Lab and Peacebuilding

Within the Innovators Lab project, creative tools are not treated as supplementary elements, but as central components of the learning design. The project is built on the understanding that traditional approaches are often insufficient to engage young people, particularly Generation Z, in topics such as peacebuilding, empathy, and conflict transformation. For this reason, creative, interactive, and game-based methodologies, especially educational escape rooms, are placed at the core of the project's activities.

Escape rooms, as developed within Innovators Lab, represent a practical application of creative tools in youth work. They combine storytelling, problem-solving, role-play, and collaborative challenges into a single immersive experience. Each of these elements is intentionally designed to support the development of key competences such as self-awareness, communication, cooperation, and empathy. Rather than discussing these concepts in abstract terms, participants are given the opportunity to experience them through action, interaction, and reflection.

In this context, creative tools serve multiple functions. They increase engagement, making learning more accessible and relevant for young people. They also create safe spaces where participants can explore sensitive topics without fear of judgment, thanks to the fictional and structured nature of the activities. Furthermore, they support inclusive participation by allowing different forms of expression verbal, visual, and experiential so that participants with diverse strengths can actively contribute to the process.

The Innovators Lab project also places strong emphasis on the role of youth workers as facilitators of these creative methodologies. Through training, testing, and capacity-building activities, partners develop the skills needed to design and implement their own escape room scenarios. This ensures that the use of creative tools is not limited to a single activity, but becomes a sustainable practice within youth work.

Moreover, the project highlights the adaptability of creative tools across different contexts. The escape room scenarios developed within Innovators Lab are designed to be flexible, allowing them to be implemented in various countries, cultural environments, and group settings. This adaptability is essential for ensuring that the project's impact extends beyond its initial implementation and can be transferred to other youth work contexts.

In conclusion, the Innovators Lab project demonstrates how creative tools particularly escape rooms can transform youth work practices by making learning more engaging, experiential, and impactful. By integrating creativity with clear educational objectives, the project contributes to a more innovative and effective approach to peacebuilding, empowering young people to actively participate in creating more understanding, cooperative, and inclusive communities.

5.3 Practical Application in Youth Work

Creative tools can be applied flexibly across various youth work contexts.

Standalone Peacebuilding Workshops
Workshops may begin with peace cards presenting short scenarios involving conflict or misunderstanding. Participants first reflect individually, then discuss in small groups, identifying emotions, needs, and possible constructive responses. This staged structure reduces performance pressure and supports inclusion.

Conflict mapping exercises can follow. Participants visually represent stakeholders, relationships, and underlying interests. This process encourages analytical thinking and reduces personalization of disputes.

Integration into Ongoing Programs
Creative tools can enrich leadership training, intercultural exchanges, and civic engagement programs. Structured dialogue rounds using speaking tokens ensure balanced participation. Symbolic construction tasks, such as collaboratively building a representation of community cooperation, reinforce shared responsibility.

Role rotation exercises help participants experience different perspectives, strengthening empathy and flexibility.

Integration within Escape Rooms
Escape rooms combine narrative immersion with structured challenges. Each puzzle should correspond to a specific competence, such as listening, negotiation, or assumption awareness. For example, a challenge may require reconstructing information only through careful listening. Another may require reaching consensus before unlocking the next stage.

Facilitators must monitor emotional intensity and group inclusion. Debriefing should explore both task completion and relational dynamics.

Digital adaptations may include online breakout rooms, collaborative boards, and timed dialogue challenges. Regardless of format, the core principle remains experiential learning followed by structured reflection.

5.4 Good Practice Example: the Rebuilding Babel Escape Room

A concrete example of applying creative tools in youth peacebuilding is the escape room scenario Rebuilding Babel, designed for participants aged 16–30 in mixed youth groups, student cohorts, and youth worker trainings. The activity was structured as a 90–120 minute immersive learning experience combining narrative immersion, cooperative problem-solving, and structured reflection.

The storyline draws inspiration from the myth of Babel, reframed as a metaphor for communication breakdown. Participants take on the role of "The Rebuilders," tasked with restoring six Fractured Stones, each representing a lost dialogue skill. This symbolic narrative creates emotional distance from real-world conflicts while allowing participants to recognize parallels with their own experiences. Research in experiential education emphasizes that metaphor and narrative enhance engagement and emotional processing, especially when dealing with sensitive topics.

Each of the six puzzles corresponds to a core dialogue competence:

- **The Fracture of Impatience** requires participants to recognize the need for pause in escalating discussion. During a simulated debate about resource distribution, facilitator-introduced interruptions create mild tension. The group must independently identify the need to slow down and establish a speaking rule. This puzzle reveals how quickly conflict can intensify when reaction replaces reflection. It operationalizes de-escalation in a controlled environment.
- **The Fracture of Ignorance** focuses on active listening. Participants each hold partial information and must reconstruct meaning verbally. The task exposes common listening barriers such as selective attention or preparing responses instead of receiving content. Cooperative learning research highlights that shared information structures strengthen interdependence and communication quality.

- **The Fracture of Emotional Blindness** challenges participants to identify underlying emotions in a workplace misunderstanding. Rather than focusing on surface disagreement, the group must agree on emotional drivers. This reflects conflict transformation principles emphasizing relational understanding.
- **The Fracture of No Perspective** requires identifying differences and shared interests between two conflicting narratives. This puzzle reinforces perspective-taking and demonstrates that conflicting accounts may coexist without malicious intent.
- **The Fracture of Words** introduces a cipher puzzle decoding the phrase "WORDS CAN HEAL." Participants must transform accusatory statements into ownership-based language. This aligns with nonviolent communication principles and shifts focus from blame to responsibility.
- **The Fracture of Bias** presents an undecodable script with the clue "Not every barrier is what it seems to be." Participants eventually realize the task is not to decode the script but to question their assumptions. This meta-cognitive moment fosters awareness of bias and interpretation.

The structure intentionally follows a developmental sequence: pause, listening, emotional awareness, perspective, responsible speech, and bias recognition. This mirrors both experiential learning cycles and conflict transformation logic. The final phase requires participants to restore the stones in correct order and articulate how misunderstanding escalates when dialogue skills collapse.

During implementation, facilitators observed several learning outcomes. Under time pressure, participants initially displayed habitual communication patterns such as interrupting or dominating conversation. However, as puzzles progressed, groups began to self-regulate. The first puzzle often generated frustration, which became a powerful debriefing anchor. Participants frequently reported that recognizing the need to pause changed group dynamics significantly.

In post-activity reflection, many participants articulated increased awareness of assumptions and emotional triggers. Some described noticing how silence in group discussions may signal confusion rather than agreement. Others reported applying listening techniques in subsequent workshops or academic settings.

The escape room proved adaptable across contexts. In smaller groups, one facilitator guided the entire process. In larger settings, multiple facilitators supervised parallel small groups, enhancing engagement. The activity was successfully adapted for intercultural exchange programs and entrepreneurship trainings, demonstrating its transferability beyond peace-specific contexts.

The strength of Rebuilding Babel lies in its integration of narrative symbolism, cooperative gamification, and structured reflection. It exemplifies how creative tools can operationalize theoretical peacebuilding concepts into embodied learning experiences.

5.5 Challenges and Ethical Considerations

While creative escape room methodologies offer strong engagement potential, they also present challenges requiring careful facilitation. Time pressure, while pedagogically useful for revealing communication habits, may generate stress. Some participants may experience anxiety under performance conditions. Facilitators must balance immersion with emotional safety, monitoring verbal and non-verbal cues.

Power dynamics may surface in collaborative puzzles. More confident or outspoken individuals may dominate tasks, while quieter participants withdraw. Cooperative learning theory underscores the importance of structured interdependence and balanced participation. Facilitators should encourage role rotation and actively invite quieter voices.

Cultural sensitivity is critical. Communication norms differ across contexts, and interpretations of interruption, silence, or directness vary. Scenario content must avoid reinforcing stereotypes or targeting specific identities. Using fictional narratives like Babel reduces the risk of politicization while still enabling reflection.

The final puzzle involving assumptions requires particular care. Some participants may resist recognizing bias, especially if discussions become personal. Facilitators must maintain a non-judgmental tone and frame bias awareness as a universal human tendency rather than a moral failure.

Ethical youth work practice includes establishing group agreements at the beginning, clarifying voluntary participation, and allowing opt-out options for specific tasks. Reflection should focus on behaviors and processes rather than labeling individuals.
When implemented thoughtfully, these challenges become learning opportunities. However, they require skilled facilitation grounded in awareness of group dynamics and emotional safety.

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5.6 Tips and Recommendations for Practitioners

When implementing creative tools such as the Rebuilding Babel escape room, practitioners should begin by clearly defining the specific dialogue competences they aim to develop and ensure that each activity or puzzle is intentionally aligned with those objectives. The sequence of challenges should reflect a logical developmental progression, allowing participants to move from foundational skills such as pausing and listening toward more complex capacities such as perspective-taking and bias awareness.

Facilitators are encouraged to introduce tension thoughtfully, recognizing that mild pressure can reveal authentic communication patterns, while excessive stress may hinder learning. Frustration should be normalized as a natural component of collaborative problem-solving and reframed as an opportunity for insight rather than failure.

Structured debriefing must remain central, with sufficient time allocated for participants to connect their in-game behaviors to real-life interactions in schools, workplaces, and communities. Practitioners should actively encourage shared leadership and rotating speaking roles to prevent dominance by more vocal participants and to ensure inclusive engagement. Pacing may need adjustment depending on group dynamics, but reflection time should never be sacrificed for speed. Above all, psychological safety must be prioritized, particularly when exploring sensitive topics such as assumptions or bias.

These themes should be framed as universal human tendencies open to growth and awareness, rather than moral shortcomings. When facilitated with intentionality and care, creative escape rooms function not merely as engaging activities but as structured laboratories for practicing dialogue and peacebuilding competences in a safe and transformative environment.

CHAPTER 6

FACILITATING PEACEBUILDING ACTIVITIES WITH YOUTH

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This section focuses on the role of the facilitator in ensuring that peacebuilding games and activities with young people become truly meaningful and transformative learning experiences. While games naturally bring energy, interaction, and connection into a group, their real educational value lies in how they are introduced, guided, processed, and evaluated.

It explores how facilitators can intentionally shape group dynamics, build trust, and create emotionally safe spaces, especially when sensitive topics such as conflict, identity, power, or justice emerge. The emphasis is on moving beyond gameplay itself and creating space for reflection, dialogue, and critical thinking. Through thoughtful facilitation, young people are supported in connecting the experience to their own lives, communities, and social realities.

A central part of this section is the role of reflection and evaluation in non-formal peace education. These are not administrative tasks or formal endings to an activity; they are essential pedagogical practices that help participants understand what they experienced, how they felt, what they learned, and why it matters. By clearly distinguishing between reflection (participant-centered meaning-making) and evaluation (assessing impact and effectiveness), this section demonstrates how both processes work together to deepen and sustain learning.

It also highlights how evaluation results should actively inform and improve future practice, ensuring that feedback becomes a living part of program development rather than a forgotten formality. Finally, the section introduces a range of creative reflection methods, digital tools for participatory learning assessment, and Youthpass as a structured framework that links self-reflection, competence development, and long-term recognition of learning outcomes.

6.1 The Role of the Facilitator in Peacebuilding Activities

Who is the Facilitator?

