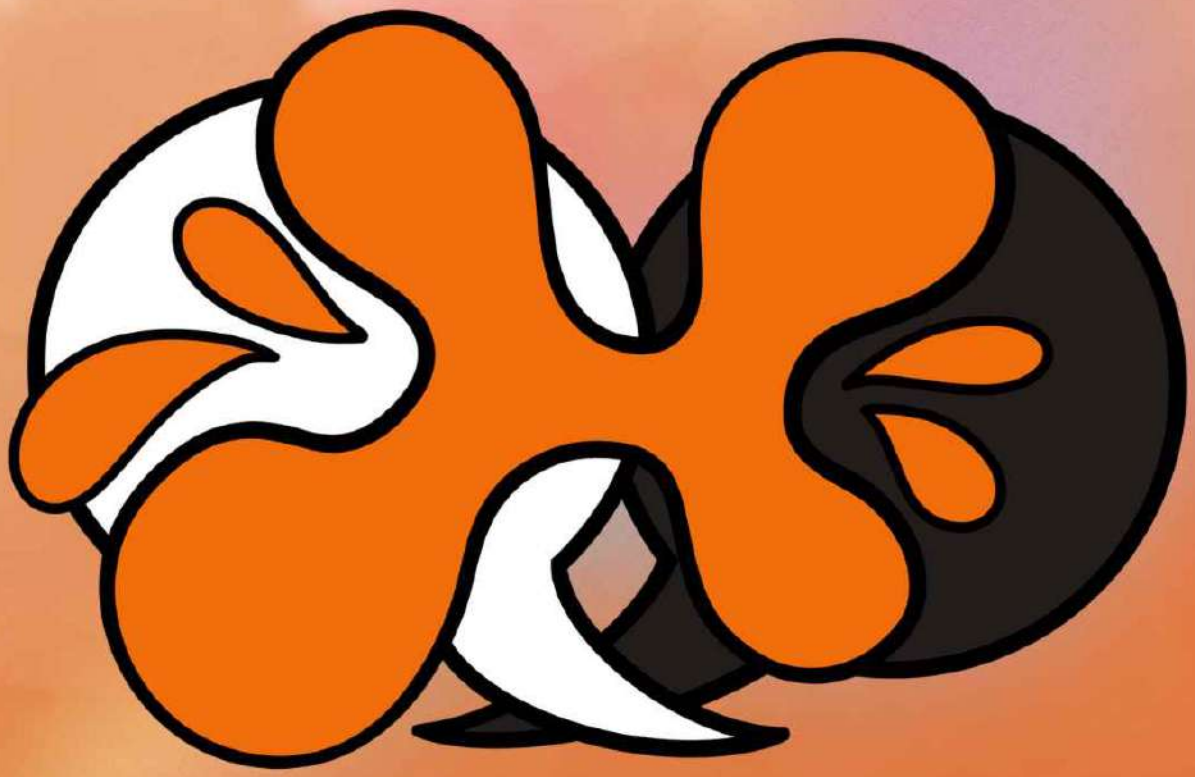
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Educational Curriculum



PARTICIPATION NEEDS NONVIOLENT DEBATE FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Co-funded by the European Union

Educational Curriculum

Participation Needs Nonviolent Debate for Conflict Transformation

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Centre for Euroinitiatives (Ukraine)

Local Peace (Kosovo)

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1.

The Project and the Process of Developing the Curriculum

1.1 Project Overview

This curriculum is the main outcome of the project **"Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation**", carried out under the Erasmus+ programme - Cooperation partnerships in youth (KA220-YOU). The project stems from a collaboration between five organisations from Italy, Ukraine, Kosovo, Türkiye and Poland, combining their extensive experience in the fields of peace education, human rights education, youth participation and non-formal education.

The project is based on the recognition that conflict is an inevitable aspect of social and democratic life. As highlighted by studies on conflict transformation, peace-building does not mean the absence of conflict, but rather the ability to address differences and tensions through nonviolent and transformative methods.

However, in contemporary societies, spaces for debate are increasingly characterised by polarisation, the oversimplification of complex issues, the spread of disinformation and difficulties in maintaining constructive dialogue between differing perspectives. These dynamics are even more significant in contexts marked by armed conflict, structural violence, or reconciliation processes, where disagreement often becomes intertwined with personal experiences, collective memories, identities and traumatic experiences.

Against this backdrop, there is a need to develop educational approaches that do not seek to eliminate conflict, but rather to accompany it as an opportunity for learning, democratic participation and the transformation of relationships. Nonviolent debate stems precisely from this need: to rethink debate not as a competition aimed at convincing or prevailing over others, but as an educational space in which to develop mutual listening, critical thinking, the ability to understand different perspectives, and a willingness to question one's own beliefs.

The project **"Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation"** aimed to develop and test an educational model capable of supporting youth workers, educators and young people in managing discussions on controversial issues, promoting forms of dialogue based on non-violence, recognising differences and promoting a shared construction of meaning.

Through an action-research approach, the project integrated theoretical analysis, research into the needs of youth workers in the various partner countries, international training, and local pilot activities. This process enabled a dialogue to be established between studies on peace, conflict transformation, dialogic pedagogy, non-formal education, and the practical experiences gained by organisations and youth workers operating in different contexts.

The result of this process is the **nonviolent debate** model, presented in this curriculum. It is not merely a discussion methodology, but a pedagogical approach aimed at transforming the way in

which conflict and disagreement are experienced in educational contexts, creating conditions conducive to listening, participation and the building of relationships capable of supporting processes of nonviolent transformation.

The following sections outline the main activities carried out during the project and the international partnership that contributed to the development of the training model.

1.2 Activities Carried Out

The "**Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation**" project was developed through a structured process of research, training, experimentation and dissemination, aimed at the collaborative development of an educational model to support young people, youth workers, and educators in the constructive management of conflict and disagreements.

The activities carried out followed an action-research approach, combining an analysis of the needs of the local areas involved, the development of youth workers' skills, the trialling of the nonviolent debate methodology in local contexts, and the subsequent development of a training programme that can be adapted for use across Europe.

The main activities implemented were:

1. **Kick-off Meeting and Research on the Training Needs of Youth Workers and Youth Organisations**

The first operational phase of the project was dedicated to conducting comparative research aimed at analysing the needs, experiences, and challenges faced by youth workers, educators, and youth organisations in managing conflicts, polarisation dynamics, and processes of exclusion in the various local contexts involved.

The research activity had a twofold purpose: on the one hand, to establish a common knowledge base for the partnership by sharing methodology, tools and criteria for analysis. On the other, to identify the skills and tools necessary to develop a training programme on **nonviolent debate** that truly meets the needs of the local areas.

The initial phase was launched with an **international kick-off meeting in Italy**, coordinated by **Centro Studi Sereno Regis** which enabled the partners to define the work plan, the division of tasks, the coordinational tools, and the general methodology of the project. During the meeting, the structure of the research and the common methodological framework for data collection and analysis across the various partner countries were also agreed upon.

The definition of the research methodology was coordinated by **Peace Ambassadors Poland**, which supported the partnership in developing the survey tools and devising a common approach to analysing training needs. Subsequently, each partner organisation carried out local research within its own area of operation: **Centro Studi Sereno Regis** for Italy, **Peace Ambassadors Poland** for Poland, **Local Peace** for Kosovo, **Centre for Euroinitiatives** for Ukraine and **Uluslararası Gençlik İnisiyatifi Derneği** for Türkiye.

The research was carried out by distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews and focus groups with youth workers, educators, representatives of youth organisations, schools, youth centres, and other stakeholders active in the non-formal education sector.

In particular, the research examined:

- The difficulties encountered by youth workers in facilitating dialogue in contexts characterised by conflict, polarisation or social tensions;
- The challenges faced by young people in terms of participation, expressing their opinions and engaging in community life;
- The possible applications of the nonviolent debate methodology as an educational tool to promote active listening, constructive dialogue and conflict transformation.

The findings gathered across the various countries enabled the creation of a comparative overview of youth workers' training needs and the identification of the key areas of competence to be developed in the subsequent *capacity-building* programme. The research also contributed to the collection of practices and experiences already tested at European and international level, providing a theoretical and methodological basis for the development of the training curriculum.

This activity therefore served as the starting point for the entire project, ensuring that the nonviolent debate methodology was developed on the basis of the real needs of the organisations and the young people involved, and adapted to the different cultural and social contexts of the partner countries.

2. **International Training for Trainers and Multipliers**

Building on the findings of the research into the training needs of youth workers and young people in the partner countries, the project developed a **capacity-building** programme aimed at creating a network of trainers and multipliers capable of applying and disseminating the **nonviolent debate** methodology in the various local contexts involved.

The programme began with the **International Training for Trainers held in Italy**, which involved 20 youth workers, educators and activists from partner organisations in the various participating countries. The training aimed to develop the skills needed to design and facilitate educational activities based on nonviolent debate, providing methodological tools to guide dialogue, manage discussions on controversial issues, and promote processes of nonviolent conflict transformation.





The participants in the training for trainers subsequently took on the role of **multipliers** within their local contexts, passing on the skills they had acquired through specific training courses aimed at youth workers in the various areas covered by the project. The local training sessions made it possible to adapt and test the methodology in line with the characteristics and needs of each individual context, strengthening the partner organisations' capacity to promote educational activities based on dialogue, participation, and constructive conflict management.



The cascade structure adopted was as follows: **International Training for Trainers (Level 1) → Local training of multipliers (Level 2) → Testing the methodology with young people and local communities (Level 3)**. This ensured a multiplier effect, transforming a shared training experience at the European level into concrete and transferable educational practices. Through this structure, the project has contributed to building an international community of practice and to strengthening the partner organisations' capacities in promoting nonviolent debate as a tool for democratic participation, inclusion and conflict transformation.

3. **Local Training Sessions and Trials of Nonviolent Debate in Partner Regions**

Following the international training for trainers and multipliers, the project included a local implementation phase aimed at transferring, adapting and developing pilot activities on the **nonviolent debate** methodology in the various local contexts involved.

This phase represented the third level of the project's cascade structure: the skills developed during the international programme were applied by the trained participants through activities with young people in the local communities of the partner countries.

The organisations involved delivered non-formal education programmes based on the principles of nonviolent debate, with the aim of creating inclusive spaces for dialogue where young people from different backgrounds could explore alternative ways of managing disagreement, develop listening skills and take part in discussions on issues relevant to their communities.

The local activities involved young people aged between 15 and 30 through workshops, practical exercises and reflection sessions led by previously trained facilitators. Participants were guided in exploring the key elements of the methodology, including expressing their own opinions, recognising different points of view, managing emotions during discussions, and seeking constructive ways to address conflicts and differences.

A central element of the activities was experiential learning: the young people not only acquired theoretical knowledge about nonviolent dialogue, but were also able to directly experiment with participatory tools and techniques, reflecting on how these skills can be applied in daily life, in personal relationships and in participatory processes within their own communities.

The local pilot projects also served to validate and adapt the methodology, enabling the partners to gather feedback from participants and assess the effectiveness of the proposed tools in different cultural and social contexts. These initiatives helped to strengthen the role of young people as active agents in promoting dialogue, social cohesion and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

Overall, the local activities reached around **375 young people in the three countries involved in the local trials (Kosovo, Türkiye and Ukraine)**, creating concrete opportunities for participation in and experimentation with nonviolent debate. Through the direct involvement of young people and the

strengthening of local practitioners' skills, this phase has contributed to the development of a network of educational practices capable of supporting processes of peace, inclusion, and democratic participation at community level.

4. **Development of the Training Curriculum on Nonviolent Debate and Dissemination of Results**

The final phase of the project was dedicated to the creation of a training curriculum on **nonviolent debate**, aimed to transform the knowledge, methodologies and practices developed throughout the project into a structured educational tool accessible to youth workers, educators and organisations working in the fields of youth participation, peace education and conflict transformation.

The curriculum was developed on the basis of the findings from research on the training needs of youth workers, the skills acquired during the **international Training for Trainers** programme, and the pilot initiatives carried out in various local contexts. The document therefore integrates theoretical references, pedagogical principles, methodological tools and practical activities aimed at supporting the design and facilitation of educational programmes based on dialogue, active listening, the constructive management of differences and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

Creating the curriculum brought together everything the project had learned. It allowed partner organisations to share their knowledge and experience and to produce a shared resource that can be adapted to different educational and local settings.

The programme concluded with an **international online dissemination event**, aimed at presenting the curriculum and sharing the lessons learnt through the project. The event provided a forum for discussion among youth workers, educators and interested organisations, fostering the exchange of practices, the dissemination of the nonviolent debate methodology, and the opportunity to use the curriculum as a tool to further promote pathways of dialogue, participation and peace-building across various European contexts.

Table 1.1 - Summary of the project phases: from research to the dissemination of the nonviolent debate methodology

Project phase	Period	Activity	Brief description
1. Project launch and coordination	September - October 2024	**International kick-off meeting (Italy)**	First meeting of the partners to define the work plan, the overall methodology, the division of tasks and the tools for coordinating and monitoring the project.
2. Needs analysis and comparative research	September - December 2024	**Research into the training needs of youth workers and youth organisations**	Conducting comparative research in the partner countries through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with youth workers, educators and stakeholders in the youth sector, to identify needs, challenges and the skills required for managing conflicts and polarised debates.

3. Skills development	January - February 2025	**International Training for Trainers on nonviolent debate**	An international training programme aimed at youth workers, educators and activists from partner countries, designed to develop the skills needed to design and facilitate educational activities based on nonviolent debate.
4. Roll-out of the methodology in local areas	February - March 2025	**Local training sessions for youth workers and multipliers**	Training courses delivered in the various partner regions by participants in the Training for Trainers programme, with the aim of disseminating the methodology, adapting it to local contexts and strengthening the skills of youth workers.
5. Pilot programme with young people	September 2025 - March 2026	**Local Youth Work Initiatives**	Implementation of non-formal educational activities with young people in the partner regions to test nonviolent debate methodology, and to promote skills in dialogue, active listening, participation and constructive conflict management.
6. Development of the educational model	March - July 2026	**Co-design and creation of the training curriculum**	Systematisation of the results of research, training and pilot projects through the development of the curriculum on nonviolent debate aimed at youth workers and educators.
7. Sharing and dissemination of results	June - July 2026	**International event to disseminate the curriculum**	Presentation of the curriculum and sharing of project learnings through an online event for youth workers, educators and organisations interested in promoting nonviolent dialogue.

1.3 The International Partnership

The project **"Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation"** stems from a collaboration between five civil society organisations from Italy, Ukraine, Kosovo, Türkiye and Poland, connected by their extensive experience in working with young people and their commitment to promoting peace, human rights, democratic participation and non-formal education.

The partnership comprises of:

- **Centro Studi Sereno Regis ODV** (Italy) - an organisation dedicated to research, education and nonviolent action, with over forty years' experience in *peace education*, youth participation and European project management;
- **Center for Euroinitiatives** (Ukraine) - an organisation committed to promoting democratic values, peace education, youth participation and conflict transformation, with extensive experience in working with young people affected by war;

- **Local Peace** (Kosovo) - an association belonging to the international Youth Peace Ambassadors Network, specialising in peacebuilding, reconciliation, nonviolent conflict transformation and human rights education in post-conflict contexts;
- **Uluslararası Gençlik İnisiyatifi Derneği – UGİ-DER** (Türkiye) - an organisation committed to youth empowerment, democratic participation, non-formal education and the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities;
- **Peace Ambassadors Poland** (Poland) - an organisation belonging to the international Youth Peace Ambassadors Network, active in human rights education, *peace education*, research and the training of youth workers.

The composition of the partnership is one of the project's key strengths. Each organisation has contributed their specific fields of expertise gained in various social, cultural and political contexts: from peace education to conflict transformation, from human rights education to youth participation, from facilitating dialogue processes to working with communities affected by armed conflict, social polarisation, discrimination and inequality. This diversity of experience has enabled the development of an educational model capable of integrating complementary perspectives and addressing needs which, whilst emerging in different national contexts, share numerous common elements.