In formal education, the role of the educator is usually clearly defined, structured, and institutionally regulated. In non-formal education, however, the situation is more nuanced. Because of its holistic, participant-centered approach and its focus on personal and social development, non-formal education requires educators to adopt multiple roles depending on the context, objectives, and needs of the group.

Although these roles often overlap and there is no single fixed definition, two commonly used terms are trainer and facilitator.

A trainer is typically a subject-matter expert whose primary responsibility is to transfer knowledge and specific skills to participants. In this role, learning is more structured and can involve more frontal or content-driven methods compared to other non-formal approaches. The trainer takes a more central position in the session, especially when introducing new theoretical frameworks, concepts, or practical tools. This role is particularly valuable when participants need foundational knowledge or technical competencies.

A facilitator, in contrast, focuses less on delivering content and more on guiding the learning process and supporting group dynamics. The facilitator works with the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives that participants already bring into the space. Instead of positioning themselves as the main source of information, they use inputs as triggers, reflections, or summaries to deepen collective understanding. In facilitation, power and responsibility are shared with the group, and decisions about the process are often made collaboratively. The emphasis is on personal growth, critical reflection, and self-directed learning, allowing each participant to take what is meaningful for them rather than following a standardized outcome. Facilitation is especially effective when the aim is transformation, both at the individual and group level.

Facilitating peacebuilding with young people

Facilitating peacebuilding with young people goes far beyond simply guiding activities; it involves creating inclusive learning environments where participants can explore, connect, and grow together. A good facilitator recognises that every learner is different and that meaningful engagement requires more than delivering content, it needs active involvement, reflection, and shared discovery.

It is extremely important that, as a facilitator, you have a strong command of your topic and real expertise in the field you are working in. Facilitation does not mean a lack of knowledge. On the contrary, credibility, confidence, and the ability to guide meaningful dialogue are rooted in deep understanding.

A good facilitator is not only skilled in managing group processes but is also grounded in solid area-specific competences. This ensures that discussions remain accurate, relevant, and purposeful, especially in sensitive fields such as peacebuilding.

Becoming a skilled facilitator takes time, reflection, and hands-on experience. Effective facilitation is rooted in learning by doing. People retain far more when they actively participate, explain ideas, and reflect on their experiences than when they only read or listen. This highlights the facilitator's responsibility to design interactive and participatory learning spaces rather than relying solely on lectures or one-way communication.

A strong facilitator combines personal qualities with practical competences. While some strengths are shaped by personality and life experience, many can be developed through conscious practice and reflection.

Key personal and professional qualities include:

- Strong expertise in the thematic area (e.g., peace education, civil society, democracy, human rights)
- Flexibility to adapt methods and plans when needed
- Understanding of group development and dynamics
- Ability to create a safe and supportive atmosphere
- Attention to space, materials, and the learning environment
- Creativity and innovative thinking
- Trust in participants and belief in their capacities
- Patience and strong listening skills
- Self-awareness and openness to continuous learning
- Confidence without arrogance
- Respect for different opinions and perspectives

The primary role of a facilitator is to make learning possible not to dominate it. This means creating conditions in which participants can think independently, share openly, and take ownership of their growth.

Effective facilitation also involves:

- Being well prepared and clear about objectives
- Introducing the program structure at the beginning
- Managing time wisely while allowing flexibility
- Asking precise and meaningful questions
- Guiding discussions without taking control of them
- Explaining tasks clearly and visually when needed

- Summarizing key insights and discussions
- Encouraging participants to answer each other's questions
- Allowing space for choice, rather than forcing participation

In some situations, working as a facilitation team can enrich the process, providing participants with different perspectives and sources of support.

6.2 Guiding Group Dynamics and Emotional Safety

Why is it important?

Group dynamics refers to the patterns of interaction, communication, influence, roles, and relationships that develop within a group over time.
Emotional safety means creating a space where participants feel respected, heard, and protected from ridicule, humiliation, or harm.

Guiding group dynamics and ensuring emotional safety are central responsibilities of a facilitator working with youth. Peacebuilding activities often address sensitive themes such as identity, conflict, discrimination, power, and injustice. These topics can trigger strong emotions, differing opinions, and personal memories. For this reason, the facilitator must intentionally create and maintain a space where participants feel respected, heard, and protected.

Group dynamics refer to the patterns of interaction, communication, influence, and relationships that develop within a group. These dynamics are not static; they evolve over time as participants build trust, express disagreements, or negotiate roles within the group. A skilled facilitator observes these dynamics carefully, noticing who speaks often, who remains silent, who influences others, and where tensions may be emerging. This awareness allows timely and thoughtful interventions that support balance and inclusion.

Ensuring emotional safety means creating conditions in which participants feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of ridicule, judgment, or harm. This can be fostered by:

- Establishing clear group agreements at the beginning (e.g., confidentiality, respect, no interrupting).
- Modeling empathy, active listening, and non-violent communication.
- Encouraging equal participation and gently inviting quieter voices into the conversation.
- Addressing harmful language or behavior immediately and constructively.
- Providing participants with the option to step back or take breaks when needed.

Facilitators must also regulate their own presence in the room. Remaining calm during moments of disagreement, validating emotions without escalating conflict, and reframing tensions into learning opportunities are essential skills in peacebuilding spaces. Emotional safety does not mean avoiding disagreement; rather, it means holding disagreements in ways that promote understanding instead of division.

When participants feel secure and valued, they are more willing to engage deeply, challenge assumptions, and collaborate across differences which are all fundamental outcomes of meaningful peace education.

Setting the Foundation: Creating Safety, Belonging, and Shared Ownership

Before engaging in deeper dialogue or sensitive topics, facilitators must intentionally create an environment where participants feel safe, welcomed, and valued. A strong foundation is built on connection, clarity, and shared responsibility.

Welcoming and Introducing the Group

Start by creating a warm and respectful atmosphere. Greet participants individually, paying attention to cultural norms and personal boundaries. In some contexts, a handshake may feel natural; in others, it may not be appropriate. Observe and follow participants' cues. Introduce yourself and your facilitation team briefly, then invite participants to introduce themselves in ways that feel accessible and comfortable. This might include sharing preferred names, using creative icebreakers, small group exchanges, drawing activities, or light movement-based introductions. The goal is not only to learn names but to signal that every individual matters in the space.

Building Group Cohesion

True group formation goes beyond introductions. Trust develops gradually and requires intentional design. Include activities that foster cooperation, storytelling, and mutual understanding. Equally important is informal, unstructured time that allows participants to interact freely and organically. Semi-structured moments such as storytelling circles,

creative exercises, or collaborative games help build bonds without feeling forced. Rather than over-managing every interaction, allow space for self-organization and collective ownership of shared experiences.

Clarifying Needs and Expectations

A participant-centered approach begins with understanding who is in the room. Whenever possible, gather insights about participants' needs beforehand through surveys or application forms. At the start of the program, collect expectations and return to them throughout the process. Recognize that needs evolve — as participants gain knowledge and confidence, their questions and interests may deepen. Remain flexible and transparent: adapt when possible, and acknowledge honestly when certain needs cannot be fully addressed. Encourage peer learning by inviting participants to contribute their expertise and experiences. While structure is necessary, responsiveness to the group should always take priority over rigid adherence to a schedule.

Co-Creating the Social Contract

Instead of presenting predefined rules, engage participants in co-creating shared agreements. Frame this process as building a small, temporary community together, where mutual respect and responsibility are foundational. This democratic exercise is especially meaningful in youth work contexts, where participants may be accustomed to top-down decision-making. By collaboratively defining how the space will function — including principles such as confidentiality, respectful dialogue, and active listening — facilitators model shared power and collective accountability. The resulting social contract strengthens trust, ownership, and long-term engagement.

Guiding the Core Journey: Deepening Learning and Navigating Group Dynamics

During the main part of the program or the game, the focus shifts toward achieving your learning goals while continuously observing the group process and adapting when necessary. Content and process should move together. Facilitation is not only about delivering sessions but about guiding an evolving journey.

Take participants on a structured learning journey.

Design the flow of the event with clear logic, for example, moving from surface-level topics to deeper exploration, or from broad concepts to more focused application. Make this structure visible to participants. Explicitly connect sessions to one another and explain how each step builds on the previous one. Refer back to participants' expressed needs and adjust when possible. Accept that time is limited; focus on what truly matters rather than trying to cover everything. Always leave sufficient space for reflection and processing, since this is where experience transforms into meaningful learning.

Include all participants.

Be attentive to different learning styles, abilities, and personality types. Some participants may need more time to feel comfortable, while others engage immediately. Adjust methods to ensure diverse ways of participation such as discussion, writing, movement, small groups, visual tools, etc. Inclusion requires awareness and flexibility.

Maintain a healthy relationship between facilitators and participants.
Be approachable and authentic while respecting your own boundaries. Avoid favoring particular participants, and discuss this risk openly within your facilitation team. Recognize that some participants may connect more easily with certain facilitators and this can be a resource rather than a problem. Stay conscious of how your team's composition, personalities, and working styles influence the group dynamic.

Ask for feedback and use it constructively.
Regularly invite feedback from participants and colleagues, and be open to reasonable adjustments (e.g., changes in timing, structure, or setting). Feedback strengthens trust and improves the quality of the process.

Practice what you teach.
Facilitators model the values they promote. If you speak about nonviolent communication, respect, or empathy, your behavior must reflect these principles. Authentic facilitation requires self-awareness, paying attention to your words, tone, body language, and reactions. Mistakes will happen; use them as learning opportunities rather than hiding or blaming.

Encourage growth beyond the comfort zone.
Create a safe environment first, and when the group is ready, gently guide them toward deeper conversations, sometimes called a "brave space." Establish agreements around empathic listening and perspective-taking. Monitor both verbal and non-verbal signals and adjust your moderation style accordingly. Be mindful not to push discussions for the sake of personal ego or agenda.

Handle conflict with neutrality and care.
If tensions escalate, remain calm and avoid prematurely closing the discussion, as these moments can lead to important breakthroughs. However, protect participants from personal attacks, humiliation, or dehumanization. Address emotions with empathy and demonstrate trust in the group's ability to work through disagreement. After intense situations, follow up individually with affected participants to ensure proper closure.

Know your limits
Never guide a process toward areas you are not equipped to handle. Peacebuilding activities, especially those addressing trauma or sensitive identity issues, can have deep and lasting impacts. Do not treat them lightly. Facilitating sensitive topics requires specific skills and often supervision or support from experienced professionals. Be honest about your competencies and respectful of the responsibility you carry.

Closing the Journey: Integration, Evaluation, and Meaningful Departure

The closing stage of a facilitation process is a crucial moment to ensure clarity, integration, and respectful completion of the shared experience.

Close what was opened.

Return to the starting point of the event and revisit the initial goals and expectations. Reflect together on how these objectives were addressed throughout the process. Identify any topics that remain unfinished and consider how relevant they are. If something could not be fully explored, acknowledge it and suggest possible follow-up resources or next steps. Provide participants with "farewell resources" such as useful links, further reading, contacts, and opportunities for continued engagement. If appropriate and within your comfort, share your contact information for future questions or collaboration.

Reflection.

Create intentional space for participants to engage in final reflection. This allows them to process their learning, connect insights, and articulate what they are taking away from the experience. Reflection helps transform activities into meaningful and lasting learning.

Evaluation.

Invite participants to evaluate the process, content, and facilitation. Treat this as a learning opportunity for yourself and your team. Honest feedback strengthens future practice and demonstrates that participants' voices continue to matter until the very end.

Saying goodbye.

Ending a peacebuilding experience can be emotionally complex. Even after only a few days, participants may have shared intense conversations, vulnerable moments, and transformative insights. Returning to everyday life can bring mixed emotions — sadness, joy, relief, frustration, hope, or uncertainty. Provide space to acknowledge these feelings without minimizing them. Normalize the transition and encourage participants to carry their insights, connections, and growth into their daily realities with care and intention.

6.3 Learning Beyond the Activity: Reflection & Evaluation

The Difference Between Reflection and Evaluation

Although reflection and evaluation are closely connected, they serve different purposes in non-formal education settings, especially in youth work and peacebuilding.

Reflection is an internal, participant-centered process. Its purpose is to help young people process their experiences, explore emotions, recognize learning, and connect activities to their own lives.

Reflection focuses on questions such as:

- What did I experience?
- How did I feel?
- What did I learn about myself or others?
- How does this relate to my real life?

In non-formal education, reflection is continuous and often creative. It can take the form of storytelling, metaphors, dialogue circles, journaling, movement exercises, or visual methods. Reflection prioritizes self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, and personal growth.

Evaluation is a broader and more structured process that examines the effectiveness and impact of a learning activity or program. It looks at whether objectives were achieved and how the process can be improved.

Evaluation addresses questions such as:

- Were the learning goals met?
- What worked well and what did not?
- Did participants develop specific competences (e.g., empathy, cooperation, communication)?
- How can future activities be improved?

Evaluation may include surveys, feedback forms, competence self-assessments, facilitator observations, or digital tools. While reflection focuses mainly on the participant's internal learning, evaluation also serves facilitators, organizations, and funders by providing evidence of impact and accountability.

> Evaluation in youth peacebuilding activities is essential for understanding how and whether peace education efforts are actually working, not just whether participants enjoyed an activity, but how it contributes to meaningful learning, behaviour change, and longer-term peace outcomes. This is especially important because peacebuilding initiatives often aim to transform attitudes, foster agency, and support young people to act as active contributors to peace processes outcomes that are complex and not easily measured without careful evaluation.

Participatory evaluation strengthens the quality of peacebuilding work by:

- Helping practitioners understand what worked, for whom, and why rather than assuming impact.
- Empowering youth to name and interpret their own learning and contributions to peace processes.
- Providing evidence to refine programs, improve design, and inform future peace education strategies.
- Supporting accountability to participants, communities, and stakeholders.

Games used in youth peacebuilding can be engaging, emotional, and dynamic. They create powerful shared experiences and often simulate real-life situations such as conflict, cooperation, negotiation, or exclusion. However, without clear evaluation, it is difficult to understand whether these experiences actually lead to meaningful learning.

Linking gameplay to learning outcomes requires asking intentional questions:

- What skills were practiced during the game?
- What attitudes or assumptions were challenged?
- What emotions emerged, and why?
- How does this experience connect to real-life situations?
- What would participants do differently in a similar real-world context?

Reflection transforms action into awareness. After a game, participants have the opportunity to explore what happened, how they felt, why certain dynamics emerged, and how the experience connects to real-life situations. This process deepens understanding and allows young people to move from surface impressions to meaningful insights.

Through guided reflection, participants can:

- Recognize patterns of behavior, communication, or power dynamics that emerged during the game.
- Identify emotions such as frustration, cooperation, exclusion, or trust, and understand their roots.
- Link simulated experiences to real societal issues like inequality, conflict, leadership, or decision-making.
- Develop self-awareness about their roles, reactions, and choices.
- Strengthen key peacebuilding competences such as empathy, critical thinking, and collaboration.

Using Evaluation Results to Improve Future Activities

Evaluation only becomes meaningful when its results are used to inform future practice. In youth peacebuilding work, feedback and reflection should not remain on paper or in digital reports — they should actively shape the design, structure, and facilitation of upcoming activities.

After collecting evaluation data whether through surveys, creative reflection methods, observations, or discussions facilitators should analyse it thoughtfully. This includes identifying recurring themes, unexpected insights, areas of strong impact, and aspects that may need improvement. Patterns in participant feedback can reveal which activities were most engaging, which methods supported deeper learning, and where adjustments are necessary.

Using evaluation results effectively may involve:

- Refining objectives to better match participants' needs
- Adjusting methodologies to improve inclusiveness and engagement
- Revising time allocation and pacing
- Strengthening facilitation strategies for group dynamics
- Adding or simplifying content where confusion was identified
- Integrating participants' suggestions into future program design

It is also important to close the feedback loop by sharing key insights with participants and explaining how their input will influence future activities. This reinforces trust, transparency, and shared ownership of the learning process.

On a broader level, continuous use of evaluation results contributes to long-term program development. By comparing outcomes across different activities, organizations can track competence development, identify trends, and strengthen their overall peacebuilding strategy.

6.4 Creative Reflection Methods

Reflection is the bridge between experience and transformation. In youth peacebuilding activities, creative reflection methods allow participants to process insights not only cognitively, but also emotionally and socially. Because peacebuilding touches values, identity, power, and relationships, reflective practice must go beyond standard question-and-answer formats. Creative approaches open space for deeper expression, shared understanding, and collective meaning-making.

Examples of creative reflection approaches include:

Visual and Symbolic Methods

Activities such as drawing metaphors, body mapping (e.g., linking learning to the "brain," "heart," or "hands"), or creating visual "fishing nets" and "icebergs" allow participants to express insights symbolically. These techniques help surface emotional and implicit learning that may be difficult to articulate in direct conversation.

Storytelling and Metaphor

Inviting participants to describe their experience through a story, an object, or a metaphor supports imaginative thinking and emotional honesty. For example, participants might compare their learning journey to a bridge, a storm, a seed growing, or a map unfolding. Such metaphors often reveal deeper interpretations and personal connections to the material.

Role-Based and Experiential Reflections

Participants can reflect from the perspective of a role they played during an activity or simulation. Questions like "What did my role experience?" or "What would I do differently next time?" encourage critical thinking and perspective-taking. This method strengthens empathy and helps link simulated scenarios to real-life conflicts or social dynamics.

Dialogical Formats

Structured discussion methods such as fishbowls, paired exchanges, or rotating reflection circles ensure balanced participation and active listening. These formats reinforce that reflection is not only individual but collective, a shared exploration of meaning.

Movement and Embodied Reflection

Some participants process experiences more effectively through physical movement or spatial positioning (e.g., standing along a spectrum to express agreement or discomfort). Embodied reflection can reveal group patterns and emotional trends that may remain hidden in purely verbal formats.

The following reflection methods offer creative and participatory ways to make learning visible and meaningful.

1. The Fishing Net & Pond method is a visual and participatory reflection activity that helps a group collectively review what was achieved during a training and what remains unfinished.
On a flipchart, the facilitator draws a fishing net floating in a pond and explains its meaning: inside the net, participants write what was "caught", such as key learnings, conclusions, skills, or achievements; in the pond, they add what was not fully addressed, unanswered questions, or expectations that were not met. After taking a few minutes for individual reflection, participants come forward to add their thoughts in the appropriate area. The group then discusses patterns and insights together. This method makes learning visible, acknowledges both strengths and gaps, and reinforces that reflection is an ongoing and shared process.

2. The Evaluation Iceberg is a reflective method that helps participants prioritize insights and learning outcomes from a training. On a flipchart, the facilitator draws a large iceberg divided into three sections. At the tip of the iceberg, participants write key insights or results that must be implemented immediately. In the section below the surface, they note issues or learnings with strong personal relevance that require attention and further reflection. At the bottom of the iceberg, they add newly acquired knowledge or ideas that are valuable but can wait before being applied. After explaining the structure, participants take time to reflect and write their thoughts in the appropriate sections. This method supports deeper awareness, helps distinguish urgency from long-term learning, and encourages intentional follow-up after the activity.

3. The Metaphor reflection method invites participants to evaluate a training or activity through symbolic and creative expression. After briefly revisiting the main topics and activities of the event, the facilitator asks participants to choose an object, image, plant, condition, word, or phrase that best represents how they feel about the experience.

Each participant then shares their chosen metaphor and explains its meaning. For example:
"I feel like a watering can filled to the top, ready to nourish new plants."
"I feel like an okada, eager to carry many ideas into different spaces."
"I feel like a young plant taking root and growing, but still needing care and support."
Participants share one by one, creating a space for individual reflection and collective listening. This method allows emotions, insights, and personal interpretations to emerge in a creative and non-judgmental way. It supports deeper self-expression, encourages empathy within the group, and transforms evaluation into a meaningful and engaging experience.

4. The **Fishbowl** method is an interactive reflection technique that can be used for daily check-ins or final evaluations. It creates a structured dialogue space where everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard.

First, arrange the room by placing three or four chairs in the center of a circle formed by the remaining chairs. Explain to the group that only the participants seated in the inner circle (the "fishbowl") are allowed to speak. When someone finishes sharing, they move back to a chair in the outer circle, making space for another participant to enter the center and contribute.

The facilitator then poses an evaluative question related to the training, such as:

- "What was the most interesting topic for you?"
- "What challenged you the most?"
- "What insight are you taking with you today?"

One participant begins by sharing from the inner circle, then rotates out to allow the next person to speak. This continues until everyone who wishes to contribute has had the opportunity. The Fishbowl method ensures balanced participation, encourages active listening, and creates a focused yet dynamic reflection space.

Because participants physically move between circles, it keeps the process engaging and reinforces shared responsibility for dialogue.

5. The Draw & Write method is a creative and holistic reflection exercise that invites participants to explore their learning in a visual and embodied way. It can be used both at the beginning of a training to gather expectations and at the end to evaluate what participants have gained.

The facilitator draws the outline of a human body on a flipchart and explains that each body part symbolically represents a different dimension of learning. Participants are invited to reflect on their experience and write directly onto the drawing, connecting their insights to the relevant parts of the body.
For example, the brain can represent new knowledge, concepts, or methods learned; the heart may reflect emotions, values, or empathy developed; the hands can symbolize practical tools or skills gained; the legs might indicate motivation to act or ideas to take forward; and the stomach can express what felt nourishing or meaningful during the process.

By linking learning to the body, this method encourages participants to think beyond purely cognitive outcomes and to recognize emotional, practical, and motivational aspects of their experience. The visual nature of the exercise makes collective learning visible and often reveals interesting patterns in how the group perceived the training.

6. The 5 Finger Reflection is a simple, visual evaluation method often used in non-formal education, youth work, and peacebuilding activities. Each finger represents one reflection question.

- Thumb – What was good? What did I like? What worked well? What felt meaningful?
- Index Finger – What will I take with me? What did I learn? What insight or skill will I use in the future?
- Middle Finger – What was challenging or frustrating? What was difficult? What didn't work for me?
- Ring Finger – What will I commit to? What action will I take? What will I apply in my work/life?
- Little Finger – What was missing? What was small but important? What needs more attention next time?

Participants reflect individually and then share in pairs or in plenary.

6.5 Digital Tools for Reflection, Evaluation and Learning Assessment

There are several well-recognised digital tools and evaluation approaches used in youth work and peacebuilding that help facilitators measure engagement, learning outcomes, and impact more systematically rather than relying solely on observation or anecdotal feedback. These tools appear in manuals and toolkits developed for youth workers and peace educators to strengthen quality, adaptability, and evidence-informed practice.