The international dimension of the partnership has also been a fundamental element of the entire research and co-design process. Through the ongoing exchange of educational practices, methodologies and professional experiences, the partner organisations have helped to validate the nonviolent debate model, putting it to the test in contexts characterised by different forms of conflict: from societies marked by the consequences of armed conflict, such as Ukraine and Kosovo, to contexts affected by processes of social polarisation, exclusion and intercultural tensions, right through to educational settings engaged on a daily basis in promoting democratic participation and dialogue.

This variety of expertise has enabled the development of a curriculum that is not merely the sum of the individual partners' experiences, but the result of a genuine process of mutual learning. The nonviolent debate model is, in fact, based on the integration of approaches, practices and tools tried and tested in the various countries involved, creating a shared educational proposal that is transferable and adaptable to a wide range of formal and non-formal educational contexts.

The following section presents the partner organisations and the specific contribution each has made to the development of the project and the creation of this curriculum.

Centro Studi Sereno Regis ODV (Italy)

The **Centro Studi Sereno Regis ODV (CSSR)** is an independent, non-profit, volunteer-based organisation founded in Turin in 1982. For over forty years, it has been working to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence, developing research, training and direct action initiatives aimed at young people, schools, educators, institutions and civil society organisations.

At the heart of the centre's identity lies a conception of **nonviolence** understood not merely as a rejection of direct violence, but as a practice capable of countering all its forms: **direct, structural or cultural violence**, in accordance with the perspective developed by Johan Galtung. For CSSR, nonviolence means recognising the interdependence between people, communities and the environment, adopting as a fundamental principle the responsibility for one's own actions and the pursuit of transformations that are always reversible and respectful of the dignity of all those involved.

Since 2014, CSSR has been a regular participant in the European **Erasmus+** and **European Solidarity Corps** programmes, coordinating and delivering training courses, youth participation activities, cooperation partnerships and international volunteering schemes. Over the years, it has engaged thousands of young people and youth workers from numerous European countries, building up significant expertise in the design and management of international initiatives dedicated to peace, human rights and youth participation.

One of the organisation's main areas of focus is **Peace Education**. The centre has a department specifically dedicated to education for peace and nonviolence, with the aim of supporting young people who experience forms of violence, discrimination or exclusion in developing interpersonal, participatory and democratic skills through inclusive, participatory, non-formal and nonviolent methodologies.

Over the years, CSSR has developed numerous initiatives in this field, including:

- Training programmes for teachers, educators and youth workers on the themes of peace education;
- International youth exchanges focused on peacebuilding, conflict transformation, human rights and democratic participation;
- European Solidarity Corps (ESC) projects aimed at promoting non-violence and civic activism;
- The production of teaching materials and methodological tools on peace education;
- Support for schools and youth organisations in implementing peace education programmes.

At the same time, the centre promotes research and *advocacy* activities aimed at educational institutions and public decision-makers, contributing to the development of educational policies geared towards building more inclusive and democratic communities. The project **"Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation"** forms part of this approach.

Within the project, Centro Studi Sereno Regis acted as the partnership coordinator, leading the comparative research process, the pedagogical design of the methodology, the pilot training activities and the drafting of this curriculum.

Centre for Euroinitiatives (Ukraine)

The **Centre for Euroinitiatives (CEI)** is a public, non-profit organisation based in **Sumy, Ukraine**. It was founded in 2008 with the aim of supporting the country's democratisation process through education, youth participation and the promotion of European values. Originally established under

the name *Centre for European Initiatives*, the centre brings together a team comprising youth workers, trainers, experts in non-formal education, youth leaders, volunteers and experts in international cooperation, all united by their commitment to building a democratic and participatory civil society.

The organisation's mission is to contribute to Ukraine's development in accordance with the principles of democracy, human rights and active citizenship, by promoting educational initiatives designed to strengthen the younger generations' participation in public life and foster intercultural dialogue.

Throughout its work, the centre has developed numerous programmes dedicated to promoting European integration, youth leadership and democratic participation. Among the objectives guiding its work are the development of educational programmes on European values and human rights, the promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity, the building of international networks of collaboration between young people from different countries, and support for the emergence of a culture of active citizenship.

The organisation also promotes international mobility programmes aimed at both young people and professionals from various sectors - teachers, journalists, civil servants, professionals and representatives of civil society - with the aim of fostering the exchange of expertise, international cooperation and the building of lasting partnerships.

Another key area of focus is the promotion of volunteering and civic participation. The centre supports the development of local and national networks of **Youth Euroclubs**, promotes initiatives dedicated to volunteering at local, regional, national and international levels, and carries out activities aimed at strengthening the younger generations' sense of social responsibility. At the same time, it develops programmes dedicated to environmental education, the promotion of gender equality, national unity and a culture of human rights.

One of the distinctive features of the Centre for Euroinitiatives is its strong commitment to **peace education** and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts. Since **2014**, following the outbreak of armed conflict in the country, the organisation has progressively directed a significant part of its work towards developing educational methodologies aimed at young people and communities directly involved in or affected by the war.

Over the years, it has designed and implemented numerous national and international programmes dedicated to peace-building, reconciliation and conflict transformation, including training courses for youth workers, international seminars, youth camps and educational programmes aimed at young people from conflict-affected areas.

Of particular significance was the experience of **the National youth peace camps**, held in **2016** and **2017**, which involved young people directly affected by the consequences of the war, offering them tools for dialogue, reconciliation and the building of mutual trust.

Between **2020** and **2022,** the centre also coordinated the project **"Peace Education: Ukrainian Youth Builds Dialogue"**, aimed at strengthening young people's skills in conflict transformation and

peacebuilding. As part of the project, recommendations were drawn up for institutions to encourage youth participation in peacebuilding processes, and a handbook containing methodological tools for peace education was produced, which is now used by numerous organisations and youth workers.

The Centre for Euroinitiatives' contribution to the project **"Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation"** is based on this established experience in peace education and in working with young people from conflict-affected contexts. The organisation has contributed specific expertise in designing educational programmes aimed at facilitating dialogue and promoting youth participation in peacebuilding processes in a context of war.

Local Peace (Kosovo)

Local Peace is a non-governmental organisation based in **Leposavić, Kosovo**, established with the aim of contributing to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in one of the European regions most affected by ethnic and political conflicts in recent decades. The organisation promotes a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding, placing at the centre the active role of local communities and, in particular, the younger generations in building relationships based on dialogue, mutual trust and peaceful coexistence.

Local Peace's mission is to strengthen civil society's contribution to peace processes, recognising that reconciliation cannot be imposed from above but requires the direct participation of those involved in conflicts and the communities that experience them on a daily basis. For this reason, the organisation works primarily with young people from different cultural backgrounds, promoting educational programmes aimed at developing skills in the nonviolent transformation of conflicts, human rights education and democratic participation.

Although it is a relatively young organisation, local peace draws on the experience gained by its members within numerous local and international organisations active in the fields of peacebuilding, non-formal education and international cooperation. Before the association was established, the founding group had, in fact, been involved in the design and implementation of numerous initiatives dedicated to reconciliation, intercultural dialogue and working with young people from communities divided by conflict.

The organisation possesses specific expertise in the fields of **peacebuilding**, **reconciliation**, **nonviolent conflict transformation**, human rights education, the prevention *of hate speech* and the facilitation of intercultural processes. This expertise forms the basis of its contribution to this project, particularly in the development of training activities focused on conflict management, dialogue and the deconstruction of polarising narratives.

Among the association's earliest initiatives is the **"Bridges for peace"** project, supported by **the Council of Europe**, designed as a training programme for young people from the various ethnic groups present in Kosovo. The main objective of the project is to provide tools and skills for the nonviolent transformation of conflicts and to promote forms of peaceful coexistence between historically opposed communities.

During the training programme, particular attention was paid to the analysis of **one-sided narratives**, stereotypical representations of "the Other" and media manipulation, which fuel social polarisation and make it more difficult to build dialogue. These issues are also particularly relevant to this project, as they highlight how conflict is often fuelled not only by conflicting interests, but also by distorted ways of interpreting reality and history.

Local Peace's experience therefore represents a fundamental contribution within the partnership, as it enables the integration of the nonviolent debate pedagogical model with practices developed directly within a region where peace-building and intercultural dialogue are a daily necessity rather than merely an educational objective. In this sense, the Kosovar partner has brought to the project a perspective deeply rooted in the practice of conflict transformation and the building of relationships between historically divided communities.

Uluslararası Gençlik İnisiyatifi Derneği – UGİ-DER (Türkiye)

Uluslararası Gençlik İnisiyatifi Derneği (UGİ-DER) is a non-governmental organisation based in **Türkiye**, founded with the aim of strengthening the role of the younger generations in the social, cultural, economic and democratic life of their region. The association promotes a concept of youth participation understood not merely as involvement in public activities, but as a genuine opportunity for young people to contribute to decision-making processes, propose policies and become key players in the development of their own communities.

UGİ-DER's mission is to foster youth empowerment through educational programmes, active citizenship initiatives and opportunities for participation that enable young people to develop personal, social and professional skills. The association works to ensure that the younger generation can acquire a greater sense of belonging to their local area and, at the same time, develop a European dimension of citizenship, strengthening intercultural dialogue and international cooperation.

The organisation operates in the city of **Diyarbakir**, one of the areas of Türkiye characterised by the greatest socio-economic fragility and a significant number of young people with limited educational and employment opportunities. It is precisely this context that represents the association's main area of intervention, as it regards youth participation and non-formal education as fundamental tools for combating social exclusion and promoting a more inclusive form of democratic citizenship.

UGİ-DER's activities include organising training courses, non-formal education workshops, cultural initiatives, programmes dedicated to youth participation, and projects aimed at developing entrepreneurship and civic activism. Through these initiatives, the association aims to strengthen young people's personal and interpersonal skills, supporting them in building pathways for active participation in community life.

The experience gained by UGİ-DER through Erasmus+ programmes has also enabled the organisation to build an international network of partnerships, offering many young people in the region opportunities for mobility, intercultural learning and participation in European projects. The

association regards the international dimension as a key tool for broadening the cultural horizons of the younger generations and strengthening their sense of belonging to the European community.

In the project **"Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation"**, UGİ-DER contributed in particular through its experience in engaging young people from backgrounds characterised by limited educational and social opportunities, bringing methodologies focused on participation, empowerment and education for democratic citizenship. The extensive experience of its members in Erasmus+ programmes has also facilitated the development of the international cooperation and educational experimentation activities envisaged by the partnership.

Thanks to its experience in youth empowerment, democratic participation and non-formal education, UGİ-DER contributed to the partnership by offering a perspective with a particular focus on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and on the development of educational pathways capable of strengthening youth leadership, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue - elements that constitute essential components of the **nonviolent debate** model developed by the project.

Peace Ambassadors Poland (Poland)

Peace Ambassadors Poland is a non-governmental organisation based in **Warsaw** which represents the Polish branch of **the Youth Peace Ambassadors Network (YPAN)**, an international network established as part of the **Council of Europe** programme launched in 2011 with the aim of promoting a culture of peace through youth empowerment, human rights education, and the promotion of human dignity, equality and respect for diversity. The network brings together young peacebuilders from over thirty countries across Europe and beyond, and supports the dissemination of educational practices focused on peacebuilding, nonviolent conflict transformation and democratic participation.

Building on this international experience, the Polish branch of the network established the association **Peace Ambassadors Poland**, with the aim of developing national initiatives in human rights education, peace promotion and civic participation, aimed primarily at young people, students and youth workers. The organisation views peace as a process closely linked to the protection of fundamental rights and regards education as a key tool for combating discrimination, social polarisation and exclusion.

The association's working group brings together professionals from different fields - lawyers, researchers, documentary filmmakers, ethnologists, journalists and trainers - united by their commitment to peacebuilding and the promotion of human rights. This multidisciplinary composition enables the organisation to address issues related to peace and conflict from complementary perspectives, integrating legal, educational, communication and research expertise.

The association's activities are centred on four main areas of focus:

- The promotion and protection of human rights;
- Human rights and peace education;

- Research into social phenomena and conflict transformation processes;
- The use of the arts and culture as tools for dialogue, inclusion and participation.

Peace Ambassadors Poland regularly organises workshops and educational programmes aimed at secondary school pupils, young people and youth workers, with the aim of raising awareness of tools for the protection of human rights, anti-discrimination legislation, the rights of minorities and the main methodologies of peace education. Alongside its training activities, the association promotes participatory research projects and experiments with innovative communication and advocacy tools aimed at the younger generation.

The association maintains ongoing collaboration with numerous European institutions committed to promoting human rights and peace. These include the **Council of Europe**, with which its trainers collaborated, amongst other initiatives, during **Youth Week 2022** in Strasbourg.

In the project **"Participation needs nonviolent debate for conflict transformation"**, Peace Ambassadors Poland played a central role in designing and coordinating comparative research into the training needs of youth workers in the various partner countries, contributing to the definition of the methodological framework, data collection tools, and analysis of the results. The findings from the research formed the basis for the design of the training programme and the entire curriculum. At the same time, the organisation contributed its expertise in the fields of human rights education, peace education and international training, helping to define the pedagogical principles of the nonviolent debate model and to develop training activities for youth workers and multipliers.

1.4 Conclusions

Working together in this international partnership was much more than a basic collaboration between organisations. By regularly sharing different teaching methods, educational practices and ways of working, the partners carried out a real joint learning process. This helped them combine their different strengths and develop a shared educational model.

Each partner has contributed their own experience, knowledge and methodologies, enriching the nonviolent debate model with perspectives developed in contexts characterised by different educational, social and cultural challenges. The result is a pedagogical approach which, whilst maintaining a solid theoretical foundation, stems from the combination of research and practice, and of reflection and field experimentation.

It is precisely this diversity of perspectives that is one of the key strengths of the model presented in the following pages. Nonviolent debate is not the product of a single organisation or a single national context, but the result of an international process that has made it possible to integrate experiences gained in fields such as peace education, nonviolent conflict transformation, human rights education, youth participation and dialogue facilitation. This variety of knowledge forms the basis for the following chapters, which are devoted to an in-depth exploration of the theoretical framework, the pedagogical model and the skills that characterise nonviolent debate.

2.

Why Implement a Project on Nonviolent Debate as an Educational Approach in Armed Conflict and Post-conflict Contexts?

> «Peace is what we have when conflict has been creatively transformed through nonviolent means. [] Peace is therefore understood as a systemic characteristic [...]. Peace is a revolutionary proposition. What is needed is not only a culture of peace, but also a structure of peace: these are the two systemic characteristics of peace, which shape people to act nonviolently and creatively, and vice versa».
>
> Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means*

The perspective proposed by Galtung allows us to understand conflict not as a deviation from peace, but as an inevitable dimension of social life that can be transformed through practices, competencies, and structures capable of sustaining nonviolent relationships. Within this framework, nonviolent debate is understood not simply as a communication technique, but as an **educational space** in which participants develop the competencies required to engage in processes of nonviolent conflict transformation.

2.1 The Need for New Spaces for Participation

We live in a historical context marked by increasing polarization in public debate, the widespread circulation of disinformation, and the rise of social, cultural, and political conflicts that make it progressively more difficult to create spaces for authentic dialogue. Digital platforms and social media have expanded opportunities for expression and participation. However, they have also fostered communication dynamics that frequently privilege simplification, confrontation, and the pursuit of immediate consensus. In doing so, they repeatedly and deliberately promote polarizing content in order to encourage users' emotional engagement and increase the time they remain on the platform.

Within this context, many young people experience considerable difficulty participating consciously and confidently in public debate. On the one hand, they may feel excluded from spaces perceived as competitive or judgmental. On the other hand, they are often exposed to communication models in which polarization, the delegitimization of others, and the portrayal of opposing positions as fundamentally irreconcilable become the dominant patterns.

These dynamics become even more evident in contexts marked by armed conflict, structural violence, or reconciliation processes, where differences of opinion extend far beyond divergent

ideas and involve personal experiences, collective memory, identities, trauma, and deeply rooted needs. In such contexts, creating an inclusive **'brave space'** for dialogue becomes an essential condition for promoting participation, strengthening community resilience, and supporting peacebuilding.