Here are some examples of digital tools that can support evaluation in non-formal activities activities:

1. Google Forms (forms.google.com) is a simple and accessible tool for creating online surveys, questionnaires, and registration forms.

It is widely used in youth work and educational settings to collect data efficiently and organize responses automatically in digital format.
Youth workers and facilitators commonly use Google Forms to:

- Assess participants' needs before an activity.
- Collect registrations and application submissions.
- Gather feedback after workshops or training sessions.
- Conduct pre- and post-activity evaluations to measure learning outcomes.

The platform allows the use of different question types, including multiple choice, short answers, scales, and open-ended reflections. Responses are automatically compiled and visualized in charts, making it easier to analyse patterns and identify trends.

2. Mentimeter (www.mentimeter.com) is an interactive presentation and audience engagement platform that helps presenters, educators, and facilitators create dynamic and participatory experiences during live events, meetings, trainings, and workshops.

It allows you to collect real-time feedback, encourage discussion, and actively involve participants through interactive features such as:

- Live polls
- Word clouds
- Multiple-choice questions
- Open-ended questions
- Quizzes
- Scales and rankings

Participants can join using their smartphones or laptops, without creating an account, which makes it simple and accessible.

3. Kahoot! (www.kahoot.com) is an interactive digital learning platform designed to make educational activities more engaging and participatory. It allows educators, trainers, and youth workers to create quizzes, polls, surveys, and discussion prompts that participants can access via smartphones, tablets, or computers. By introducing game-based elements such as points, competition, and instant feedback, Kahoot transforms traditional assessment into a shared and dynamic learning experience.

For youth work and peacebuilding activities, Kahoot can be used:

- To assess prior knowledge before a session.
- To check understanding during activities.
- To reinforce key concepts at the end of a workshop.
- To stimulate discussion around sensitive or complex topics.

The primary purpose of Kahoot as a learning and evaluation tool is to increase engagement and enhance learning outcomes. Its game-based format motivates participants to stay attentive, respond actively, and test their understanding in real time. Immediate feedback allows both facilitators and participants to quickly identify areas of strength and gaps in knowledge.

4. Padlet (www.padlet.com) is a digital collaboration tool that allows participants to post ideas, reflections, images, videos, and links on a shared virtual wall in real time. It is accessible via web and mobile devices and works well in both in-person and online youth activities.

Padlet can be used for:

- Collecting expectations at the beginning of a training
- Post-game reflection and emotional check-ins
- Evaluating learning outcomes at the end of a session
- Documenting collective insights or action plans

Padlet is especially useful for collective reflection and inclusive participation, as participants can contribute simultaneously and, if needed, anonymously. This makes it a helpful tool for emotional check-ins, post-game reflections, brainstorming, and evaluation activities.

5. Typeform (www.typeform.com) is an interactive online survey and form-building tool designed to create visually engaging and user-friendly questionnaires. Its conversational format showing one question at a time makes the experience more personal and accessible for participants.
In youth work and peacebuilding activities, Typeform can be used to:

- Collect registrations and applications
- Assess participants' needs before a workshop
- Conduct pre- and post-activity evaluations
- Gather feedback after sessions
- Measure shifts in attitudes, knowledge, or skills

It is particularly useful when facilitators want evaluation to feel interactive and youth-friendly rather than formal or administrative.

6. Miro (www.miro.com) is an online whiteboard platform that supports collaborative work in real time. It allows participants to co-create content on a shared digital space using sticky notes, drawings, diagrams, images, and text.
In youth peacebuilding and non-formal education activities, these tools are particularly useful for:

- Brainstorming ideas collectively
- Mapping conflicts, stakeholders, or power dynamics
- Designing action plans or project concepts
- Visualizing group discussions
- Facilitating post-game reflection through diagrams or thematic clustering.

Miro offers advanced features such as templates, mind maps, flowcharts, and voting options, making it suitable for more complex mapping and strategy work. By making ideas visible and interactive, it strengthens collective analysis, shared decision-making, and reflective learning processes in youth peacebuilding settings.

6.6 Youthpass as a Tool for Evaluation and Reflection in Youth Peacebuilding

Youthpass (www.youthpass.eu) is a European recognition and reflection instrument designed to support young people and youth workers in documenting and articulating learning gained through non-formal and informal activities within Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps programmes. Its value lies not just in the certificate itself, but in the process of self-reflection and evaluation that leads to it.

At its core, Youthpass invites participants to engage deeply with their experiences, to identify what they learned, and to describe how the activity contributed to their personal, social, intercultural, and civic competences. This makes it a powerful instrument for reflecting on impact and learning in peacebuilding activities with youth.

Youthpass is not just a certificate; it is a learning process. Participants work, often with a mentor, youth worker, or facilitator, to reflect on their project experience, explore what they have learned, and make sense of how that learning connects with broader personal and professional development. This reflection includes describing concrete outcomes, challenges overcome, skills developed, and changes in perspective or behaviour.

In peacebuilding contexts, this means going beyond surface feedback. Rather than simply asking whether young people enjoyed an activity, Youthpass encourages them to articulate:

- What specific competences they developed (for example, communication, conflict transformation, intercultural understanding).
- How these competences emerged through their interactions and participation.
- How their attitudes, behaviour, or understanding of peace and conflict have shifted as a result of the activity.

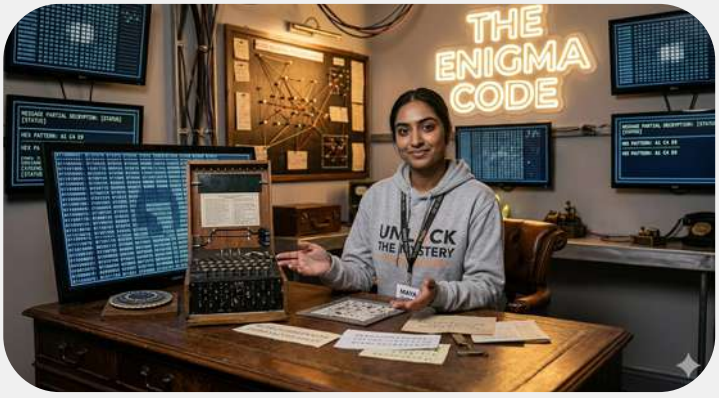
This reflective process becomes a structured form of evaluation: young people identify their own learning outcomes, link them to real experiences, and express them in their own words. The second key feature of Youthpass is that the reflection feeds into a recognition tool—the Youthpass certificate. This certificate records the participant's reflections, the competences they self-assess, and the context of their participation. For youth workers and participants alike, this documentation gives visibility to non-formal learning that might otherwise remain invisible.

In evaluation terms, this does two important things:

1. It makes learning outcomes explicit rather than assumed. Participants have to articulate what they learned and how.
2. It provides tangible evidence of that learning, which can be used for further reflection, for personal development portfolios, academic or employment contexts, and for organisational learning.

The power of Youthpass lies in its capacity to link individual reflection with wider evaluation processes. When integrated into a project's planning and follow-up phases, Youthpass can support:

- Ongoing reflection: Project participants reflect during, not just after, the activity.
- Dialogue between participants and facilitators: The self-assessment dialogue deepens understanding of learning processes.
- Evaluation of project design: Facilitators and coordinators can use participants' reflections to assess the quality and impact of methods, sessions, and activities.
- Long-term learning evaluation: Because Youthpass encourages participants to connect their learning to real-world contexts, it can reveal sustained impact beyond the project itself.



Youthpass is also designed with youth workers in mind. For training activities involving practitioners, the European Training Strategy (ETS) competence model is used for self-assessment, helping youth workers reflect on their professional competences in a structured way. This integration strengthens their ability to evaluate and articulate their own professional learning within a peacebuilding context.

In youth peacebuilding work, meaningful evaluation is rooted in reflection, evidence, and dialogue. Youthpass offers a structured but flexible way to support this, by guiding participants through self-assessment of competences and learning outcomes, and by providing documented recognition that can be used for personal, educational, and professional development. Integrated into projects from preparation to follow-up, Youthpass becomes both a reflective evaluation tool and a bridge between experience and impact, enabling young people and youth workers to make learning visible and meaningful.

CHAPTER 7

READY TO USE SCENARIOS

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7.1 Inner Labyrinth

Target Group (age, profile): 18+, youth
Estimated Duration: 60 minutes
Number of Participants: 10 people

Educational Objectives
This escape room supports experiential learning in:

- **Peacebuilding:** Participants experience how mutual understanding and listening lead to shared solutions.
- **Cooperation:** Tasks require teamwork and collective problem-solving.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Participants navigate differing viewpoints and limited resources.
- **Self-awareness:** Reflection on emotions, behaviors, and group roles.
- **Communication:** Active listening, clarity, and trust-building.

Key Competences Addressed
Please tick or describe:

Empathy
Critical Thinking
Cooperation
Communication
Problem-solving

□ Other:

Scenario Background / Storyline
Participants enter a symbolic **"Inner Labyrinth"** representing the human mind. The labyrinth remains locked until inner contradictions are recognized and balance is restored.
To escape, participants move through stages reflecting:

- self-awareness
- dialogue
- navigating conflict
- cooperation

Each decision and interaction impacts the whole group.
The journey ends with a **mirror**, symbolizing self-reflection. Participants realize the labyrinth reflects their inner world and that freedom comes through understanding themselves and supporting others.

Core message:

Inner peace begins with self-awareness, dialogue, and mutual understanding.

Mission & Success Criteria

Mission:

Solve puzzles collaboratively to escape the labyrinth.

Success:

The team unlocks the final object (mirror) by:

- communicating effectively
- resolving challenges together
- demonstrating trust and shared decision-making

Game Structure & Flow

- The game consists of **18 puzzles**, divided into **3 groups of 6**
- Each group reveals **one digit** of a **3-digit code (059)**
- Each puzzle reveals a **time**, which must be marked on clocks
- Clock hand positions visually form numbers (0, 5, 9)

End goal:

Enter the final code to unlock a chest/closet containing the mirror.

Puzzles & Challenges

The puzzles vary in type to engage different skills:

- **Logic & strategy:** chess puzzle, coordinate grid
- **Visual recognition:** picture counting, geometry shapes
- **Decoding systems:** Morse code, Caesar cipher, phone keypad
- **Assembly & interaction:** puzzle pieces, cut-out overlays
- **Navigation & spatial thinking:** labyrinth, compass
- **Language-based:** scrambled letters, crossword
- **Analytical tasks:** calendar, book cipher, odd-one-out

Each puzzle reveals a **time clue**, contributing to the final code.

Roles & Group Dynamics

No fixed roles—participants naturally take on functions such as:

- Observer (notices details)
- Communicator (shares ideas)
- Analyzer (solves logic tasks)
- Organizer (manages process)
- Supporter (maintains group atmosphere)

Roles shift throughout the game, encouraging flexibility and inclusion.