These reflections inspired the **nonviolent debate for conflict transformation** project, developed by five European organizations with the aim of consolidating and testing an educational methodology capable of supporting dialogue in contexts characterized by conflict and polarization. The project seeks to strengthen the competencies of youth workers and partner organizations by promoting nonviolent debate as a tool for youth participation, resilience, and the nonviolent transformation of conflict.

Its primary objectives include developing an educational model specifically designed for contexts of war and polarization; facilitating the exchange of youth work practices among organizations operating in different European countries; training youth workers and multipliers; developing pilot activities based on the methodology in local contexts; and creating a training curriculum based on needs analysis and the evaluation of practical experiences.

Reflection on these challenges did not remain purely theoretical. Rather, the project builds upon a longer process of research and experimentation initiated several years earlier through initiatives dedicated to promoting youth participation and nonviolent debate. Over time, this process highlighted the need to rethink the very meaning of debate as an educational practice.

2.2 The Origins of the Method: from the *Participation Needs Debate Project* to *Nonviolent Debate for Conflict Transformation*

The nonviolent debate methodology emerged from an action research process carried out through several European projects dedicated to youth participation. The first phase of experimentation began with the *Participation Needs Debate* project, promoted by the Centro Studi Sereno Regis together with local partners. Its objective was to create a form of participation that would be more inclusive and accessible than traditional models of debate.

From the earliest stages of the project, a fundamental question emerged: *What kind of debate do we want to promote?* Even more importantly, it became necessary to reflect on the meaning of the very word *debate*, which is often associated with competition, the opposition between winners and losers, or the need to persuade one's interlocutor.

The project team deliberately chose to redefine this concept. Debate came to be understood as a welcoming space where participants can practice nonviolence in communication, recognize both their own vulnerabilities and those of others, engage in reciprocal listening, and create the conditions in which every person is free to decide whether - and how - to participate in the discussion.

The objective is not to reduce conflict or eliminate disagreement, but rather to create a space capable of embracing the complexity of the issues under discussion. Emotions, personal experiences, and differing perspectives are therefore regarded not as obstacles to dialogue, but as valuable resources through which reality can be understood more deeply and processes of change can be fostered.

One of the central insights that emerged during this initial experimentation concerns the role of debate as a process of **mutual learning**. Debate is not conceived as an isolated event or a

competition between arguments, but as a process that requires time, introspection, attentive listening, and a willingness to reconsider one's own beliefs. Discussions may even arise from informal conversations in everyday life, provided that they are supported by careful facilitation and a relational context that promotes mutual respect.

This first experience laid the theoretical and methodological foundations of Nonviolent Debate, which were later expanded through a second edition of the project in partnership with organizations from Catalonia and Ukraine. In Italy, the methodology was implemented through a comprehensive educational programme involving lower and upper secondary schools, with a particular focus on contexts characterized by marginalization, educational disadvantage, and the risk of school dropout. Students participated in workshops on active listening, nonviolent communication, and debate techniques before designing and facilitating numerous peer-to-peer debates themselves.

This experimentation demonstrated that young people are not merely recipients of educational initiatives but can become facilitators of dialogue, promoters of participation, and protagonists of processes of change within their own communities. The reflections generated during these debates were collected and transformed into recommendations addressed to candidates for the European Parliament, demonstrating how Nonviolent Debate can be translated into concrete forms of democratic participation.

Through these experiences, the methodology gradually matured until it evolved into the current **Nonviolent debate for conflict transformation** project, which further expands the approach by adapting Nonviolent Debate to contexts of war, post-conflict reconstruction, and intense social polarization.

2.3 What Do We Mean by *Nonviolent Debate*?

Nonviolent debate is an **educational approach** designed to promote forms of dialogue capable of transforming conflict into an opportunity for learning, participation, and relationship-building. It does not seek to avoid disagreement or eliminate conflict; rather, it creates the conditions that enable people to move through conflict without generating new forms of violence.

By nonviolent debate, we mean an educational process through which people learn to construct and critically examine their own opinions while developing an awareness of the processes through which those opinions are formed. The views we hold are therefore not simply the result of neutral access to information. Instead, they are shaped by the meanings we attribute to reality, by our frames of reference, and by the interpretative lenses through which we understand what happens around us.

Accordingly, the methodology encourages participants to reflect not only on the strength of the arguments they use, but also on the cognitive and relational processes that shape the ways in which they know and understand the world. This means recognizing the influence of underlying assumptions, deeply held beliefs, and cognitive biases that may affect how we select, interpret, or reject particular information. The goal is **not to eliminate subjectivity**, which is impossible in any process of knowledge construction, but rather to cultivate the ability to **recognize one's own subjectivity** and engage with it consciously.

The methodology promotes **active listening** as a fundamental competence for dialogue. Active listening does not simply mean waiting for one's turn to speak; it means making a genuine effort to understand another person's perspective, suspending judgment, acknowledging the legitimacy of different experiences, and remaining open to questioning one's own beliefs.

Another central feature of the methodology is its recognition of the complexity of opinions. Every viewpoint emerges from the intersection of personal experiences, values, needs, identities, and cultural contexts. Consequently, nonviolent debate encourages participants to move beyond the logic of polarization by appreciating nuance and resisting the tendency to reduce discussions to simplistic oppositions between two irreconcilable positions.

In this sense, the methodology also serves as an instrument for developing **critical thinking**. However, the critical thinking promoted through nonviolent debate goes beyond the ability to distinguish accurate information from false information or to identify the position that appears closest to an assumed objective truth. It also involves reflecting on the processes through which we construct meaning, interpret events, and assign value to the information we encounter.

Developing critical thinking therefore means learning to question one's own assumptions, recognize personal blind spots, and understand how emotions, identities, and cognitive patterns influence our interpretation of reality. Engaging with different perspectives becomes an opportunity to broaden one's understanding, not because it necessarily leads to consensus, but because it enables a deeper appreciation of the complexity of the issues under discussion and the plurality of ways in which they may be understood.

The project also invests in young people as **peacebuilders**, recognizing their potential to promote dialogue, inclusion, and conflict transformation within their communities. Through nonviolent debate, young people are not simply invited to express their opinions; they are accompanied in a process of developing critical thinking, clarifying their values, and strengthening their civic responsibility.

Accordingly, nonviolent debate views discussion not as a competition in which one position must prevail over another, but as a process of mutual learning in which every participant contributes to expanding the collective understanding of an issue.

To fully appreciate this approach, it is also necessary to distinguish it from forms of debate traditionally used in educational settings. Although both approaches recognize the importance of engaging with different viewpoints, **nonviolent debate** is grounded in a fundamentally different understanding of communication, conflict, and learning, thereby establishing an independent educational paradigm that will be explored in the following section.

2.4 From Competitive Debate to *Nonviolent Debate*: a Paradigm Shift

Nonviolent debate is not simply a variation of traditional debate but an *independent educational paradigm*. While it retains the exchange of differing viewpoints as a central feature, it fundamentally redefines the objectives of debate, its relational dynamics, and its ethical foundations. The focus is no longer the opposition between competing arguments but the creation of a space in which dialogue becomes an opportunity for mutual understanding, learning, and conflict transformation.

The shift proposed by nonviolent debate concerns three fundamental dimensions:

- **The purpose of debate**, which shifts from defending one's own position to developing a shared understanding of a complex issue;
- **The relationship with others**, who are no longer viewed as opponents to be persuaded but as people from whom we can learn;
- **The understanding of conflict**, which is no longer seen as something to win or eliminate but as an opportunity for growth, learning, and transformation.

The principal differences between the two approaches are summarized below.

Table 2.1 - Traditional Debate and Nonviolent Debate: a Comparison of Educational Paradigms

Traditional Debate	Nonviolent Debate
The objective is to support and defend a position.	The objective is to understand an issue in all its complexity.
Discussion is oriented toward persuasion and rebuttal.	Discussion is oriented toward listening, mutual understanding, and the shared construction of meaning.
The other person is viewed as an opponent to convince.	The other person is viewed as a source of learning and understanding.
Positions are treated primarily as opposing viewpoints.	Positions are explored through values, interests, needs, and lived experiences.
Success is measured by the ability to defend one's position effectively.	Success is measured by the quality of the dialogue and the process of mutual learning.
Disagreement is primarily something to overcome.	Disagreement is recognized as an educational resource.
The facilitator ensures compliance with rules and the quality of argumentation.	The facilitator accompanies the process, supports relationships, and creates a safe and inclusive space for dialogue.
The emphasis is placed mainly on content.	Attention is also given to emotions, relationships, needs, and the quality of the communicative process.

As this comparison illustrates, the difference does not simply concern the way debates are organized. Rather, it reflects two fundamentally different conceptions of learning, communication, and conflict.

Traditional debate is a well-established educational practice that is particularly effective in developing argumentative skills, information literacy, critical thinking, and communication abilities. Preparing arguments, using reliable sources, and defending a position are valuable competencies that nonviolent debate fully acknowledges and appreciates.

However, when discussion concerns issues characterized by profound social tensions, identity conflicts, or deeply rooted divisions, the competitive structure of traditional debate may make constructive processes more difficult to achieve. Attention naturally shifts toward defending one's own position and refuting opposing arguments, leaving less room to explore the experiences, needs, and values from which differing opinions emerge.

Nonviolent debate therefore broadens the educational purpose of dialogue. Its goal is not to determine who is right or to identify a winner, but to create the conditions in which people can develop a deeper understanding of an issue, question one another respectfully, and collectively generate new ways of interpreting reality.

Within this perspective, the ability to argue effectively remains important, but it is no longer sufficient. The methodology also cultivates competencies that are essential for the nonviolent transformation of conflict:

- Understanding the deeper motivations that shape people's opinions;
- Practising genuine listening while remaining open to being challenged by another person's perspective;
- Recognizing the complexity of the issues under discussion and resisting simplistic or polarized interpretations;
- Developing the willingness to critically reconsider one's own beliefs;
- Paying attention not only to the content of the discussion but also to the emotions, relationships, and needs of everyone involved.

Dialogue becomes a process of shared exploration in which discussion is not intended to prevail over others but to deepen collective understanding through the diversity of perspectives present. The quality of the process becomes as important as the issues being discussed, while conflict is recognized as an inevitable dimension of human coexistence that can be addressed constructively without resorting to violence.

This perspective becomes even more significant in contexts of conflict and post-conflict, where the challenge is not simply the existence of differing opinions but the possibility of preserving a space for dialogue among individuals and groups whose experiences have been profoundly different, and are often marked by trauma, violence, or social fragmentation.

For this reason, nonviolent debate does not seek to eliminate conflict or necessarily achieve consensus. Instead, it recognizes disagreement as a natural feature of democratic life and considers the ability to remain in relationship despite differences to be a fundamental competence for peacebuilding.

Adopting this perspective also means acknowledging that social reality can rarely be reduced to simple oppositions or definitive answers. One of the principal educational challenges of nonviolent debate is therefore to help people resist the polarization of thought and communication while developing the capacity to embrace complexity without abandoning dialogue.

2.5 Beyond Polarization: Educating for Complexity

> «*Complexus* means that which is woven together; complexity exists when the different elements that constitute a whole are inseparable, and when there is an interdependent, interactive, and inter-retroactive relationship between the object of knowledge and its context, between the parts and the whole, the whole and the parts, and between the parts themselves. Complexity is therefore the link between unity and multiplicity. The developments characteristic of our planetary era confront us increasingly and inevitably with the challenges of complexity».
>
> Edgar Morin, *The Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*

Polarization represents one of the main challenges characterizing contemporary public debate. Complex issues are frequently reduced to clear-cut oppositions, in which people are encouraged to completely identify with one position and to consider the opposing one as incompatible with their own.

In these contexts, dialogue gradually gives way to confrontation, while the complexity of situations is sacrificed in favour of simplistic and dualistic narratives.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in contexts marked by armed conflicts, social crises, or strong political tensions, but it increasingly affects everyday communication as well, especially within digital environments. The logic of polarization tends to simplify reality, fostering dynamics of opposing group identification that make it difficult to recognize the legitimacy of other people's experiences and needs.

Nonviolent debate proposes a different approach, based on the recognition of complexity. Every opinion is the result of an intersection of experiences, values, emotions, needs, and cultural contexts that cannot be reduced to a simple position of being "for" or "against" something. For this reason, the method encourages exploring what lies behind expressed opinions, focusing on understanding the deeper motivations that guide people's choices.

Educating for complexity also means developing the ability to coexist with uncertainty and doubt, accepting that some issues do not have simple or definitive answers. Nonviolent debate therefore encourages an attitude of openness and curiosity, in which changing one's mind or reconsidering one's beliefs does not represent a weakness, but rather a natural consequence of the learning process.

From this perspective, conflict is neither denied nor avoided. On the contrary, it is recognized as an inevitable dimension of democratic coexistence and as an opportunity to broaden the understanding of reality. Dialogue thus becomes a space where differences can be explored without necessarily transforming into new forms of exclusion or violence.

Developing this capacity is even more important today, in a communication context characterized by the rapid spread of information and increasing exposure to phenomena of disinformation and manipulation.

2.6 Critical Thinking, Disinformation, and Manipulation

Polarization and disinformation are closely interconnected phenomena. When public debate is reduced to opposition between different sides, it becomes easier for partial, manipulated, or false information to be used to reinforce pre-existing beliefs rather than promote a critical understanding of reality.

For this reason, nonviolent debate considers critical thinking an essential competence within the educational process. However, developing critical thinking does not only mean acquiring tools to verify the reliability of information or distinguish between facts and interpretations; it also means understanding the ways in which each person constructs their own vision of the world.

Every individual interprets reality through a set of experiences, values, previous knowledge, and forms of belonging that influence the way information is selected and given meaning. Even when faced with the same data, different people can construct different interpretations based on their own frames of reference. Nonviolent debate therefore invites participants to recognize this situated dimension of knowledge, promoting the ability to question their own beliefs and identify the mechanisms that may lead people to confirm exclusively what they already consider to be true.

The aim of the method is not to provide correct answers or guide people towards a specific position, but rather to create the conditions in which each participant can develop an autonomous,

conscious, and open-minded judgement that remains receptive to dialogue. This way the possibility of encountering different perspectives becomes an opportunity to test one's own convictions, recognize the complexity of the issues addressed, and expand one's understanding of reality.

In this sense, nonviolent debate also represents an important practice of education for democratic citizenship. Encouraging dialogue between different perspectives means strengthening young people's ability to participate responsibly in public life, not through the search for a definitive or unquestionable position, but through the development of the ability to dialogue, argue, listen, and remain connected with others even in situations of disagreement.

2.7 Nonviolent Debate in Contexts of Armed Conflict and Post-armed Conflict

The competences described in the previous sections have an even deeper meaning when applied in contexts marked by armed conflicts, structural violence, or reconciliation processes. In these situations, dialogue does not simply represent a tool for participation- rather, it becomes a necessary condition for rebuilding relationships, strengthening mutual trust, and creating spaces in which it is possible to imagine a shared future.

War and prolonged conflicts profoundly transform the ways in which people communicate, perceive others, and interpret disagreement. Traumatic experiences, loss, fear, and the construction of opposing narratives can make it extremely difficult to recognize the legitimacy of other people's perspectives or maintain an open space for exchange.

In these situations, the risk does not only lie in the existence of divergent opinions, but in the progressive impossibility of engaging in dialogue. People may feel forced to defend their identity, their group belonging, or their own experience, perceiving any form of openness as a sign of surrender or vulnerability.

For this reason, nonviolent debate does not present dialogue as a tool to eliminate conflict or quickly reach consensus. On the contrary, it recognizes that conflict is an inevitable component of human coexistence and that peacebuilding first requires the ability to remain in a relationship even when profound differences persist.

From this perspective, debate becomes a process of transformation. Through mutual listening, the exploration of needs, the recognition of emotions, and the understanding of different life experiences, people can progressively build new forms of trust and develop skills that are useful for managing conflict without resorting to violence.

It is precisely in response to these needs that the project **Nonviolent debate for conflict transformation** chose to experiment with this methodology in different contexts - Ukraine, Kosovo, Türkiye, and Italy - based on the belief that, despite their profound differences, they share the need to create safe spaces for dialogue, participation, and peacebuilding.

Before beginning this experimentation, however, it was necessary to understand the concrete needs of the youth workers engaged in these contexts and identify which competences were truly necessary to facilitate transformative dialogue processes.

2.8 Research Findings: Understanding Needs to Develop the Method

The development of the Nonviolent Debate model was accompanied by a comprehensive research process conducted in the project's five partner countries – Italy, Kosovo, Poland, Türkiye, and

Ukraine – with the aim of understanding the needs, challenges, and expectations of both young people and youth workers regarding dialogue and conflict management processes.

The research involved two complementary target groups. On the one hand, **762** young people between the ages of 15 and 30 participated in a questionnaire designed to explore their relationship with debate, the motivations that drive them to participate, the difficulties they encounter, and the skills they consider important for engaging with others. On the other hand, qualitative interviews were conducted with youth workers from the five partner countries to gain deeper insight into the perspectives of those who facilitate groups, support educational processes, and manage conflict situations on a daily basis.

Rather than validating predefined hypotheses, this research served as a tool for listening. The results made it possible to bring together experiences from very different contexts - from the war in Ukraine to reconciliation processes in the Balkans, to the phenomena of polarization present throughout Europe - revealing surprisingly convergent needs.

The evidence gathered served as one of the main points of reference for developing the nonviolent debate model presented in this curriculum. The methodological pillars described in the next chapter are not derived solely from theoretical sources but directly address the needs expressed by the young people and practitioners involved in the research.

2.8.1 Results of the Research with Young People

Participant Profile

The research involved a total of over **762** young people between the ages of 15 and 30.

In **Italy**, 158 questionnaires were collected. The group consisted mainly of young people between the ages of 25 and 30 (44%), followed by those aged 20 - 24 (28.3%) and those aged 15–19 (27.7%). 60.4% of the participants were women, 36.5% were men, and 2.5% were non-binary individuals. Most had a high level of education: 55.3% held a bachelor's degree and 6.9% held a Ph.D.

In **Kosovo**, 114 young people between the ages of 15 and 30 participated, primarily college students.

In **Poland**, 150 questionnaires were collected. 70.6% of the participants were between the ages of 20 and 30. Women accounted for 42.7%, men for 38.7%, while the remainder identified as non-binary, "other," or preferred not to specify. 41.3% were currently attending or had completed college, and 33.3% were high school graduates.

In **Türkiye**, the sample consisted mainly of young people between the ages of 15 and 24. 64.5% were currently attending or had completed college, while 30.9% had a high school diploma. Women accounted for 69.7% of the participants.

In **Ukraine**, 188 questionnaires were collected, primarily in the Sumy region. About 85% were between the ages of 15 and 19, and the remaining 15% were between the ages of 20 and 30. The sample consisted of about 80% women, 15% men, and the remaining 5% of other genders or people who preferred not to specify. About 70% were attending high school, while 25% were enrolled in college.

Overall, the research primarily reflects the voices of young women and people enrolled in educational programs, offering a meaningful snapshot of the segment of the youth population most actively engaged in civic participation and educational processes.

Interest in Debate: Young People Want to Engage

One of the first findings to emerge from the research concerns young people's relationship with debate. Contrary to a widespread narrative that the younger generations are uninterested in public discourse, the data reveal a different reality: in most cases, young people place great value on dialogue and see debate as an important opportunity for self-expression, learning, and participation.

In **Italy**, 42.8% say they find debate "fairly interesting" and 37.1% "very interesting," for a total of nearly 80% positive ratings. However, 73.6% say their willingness to participate depends mainly on the topic at hand, while only 13.2% say they enjoy debate regardless of the topic.

In **Poland** as well, 48% consider debates on controversial topics interesting, and 16.7% find them very interesting. However, 58% say they participate only when the topic sparks genuine personal interest.

In **Türkiye**, 40.8% of participants say they are very interested in the discussions, and an additional 38.2% are somewhat interested. Even in this case, however, only 13.8% say they always participate enthusiastically, while 70.4% decide whether to participate based on the context.

In **Ukraine**, about 30% consider debates very interesting, another 20% find them fairly interesting, while about 60% say their willingness to engage in debate depends on the topic at hand.

In **Kosovo**, 82% of the young people surveyed also regard debate as an important opportunity to express their opinions, understand others' points of view and tackle complex issues, whilst 65% recognise it as a tool that can foster personal growth, critical thinking and constructive dialogue.

Overall, one thing is very clear: young people do not shy away from discussion. On the contrary, they show widespread interest in the debate, but their participation depends heavily on the quality of the space in which it takes place. The topic being discussed, the atmosphere among participants, and the perception that they can freely express their point of view without being judged all have a decisive influence on whether they choose to take part in the discussion or remain silent.

What the Research Reveals

The challenge is not to motivate young people to engage in discussion, but to create contexts in which dialogue is perceived as meaningful, respectful, and safe. These findings highlight how the quality of the process is an essential prerequisite for fostering authentic participation and form the first foundation upon which the Nonviolent Debate method is built.

The Motivations that Drive Young People to Participate in Debates

The research findings show a strong convergence among the five partner countries regarding the motivations that drive young people to take part in a debate. Contrary to the image of debate as a competition aimed at prevailing over another person, what emerges is a conception of debate focused primarily on exchange, mutual listening, and the opportunity to share one's own point of view.

In **Italy**, the most frequently cited motivation is the desire to understand others' points of view (64.8%), followed by the desire to express one's own opinion (54.1%) and to help others understand one's own perspective (50.3%). Only (8.8%) of participants say they are primarily motivated by the desire to win the debate.

In **Poland**, too, a dialogical view of debate prevails. (60.7%) of young people say they participate in debates because they want others to understand their point of view. This is followed by the desire to understand others' opinions (34.7%) and to be able to freely express their own ideas (32%). A smaller percentage (29.3%), on the other hand, considers it important to be able to convince others or demonstrate the validity of their position.

In **Ukraine**, the motivations appear to be even more focused on personal expression. About (80%) of participants consider being able to express their own opinion a priority, while about (60%)want to better understand others' perspectives and about (50%) believe it is important to help others understand their point of view. Only about a quarter of young people (25%) cite winning the debate as a significant motivation.

Research conducted in **Kosovo** also confirms this trend. Although it does not provide detailed percentage data, participants describe debate as a space where they can express their opinions, understand different perspectives, address complex issues, and develop critical thinking through interaction with others.

In **Türkiye**, although the questionnaire did not include a detailed ranking of motivations, the responses collected show that young people view debate primarily as an opportunity to exchange ideas, communicate effectively, and build meaningful dialogue with others.

These findings are further confirmed when participants are asked to reflect on the goal they pursue during a discussion.

In **Italy**, 44.7% state that their main goal is to share their point of view without necessarily convincing the other person. 22% seek common ground for understanding, while 15.1% primarily want to better understand the other person's perspective. Only 14.5% consider winning the debate a priority.

A very similar distribution emerges in **Poland**, where 49.3% wish to share their perspective without imposing it, 22% seek common ground, 17.3% aim to better understand others, and just 8.7% identify winning as the main goal of the debate.

In **Ukraine**, too, about 40% of young people say they primarily want to share their perspective without trying to persuade others, while a significant proportion considers it a priority to be able to freely express their opinion and understand different points of view. Only a minority - about 25% - equates the success of a debate with being recognized as "right."

In **Kosovo** and **Türkiye**, the same qualitative approach emerges: debate is described primarily as a space for dialogue, personal growth, and constructive exchange rather than as a competition.

Overall, the research findings show that young people attribute a predominantly dialogic function to debate. The desire to be heard, to understand others, and to share one's own point of view is significantly more widespread than the desire to prevail or convince others.

What the Research Reveals

The research challenges one of the most widespread assumptions of traditional debate models: the idea that debate is primarily motivated by the desire to persuade or win. On the contrary, young people seem to seek out spaces where they can build mutual understanding, engage with different perspectives, and express their own experiences without experiencing the dialogue as a competition. This evidence reinforces one of the fundamental principles of Nonviolent Debate: transforming dialogue from an exercise in persuasion into an opportunity for mutual learning and the shared construction of meaning

The Emotions of Engagement: between the Desire to Participate and the Fear of Judgment

While the research highlights a strong interest in engagement and dialogue, it also shows that debate is often an emotionally challenging experience. In fact, a recurring tension emerges across all partner countries: young people want to participate, but at the same time they experience emotions that can limit their involvement, such as frustration, insecurity, fear of judgment, and fear of conflict.

In **Italy**, 40.9% of participants say they sometimes feel frustrated or defensive when someone strongly disagrees with their opinions, while 31.4% say they experience these emotions often. Furthermore, 40.9% consider feeling confident or in control during a debate to be “fairly important,” while an additional 5.7% consider it “very important.”

The picture is similar in **Poland** as well. 39.3% report feeling frustrated at times when their ideas are strongly challenged, while 31.3% experience this feeling frequently. For 45.3% of participants, feeling confident during a debate is an important factor, although about one-third (31.3%) remain neutral on this issue.

In **Ukraine**, where debate takes place in a context deeply marked by war and uncertainty, about 50% of young people say that feeling safe and confident during a debate is very important. At the same time, about half report feeling hurt, uncomfortable, or discouraged when their opinions are not accepted or valued.

In **Türkiye**, although detailed quantitative data on emotional reactions are not available, it is clear that managing emotions is one of the skills young people most wish to develop. Many participants, in fact, emphasize the difficulty of staying calm when the discussion becomes heated or is perceived as judgmental.

In **Kosovo** as well, the testimonies collected highlight how debate can generate a strong sense of vulnerability, especially when the discussion takes on a confrontational tone or when participants feel that their opinions are not respected or given careful consideration.

These dynamics are also reflected in their relationship with conflict. Although some young people say they are drawn to more intense discussions, the majority say they participate in them only under certain conditions.

In **Italy**, 37.1% say they are drawn to heated debates only occasionally, while 30.2% say they seek them out frequently.

In **Poland**, 14% often participate in particularly contentious discussions, 32% do so occasionally, and 18.7% only rarely.

In **Ukraine**, although there is interest in controversial topics, more than half of the participants say they avoid discussions characterized by high emotional tension.

Overall, therefore, an ambivalent relationship with conflict emerges: debate is perceived as important, but its emotional intensity can easily become an obstacle to participation.

This difficulty is particularly evident in self-censorship.

In **Italy**, 55.3% of young people say they sometimes hold back their opinions to avoid conflict, while 16.4% say they do so frequently.

In **Poland**, 44% report self-censoring occasionally, 8.7% frequently, and only 24% say they always express what they think.

Data from **Kosovo**, Türkiye, and Ukraine also confirm this trend. In all three contexts, it is evident that fear of judgment, criticism, or the impact on relationships leads many people to refrain from sharing their point of view, especially when the topic at hand is particularly sensitive or polarizing.

Overall, the research shows that silence is not necessarily a sign of disinterest. On the contrary, it very often represents a protective strategy adopted when the context is perceived as unsafe, and the fear of being judged, excluded, or misunderstood outweighs the desire to participate.

What the Research Reveals

Emotions are a central component of every dialogue process. Young people do not avoid confrontation because they are unable to discuss issues, but because they fear the relational consequences it may entail when the atmosphere becomes judgmental or competitive. Promoting nonviolent debate therefore means recognizing the role of emotions within the dialogic process and creating conditions in which each person can express themselves without having to choose between authenticity and safety. This insight constitutes one of the project's main methodological premises and foreshadows the importance of the Brave Space, active listening, and de-escalation practices, which will be explored in greater depth in the following chapters.

Barriers to Participation and the Conditions for a Safe Dialogue

One of the most significant findings to emerge from the research concerns the reasons why many young people choose not to participate in debates, even though they recognize their value. In all partner countries, it is clear that the main obstacle is not a lack of interest, but rather the perception that the environment is not sufficiently safe, inclusive, or welcoming.

The most commonly reported difficulties include fear of judgment, lack of confidence in one's ability to argue a point, fear that one's opinion will not be taken seriously, and discomfort with conflict or particularly tense discussions.

In **Italy**, the most frequently cited barrier is a lack of confidence in one's knowledge of the topic (40.9%), followed by the fear of being judged (33.3%), the perception that one's opinion would not be valued (30.8%), and discomfort with conflict (28.9%).

Very similar results emerge in **Poland** as well. 61.3% of participants fear that their point of view will not be considered important, while 51.3% say they do not feel sufficiently prepared to argue their ideas. Meanwhile, 20% cite fear of judgment as one of the main obstacles to participation.

In **Türkiye**, the most common barrier is the fear of being judged (38.2%), followed by discomfort with conflict (32.9%) and the belief that one's opinion will not be valued (21.1%).

In **Ukraine**, about half of the participants say they avoid confrontation out of fear of receiving criticism or being judged. About 40% say they do not feel sufficiently prepared to engage in a discussion, while over 50% avoid debates that are particularly contentious or marked by high emotional tension. Only about 20% attribute their lack of participation to a genuine lack of interest in the topic.

In **Kosovo,** the same is true: 58% say they avoid confrontation for fear of being judged, belittled or not taken seriously by others; 51% attribute this reluctance to the discomfort caused by debates perceived as too confrontational, aggressive or polarised, whilst 44% identify a lack of confidence in their own debating and communication skills as one of the main obstacles to participation.

These findings show that participation does not depend exclusively on individual characteristics, but also on the quality of the educational and relational context in which the debate takes place.

For this reason, the questionnaire also explored the conditions that help young people feel confident enough to take part in the discussion.

On this point as well, there is significant convergence among the five countries.

In **Italy**, the factor considered most important is the assurance of being listened to with respect, cited by 74.5% of participants. This is followed by the ability to express oneself without being judged (61%), the presence of a facilitator (30.8%), and the existence of shared rules for managing the dialogue (27.7%).

In **Poland**, the most strongly felt need is precisely the assurance of not being judged (58%), followed by the presence of a facilitator (42.7%), respectful listening (41.3%), and clear rules (32.7%).

In **Türkiye**, the elements considered most important are a respectful environment (33.6%) and the assurance of being able to express one's ideas without being judged (25.7%).

In **Ukraine**, between 60% and 70% of participants consider it essential to know that their words will be listened to with respect, while between 50% and 60% consider shared rules to be essential. Between 30% and 40% also attribute an important role to the presence of a moderator.

In **Kosovo**, as well, 91% of participants consider mutual respect and active listening to be essential conditions for an effective debate; 74% emphasise the importance of having neutral facilitators or mediators to ensure balance and a safe environment for discussion, while 68% highlight the need to

ensure that everyone, particularly those who feel less secure, has a genuine opportunity to express their point of view.

Another element that emerged concerns the sense of exclusion experienced during discussions.

In **Italy**, 50.9% of participants say they have felt excluded or discouraged at least sometimes during a debate, while 8.8% report that this happens frequently.

In **Poland**, this perception is even more pronounced: 60.7% report having often or sometimes experienced situations of exclusion or discouragement, while only 10.7% say they have never had such experiences.

In **Kosovo**, **Türkiye**, and **Ukraine** as well, there is a strong need to create more inclusive environments where even the least assertive people can feel heard without fear of being ridiculed, ignored, or marginalized.

Overall, the research conveys an extremely consistent message: when the debate is perceived as a respectful, structured, and facilitated space, the willingness to participate increases significantly. Conversely, the fear of judgment, exclusion, or conflict is one of the main factors leading people to refrain from participating.

What the Research Reveals

The results show that creating a safe space is not merely an ancillary element of nonviolent debate, but rather a fundamental condition for it. Young people seek environments where they can express their ideas without fear of being judged, belittled, or excluded. The presence of shared rules, attentive facilitation, and an atmosphere of mutual listening not only supports dialogue but is also a necessary prerequisite for the discussion to truly become an experience of participation, learning, and collective growth.

The Skills Young People Wish to Develop and Their Concept of Debate

In addition to examining the challenges encountered when participating in debates, the research explored which skills young people consider most important for engaging in constructive debate. The results show a highly consistent picture across the five partner countries: the skills considered most relevant do not so much concern the ability to persuade or prevail over others, but rather the ability to communicate clearly, listen, understand different perspectives, and manage one's emotions during the debate.