Materials & Setup

Key materials:

- Printed puzzle sheets (18 puzzles)
- Clock poster + paper clocks
- Locked chest/closet with mirror
- Puzzle-specific items (transparent sheets, book, shapes, etc.)
- Pens, envelopes for organization

Space:

- One room with space for movement and teamwork
- Tables + wall space for visual mater

Facilitation Notes

Before the game:

- Introduce story, objectives, and rules
- Emphasize teamwork and respect

During the game:

- Observe without interfering
- Provide hints only when needed (after ~7–10 min stuck)
- Encourage balanced participation

Intervention moments:

- Clarify instructions (not solutions)
- Offer progressive hints
- Address group dynamics if needed

After the game:

- Conduct debriefing and reflection

Safety & Ethical Considerations

Potential risks:

- Emotional discomfort (self-reflection, tension)
- Minor physical risks (movement in space)
- Cultural misunderstandings

Mitigation:

- Clear rules on respect and inclusion
- Safe and organized physical setup
- Facilitator monitoring
- Supportive debriefing space

Debriefing & Reflection

Reflection questions:

- What was most challenging?
- How did you handle disagreements?

- Did everyone participate?
- What role did you take?
- How did cooperation affect success?
- What did the mirror symbolize?
- How does this relate to real-life peacebuilding?

Adaptation & Reusability

Cultural adaptation: local symbols, language, books

Group size:

- small groups → work together
- large groups → split into teams

Flexible format: can be used in youth centers, trainings, classrooms

Reusable structure: puzzles can be redesigned while keeping the 18-task logic

Evaluation

How will learning outcomes be measured?

Learning outcomes can be measured through:

- group discussion
- reflection exercises
- written feedback

Additional Notes

- Prepare and test all materials in advance
- Organize puzzles clearly (envelopes, symbols)
- Manage time actively
- Create atmosphere (music, lighting, theme)
- Focus on debriefing—it's where most learning happens

For more information and printable materials please access the additional resourses at:

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7.2 The Cooperation Code

Target Group (age, profile):16 - 99 years old
Estimated Duration: 30 min
Number of Participants:3 - 5 people

Educational Objectives

- Strengthen cooperation through shared decision-making and collective problem-solving
- Encourage careful listening, observation, and trust in group processes
- Support communication and teamwork while solving sequential challenges
- Develop patience, attention to detail, and the ability to recover from mistakes by going back and trying again
- Reinforce the idea that success is not only about completing tasks, but also about acting as a good team
- Promote shared responsibility and group reflection during gameplay

Key Competences Addressed
Please tick or describe:
□Empathy
Critical Thinking
Cooperation
Communication
Problem-solving
Other: Attention to detail, teamwork, listening, pattern recognition, shared decision-making

Scenario Background / Storyline
Describe the fictional context and narrative of the escape room. Avoid real political actors or ongoing conflicts.

Players enter The Cooperation Code – an "Escape Room in a Box," a story told through cards. They are welcomed as brave players about to enter a mysterious journey in which they must follow the path, solve challenges, and return to the real world. The game unfolds through a deck of cards that guides them from one "room" to another. Each card contains instructions, clues, numbers, symbols, or hidden hints that direct the players forward.

The narrative is structured as a journey through a coded path. Players must move step by step, read carefully, solve puzzles, and identify the correct next room. The experience includes dead ends, such as BOOM cards or wrong-path messages, which force the group to return to the previous choice point and try another option. There is also one extra object, the Old Paper, which remains closed until a special symbol instructs players to open it and use its information to continue.
The storyline is simple but immersive: the players are trapped inside a coded sequence and can only escape by cooperating, observing details, and reaching the final card.

Mission & Success Criteria
What is the main mission of the players?
The main mission is to follow the path of the game, solve the challenges, make the correct choices, and reach the final card in order to return to the real world.
What does success look like at the end of the game?
Success means:
– Reaching the final card
– Completing the last step
– Reading the ending
– In some cases, not only solving a challenge but also agreeing as a group that the team has truly acted well together.

Game Structure & Flow
How to play
– Start with the START card
– Open one card at a time
– Read each card out loud and do exactly what it says
– Each card will guide you to the next one by giving you a number (sometimes written on the paper) or a clear instruction for the next room
– Do not read any card before you are told its number, clue, or instruction
– Most of the time, the number of the next card is right in front of your eyes – so pay close attention
– Look carefully, think together, and trust the process
Dead ends and going back to the previous room
Sometimes you will reach a "room with no exit" (a dead end), for example:
– A BOOM card
– A vortex / fog / reset message
– Any card that clearly means "wrong path"

When this happens:
– Go back to the previous choice card (the last card where you had to choose a number)
– Try a different number
– Continue until you find the correct path forward

The Old Paper

– If you see the special symbol (the one marked for the Old Paper), immediately open and read the Old Paper
– Use the information on it to continue the game

Rules

– No peeking ahead
– No skipping cards
– No opening cards "just to check"
– Use only what is inside the box (unless a card explicitly tells you to scan the QR)

If you get stuck

– Re-read the current card slowly
– Check for numbers, words, symbols
– Look for patterns: first letters, repeated words, objects/colors mentioned, hidden hints on visuals
– If it still doesn't work, go back to the last choice point and try a different option

Start now

Answer Sheet / Solution Path

– Start with the START card
– Open card 25
– The players must find the QR code in the quiz
– Open card 3
– The Morse code says: Go to room 14
– Open card 14
– Complete the task and find the clue written in red on the card
– Open card 1
– There are three light switch colors — the correct choice is blue
– Open card 15
– Open card 42
– Open card 24 and then open the Old Paper
– Open card 11 — this is the end of the journey

Dead ends

– If you choose 2 → BOOM/dead end → go back
– If you choose 5 → BOOM/dead end → go back
– If you choose 52 → BOOM/dead end → go back
– If you choose 4 → BOOM/dead end → go back

Crossroad answer

T**e**am
Listen
H**e**lp
Value
Shar**e**
U**n**ity
→ Card 11 → The end

Roles & Group Dynamics

There are no fixed formal roles described in the provided content. The game is designed to be played without a facilitator, and the cards guide the group through the experience. Collaboration is encouraged through the need to:

– Read cards out loud together
– Observe details carefully
– Solve clues collectively
– Agree on choices before opening the next card
– Return to previous choice points when the group takes a wrong path
– Work as a good team, not only finish tasks

The structure naturally promotes shared responsibility, communication, and collective attention. Since players must not peek ahead and may need to interpret clues together, the game relies on collaboration rather than individual play.

Materials & Setup

– A deck of game cards
– One extra item: an Old Paper
– A table with enough space
– Pen and paper (recommended)
– A QR code included in the quiz
– Any visuals, numbers, symbols, colors, and written clues already printed on the cards

Space set up:

– A table with enough space for 3–5 players to sit or gather around
– Sufficient room to handle and sort cards comfortably
– No special room setup is required beyond a playable table surface
– The game is card-based and can be played without a facilitator
– A device may be needed only if a card explicitly tells players to scan the QR code

Facilitation Notes

The content states that the game can be played without a facilitator, because the cards themselves guide players through the experience. If a facilitator is present, their role should remain minimal and supportive. They should:

– Ensure the players start only with the START card
– Make sure the deck remains closed except for the card currently in play
– Remind players to read each card out loud
– Encourage them to follow instructions exactly as written
– Reinforce the rule of not peeking ahead
– Support the flow without revealing answers

If the group gets stuck, they should first be encouraged to:
– Re-read the current card slowly
– Check for numbers, words, and symbols
– Look for patterns: first letters, repeated words, objects/colors mentioned, hidden hints on visuals
– Go back to the last choice point and try a different option if needed

A facilitator should intervene only after the group has done the above and is still unable to continue. Any intervention should be light, for example by reminding them where clues may be hidden, rather than giving the direct answer.

Safety & Ethical Considerations

Potential risks (emotional, physical, cultural):

– Frustration if players reach dead ends repeatedly
– Minor tension in the group if there is disagreement about choices
– Risk of one or two players dominating decisions while others participate less
– Possible confusion if instructions are not read carefully
– Mild stress due to the puzzle-solving format and the need to avoid mistakes

Mitigation measures:

– Emphasize from the beginning that dead ends are part of the game and that going back is normal
– Encourage all players to speak and contribute
– Remind the group that the experience is based on cooperation, not competition inside the team
– Encourage reading cards out loud and checking clues together
– Use pen and paper if needed to reduce confusion and support shared thinking
– Reinforce that success may also include acting as a good team, not only finishing fast

Debriefing & Reflection

Reflection questions:

– What helped your group work well together during the game?
– What happened when you reached a dead end, and how did your team respond?
– Did everyone have a chance to contribute to the decisions? Why or why not?
– Which clue or challenge required the strongest cooperation?
– How did careful listening and observation affect your progress?
– What does it mean to “truly act as a good team” in this game?

This experience connects to real-life peacebuilding by showing that moving forward as a group often requires listening, trust, patience, and collective problem-solving. Dead ends in the game mirror real-life misunderstandings or wrong turns, where teams need to pause, go back, reflect, and try another approach instead of blaming one another. The game also highlights that success is not just about reaching the end, but about how people cooperate along the way. This reflects peacebuilding values such as mutual support, shared responsibility, communication, and constructive decision-making.

Adaptation & Reusability

The scenario can be adapted by:

– Translating the cards into different languages
– Replacing clues, symbols, or visuals with culturally relevant but neutral alternatives
– Adjusting the complexity of puzzles depending on the age group
– Changing the storyline while keeping the same structure of sequential cards, dead ends, and return points
– Using different final words or crossroad answers while preserving the cooperative logic
– Adapting the number of cards or the difficulty for younger or older participants
– Keeping the same no-peeking, one-card-at-a-time structure for different educational settings

The core format is reusable because it relies on a simple card path, puzzle solving, and team cooperation rather than on a specific national or political context.

Evaluation

How will learning outcomes be measured?

☒ Group discussion

☐ Reflection cards

☐ Written feedback

☒ Other: Observation of team interaction during gameplay, group self-assessment on whether they acted as a good team, completion of the final mission and discussion of how decisions were made

For more information and printable materials please access the additional resourses at:

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7.3 Negotiating the Future

Target Group (age, profile): Young people aged 16–25. Suitable for youth groups, students, volunteers, youth workers in training, and participants in non-formal education activities.
Estimated Duration: 90–120 minutes
Number of Participants: 16–24 participants, divided into 4 teams of similar size.

Educational Objectives
Main learning objectives

- To help participants understand how different stakeholders interpret the same crisis in different ways.
- To develop empathy and perspective-taking by asking participants to represent positions that may differ from their personal views.
- To strengthen cooperation, negotiation, and conflict transformation skills through joint problem-solving and dialogue.
- To explore how language, framing, and public statements can either increase tension or support peacebuilding.
- To encourage reflection on responsibility, inclusion, stability, representation, and democratic compromise.

Key Competences Addressed
Please tick or describe:
Empathy
Critical Thinking
Cooperation
Communication
Problem-solving
Other: Negotiation, perspective-taking, decision-making, conflict analysis, democratic participation

Scenario Background / Storyline

A fictional city has recently gone through serious public unrest. Trust in institutions has weakened, social tensions have become more visible, and different groups now view the situation through very different lenses. Some focus on stability and responsibility, others on reform, representation, equal protection, or economic recovery. In order to reduce tensions and prevent further division, four stakeholder groups are invited into an emergency dialogue process to prepare a common public agreement.

Participants are divided into four teams, each representing one stakeholder voice: local government, youth activists, business owners, and minority community. Each team receives incomplete statement cards that reflect its own priorities, concerns, and political language. By solving clues, decoding words, and discussing answers, the team gradually reconstructs its position. But solving the cards is only the first step. In the final stage, all four groups must negotiate with one another and attempt to create one shared statement that all can accept.
The storyline is fictional and does not refer to real political actors or any ongoing conflict. Its purpose is to simulate tensions that can appear in divided societies, where peacebuilding requires listening, compromise, and careful use of language.

Mission & Success Criteria

Main mission of the players: To solve their team's cards, complete the missing words, select the sentence that best represents their stakeholder position, and then negotiate with the other teams to build one shared final agreement.

What success looks like: Participants complete the puzzle tasks accurately, cooperate within their teams, and engage in meaningful negotiation across teams. The strongest outcome is a shared final statement that reflects compromise while still preserving each group's voice.

Game Structure & Flow

Introduction (10 min) Facilitator explains the scenario, team roles, rules, and overall mission.
Puzzle Solving (25–30 min) Teams solve sentence cards by using QR clues, scrambled words, multiple-choice prompts, and short hints.
Internal Selection (10–15 min) Each team reviews its solved statements and chooses one sentence to defend.
Intergroup Negotiation (25–30 min) Teams present their selected sentences and negotiate one common agreement.
Final Agreement Reading (5 min) One representative reads the combined statement aloud.
Debrief (20–25 min) Group reflection on language, power, compromise, and peacebuilding.

Puzzles & Challenges

Puzzle 1: QR-based missing word clues

Objective: To find hidden clues in the room and complete selected team sentences.

Description: Some cards instruct participants to find a QR code in the room. Teams must locate the correct QR code, scan it, and use the linked text or audio clue to fill in the missing word in the sentence.

Materials Needed: Printed QR codes; phones or tablets for scanning; internet access if needed; printed team cards.

Puzzle 2: Word reconstruction and answer selection

Objective: To solve language-based clues and identify the correct missing concept.
Description: Teams complete cards by unscrambling letters or choosing the best option from a short set of words. These puzzles encourage discussion about meaning, not only vocabulary.
Materials Needed: Printed team cards; pens or pencils; optional answer sheets; table space for each team.

Puzzle 3: Strategic sentence selection and negotiation

Objective: To transform solved puzzle content into a negotiated stakeholder position.

Description: After solving all cards, each team must choose one completed sentence to defend in the final negotiation. Teams decide whether to select the most honest, strategic, or powerful sentence, then try to combine all chosen sentences into one public agreement.

Materials Needed: Completed team cards; flipchart or whiteboard; markers; visible wall or board space.

Roles & Group Dynamics

Participants are divided into four stakeholder teams: local government, youth activists, business owners, and minority community. Each team works from a distinct perspective and receives different sentence cards that reflect different priorities and concerns.

The game encourages collaboration in two ways. First, players must cooperate within their own team to solve clues, interpret wording, and choose one final sentence. Second, they must collaborate across teams during negotiation, where no single group can complete the mission alone.

Materials & Setup

- Printed team card sets for Teams A, B, C, and D
- Printed QR codes for each team
- Smartphones or tablets for scanning QR codes
- Internet access or pre-tested offline access, depending on how QR codes are set up
- Pens or pencils
- Flipchart, whiteboard, or large paper
- Markers
- Timer or phone stopwatch
- Facilitator answer key / manual

Space requirements: One medium or large room is enough, as long as four teams can work separately without too much noise overlap and the QR codes can be placed around the room. A shared central space is needed for the final negotiation and for displaying the selected sentences.

Facilitation Notes

The facilitator should begin by clearly explaining that this is not only a puzzle game, but also a negotiation and reflection exercise. During the puzzle phase, the facilitator should observe team dynamics, answer practical questions if players get stuck, and ensure that teams focus on their own materials.

During the internal selection stage, the facilitator should push teams to think strategically by asking whether their chosen sentence is their most honest or most strategic position. During negotiation, the facilitator should write all chosen sentences in a visible place, keep the discussion structured, and make sure that one group does not dominate.

When and how to intervene if needed: Intervene when a team is fully blocked, when one participant takes total control, when tension becomes personal, or when the discussion moves too far away from the fictional scenario. Interventions should guide the process rather than provide answers too quickly.

Safety & Ethical Considerations

Potential risks (emotional, physical, cultural): Participants may identify strongly with stakeholder roles and feel frustrated or unheard during negotiation. Language around exclusion, discrimination, unrest, or inequality may feel sensitive for some participants. Movement around the room to find QR codes may also create small practical risks if the space is crowded.

Mitigation measures: Explain clearly that the scenario is fictional and educational, set respectful communication rules before starting, remind participants that they are representing roles rather than defending their personal identity, monitor emotional tone during negotiation, avoid direct links to ongoing conflicts, and make sure QR codes are placed safely in the room.

Debriefing & Reflection

Reflection questions

- Which sentence did your team choose, and why?
- Which words created the most tension during negotiation?
- Did your group try to protect its own interests, or move toward compromise?
- Who had the strongest leverage in the negotiation, and why?
- Did anyone feel unheard or underrepresented?
- What did this activity show about how public statements are shaped?

Connection to real-life peacebuilding: This scenario mirrors real peacebuilding situations in which different groups experience the same crisis differently and bring different priorities into dialogue. It shows that peacebuilding is not only about good intentions, but also about language, power, representation, listening, and compromise.

Adaptation & Reusability

This scenario can be adapted by changing the fictional setting, stakeholder groups, and sentence content while keeping the same structure. It could be used around themes such as school conflict, community development, environmental tension, intergenerational dialogue, or post-crisis recovery.

The game can be simplified for younger groups by using easier vocabulary and fewer cards, or made more complex for older participants by adding more negotiation rules, more stakeholder groups, or stronger time pressure. For smaller groups, each team can have fewer participants. For larger groups, teams can be doubled or parallel sessions can run at the same time.

Evaluation

How will learning outcomes be measured?

☒ Group discussion

☒ Reflection cards

☒ Written feedback

☒ Other: Facilitator observation during puzzle solving and negotiation, plus short verbal check-out at the end

Learning outcomes can be measured by observing whether participants cooperate within teams, engage in negotiation respectfully, identify different stakeholder perspectives, and reflect meaningfully during the debrief.

Additional Notes

This activity works best when the facilitator treats the puzzle phase and negotiation phase as equally important. Participants may first think the goal is only to solve clues, so it is useful to frame the final negotiation as the real challenge. The transition from solving to negotiating is what makes this scenario effective as a peacebuilding tool.

For more information and printable materials please access the additional resourses at:

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7.4 Rebuilding Babel

Target Group (age, profile): 16–30 years old; youth groups, students, youth workers, mixed cultural backgrounds
Estimated Duration: 90–120 minutes (including 15–20 min debrief)
Number of Participants: 5-8 for one facilitator, 8–24 (ideal 12–18) for multiple facilitators (1/task, with small working groups)

Educational Objectives
Main learning objectives:

- Practice active listening
- Develop emotional awareness
- Strengthen perspective-taking
- Improve de-escalation skills
- Identify and challenge assumptions
- Practice constructive communication

Key Competences Addressed
Please tick or describe:

Empathy
Critical Thinking
Cooperation
Communication
Problem-solving
Other: Conflict resolution

Storyline
In an ancient land, people once spoke a single language and built a great tower symbolizing unity. Fearing their collective strength, the gods divided their tongues. Misunderstanding turned into mistrust, and the tower collapsed. Participants are "The Rebuilders." To lift the curse, they must restore six Fractured Stones — each representing a lost dialogue skill. Only when the skills are restored in the correct order can the Tower rise again.

Mission & success criteria
Mission: Restore the six Fractured Stones by solving communication-based challenges and rebuild the Tower.
Success is achieved when all six stones are restored, and the group articulates how misunderstanding escalates conflict. The reflection is meant to help connect the experience to real-life dialogue and peacebuilding.

Game Structure & Flow

Phase 1 – Introduction (5–10 min)

Participants receive the **Start Envelope** and read the story and rules themselves.

Phase 2 – Puzzle Phase (60–75 min)

Participants solve six envelopes. Each envelope contains:

- a puzzle challenge
- a hint card
- a stone card revealed when solved

Each stone represents a dialogue skill.

Phase 3 – Tower Reconstruction (5–10 min)

Participants must place the restored stones in the correct order to rebuild the Tower.

Phase 4 – Debrief (15–20 min)

The facilitator guides reflection about communication, conflict, and cooperation.

Why: makes the **flow clearer for someone who runs the game**.

Game rules (given on a card, for the participants):

You are the Rebuilders.
Six dialogue skills were lost when the Tower of Babel fell.
Each challenge you solve restores one Fractured Stone.
Your task is not to guess the exact word on the stone.
Instead, understand the communication problem in the situation and solve it together.
When you complete a challenge, the facilitator will give you a stone.
When all six stones are restored, place them on the Tower to rebuild it.
If you feel stuck, you may ask the facilitator for a hint.

Puzzles & Challenges:

Puzzle 1 – The fracture of impatience

Objective: Recognize need for pause.

Description: Message that will explain the flow of the game to the participants, but that is missing the pause between words.

Unlock: Participants must restore the text.

Materials: Printed inscription.

Text (with breaks): This game is structured around six challenges called stones, each containing a puzzle or task that must be fully completed before moving to the next. Participants must work together to uncover hidden messages, solve problems and make decisions based on the information provided. The group must determine the correct actions to restore all stones. Hints are embedded in the materials and clues must be interpreted by the participants themselves. The game flows from introduction to challenge completion and ends with a final restoration where the results of the choices become clear. Reflection and discussions will take place after all stones are restored to connect the experience and reflect on the learning process.

The text on the card: Thisgameisstructuredaroundsixchallengescalledstones, eachcontainingapuzzleortaskthatmustbefullycompletedbeforemovingtothenext. Participantsmustworktogethertouncoverhiddenmessages, solveproblemsandmakedecisionsbasedontheinformationprovided. Thegroupmustdeterminethecorrectactionstorestoreallstones. Hintsareembeddedinthematerialsandcluesmustbeinterpretedbytheparticipantsthemselves. Thegameflowsfromintroductiontochallengecompletionandendswithafinalrestorationwhereretheresultsofthechoicesbecomeclear. Reflectionanddiscussionswilltakeplaceafterallstonesarerestoredtoconnecttheexperienceandreflectonthelearningprocess.

Puzzle 2 – The fracture of ignorance
Objective: Practice active listening.
Description: A phone placed on the table that plays an audio of people talking over one another. The participants must split, and listen carefully to the speaker allocated to them, to try and restore their text. They must all write down what their speaker is saying. When they have written down all phrases, they must present them to the facilitator. (The messages are related to the idea of listening, to help the understanding of the learning process.)
Unlock: When they have written down all phrases, they must present them to the facilitator. If all restorations are correct, they receive the stone of listening, and move on to the next stage.
Materials: Audio, paper and pen to write the messages.

The messages told by the speakers:

- "I feel unheard when decisions are made without checking with everyone."
- "Can you repeat what you understood so we're on the same page?"
- "It helps if we focus on what each person actually means, not just the words."
- "Listening carefully can prevent small misunderstandings from becoming conflicts."

Puzzle 3 – The fracture of (emotional) blindness
Objective: Identify emotions beneath words.
Description: A scenario sheet presenting a workplace misunderstanding between colleagues. The participants must read all encounters of the event, and identify the emotions behind each encounter. (No wrong or correct answers for the emotions, the activity has more of an introspective purpose)
Unlock: The whole team must agree on the emotions identified in each scenario, and propose an approach that would mend the situation.
Materials: Scenario text, paper.