In **Italy**, the skill cited most frequently was the ability to clearly express one's point of view, chosen by 48.4% of participants. This was followed by the ability to remain calm in conflict situations (30.8%) and other interpersonal skills related to communication and listening.

In **Poland**, the desire to improve one's ability to express oneself is even more evident: 58.7% of young people cite the ability to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively as a priority. 48.7% want to develop a greater ability to understand others' points of view, 38.7% would like to learn to remain calm during discussions, and 32% recognize the importance of active listening.

A very similar hierarchy emerges in **Türkiye** as well. 43.4% of participants wish to improve their ability to express their opinions clearly, while 36.8% identify managing emotions and the ability to remain calm as a fundamental skill to develop. Another group emphasizes the importance of active listening as an essential element for fostering constructive dialogue.

In **Ukraine**, about half of the participants say they want to strengthen both their ability to express themselves with greater confidence and their ability to maintain self-control in situations of strong disagreement, recognizing that these skills take on even greater significance in a context marked by war and constant exposure to tense situations.

Research carried out in **Kosovo** confirms these findings from a qualitative perspective. Among the proposals put forward by young people, there is a recurring call for training programmes focused on developing self-confidence, critical thinking, empathetic listening, nonviolent conflict resolution and the use of inclusive language.

The research also explored how young people envision the ideal debate. Here, too, there is a strong convergence among the different countries.

In **Italy**, 85.5% of participants (43.4% strongly agree and 42.1% somewhat agree) believe that debates should focus more on mutual understanding rather than on winning.

In **Poland**, 63.4% share this same view, stating that the main goal of a debate should be to build a common understanding rather than to prevail over the other person.

In **Ukraine**, about 70% of young people argue that debates should prioritize dialogue and mutual understanding, while only a minority - between 20% and 25% - continue to place particular importance on winning or asserting their own position.

Qualitative research conducted in **Kosovo** and **Türkiye** confirms this trend, highlighting a widespread preference for respectful, collaborative forms of discussion focused on building relationships rather than on competition.

A final, particularly significant finding concerns how young people react to situations of communicative conflict.

When faced with aggressive language, offensive remarks, or intimidating behavior, most participants spontaneously choose de-escalation strategies.

In **Italy**, 40.3% say they would try to tone down the conversation, 25.2% would urge those involved to use more respectful language, and 50.3% would ask whoever is shouting to lower their voice. When faced with an offensive joke, 40.3% would choose to criticize it openly, and 34.6% would prefer to calmly explain why it might be offensive.

Very similar results emerge in **Poland**, where 55.3% of participants say they would try to steer the discussion back toward a calmer tone, while about 49.3% would urge those raising their voices to moderate their behavior.

In **Türkiye** and **Ukraine** as well, strategies focused on de-escalation, respectful dialogue, and nonviolent conflict management prevail. Finally, in **Kosovo**, there is a strong belief that facilitation and mutual listening play a fundamental role in preventing the escalation of conflicts during

debates. In fact, it is suggested that spaces for peer-to-peer discussion be created, that mentors be involved, and that structured formats with shared rules and, initially, less polarising topics be implemented, in order to encourage broader and more informed participation.

Overall, the research paints a picture of young people that is very different from the one often portrayed in public discourse. Although they live in contexts marked by polarization, social conflicts, and aggressive communication, most participants express a strong willingness to develop relational, communicative, and emotional skills that enable them to address dissent constructively.

What the Research Reveals

The research shows that young people recognize that participating in a debate requires skills that go far beyond the ability to argue. Expressing oneself clearly, listening actively, understanding different perspectives, managing emotions, and contributing to the deescalation of conflicts are considered fundamental skills for building authentic dialogue. At the same time, a clear preference emerges for debate models oriented toward mutual understanding rather than competition. The results confirm the need for an educational approach that prioritizes the quality of relationships, the safety of the process, and the development of dialogic skills. These principles form the foundation of nonviolent debate.

Overall, the research findings show that young people's need is not simply to learn how to "debate better," but to be able to take part in spaces for discussion where they feel heard, respected, and empowered to express their own point of view. Interest, motivation, and a desire for dialogue are already present; what is often lacking are the relational and methodological conditions that make authentic participation possible.

To understand how to address these needs, however, it is necessary to complement the young people's perspective with that of those who support these processes on a daily basis. The interviews conducted with youth workers from the five partner countries allow us to explore the skills required for facilitation, the difficulties encountered in managing groups, and the strategies considered most effective for creating respectful, inclusive, and transformative spaces for dialogue. It is precisely from the convergence of these two perspectives that the methodological model of nonviolent debate, presented in the following chapters, took shape.

2.8.2 The Results of the Interviews with Youth Workers

While the research conducted with young people helped us understand the needs of those participating in debate processes, the interviews with youth workers allowed us to explore the perspectives of those who design, facilitate, and support these processes on a daily basis.

The interviews were conducted in the project's five partner countries: Italy, Kosovo, Poland, Türkiye, and Ukraine, with the aim of understanding how youth workers interpret their role, what difficulties they encounter in facilitating discussions on controversial topics, what skills they consider essential, and what training needs emerge from their professional experience.

Despite the different geographical, cultural, and political contexts, the research highlights a notable convergence. In fact, in all countries, a conception of youth work emerges that is oriented toward

creating safe spaces for dialogue, constructively managing conflicts, and promoting the active participation of young people. At the same time, the interviews highlight how this role requires increasingly complex skills, especially in contexts characterized by social polarization, identity conflicts, or armed violence.

The findings that follow represent one of the key factors that have most influenced the development of the Nonviolent Debate model presented in this curriculum.

Reflective Practice as a Professional Competency

> «Professionals are called upon to reflect in the heat of the moment, transforming uncertainty into a manageable situation, giving shape to unique problems, and devising intervention strategies directly in the field».
>
> Donald Alan Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*

This reflection accurately captures what emerged from the interviews conducted in the fivepartner countries. Youth workers describe a line of work in which it is rarely possible to apply standardized procedures or predefined solutions. Every group, every context, and every conflict presents specific characteristics that require a constant capacity for observation, adaptation, and reworking of the educational intervention.

Facilitating a Nonviolent Debate therefore means making continuous decisions as the activity unfolds: understanding when to allow space for discussion and when to intervene, recognizing signs of escalation, choosing whether to temporarily suspend the discussion or rephrase a question, and assessing how to protect the participation of those who struggle to speak up without limiting others' freedom of expression.

From this perspective, facilitation is not merely the application of a methodology but becomes a reflective practice in which technical skills, relational sensitivity, and professional ethics are continually intertwined. The interviewed youth workers, in fact, describe their work as a dynamic process of observation, interpretation, and decision-making, in which each intervention is shaped by what is actually happening within the group.

The Pole of the Youth Worker: Educator, Facilitator, Mediator

One of the first areas explored concerns how the interviewees define their own role.

A variety of definitions emerge across all countries: educator, facilitator, mediator, mentor. Rather than identifying with a single professional role, youth workers describe their work as a continuous integration of different functions, which change according to the group's needs.

In **Italy**, those working in local educational settings tend to identify more with the role of educator, while those working in non-formal education and international cooperation prefer to define themselves as facilitators. However, many interviewees emphasize that the educational process cannot be conceived of as unidirectional.

As one interviewee stated:

> **«Even when I'm in my educational role, I personally feel more like a facilitator of processes. Learning should never be a one-way process».**

A very similar view emerges in **Kosovo**, **Poland**, **Türkiye**, and **Ukraine** as well: the role of the youth worker consists primarily of creating the conditions that allow the group to communicate, reflect, learn, and build meaningful relationships.

Rather than simply conveying content, the facilitator guides processes.

Neutrality and Impartiality: a Shared Reflection

One of the most interesting aspects that emerged from the interviews concerns the concept of neutrality.

In all countries, youth workers recognize the importance of ensuring impartiality in managing the process, but at the same time they question the idea that a facilitator can be completely neutral.

In **Italy**, this reflection is particularly pronounced. Several interviewees note that every educational choice - the topics proposed, the questions asked, the way an activity is structured - inevitably reflects a worldview.

As one interviewee summarizes:

> **«Even when facilitating a process, you bring your personal values with you, and this makes it impossible to be neutral from a political standpoint».**

Neutrality is therefore reinterpreted as impartiality in dealing with people, not as an absence of values.

In **Poland**, this stance translates into a constant effort to listen to both sides, clarify different perspectives, and foster mutual understanding.

One interviewee states:

> **«The most important thing is to talk, listen to both sides separately, understand what happened, and clarify the situation together».**

In **Türkiye**, youth workers emphasize that taking sides during a conflict almost always risks fueling escalation, while in **Kosovo** and **Ukraine**, the importance of active listening, paraphrasing, and constantly referring to the group's shared rules is highlighted.

The situation in Ukraine is particularly significant, where many discussions revolve around extremely sensitive topics such as war, language, national identity, and cultural affiliations. In these contexts, youth workers report frequently resorting to taking breaks, allowing for emotional decompression, and reminding participants of shared rules to prevent discussions from escalating.

Why Nonviolent Debate is Considered Necessary

A very strong conviction emerges across all five countries: Nonviolent Debate is not simply a discussion technique, but an educational tool capable of developing fundamental democratic skills.

In **Italy**, it is linked to building inclusive communities, youth empowerment, and the prevention of discrimination.

In **Kosovo**, it is seen as a space where young people can feel that they are being listened to and can learn to live alongside diversity.

In **Poland**, it is described as a fundamental tool for learning to resolve conflicts through dialogue.

As one interviewee stated:

> **«I believe that the ability to engage in dialogue with mutual respect is fundamental. It's important to convey to young people that any problem can be addressed through conversation».**

In **Türkiye**, many youth workers observe that many young people grow up exposed to highly aggressive communication styles, present in the media, in politics, in school, and even within family settings. For this reason, respectful dialogue cannot be taken for granted but must be taught and practiced.

Finally, in **Ukraine**, Nonviolent Debate is considered an essential tool for enabling young people to address extremely painful issues while maintaining a space of psychological safety and mutual respect.

What the Research Reveals

The interviews show that the role of the youth worker goes far beyond that of moderating a discussion. Facilitating a Nonviolent Debate means designing the process, building trust, managing the group's emotions, recognizing power dynamics, supporting mutual listening, and guiding conflict without repressing or fueling it. The research also challenges a naive conception of neutrality: the facilitator is not neutral with regard to the values of dignity, respect, and nonviolence, but is impartial in managing the process, so that everyone can participate on an equal footing and in a safe environment.

The Challenges of Facilitation in Polarized Contexts

While the first part of the interviews helped outline the role of the youth worker as a facilitator of dialogic processes, the second part highlights the practical complexity of educational work when discussions involve highly divisive issues.

In fact, across all partner countries, it becomes clear that facilitating a debate becomes particularly delicate when personal and collective identities, traumatic experiences, political affiliations,

discrimination, religion, gender, or social inequalities come into play. In these cases, the conflict is not merely about differing opinions but involves deep-seated experiences, intense emotions, and power dynamics that can undermine the very possibility of dialogue.

The situations described by youth workers share many similarities.

In **Italy**, conflicts can arise both in informal educational settings, where they sometimes escalate into episodes of physical aggression, and during structured activities, in which culturally sensitive topics can cause significant tensions within the group.

In **Kosovo**, interviewees identify the use of derogatory language, very intense emotional reactions, and the spread of misinformation as among the main difficulties. These elements make it hard to maintain a respectful dialogue.

In **Poland**, political issues, discrimination, the spread of fake news, and personal attacks are cited as particularly sensitive topics, in addition to the difficulty of addressing issues that directly involve the participants' families.

In **Türkiye**, many youth workers describe how complex it is to facilitate discussions on politics, religion, gender roles, masculinity, and migration, noting that even seemingly neutral topics can quickly turn into opportunities for strong polarization.

Finally, in **Ukraine**, the main sources of tension inevitably revolve around the war, national identity, language, cultural affiliations, and the rights of LGBTQIA+ people. These are issues that permeate deeply into young people's daily lives.

Taken together, these experiences show that conflict is rarely determined solely by the content of the discussion. More often, it arises from the interplay of emotions, personal experiences, identities, and power dynamics that each person brings to the dialogue.

Recognizing Escalation: the Signs that Turn a Discussion into a Conflict

The interviews also made it possible to identify certain recurring elements that mark the transition from a constructive exchange to a violent conflict dynamic.

Very similar signs emerge in all partner countries: constant interruptions, offensive language, sarcasm, personal attacks, the spread of false information, raised voices, refusal to listen, and the gradual discrediting of the other person.

In **Italy**, cultural misunderstandings, unresolved tensions, and the use of aggressive language are cited most frequently.

In **Kosovo**, particular attention is paid to disparaging comments, interruptions, and emotionally charged statements.

In **Poland**, insults, generalizations, fake news, and verbal aggression are cited.

In **Türkiye**, youth workers report that insults targeting personal identity, physical appearance, or family - as well as sexist and discriminatory language - are particularly problematic.

In **Ukraine**, the first signs of escalation are recognized in a gradual rise in the tone of voice, the emergence of hate speech, provocations, and personal attacks.

Although they take different forms, these elements share a common characteristic: they shift the focus **from the topic of discussion to the relationships between people**, preventing them from listening to one another.

De-escalation Strategies Used by Youth Workers

When faced with these situations, there is also a notable convergence in the strategies adopted.

In all partner countries, youth workers describe a set of practices aimed at defusing conflict before it escalates.

Among the most common strategies are the shared establishment of rules for dialogue, active listening, the use of open-ended questions, paraphrasing what has been said, temporarily suspending the discussion when emotions become too intense, and ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak.

In **Italy**, several interviewees emphasize the importance of creating, from the very beginning, a space that is perceived as safe and neutral. When necessary, they choose to temporarily separate the people involved in the conflict, in order to later facilitate a more structured discussion.

As one interviewee explains:

> **«It's important to tailor the intervention to achieve the educational goal in the most respectful way possible».**

In **Kosovo**, strategies prioritize establishing shared rules, redirecting emotional comments, and fostering empathy.

In **Poland**, the interviewees emphasise the importance of intervening promptly by helping people understand each other's perspectives, but without further fueling the conflict.

In **Türkiye**, youth workers describe a particularly rich repertoire of tools: reflective questions, role-playing activities, humor, changes in the physical setting, cooperative activities, and moments of one-on-one discussion.

In **Ukraine**, taking breaks, returning to shared rules, changing the format of the activity, and constantly emphasizing respectful communication have proven particularly effective.

Across all the experiences gathered, it is clear that de-escalation does not depend on a specific technique, but on the facilitator's ability to read what is happening in the group and intervene with relational sensitivity.

What the Research Reveals

The interviews confirm that conflict does not arise simply from the presence of differing opinions, but from the way in which they are expressed and the quality of the relationships that develop among people. For this reason, facilitating a Nonviolent Debate means, first and foremost, knowing how to recognize the signs of escalation, creating conditions of relational safety, and guiding the group toward forms of discussion that keep the dialogue open even during moments of heightened tension. This skill represents one of the central elements of the entire methodological model developed by the project and will be one of the first pillars explored in depth in the next chapter.

The Limits of Facilitation: between Freedom of Expression and Protecting People

One of the themes that emerges most strongly from the interviews concerns the delicate balance between promoting freedom of expression and the need to ensure a safe environment for all participants.

While emphasizing the importance of fostering the exchange of differing viewpoints, youth workers from the five countries agree that not every form of communication can be accepted in the name of dialogue. Indeed, there are limits beyond which the facilitator must intervene to protect people's dignity and prevent the discussion from turning into a space of exclusion or violence.

In **Italy**, the interviewees emphasize that it is essential to embrace a diversity of opinions, but they also recognize the need to intervene decisively when the well-being or safety of the group is at risk.

In **Kosovo**, the importance of guaranteeing freedom of expression is reiterated, without, however, tolerating discriminatory language or behavior that could harm others.

In **Poland**, the principle that mutual respect is an essential condition for dialogue to continue emerges strongly; for this reason, incidents of verbal aggression cannot be ignored.