The scenarios:

S1: "I finished my part of the project yesterday, but no one has said anything about it. Today in the meeting, the discussion moved on as if it didn't exist."

S2: "I tried to explain my idea, but I was interrupted before I could finish. Later, someone else suggested something similar and everyone supported it."

S3: "We agreed on a plan last week, but today it changed without any notice. I had already started working based on the original version."

S4: "I asked for help because I wasn't sure how to proceed, but the response I got was 'just figure it out yourself.' Since then, I haven't asked again."

S5: "During the discussion, I stayed quiet because the conversation was moving too fast. By the time I was ready to speak, the decision had already been made."

Puzzle 4 – The fracture of dialogue
Objective: Understand how dialogue requires integrating multiple viewpoints.
Description: Participants are given **separate short statements from different people involved in the same situation**. The statements are **mixed and incomplete on their own**. Participants must **combine the information to form a complete and coherent understanding of the situation**.
Unlock: Participants must **reconstruct the full situation in writing (3–4 sentences)** that includes all perspectives. They then present it to the facilitator. If all key elements from the statements are included, they receive the stone and move on.
Materials: Printed statement cards, paper and pen.
Statements:

- "We don't have enough water to support both projects at full scale."
- "If we stop construction now, we lose all progress made so far."
- "The farmers are already struggling to maintain their crops."
- "No decision has been made that includes everyone's needs."

Puzzle 5 – The fracture of perspective
Objective: Grasp how important understanding the other's perspective is when talking.
Description: Encoded phrase (shift +2 cipher – meaning every letter turns into the second one that follows it in the alphabet, example: A-C, Q-S etc.): *"Wpfgtvcpkpi qvjgt rqkvpu qh xkgy jgnru eqpxgtcvku vweeeg dg ecg ewgcpf qwt cuuworvkqp."*.
Participants must restore the phrase, with the help of a hint that would indicate the rule.
Hint: The name of the game is: **Tgwknfkpi Dcdgn (Rebuilding Babel)**
Unlock: Restore the phrase (correct: *"Understanding other points of view helps conversations succeed because we see beyond our assumptions."*)
Materials: Encoded message, phrase cards.

Puzzle 6 – The fracture of bias
Objective: Recognize how personal biases can distort dialogue and decision-making.

Description: Participants are given a **conflict scenario between two groups** (for example, a community dispute, workplace disagreement, or school team conflict). The scenario includes **ambiguous statements, partial information, and hints of stereotypes or assumptions** about each group.
Participants must **role-play as mediators** and **restate each party's perspective neutrally**, identifying potential biases that could affect understanding.
Task to Unlock:

1. **Write down each party's perspective** in neutral, unbiased language.
2. **Identify 2–3 biases or assumptions** that could have influenced their own initial interpretation.
3. Present the neutral perspectives and bias reflections to the facilitator.

Materials: Scenario card, paper, pens.
Scenario:
Two neighborhood groups are arguing over a shared community garden. Group A says, "Group B only cares about making money, not the community." Group B says, "Group A is lazy and doesn't contribute anything." Both groups have spoken loudly and are frustrated

Roles & group dynamics
No fixed roles, but rotating speakers encouraged. The game promotes equal participation, shared problem-solving, dialogue under pressure, and collective reflection.

Materials & setup
Materials: a tower, made out of clay, with 6 stones missing, the 6 stones, that participants get after completing each challenge, cards, paper, pens.
Space requirements: Medium room with table space, movable chairs, quiet environment.

Facilitation notes
Do not give solutions directly. Introduce light tension in Stone I. In the final puzzle, gradually and eventually **hint** that decoding *may not* be required. Observe group dynamics for debrief examples. Ensure emotional safety during disagreements.

Safety & ethical considerations
Risks: Frustration under time pressure; dominant voices overpowering others, communication barriers, dismissal.
Mitigation: Set respectful communication rules, offer pause option, monitor emotional tone.

Debriefing & reflection
Initially, the facilitator is meant to let the participants figure out what the aim of the escape room was, what they were meant to learn. Afterwards, guided debriefing and reflection can follow.

Proposed potential questions for debriefing and reflection:

- When did misunderstanding first appear?
- Which skill changed the dynamic most?
- What happens when we skip one step?
- Where do you see “Tower moments” in real life?
- What will you do differently in your next conflict?

Connection to peacebuilding: Misunderstanding escalates when dialogue skills collapse. Peacebuilding then requires restoring them in sequence, with awareness of all values of the dialogue.

Adaptation & reusability

Can be shortened to 3 stones; adapted for online breakout rooms; applied to school, workplace, or community conflicts; cipher language can be localized. Can be done either with one facilitator, in smaller groups, or in big groups, spilt into small working groups, when there are multiple facilitators available – more space needed.

Evaluation

- Group discussion
- Feedback form
- Written feedback

For more information and printable materials please access the additional resourses at:

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7.5 Inner Compass Lab

Target Group (age, profile): Young people (Generation Z), including participants in youth centres, NGOs, schools, and intercultural exchange programs. The activity is suitable for diverse cultural, social, and educational backgrounds and can be adapted for mixed-ability groups within non-formal education settings.
Estimated Duration: 55 minutes
Number of Participants: 4–8 participants per group (optimal group size: 5–6 to ensure active participation and balanced group dynamics).

Educational Objectives

- To strengthen self-awareness by helping participants identify emotions, bodily signals, values, and personal growth experiences.
- To develop empathy through understanding how internal experiences influence external behavior.
- To foster cooperation by encouraging reflective dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.
- To improve assertive communication and boundary-setting skills.
- To demonstrate how self-awareness contributes to conflict prevention and constructive peacebuilding.

Key Competences Addressed
Please tick or describe:
Empathy
Critical Thinking
Cooperation
Communication
Problem-solving
Other: Self-awareness, Emotional Regulation, Reflective Thinking

Scenario Background / Storyline
Welcome to the Inner Compass Lab.

This is not just a place — it is a space within you.
Many people try to escape conflict by changing others. Few succeed in understanding themselves.

Inside this lab, you will face emotions, values, reactions, and growth that shape who you are.
If you unlock all three compartments of this bag, you will not simply "escape."
You will reach a deeper level of awareness - where understanding yourself allows you to understand others.
The question is not whether you can solve the codes...
The question is: are you ready to meet your inner compass?

Mission & Success Criteria

The players' mission is to unlock all three compartments of the Inner Compass Lab (bag) by solving self-awareness-based challenges and aligning emotions, values, boundaries, and reflection in the correct sequence.
Success is achieved when the group collaboratively unlocks the final compartment using the correct code and demonstrates reflective understanding during the debriefing, showing increased awareness of emotions, needs, authenticity, and personal growth.

Game Structure & Flow

Beginning (**5-10** minutes):
The trainer introduces the Inner Compass Lab storyline and establishes emotional safety guidelines (respectful listening, voluntary sharing, right to pass). The bag with three locked compartments is presented. Time pressure is introduced: participants have **30** minutes total gameplay time to unlock all three compartments.
Middle (**25-30** minutes gameplay):
Participants solve the three puzzles in sequence:
Puzzle 1 – The Compartment Within: Matching emotions and reflections to unlock the first compartment.
Puzzle 2 – The Authentic Feed: Completing envelope challenges and arranging the sequence to unlock the second compartment.
Puzzle 3 – The Mirror's Message: Using reflection and mirrored numbers to unlock the final compartment.

Each puzzle builds on the previous one, moving from emotional awareness to authenticity and finally to deep self-reflection. The trainer observes group dynamics and intervenes only if necessary.
End (10-15 minutes debriefing):
After unlocking the final compartment and reading the closing letter, the group transitions into a structured reflection phase. Participants discuss insights about emotions, values, boundaries, and authenticity. The trainer connects the experience to peacebuilding, emphasizing that self-awareness strengthens empathy and reduces conflict escalation.

Puzzles & Challenges

Puzzle 1: The Compartment Within

Objective: To help participants recognize the connection between emotions, body signals, values, and personal growth, and use this understanding to unlock the first compartment.

Description: Before the session, print and cut the eight selected Self-Awareness Empathy Cards (4 reflection cards and 4 matching activity cards). Make sure each card has a small number written in the top-left corner as indicated in the facilitator guide. Mix the cards and prepare them in an envelope labeled “Compartment 1.” Place the Gen Z style hint visibly on the table.
During the game, give each group the mixed cards and read the instruction aloud.
Trainer Script to start the game:
"To open the first compartment, you must first understand the compartment within. Match each core emotion to its deeper reflection. Once matched, order the pairs to find the sequence."

Participants must match each reflection card with its corresponding activity card. Once matched, they add the numbers on each pair to generate four digits. Using the self-discovery flow hinted on the table, they determine the correct order of the digits to unlock the first compartment.
Hint on the table:

"To unlock your path, follow the flow of self-discovery:
-Start with your Feelings,
-Listen to your Body,
-Stay true to your Values,
-And celebrate your Growth.
!Remember, one card plus the other, gives you the solution."
Pairs:
Pair A – Feelings
Card A1 (3)
"What emotion shows up most often for you lately, and what do you think it might be trying to tell you?"
Card A2 (4)
"In pairs, describe your current emotional state using a color, a weather condition, and a sound. Then introduce your partner’s emotional forecast to the whole group."

Pair B – Body
Card B1 (1)
"A time when you noticed your body reacting before your mind did. What did you learn from it?"

Card B2 (3)

"In groups of four, share one physical signal your body gives you when you feel stressed or uncomfortable. As a group, identify common patterns and discuss healthy responses."

Pair C – Values
Card C1 (1)
"Which values guide your decisions the most right now?"
Card C2 (2)

"Each person chooses one core value that guides their decisions. Stand in a line according to how strongly you feel that value influences your daily life. Discuss your positions with the people next to you."

Pair D – Growth

Card D1 (4)

"A situation where you felt proud of your growth, even if no one else noticed."

Card D2 (2)

"In pairs, share a recent moment of personal growth that others may not have noticed. Your partner summarizes your story to the group, highlighting your strength."

Player Task:

Players must:

- Correctly match each reflection card with its corresponding activity card.
- Once the correct pairs are identified, the group must complete the activity tasks before calculating the code.
- Once matched, add the numbers in the top-left corner of each pair.

For the master code: First players have to find the correct match, then they must add up the numbers in the upper left corner of the cards.

MASTER CODE IS: 7 – 4 – 3 – 6

This opens Compartment 1.

Materials Needed:

- 8 printed Self-Awareness Empathy Cards (4 reflection cards + 4 matching activity cards)
- Small numbers written on the top-left corner of each card
- 1 envelope labeled "Compartment 1"
- 1 printed hint paper
- 1 four-digit lock (or facilitator-held code sheet)
- Timer (optional)

Puzzle 2: The Authentic Feed

Objective: To help participants distinguish between social expectations and their authentic self by practicing boundaries, self-care, self-compassion, and future-oriented reflection.

Description: Before the session, prepare four sealed envelopes labeled with the following icons:

Shield
Heart
Cloud
Rocket

Inside each envelope, place one printed Empathy Card activity. On the back of each card, clearly write the secret number indicated in the facilitator guide (1, 5, 9, 8).