In **Türkiye**, interviewees state that sexist, racist, or discriminatory remarks always require the facilitator's intervention. Some prefer to immediately halt the discussion, while others choose - when the group allows, to encourage collective reflection so that the participants themselves can recognize the effects of such language.

Finally, in **Ukraine**, the boundary is defined with particular clarity: hate speech, incitement to violence, identity-based insults, degrading language, and discrimination cannot be considered mere opinions, but rather constitute behaviors incompatible with a space for Nonviolent Debate.

Taken together, these reflections show that facilitating a debate does not mean accepting any form of communication, but rather creating the conditions so that each person can express themselves without compromising others' ability to participate.

The Facilitator is Also Part of the Process

Another particularly significant element that emerged from the research concerns the awareness that the facilitator is not an external observer of the conflict, but a person who enters the relationship bringing their own history, values, emotions, and limitations with them.

This theme is explored in greater depth, particularly in the interviews conducted in Italy, where many youth workers emphasize the importance of recognizing their own emotional triggers and developing a consistent practice of self-reflection.

One interviewee notes, for example, that one of the most difficult situations to manage does not necessarily involve the young people themselves, but rather the perceived inconsistency between the stated values and the actual behaviors of the adults with whom they work.

As they state:

> **«The lack of consistency between what is said and what is done is one of the things that causes me the most difficulty».**

In **Kosovo**, **Türkiye**, and **Ukraine** as well, there is a growing awareness that certain issues can deeply affect the facilitator on a personal level. For this reason, skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, the ability to take breaks, and recognizing one's professional limits are considered essential.
Research thus shows that the quality of facilitation also depends on the youth worker's ability to observe themselves while guiding the group, ensuring that their own reactions do not unconsciously influence the process.

The Systemic Challenges of Educational Work

In addition to difficulties directly related to group management, the interviews highlight numerous organizational and structural obstacles that affect the daily work of youth workers.

In **Italy**, the precarious nature of educational work, the limited professional recognition of youth work, the difficulty of defining clear boundaries between personal and professional life, and the growing risk of burnout are mentioned particularly frequently.

One interviewee summarized this situation as follows:

> **«One of our main challenges today is having to work continuously in contexts so complex that they greatly increase the risk of burnout».**

In **Kosovo**, the need for greater institutional support, increased financial resources, and ongoing training opportunities has emerged.

In **Poland**, difficulties related to growing political polarization, relationships with families, and the spread of misinformation are highlighted.

In **Türkiye**, youth workers describe an educational system that remains highly hierarchical, traditional social norms, family expectations, and a limited availability of training programs dedicated to facilitating dialogue.

As one interviewee summarizes:

> **«The education system discourages critical thinking; some families struggle to accept that young people develop their own ideas, and there is a lack of adequate resources».**

In **Ukraine**, of course, the main source of complexity is the war, which profoundly affects the ability to conduct in-person educational activities, the safety of groups, and the emotional well-being of both young people and professionals.

Training Needs and Effective Practices

Despite the difficulties, the research also reveals an extremely rich wealth of experiences and effective practices.

A very clear need emerges in all countries: youth workers feel the need to strengthen their skills through structured training programs, opportunities for peer exchange, professional supervision, and concrete methodological tools.

In **Italy**, the importance of creating spaces for shared reflection and peer supervision is emphasized.

In **Kosovo**, there is a demand for training focused on conflict management, facilitation, intercultural skills, simulations, and the exchange of best practices.

In **Türkiye**, one of the most significant findings is that the majority of respondents stated they had never received specific training on Nonviolent Debate, having developed their skills primarily through direct experience.

In **Ukraine**, the need for manuals, practical tools, tried-and-tested formats, and experiential workshops is highlighted.

The interviews also document numerous practices considered particularly effective: the shared development of rules, facilitators working in pairs, role-playing, final reflection, the use of humor to reduce tension, active listening, cooperative activities, attention to the setting, and the use of moments of silence as an integral part of the dialogic process.

What the Research Reveals

This reflection constitutes one of the methodological foundations of Nonviolent Debate. The research highlights that the facilitator's role does not consist in being neutral with regard to the values of dignity, respect, and nonviolence, but rather in being impartial in managing the process, ensuring that every participant can express themselves and feel heard within a safe, equitable, and inclusive space.

The interviews also show that facilitating a Nonviolent Debate requires skills that go far beyond simply moderating a discussion. Building trust, recognizing escalation dynamics, managing emotions, supporting dissent, and safeguarding the quality of the relationship emerge as essential elements of educational work. The success of a debate therefore does not depend exclusively on the techniques used, but above all on the quality of the process that the facilitator is able to design and guide.

Taken together, the interview findings confirm what has already emerged from research focused on young people: the opportunity to participate in a constructive exchange depends not only on individual willingness but also on the relational, methodological, and organizational conditions that make authentic dialogue possible. While young people seek spaces where they feel heard, respected, and free to express themselves without fear of judgment, youth workers highlight the need for skills, tools, and methodologies capable of supporting these processes even in the most complex contexts.

It is precisely from the intersection of these two levels of needs - those expressed by young people and those identified by education professionals - that the methodological model of Nonviolent Debate developed within the project takes shape. The pillars presented in the following chapter are therefore not an abstract theoretical proposal, but rather an educational response developed based on evidence gathered through research and subsequently validated in pilot projects carried out in the five partner countries.

2.9 From Needs to Methodological Pillars

The research and pilot testing process described in this chapter made it possible to identify recurring needs that cut across the various contexts involved in the project. On the one hand, young people expressed a desire to engage in environments where they feel heard, respected, and valued, while at the same time highlighting difficulties related to fear of judgment, conflict management, and a lack of confidence in their own communication skills. On the other hand, youth workers emphasized the complexity of their role, highlighting the need for methodological tools capable of supporting dialogue even in the most delicate and polarized situations.

Nonviolent Debate grew out of the meeting of these two perspectives. The methods described in the following pages are not just a set of facilitation techniques. They are an educational response to the needs identified through research and improved over years of reflection and testing in the five partner countries.

The research process has in fact shown that facilitating a Nonviolent Debate requires skills that go far beyond the ability to moderate a discussion or manage the clash of differing opinions. **Guiding groups as they address controversial issues means knowing how to create relational conditions that foster trust, recognizing the dynamics of conflict escalation, supporting mutual listening, valuing the complexity of different perspectives, and guiding people as they explore the values and needs that shape their positions.**

To address these needs, the project has progressively developed a methodological model based on several educational pillars that now form the core of Nonviolent Debate. These pillars are the result of integrating research findings, pilot projects conducted in the various partner countries, and theoretical contributions from studies on the nonviolent transformation of conflicts, group facilitation, and education for dialogue.

In particular, the model is based on six closely interconnected dimensions:

- Awareness of conflict escalation processes and power dynamics;
- The creation of a “Brave Space,” in which every person can feel safe enough to participate authentically in dialogue;
- Active listening as a practice of mutual understanding;
- Dilemmatic thinking and the ability to navigate complexity;
- Expression through one’s own core beliefs, values, and needs;
- Participatory facilitation techniques focused on the quality of the dialogic process.

Each of these pillars represents a fundamental competency for youth workers operating in contexts characterized by conflict, polarization, or social fragility. They are not independent tools, but **complementary dimensions of a single educational approach**, in which the quality of the relationship and the process takes on the same importance as the content discussed.

In the following chapters, each pillar will be explored in depth through a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, the main theoretical references that form its foundation will be presented; on the other, these will be translated into concrete competencies for youth Workers - in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors - accompanied by operational proposals and practical activities tested during the project. In this way, the curriculum aims to offer not only a theoretical framework but also a practical tool to support processes of dialogue and conflict transformation in educational, community, and postconflict contexts.

3.

The Methodological Pillars of Nonviolent Debate

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we explored the findings of the research conducted as part of the nonviolent debate for conflict transformation project, highlighting the needs, expectations, and challenges that young people and youth workers face in processes of dialogue and conflict management. Despite the cultural, social, and political differences among the five partner countries, the research revealed a significant convergence: for dialogue to become a tool for democratic participation and conflict transformation, it is not enough to simply create opportunities for discussion; rather, it is necessary to **design educational environments capable of supporting the complexity of human relationships**.

Young people express a desire to engage with complex and controversial issues, but they also describe the difficulty of finding spaces where they feel truly heard and empowered to speak up. Fear of judgment, fear of conflict, the polarization of public debate, and the perception of lacking adequate skills represent recurring barriers to participation. At the same time, youth workers describe facilitating dialogue as one of the most complex educational challenges in their work: building trust, reading group dynamics, managing emotions, preventing the escalation of conflicts, and fostering everyone's participation require skills that go far beyond simply moderating a discussion.

The Nonviolent Debate model arises precisely from the intersection of these needs and the interplay between research, educational experimentation, and theoretical reflection. The six methodological pillars presented in this chapter do not constitute a sequence of techniques to be applied rigidly, nor an operational protocol to be followed step by step. Rather, they represent an integrated set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable the design and facilitation of dialogic processes in which conflict can be addressed constructively, participation can be truly inclusive, and discussion becomes an opportunity for mutual learning.

This perspective reflects a specific pedagogical conception. Nonviolent debate does not view dialogue as a tool aimed at convincing others or necessarily reaching consensus, but rather as an educational process through which people construct new understandings of reality, develop critical thinking, learn to navigate dissent, and experience forms of democratic participation grounded in mutual recognition. From this perspective, conflict is not a problem to be avoided, but an inevitable aspect of coexistence that can become an educational resource when guided by nonviolent practices.

For this reason, the model attaches equal importance to both the content of the dialogue and the quality of the process through which it is explored. The ways in which people speak, listen, ask questions, manage disagreement, acknowledge emotions, and construct shared meanings become an integral part of the educational experience. There can be no authentically democratic dialogue if some people do not feel secure enough to participate, if the discussion reproduces dynamics of exclusion or power relations, or if the search for the "right answer" takes precedence over the willingness to understand the complexity of the experiences present in the group.

The six methodological pillars proposed in this chapter are the result of an action-research process in which the findings from the survey of young people and youth workers were constantly cross-referenced with the experiments conducted during the project and with some of the key theoretical contributions on nonviolent conflict transformation, group facilitation, and democratic education.

Each pillar addresses a specific dimension of the dialogic process, but only acquires its full meaning in relation to the others. Building a Brave Space, developing active listening, recognizing complexity, exploring the needs and values that shape opinions, understanding the dynamics of conflict escalation, and facilitating discussion are closely interdependent skills. None of them is sufficient on its own: it is their interplay that makes possible a dialogue capable of sustaining dissent without turning it into violence and of promoting participation without sacrificing complexity.

In the following paragraphs, each pillar will be explored in depth through a competency framework divided into four components:

- **Knowledge**: what the youth worker must know to understand its educational significance.
- **Skills**: what they must be able to do to translate that knowledge into facilitation practice.
- **Attitudes and Values**: the personal and ethical orientations that underpin facilitation consistent with the principles of Nonviolent Debate.
- **Observable Behaviors**: the actions through which the competency is concretely manifested while working with groups.

Each section will also be accompanied by a theoretical exploration and a proposed experiential activity, with the goal of offering youth workers concrete tools to develop and put into practice each dimension of the competency.

The journey begins with the first and most cross-cutting of the pillars: the creation of a "**Brave Space**", understood as the essential condition for dialogue to develop as an experience of learning, democratic participation, and nonviolent conflict transformation.

3.1 The Brave Space: Creating the Conditions for Authentic Dialogue

«Together we will create a Brave Space
Because there is no such thing as a "safe space"
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars, and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that struggle to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to greater truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It won't always be what we want it to be
But
It will be our safe space together,
and
We'll work on it side by side».

Micky Scottbey Jones, *An Invitation to a Brave Space*

3.1.1 Why Nonviolent Dialogue Begins with a *Brave Space*

Every process of dialogue involves a form of personal exposure. Speaking up in front of others means making one's ideas visible, sharing experiences, expressing doubts, questioning established beliefs, and engaging with perspectives that may be profoundly different from one's own. This is particularly true when the discussion concerns controversial topics, identity, rights, discrimination, armed conflicts, or other issues involving values, affiliations, and personal experiences.

The research presented in the previous chapter showed that, in these contexts, the main difficulty does not lie in a lack of interest in dialogue, but rather in the difficulty of finding spaces where people feel sufficiently empowered to participate. The young people interviewed expressed a desire to be able to discuss complex issues in environments characterized by mutual listening, respect, trust, and non-judgment. At the same time, the youth workers highlighted how creating such conditions represents one of the most delicate skills in educational facilitation.

These findings suggest that the quality of dialogue does not depend exclusively on the participants' argumentative skills or on the methodologies used to structure the discussion. **Before even asking *how* to engage in dialogue, it is necessary to ask *under what conditions* dialogue can truly take place.**

The Nonviolent Debate model assumes that discussion cannot be separated from the relational context in which it unfolds. People participate authentically when they perceive the group as an environment where it is possible to express different viewpoints, ask questions, acknowledge uncertainty, change one's mind, and address dissent without this leading to humiliation, exclusion, or delegitimization. Conversely, when fear of judgment, competition, power imbalances, or the perception of not being heard prevail, dialogue tends to devolve into a mere clash of positions or is gradually abandoned.

For this reason, the facilitator's primary task is not to steer the discussion, but to build and maintain the relational conditions that make dialogue possible. The Brave Space therefore represents the foundation upon which all the other methodological pillars of Nonviolent Debate are built. Without a context capable of supporting vulnerability, fostering mutual trust, and recognizing the legitimacy of diverse experiences, even the tools of active listening, facilitation, or conflict management risk losing much of their effectiveness.

Placing the Brave Space at the beginning of the model does not mean asserting that it constitutes a preliminary phase to be completed before engaging in dialogue. On the contrary, it means recognizing that the quality of the relational space constantly accompanies the entire educational process. Every activity, every question, every methodological choice, and every intervention by the facilitator contributes, in fact, to either strengthening or weakening people's willingness to participate.

Considering the Brave Space as the first pillar therefore means adopting a specific pedagogical stance: Nonviolent Debate does not arise spontaneously from the mere presence of people with differing opinions, but requires intentional design of the conditions that allow the exchange to take place in a respectful, inclusive, and transformative manner. It is within this space that it becomes possible to explore the other elements of Nonviolent Debate: active listening, the exploration of complexity, understanding the needs that shape opinions, nonviolent conflict management, and the facilitation of dialogic processes.

3.1.2 The Theoretical Framework: from *Safe Space* to *Brave Space*



In recent decades, the concept of **Safe Space** has taken on a central role in educational settings, group facilitation, and programs focused on human rights, participation, and inclusion. The underlying idea of this approach is that learning and dialogue can only fully develop within contexts where people feel welcomed, respected, and protected from discrimination, humiliation, or violence. Creating a safe space therefore means fostering a relational environment characterized by mutual trust, active listening, respect for differences, and attention to the well-being of those involved.

In working with diverse groups, the concept of a Safe Space has represented a significant shift in perspective. It has helped us recognize that the quality of learning does not depend exclusively on the content presented or the methodologies used, but also on the relational climate in which people are called upon to participate. Feeling heard, not fearing ridicule, and being able to express doubts or share personal experiences without the risk of being devalued are essential conditions for dialogue to develop authentically.

As this concept has gradually gained consensus, however, numerous scholars have highlighted certain limitations of the idea of "safety" when it is interpreted as the absence of discomfort, conflict, or tension. In educational processes that address complex or controversial issues, in fact, engaging with different perspectives inevitably generates intense emotions, uncertainty, and moments of vulnerability. Attempting to completely eliminate these dimensions risks impoverishing the dialogue and limiting the possibilities for transformative learning.

Based on these reflections, Arao and Clemens (2013) propose the concept of Brave Space, calling for a shift in focus from the pursuit of absolute safety to the creation of conditions that allow people to engage with the risks of dialogue in a conscious and responsible manner. According to this perspective, it is unrealistic to promise that every participant will always feel safe or at ease. Confronting different ideas, discussing experiences of discrimination, acknowledging one's own privileges, or questioning one's own beliefs can generate discomfort. Such discomfort, however, does not necessarily represent an obstacle to the educational process: when it is welcomed and supported within a relational framework based on mutual respect, it can become a condition conducive to learning, personal growth, and the transformation of relationships.

The Brave Space, therefore, does not replace the Safe Space but broadens its perspective. Safety remains a fundamental condition for dialogue, but it is no longer understood as the elimination of all forms of tension. Rather, it consists of creating an environment in which people can take the risk of opening up, acknowledge their vulnerability, question their beliefs, and engage with dissent without compromising mutual dignity or recognition. From this perspective, courage does not mean the absence of fear, but rather the willingness to navigate it together with others within a relationship grounded in trust and shared responsibility.

A particularly significant contribution to the operational development of the concept of the Brave Space was made by Victoria D. Stubbs, who proposes that the Brave Space be viewed not as a set of rules to be applied, but as an educational and relational process involving both the facilitator and the participants. According to the author, the quality of a Brave Space depends on the group's ability to develop certain personal and collective dispositions that foster authentic dialogue and transformative learning.

To describe this process, Stubbs identifies six fundamental dimensions that underpin the quality of a Brave Space:

- **Vulnerability**, understood as a willingness to open up, share doubts, acknowledge one's own limitations, and accept the uncertainty that accompanies every authentic learning process.
- **Perspective-Taking**, that is, the ability to temporarily set aside one's own point of view to understand how other people interpret reality, while recognizing the legitimacy of different experiences and perspectives.
- **The willingness to embrace fear as a learning opportunity ("Lean into Fear")**, which encourages us to recognize discomfort, fear, or uncertainty not as signals to be avoided, but as experiences that can foster personal growth and transformation when supported within a respectful relational context.
- **Critical Thinking**, understood as the ability to question one's own beliefs, analyze information thoughtfully, and challenge established perspectives without giving up dialogue with those who express different opinions.
- **Examining One's Intentions**, which encourages constant reflection on the motivations, values, and goals that guide one's way of communicating and participating in discussions, fostering greater responsibility for the impact of one's words and behaviors.
- **Mindfulness**, understood as intentional attention to what is happening in the present moment, to one's own emotional states, to group dynamics, and to the relationships that develop during dialogue.

Rather than defining a sequence of actions, these dimensions describe the relational and reflective processes that make a Brave Space possible. They highlight how the quality of dialogue depends not only on facilitation techniques or rules shared by the group, but also on people's willingness to put themselves on the line, to question their own beliefs, to listen to different perspectives, and to take responsibility for their relationships with others. The Brave Space is therefore not a place free of conflict, but a context in which conflict can be navigated without compromising mutual recognition.

The Nonviolent Debate model takes this perspective as its starting point and reworks it in light of research findings, experiments conducted during the project, and contributions from studies on the nonviolent transformation of conflicts, facilitation, and democratic education. As will be explored in greater depth in the following section, the Brave Space is not merely a condition leading to dialogue, but constitutes the methodological foundation of the entire model proposed in this curriculum: an educational competency that educators and youth workers are called upon to build, sustain, and continually renew throughout the facilitation process.

3.1.3 The Brave Space in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Nonviolent Debate adopts the concept of *Brave Space* as one of its main theoretical references, reworking it in light of the findings from research conducted in the five partner countries and integrating it with contributions from studies on nonviolent conflict transformation, participatory facilitation, and peace education.

As illustrated in the previous paragraph, Arao and Clemens propose moving beyond the traditional idea of a *Safe Space*, recognizing that authentic dialogue inevitably requires navigating moments of uncertainty, vulnerability, and discomfort. Subsequently, Victoria D. Stubbs expands on this

perspective, describing the *Brave Space* as a learning environment in which facilitators and participants share the responsibility of building a dialogue grounded in mutual respect, active listening, and a willingness to engage fully. The Nonviolent Debate model fits within this perspective, proposing a reworking of it geared toward educational work with young people and the training of youth workers.

In the proposed model, the **Brave Space** is not merely the context in which the debate takes place, but constitutes a genuine professional competency for youth workers. Facilitating a Nonviolent Debate, in fact, means knowing how to design, build, and guide group processes in which people can participate authentically, developing mutual trust, shared responsibility, active listening, and a willingness to engage in dialogue, even when intense emotions, conflicts, or profound differences of opinion arise.

The choice to speak of a **Brave Space** rather than a **Safe Space** also takes on special significance in relation to the context in which the project was developed. The partner organizations operate in profoundly different contexts, some of which are directly marked by armed conflict, political tensions, social polarization, and institutional fragility. In particular, the experience of Ukraine, a country torn by war, as well as the various forms of conflict present in the other partner countries, show how the idea of a completely "safe" space risks being out of step with the concrete experiences of many young people.

Research conducted as part of the project confirms this perspective. The survey of young people highlighted that the main obstacle to participation is not a lack of interest in discussion, but rather the fear of judgment, exclusion, conflict, or the devaluation of one's own opinions. At the same time, interviews with youth workers show that the quality of dialogue depends first and foremost on the ability to create a climate of trust, establish shared rules, value every voice, and guide the group in managing emotions and differences. These findings confirm what Arao and Clemens have argued: it is not the absence of conflict that fosters learning, but rather the presence of relational conditions that allow people to navigate it constructively.

For many of the people involved in the project, fear, uncertainty, and vulnerability are not exceptional circumstances but are part of everyday life. In these contexts, it is unrealistic to promise a space free of risk, tension, or emotional distress. Instead, it is possible to create a space where everyone can feel **sufficiently supported** to speak up, share their experiences, ask questions, express doubts, and engage with different points of view, while acknowledging that some conversations may remain difficult or emotionally challenging.

From this perspective, vulnerability is not a weakness to be avoided, but an educational resource to be recognized and nurtured. Drawing on the insights of Brené Brown, **courage arises precisely from a willingness to expose oneself to uncertainty, risk, and emotional vulnerability.** The Brave Space thus becomes the place where this vulnerability can be welcomed without becoming a cause for judgment or exclusion, allowing people to experience more authentic forms of connection and mutual learning.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, courage does not mean the absence of fear, but rather the ability to participate in dialogue **despite** the fear, uncertainty, differences, and wounds that each person carries with them. The Brave Space thus becomes a relational space in which conflict is not denied or avoided, but recognized as part of the human experience and supported so that it can be transformed into an opportunity for learning, growth, and mutual understanding, rather than degenerating into dynamics of exclusion, oppression, or violence.

In this sense, the facilitator's role echoes Victoria D. Stubbs's proposal: a Brave Space takes shape when the facilitator and participants assume shared responsibility for the quality of the dialogue. The facilitator's responsibility, therefore, is not to eliminate conflict or prevent emotions from surfacing, but rather to create the conditions under which they can be acknowledged, accepted, and processed constructively. This means designing and guiding participatory processes in which every person can feel heard, acknowledged, and jointly responsible for the quality of the relationship and the exchange.

The Brave Space thus constitutes the relational foundation of the entire Nonviolent Debate model. While the Brave Space represents the theoretical starting point, the model presented here offers a reworking of it that arises from the intersection of empirical research, educational practice, and pedagogical reflection. All the methodological pillars presented in the following chapters are based on this conviction: authentic dialogue does not arise spontaneously from the presence of differing opinions, but from the ability to create contexts in which people can take the risk of engaging in dialogue, recognize the legitimacy of one another's experiences, and view others not as adversaries to be convinced, but as resources with which to explore the complexity of reality.

For this reason, in the Nonviolent Debate model, the creation of a Brave Space is described as a multifaceted professional competency that integrates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and observable behaviors. The following sections explore these dimensions in greater depth, translating the theoretical principles of the Brave Space into a competency framework and practical tools for the training and practice of youth workers.

3.1.4 The Competency: Building a Brave Space

In the Nonviolent Debate model, the creation of a "Brave Space" translates into a multifaceted professional competency that integrates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and observable behaviors. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this competency goes beyond the application of facilitation techniques; it concerns the youth worker's ability to guide dialogue processes in which people can participate authentically, even in the presence of disagreements, vulnerabilities, and intense emotions.

Following the framework proposed by Victoria D. Stubbs and adapting it within the Nonviolent Debate model, this competency is described through six closely interconnected dimensions:

- **Vulnerability;**
- **Perspective-Taking;**
- **Leaning into Fear;**
- **Critical Thinking;**
- **Examining Intentions;**
- **Mindfulness.**

Each dimension represents a fundamental aspect of building the Brave Space and, together with the others, contributes to sustaining the quality of the dialogic process.

Knowledge
Understanding the Educational Significance of the Brave Space

Building a Brave Space first and foremost requires a solid understanding of the theoretical frameworks that form its pedagogical foundation. Youth workers are called upon to understand not only facilitation techniques but also the educational perspectives that explain why certain relational conditions foster learning, participation, and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

The concept of *Brave Space* emerged as a critical evolution of the idea of *Safe Space*. Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) note that, in educational contexts, it is unrealistic to promise a space completely free of discomfort, conflict, or emotional exposure. Authentic learning often requires engaging with controversial issues, challenging entrenched beliefs, and navigating moments of uncertainty. For this reason, they propose replacing the idea of absolute safety with that of a space where people can take the risk of dialogue, knowing they are supported by shared rules, mutual accountability, and facilitation that prioritizes the quality of relationships.

The framework developed by **Victoria D. Stubbs** fits into this perspective; she interprets the Brave Space as an educational practice grounded in vulnerability, listening to different perspectives, a willingness to confront fear as a learning opportunity, critical thinking, awareness of one's own intentions, and mindfulness understood as conscious presence in the dialogic process. In the Nonviolent Debate model, these dimensions are considered crosscutting elements that cut across the youth worker's professional competence and will be explored in greater depth in the activities proposed at the end of this chapter.

A second fundamental concept concerns the meaning of **vulnerability** in educational processes. Brené Brown (2012; 2018) demonstrates that vulnerability is not a form of weakness, but rather the condition that makes trust, creativity, learning, and the building of authentic relationships possible. Opening oneself up to dialogue, acknowledging one's own limitations, asking questions, or admitting that one does not have all the answers are essential skills for those who facilitate participatory processes aimed at mutual growth.

Brave Space is also firmly rooted in **Paulo Freire's** (1970) **dialogic pedagogy**, according to which dialogue is a practice of freedom and emancipation. For Freire, educating does not mean transmitting content in a one-way manner, but rather creating conditions in which people can construct knowledge together, develop critical consciousness, and recognize one another as active participants in the educational process. This perspective directly addresses the role of the facilitator, who is called upon not to direct the debate, but to nurture a process in which every voice can contribute to the construction of meaning.

Another key reference is Marshall Rosenberg's **Nonviolent Communication** (2003), which invites us to interpret conflicts by looking beyond judgments, labels, and oppositions to recognize the needs, values, and emotions that guide people's behaviors. This perspective helps us understand that dialogue is not merely an exchange of opinions, but rather a space in which we learn to recognize our shared humanity even when profound differences arise.

Finally, the construction of the Brave Space resonates with the work of **John Paul Lederach** (2005), who interprets conflict transformation as a process oriented toward rebuilding relationships rather than merely resolving the problem. From this perspective, the facilitator becomes a creator of contexts in which conflict can be navigated without destroying bonds, fostering trust, shared responsibility, and the ability to envision new possibilities for coexistence.

These theoretical references are significantly corroborated by the results of the research conducted as part of the project. In fact, the questionnaires administered to young people show that their

willingness to participate in debates depends above all on the possibility of feeling heard, respected, and not judged, while interviews with youth workers highlight how the quality of facilitation is closely linked to the ability to build trust, manage vulnerability, support emotions, and maintain an inclusive relational space even in the most complex situations. The research thus confirms that Brave Space is not merely a theoretical principle, but an indispensable educational skill for promoting authentic and nonviolent dialogue.

Skills
What Youth Workers Need to Be Able to Do

Creating a Brave Space requires practical skills that enable the youth worker to translate the principles of Nonviolent Debate into concrete educational practices. It is not enough to be familiar with the theoretical framework or to share the values of nonviolence: one must know how to design and facilitate experiences in which the group can progressively develop trust, shared responsibility, and a willingness to engage in dialogue.

In particular, the youth worker should be able to:

- Design activities that foster mutual understanding and build trust within the group, including activities in pairs or small groups, and dedicating the necessary time to this phase;
- Design activities that guide participants in the co-creation of shared rules that promote respect, active listening, and shared responsibility;
- Design educational activities that promote a positive view of vulnerability and allow participants to experience a degree of fear and insecurity in a safe environment;
- Guarantee and recognize the right to remain silent; establish shared guidelines to ensure that people are always free to participate in the activity and, therefore, also have the option to step back or choose a more low-key role;
- Create settings or rituals that encourage mutual sharing and self-expression without judgment (for example, variations on “circle time” and storytelling tools);
- Create opportunities for people to share their experiences and exchange different perspectives without feeling judged;
- Use open-ended questions, facilitation techniques, and participatory tools to stimulate reflection and discussion;
- Recognize signs of discomfort, withdrawal, or exclusion and intervene promptly to restore conditions conducive to participation, including by valuing and making use of informal times and spaces;
- Acknowledge difficult emotions without denying or repressing them, helping the group transform them into learning opportunities;
- Manage time, speaking turns, and group dynamics so that everyone has genuine opportunities to express themselves;
- Ask participants to gradually increase their level of openness without forcing the group or individual participants, and be able to feel the “group’s mood”;
- Encourage participation even from those less accustomed to speaking up, valuing different forms of expression and contribution;

- Be able to alternate between different tools and methods that also allow those who would not be confortable to speak up in a plenary setting to express themselves;
- Foster your own process of self-reflection as a facilitator: what power dynamics do I inadvertently reinforce? Could what I say or do put an individual or a group of participants in a difficult position?
- Co-develop working methods with colleagues that help divide responsibilities in observing group dynamics;
- Conclude activities with moments of individual and collective reflection that allow participants to process their experiences and consolidate their learning.

The interviews conducted with the youth worker confirm that these skills represent one of the most delicate aspects of facilitation. The participants emphasize that creating a space conducive to dialogue means continuously reading what is happening in the group, adjusting one's approach, adapting tools and methodologies to the people present, and finding a balance between structure and flexibility. At the same time, the survey conducted with the young people also highlights how willingness to participate increases when the discussion is accompanied by clear rules, attentive facilitation, and the perception of being listened to without being judged.

Facilitation skills, therefore, do not consist of controlling the group or avoiding conflict, but rather of creating the conditions so that each person can take the risk of engaging in dialogue while feeling supported by the quality of the educational process. From this perspective, the youth worker's competence is manifested in the ability to guide the group step by step, transforming the discussion into a shared learning experience.

Attitudes and Values
The Youth Worker's Educational Approach

Building a Brave Space does not depend exclusively on the knowledge possessed or the techniques used. Above all, it requires a set of values that guide the youth worker's way of being and their approach to the educational relationship. In the Nonviolent Debate model, these values represent the ethical foundation of facilitation and guide every methodological choice, every intervention, and every decision made during the dialogic process.

Facilitating a nonviolent debate means, first and foremost, recognizing the **dignity of every person**, regardless of the opinions they express, their cultural, religious, or political affiliations, or the role they play within the group. Every participant brings with them a story, experiences, needs, and values that deserve to be welcomed and listened to, even when they differ profoundly from one's own.

A second fundamental value is **trust in dialogue as a tool for learning and transformation**. Nonviolent Debate does not view discussion as a competition aimed at determining who is right, but rather as a process through which people can better understand themselves, engage with different perspectives, and build new possibilities for meaning. From this perspective, even conflict is recognized as a natural component of human relationships and as an educational opportunity, provided it is handled in a respectful and mindful manner.

Another core value concerns **embracing vulnerability**. Drawing on the work of Brené Brown, the model recognizes that the willingness to open up, share doubts, acknowledge one's limitations, and accept uncertainty is an essential condition for authentic learning. Vulnerability is therefore not interpreted as fragility or weakness, but as an expression of courage and a prerequisite for building relationships based on mutual trust.

A Brave Space also requires **openness to diversity and complexity**. This implies a willingness to suspend judgment, to listen with curiosity to perspectives different from one's own, and to recognize that reality can rarely be interpreted through simplistic or polarized categories. This disposition represents one of the essential elements of dialogic thinking and constitutes one of the conditions that allow discussion to transform into mutual learning.