Also prepare a printed "Social Media Profile" sheet with the hint for participants and place it inside Compartment 1.

After participants unlock Compartment 1, allow them to open it and discover the "Profile Page," and four sealed envelopes. Read the instruction aloud and let the group begin.

Instructions:
Social Media Profile Sheet (To be printed):
@InnerSelf_
"Real growth is a process.
To find the code, follow these steps:
Set your Boundaries first.
Check in on your Self-Care.
Release the weight of Expectations.
And finally, look toward your Future Self."

Envelope Content
Each envelope contains one activity card (from the Self-Awareness set):
Shield – Boundaries
Activity Inside:
"Practice expressing a boundary calmly while your partner listens and provides feedback."
Secret Number (back of card): 1
Heart – Self-Care
Activity Inside:
"Each participant shares one realistic self-care practice."
Secret Number (back of card): 5
Cloud – Expectations
Activity Inside:
"Write one expectation you place on yourself. Discuss how you would support the person who carries that."
Secret Number (back of card): 9
Rocket – Future Self
Activity Inside:
"Role-play a short dialogue between your present self and your future self."
Secret Number (back of card): 8

Player Task:
- Open all envelopes.
- Complete each activity as a group.
- After finishing each task, check the number written on the back of the activity card.
- Use the order provided in the "Social Media Profile" to determine the correct sequence of the digits.

MASTER CODE: 1 – 5 – 9 – 8
This opens Compartment 2.

Materials Needed:

- 4 sealed envelopes labeled with icons: Shield, Heart, Cloud, Rocket
- 4 printed Empathy Activity Cards (one placed inside each envelope)
- Secret numbers written clearly on the back of each activity card (1, 5, 9, 8)
- 1 printed "Social Media Profile Sheet" sheet with the Bio instructions
- 1 four-digit lock (or facilitator-held master code sheet)
- Pens for participants
- Small blank paper slips (for reflection tasks)
- Timer (optional)

Puzzle 3: The Mirror's Message

Objective: To reinforce self-awareness by guiding participants to reflect on honesty, safety, listening, and connection, and to recognize that personal insight unlocks collective understanding.

Description:
Before the session, prepare:
1 small mirror (or a cardboard covered with aluminum foil if a mirror is not available)
4 semi-transparent or thin white paper strips written a number in mirror writing (reversed) so it can only be read correctly when held up to the mirror

On each strip, write the reflection prompt :
Strip 1 – Honesty
Prompt:
"What does being honest with yourself mean to you?"
Mirrored Number (written reversed): 3
Strip 2 – Safety
Prompt:

"Describe a place where you feel safe using sensory details."
Mirrored Number (written reversed): 5
Strip 3 – Listening
Prompt:
"A recent situation where you listened to your needs instead of expectations."
Mirrored Number (written reversed): 9
Strip 4 – Connection

Prompt:
"Think about a moment when you felt truly comfortable being yourself."
Mirrored Number (written reversed): 0
Attach the final "Reflection Tip" discreetly to the edge or back of the mirror

Reflection Tip: (to be printed)
"To unlock the final door, reflect in this order:
Be Honest with yourself.
Find your Safe space.
Listen to your inner voice.
And find your Connection."

Prepare the Final Letter and place it inside Compartment 3:

Final letter: (To be printed)
"Congratulations!
You didn't just escape the room — you found the way back to yourself.
Remember: Self-awareness is not a destination, it's a daily practice.
Keep your empathy cards close."
Place the mirror and the four strips inside Compartment 2.

Trainer Script (After Compartment 2 Opens) :

"You have filtered the noise and found your authentic self.
Now, look into the mirror.
The final code isn't hidden in the room — it's hidden in how you see yourself.
Align your values to reveal the exit."

Inside Compartment 2 Players find:

- A small mirror
- 4 paper strips with reflection prompts
- The strips contain mirrored numbers (not immediately readable)
- The Strips (Reflection Prompts)

Player Task:

- Use the Mirror
- Find the Correct Order
- Align in Order

Order given:
Honesty → Safety → Listening → Connection

MASTER CODE: 3 – 5 – 9 – 0
This unlocks Compartment 3.
The Grand Escape (Final Compartment)
Inside the final compartment, players find a printed letter:

Materials Needed:

- 1 small handheld mirror (or cardboard covered with aluminum foil as an alternative)
- 4 thin paper strips (semi-transparent or thin white paper)
- Reflection prompts printed on each strip, the strip must contain only the promp, not the topic. (Should not contain these headings: Honesty, Safety, Listening, Connection)
- Mirrored numbers written in reverse on each strip (3, 5, 9, 0)
- 1 printed "Reflection Tip" attached to the mirror
- 1 four-digit lock (or facilitator-held final code sheet)
- 1 printed Final Letter placed inside Compartment 3
- Tape or clips (to discreetly attach the Reflection Tip to the mirror)

Roles & Group Dynamics

Roles are optional but may include a Timekeeper, Reader, and Group Facilitator to support balanced participation.

The game encourages collaboration by requiring participants to match, reflect, complete activities, and agree on codes together. No puzzle can be solved individually; success depends on communication, shared reasoning, and mutual listening.

Materials & Setup

Physical Materials Required:

1 backpack or bag with 3 numbered compartments
3 four-digit locks (or facilitator-held code sheets)
Printed Empathy Cards (as specified in each puzzle)
4 sealed envelopes ( )
1 printed Social Media Profile sheet
1 small mirror (or foil-covered cardboard)
4 reflection strips with mirrored numbers
1 printed Reflection Tip
1 printed Final Letter
Pens, small blank paper slips
Timer (optional)

Space Requirements:

A medium-sized room allowing one group (4–8 participants) to move and collaborate around a table. The game can also be adapted for online delivery using breakout rooms and shared digital documents.

Note:

This guide is designed for one group. If multiple groups are running simultaneously, all materials must be multiplied according to the number of groups.

Facilitation Notes

The facilitator introduces the storyline and clearly establishes emotional safety guidelines before the game begins. During gameplay, observe group dynamics without providing direct solutions. Allow participants to struggle productively and discover patterns themselves.

Intervene only if:

- One participant dominates or others are excluded
- The group is stuck for an extended period without progress
- Emotional discomfort becomes visible

When intervening, offer guiding questions rather than answers (e.g., "What connects these cards?" or "Have you considered the order suggested in the hint?").
The facilitator's role is to hold the space, ensure safety, and support reflection — not to solve the puzzles for the group.

Safety & Ethical Considerations

Potential risks (emotional, physical, cultural):

- Emotional discomfort during self-reflection
- Participants feeling pressured to share personal experiences
- Cultural differences in expressing emotions or boundaries
- Mild stress due to time pressure

Mitigation measures:

- Establish clear emotional safety guidelines before starting
- Emphasize voluntary sharing and the right to pass
- Use fictional framing to avoid triggering real-life conflicts
- Encourage respectful listening and inclusive participation
- Allow short breaks if needed

Debriefing & Reflection

Reflection questions:

- What did you discover about yourself during the game?
- Which puzzle challenged you the most, and why?
- How did your emotions or values influence your decisions?
- What communication patterns helped your group move forward?
- Did you notice any moments of tension or misunderstanding? How were they resolved?
- How did reflecting before acting change the way you approached the challenges?

Adaptation & Reusability

This scenario can be adapted by modifying reflection prompts and activity cards to reflect local cultural contexts and languages. The metaphors (Inner Compass Lab, Social Media Profile, Mirror) are culturally neutral and can be adjusted to suit different age groups or themes (e.g., leadership, inclusion, digital identity).
For larger groups, multiple sets of materials can be prepared and run in parallel. For smaller groups, certain activities can be completed collectively instead of in pairs. The game can also be adapted for online settings using breakout rooms, digital cards, and shared documents.

Evaluation

How will learning outcomes be measured?
Group discussion
□ Reflection cards
□ Written feedback
□ Other:

- **Additional Notes**
- This scenario works best when the focus remains on reflection rather than speed. Encourage depth over competition. The debriefing phase is essential and should not be skipped, as the learning impact emerges primarily through guided reflection.
- Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the tone and pacing according to the group's emotional maturity and experience with self-awareness activities.

For more information and printable materials please access the additional resourses at:

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

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The Innovators Lab project demonstrates that youth work must continuously evolve in order to respond to the changing realities, needs, and expectations of young people. In a world shaped by rapid digital transformation, increasing diversity, and complex social dynamics, traditional learning approaches are often no longer sufficient to engage young people in meaningful ways. This guidebook has explored how creative, experiential, and game-based methodologies—particularly educational escape rooms—can offer innovative and effective alternatives.

Throughout this guide, escape rooms have been presented not merely as engaging activities, but as structured educational tools that support the development of key competences such as empathy, self-awareness, cooperation, communication, and conflict transformation. By combining storytelling, problem-solving, collaboration, and reflection, educational escape rooms create environments where young people can actively experience and practice these skills rather than only discussing them in theory.

A central strength of this approach lies in its ability to transform abstract concepts into lived experiences. Themes such as peacebuilding, inclusion, dialogue, and trust can often feel distant or difficult to grasp when approached through traditional methods. However, when embedded within interactive scenarios, these concepts become tangible and meaningful. Participants are not passive observers but active contributors, navigating challenges, making decisions, and reflecting on their behaviour in real time.

Another key contribution of this guidebook is its emphasis on intentional design. Educational escape rooms are most effective when they are built around clear objectives, supported by carefully structured elements such as storyline, puzzles, group dynamics, and reflection processes. As highlighted throughout the chapters, the role of the facilitator is equally important in guiding the experience and ensuring that meaningful learning takes place. Without this intentionality, even the most creative activities risk losing their educational impact.

The guide has also demonstrated the importance of connecting practice with theory. By drawing on both academic frameworks and real-life case examples from youth work practice across Europe, it shows that escape room methodologies are not isolated innovations, but part of a broader shift toward experiential and participatory learning. These examples confirm that such approaches are adaptable, scalable, and relevant across different cultural and social contexts.

Within the Innovators Lab project, the use of creative tools—especially escape rooms—serves a broader purpose. It contributes to strengthening the capacity of youth workers, equipping them with new methodologies and practical skills that can be applied in diverse settings. At the same time, it empowers young people to become active participants in their own learning processes and, more importantly, in peacebuilding within their communities.

Perhaps most importantly, this approach recognises that peacebuilding is not only about knowledge, but about skills, attitudes, and behaviours. It requires the ability to listen, to understand different perspectives, to manage conflict constructively, and to work collaboratively with others. These are competences that cannot be developed through theory alone; they must be experienced, practiced, and reflected upon.

Educational escape rooms provide a unique opportunity to create such experiences. They offer safe yet challenging environments where young people can explore, experiment, and learn from both success and failure. They encourage curiosity, engagement, and connection, while also supporting deeper reflection and personal growth.

In conclusion, the Innovators Lab project highlights the potential of creative, game-based methodologies to transform youth work and peacebuilding practices. By integrating innovation with clear educational purpose, escape rooms become powerful tools that bridge the gap between learning and real-life application. They support not only the development of individual competences, but also the creation of more inclusive, cooperative, and empathetic communities.

As youth work continues to evolve, approaches that combine creativity, participation, and reflection will play an increasingly important role. The experiences and methods presented in this guidebook aim to inspire youth workers, educators, and organisations to explore new ways of engaging young people and to contribute to a more peaceful and understanding society.

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