Alongside these values, the model places particular importance on **personal responsibility and shared educational responsibility**. Every word, every methodological choice, and every behavior contributes to shaping the group's relational climate. The quality of the dialogue does not depend exclusively on the facilitator but is a shared responsibility among all those involved. The role of the youth worker is to accompany this process, fostering active participation, mutual care, and respect for the rules established together.

Another fundamental dimension is **"professional humility."** Facilitation means recognizing that no educator is completely neutral or free of preconceptions. On the contrary, it requires a willingness to continually question one's own beliefs, automatic responses, and emotional reactions, accepting that every facilitation experience is also an opportunity for personal learning.

Finally, the Nonviolent Debate model considers **inclusion and relational justice** to be essential values. Facilitating a Brave Space means paying particular attention to power dynamics that may limit some people's participation, while promoting conditions that allow everyone to speak up, feel acknowledged,and contribute to building dialogue.

The interviews conducted with the youth worker strongly confirm the centrality of these values. Many professionals describe how the quality of facilitation depends less on mastery of techniques and much more on the ability to maintain an attitude of openness, active listening, and self-reflection - even when polarizing issues or topics closely tied to one's personal experience arise. Several interviewees also emphasize how crucial it is to recognize one's own limitations, manage one's emotions, and maintain consistency between stated values and actual behavior.

These reflections echo the concept of the **"reflective professional"** proposed by Donald Schön, according to whom professional competence is built on the ability to reflect in the course of action, transforming uncertainty into a manageable situation and continuously adapting one's intervention to the complexity of reality. These skills cannot be conveyed exclusively through theoretical content but are developed progressively through experience, supervision, dialogue with other professionals, and constant self-reflection.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, building a Brave Space therefore means embodying a specific educational approach, grounded in nonviolence, the recognition of human dignity, democratic participation, inclusion, shared responsibility, and the conviction that dialogue is a tool for personal, relational, and social transformation. It is this stance that enables youth workers to guide the group not only in managing discussions but also in building a culture of dialogue capable of fostering trust, learning, and democratic citizenship.

Behaviors
Translating the Brave Space into Educational Practice

The ability to create a Brave Space is concretely manifested in the choices the youth worker makes before, during, and after the facilitation process. Observable behaviors represent the practical application of the knowledge, skills, and educational approach described in the previous sections. They make visible the way in which the principles of Nonviolent Debate take shape in daily educational practice.

Creating a Brave Space means, first and foremost, intentionally designing the context in which the debate takes place. The facilitator dedicates time to jointly defining the rules of dialogue, clarifies the objectives of the activity, articulates mutual expectations, and fosters a climate of trust even before addressing controversial topics. The space is conceived not only in terms of its physical organization but, above all, in terms of the quality of the relationships it enables.

During the facilitation, the youth worker pays constant attention to group processes. They observe participation levels, identify any exclusionary dynamics, recognize signs of emotional escalation, and intervene promptly to reestablish conditions for mutual listening. Their task is not to control the discussion, but to safeguard the process so that everyone can contribute to the dialogue under conditions of equity and respect.

This presence also manifests in the ability to model, through their own behavior, the communication style they wish to promote. The facilitator listens without interrupting, asks open-ended questions, rephrases contributions when necessary, acknowledges emerging emotions, and uses respectful and inclusive language. At the same time, they do not avoid conflict but accompany it so that it can become a learning opportunity, maintaining firm boundaries of mutual respect and intervening when discriminatory, offensive, or violent behavior occurs.

Building a Brave Space also means knowing how to consciously use silence, pauses, and moments for reflection, without feeling the need to fill every moment of the discussion. In some situations, it may be helpful to temporarily suspend the discussion, modify the proposed methodology, work in small groups, or create moments for individual reflection, adapting the process to the group's emerging needs.

Another observable behavior relates to professional reflectiveness. At the end of the activity, the youth worker dedicates time to evaluating the process, gathers feedback from participants, critically reflects on their facilitation choices, and identifies possible areas for improvement. A Brave Space is not, in fact, considered a result achieved once and for all, but rather a condition that requires continuous care, observation, and adaptation.

Interviews conducted with youth workers confirm that these behaviors represent the most concrete aspects of professional practice. Many interviewees describe facilitation as a continuous balance between structure and flexibility, between educational intent and the ability to read what is happening in the group moment by moment. The quality of the process depends on the facilitator's willingness to constantly observe, listen, adapt, and reflect on their own actions.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, certain indicators allow us to observe the presence of this competency in educational practice. The youth worker:

- Consciously designs the conditions that foster a Brave Space;
- Works with the group to establish shared rules and ensures they are upheld throughout the process;
- Fosters balanced participation, paying attention to those who are less visible or less likely to speak up;
- Uses questions, rephrasing, and active listening techniques to support dialogue;
- Recognizes and manages signs of escalation without suppressing conflict;
- Intervenes when discriminatory, offensive, or violent language is used, maintaining a firm yet respectful stance;

- Adapts methods, timing, and tools based on the group's emerging needs;
- Promotes moments of individual and collective reflection during and at the end of the discussion;
- Practices self-reflection and seeks opportunities for supervision and professional dialogue to continuously improve their facilitation skills.

These behaviors do not constitute a rigid sequence of actions, but rather represent concrete manifestations of a competency that develops progressively through experience, ongoing training, and critical reflection on practice. They translate the principles of the Brave Space into everyday educational practice, helping to make Nonviolent Debate a truly inclusive, participatory, and transformative experience.

Table 3.1 – The Competency "Building a Brave Space" in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Dimension of the Competency	Objective	Key Elements
Knowledge	Understand the theoretical foundations of a Brave Space and its educational value.	Become familiar with the Brave Space framework (Stubbs), the contributions of Arao & Clemens, Brené Brown, Freire, Lederach, Rosenberg, and dialogic pedagogy; understand the processes of vulnerability, participation, conflict management, and relational safety.
Skills	Design and facilitate settings that foster authentic and respectful participation.	Establish shared rules, facilitate dialogue, interpret group dynamics, manage emotions and escalations, and encourage listening, reflection, and shared responsibility.
Attitudes and Values	Adopt an educational approach consistent with the principles of Nonviolent Debate	Human dignity, trust in dialogue, embracing vulnerability, openness to complexity, shared responsibility, professional reflection, inclusion, and relational justice
Behaviours	Apply this expertise to the daily practice of facilitation.	Build a climate of trust, model respectful communication, encourage everyone's participation, intervene in dynamics of exclusion, adapt the process to the group's needs, and critically reflect on one's own practice

3.1.5 From Competence to Practice: Activities to Build a Brave Space

The four dimensions of competence outline the professional profile of the youth worker called upon to facilitate a Nonviolent Debate. However, these competencies are not developed exclusively through theoretical learning but require direct experience, personal reflection, and group experimentation.

The activities proposed in the following pages aim to transform the principles of the Brave Space into concrete learning experiences. They are not mere exercises, but pedagogical tools designed to guide participants in exploring the main dimensions of the Brave Space, fostering personal awareness, mutual trust, active listening, critical thinking, and shared responsibility.

Each activity can be adapted to different educational and training contexts and used both in youth worker training programs and directly with groups of young people, depending on the program's objectives and the participants' characteristics.

Activity 1 - Building a Brave Space: a Sensory Storytelling Experience

Competency Dimensions Involved

- Vulnerability;
- Perspective-Taking;
- Mindfulness;
- Building Trust and Shared Responsibility.

Objective

This activity introduces the concept of a "Brave Space" through a narrative and sensory experience. The goal is to guide the group in reflecting on the conditions that allow people to feel welcomed, acknowledged, and free to express themselves, establishing an initial connection with the themes of safety, vulnerability, and authenticity.

Duration

60 minutes

Materials

- Four large posters depicting:
  - Eyes → **What do I see;**
  - Ears → **What I hear with my ears;**
  - Nose → **What do I smell?**
  - Hands → **What I touch;**
- Individual Post-it notes with different sequences of the four senses;
- Markers.

Procedure

The facilitator organizes the space into four corners, each dedicated to a different sense. Each participant receives a Post-it note with a personalized sequence indicating the order in which they will rotate through the different groups.

At each turn, one of the four questions is posed:

1. **When do you feel at home?**
2. **When do you feel safe?**
3. **When do you feel free to be yourself?**
4. **When can you be vulnerable?**

Participants move to the group indicated by their sequence number and discuss the question using the assigned sense. Each group then explores the same question from a different perspective: what they see, what they hear, what they smell, or what they touch.

The sense serves as a way to evoke different images, memories, and sensations, without providing a rigid framework for the answer. At the end of each round, participants switch groups according to their sequence, thus encountering different people and perspectives.

Final Reflection

At the end of the four rounds, the facilitator guides the group through a collective reflection on what has emerged.

Some guiding questions:

- What did you discover through this activity?
- What makes you feel at home?
- What allows you to feel safe and free to be yourselves?
- Under what conditions are you able to show your vulnerability?

Based on the group's contributions, the facilitator identifies recurring themes that have emerged, such as listening, respect, trust, the opportunity to express oneself, and the acknowledgment of vulnerability.

At this point, the concept of a **Brave Space** is introduced, linking it directly to the shared experiences. The facilitator highlights that a space conducive to dialogue is not a place where all forms of uncertainty are eliminated, but rather an environment where people can take the risk of engaging with others, express parts of themselves, and navigate moments of vulnerability while feeling supported and acknowledged.

The transition from the concept of a **Safe Space** to that of a **Brave Space** is thus presented as an evolution: safety remains a fundamental condition, but it is understood as the presence of relationships based on respect, trust, and shared responsibility, which allow people to participate even when dialogue requires openness and courage.

If relevant to the group and the training objectives, the key words that emerge can be collected on a shared poster.

Guidelines for the Facilitator

The activity encourages the sharing of personal experiences, but each participant must be able to choose their own level of disclosure. The goal is not to elicit deeply personal stories, but to create an experience of mutual listening from which to identify the conditions that make a Brave Space possible.

The suggested questions can be adapted and rephrased by the facilitator based on the learning objectives, the group's characteristics, and the educational context in which the activity takes place.

This activity serves as the starting point for subsequent activities focused on vulnerability, staying with fear, and examining intentions.

Activity 2 - Exploring Vulnerability: Recognizing, Representing, Sharing

Dimension of Competence

Vulnerability

Objective

This activity guides participants in exploring the concept of vulnerability, drawing on the reflections of Brené Brown, who interprets vulnerability not as a form of weakness, but as the ability to open up, show one's true self, and accept the uncertainty that accompanies every meaningful relationship.

Through an initial phase of individual reflection and group discussion, followed by a second creative and physical phase, participants are invited to examine their own relationship with vulnerability, recognizing how it can take on different meanings for each person.

Duration

90 minutes

Materials

- Selected quotes from Brené Brown's writings printed on individual sheets;
- A large poster for collecting the key words that emerge;
- Colored index cards;
- Magazines;
- Scissors;
- Glue;
- String;
- Colored threads;
- Fabrics and other craft supplies.

Procedure

In the first phase, the facilitator prepares the space by placing various quotes on the floor that address the theme of vulnerability.

Each participant is invited to choose the quote that best represents their own understanding of vulnerability and to stand physically near the chosen quote.

Based on these choices, the facilitator invites each person to share:

- Why did you choose this particular quote?
- What does vulnerability mean to you?
- Which aspect of this sentence resonates most with your own experience?

During the sharing session, the facilitator collects the words, images, and concepts that emerge, working with the group to build an initial shared representation of vulnerability. These reflections can be recorded on a poster that will be used in the second part of the activity.

Second Phase: Creating your Own Mask of Vulnerability

After this initial exploration, the facilitator invites participants to creatively represent their own idea of vulnerability by making a mask.

The mask can be a symbolic representation of one's relationship with vulnerability: an image, a metaphor, or a form through which to express feelings, meanings, or aspects that are not normally revealed.

Participants are free to use the available materials, choosing different colors, images, fabrics, threads, and shapes.

Once the creation is complete, each participant chooses a movement to associate with their mask: a gesture or a way of moving through space that represents its meaning.

Participants then move through the space while wearing their masks and performing the movement associated with them. When the facilitator says "stop," each person pauses and shares their creation with the person closest to them, explaining its meaning and how it connects to their own idea of vulnerability.

The movement and the exchange allow participants to explore vulnerability not only through words, but also through the body and symbolic language.

Final Reflection: Closing the Activity

The activity concludes with a moment of collective sharing. The facilitator may pose some guiding questions:

- What was it like to explore the theme of vulnerability through words, images, and the body?
- What did you discover about your relationship with vulnerability?
- Has anything changed in the way you view this concept after the activity?
- Which element of your mask would you like to share with the group?

Final reflections can be added to the bulletin board created in the first phase, creating a collective representation of what vulnerability means to the group.

Guidelines for the Facilitator

The topic of vulnerability can involve varying degrees of personal exposure. It's important to remind the group that sharing is always voluntary and that each person can choose how much to reveal about their own experience.

The goal of the activity is not to prompt participants to share intimate experiences, but to create a space where vulnerability can be recognized as a shared human experience and as a resource for building relationships based on trust.

The activity can be adapted by choosing different quotes or modifying the creative approach based on the participants' age, the group's characteristics, and the program's learning objectives.

Activity 3 - Staying with Fear: Navigating Uncertainty

Dimension of Competence

Lean into Fear

Activity Objective

This activity guides the group in exploring their relationship with uncertainty, loss of control, and the fear of not being recognized or chosen. Through a physical and relational experience, participants are invited to explore what it means to remain present even when they do not have all the information available and cannot predict what will happen.

The goal is not to eliminate fear, but to create a space in which it can be acknowledged, worked through, and transformed into a learning opportunity, in line with the perspective of the Brave Space.

Duration
Approximately 20 minutes

Materials
No materials are needed.

Activity procedure
Participants are asked to walk freely around the space, without a set direction, paying attention to their own movements and the presence of others.

After a few moments, the facilitator says “stop” and asks everyone to freeze in their current position. Next, everyone is asked to close their eyes.

The facilitator tells the group that they will begin moving around the space and that, when they touch someone on the shoulder, that person may open their eyes. The person chosen will then move among the participants with their eyes closed and, in turn, choose someone to touch on the shoulder, allowing that person to open their eyes and continue the process.

Each participant has only one turn to touch someone and may take as much time as needed to choose the person to involve. The activity continues until everyone has opened their eyes.

During the experience, participants find themselves in a state of anticipation and uncertainty: they do not know when they will be chosen, who will choose them, or how long they will remain with their eyes closed. It is precisely this aspect that allows them to connect with emotions and thoughts related to vulnerability and fear.

Final Reflection: Staying with Fear as a Practice of the Brave Space
At the end of the activity, the group is invited to share what they experienced.

The facilitator can guide the reflection with a few questions:

- How did you feel during the waiting period?
- What emotions or thoughts emerged while your eyes were closed?
- What was it like not knowing what was happening around you?
- How did you feel when you were chosen?
- How did you feel if you had to wait longer?
- What fears arose during the experience?
- What helps us stay present when we don’t have control over the situation?

In these discussions, experiences often emerge related to the fear of not being chosen, of being last, of being forgotten or excluded, along with feelings of insecurity and vulnerability stemming from not knowing what is happening around you.

These elements provide an opportunity to introduce the concept of “staying with fear” within the Brave Space. Fear and uncertainty are not viewed as obstacles to be eliminated before participating in dialogue, but rather as experiences that are part of every authentic process of discussion.

The Brave Space is therefore not a space where fear disappears, but a context in which people can learn to navigate it, recognizing it as part of the process and knowing they can count on the presence of the group and the quality of the relationship.

Guidelines for the Facilitator

This activity requires a minimum level of trust within the group, as it involves closing one's eyes and temporarily relying on others. Before beginning, it is important to ensure that participants feel comfortable with physical contact and to offer alternatives for those who prefer not to be touched.

The facilitator guides the reflection without interpreting the emotions that emerge as "right" or "wrong" responses. The goal is not to eliminate fear, but to help the group recognize how it is part of the processes of opening up, learning, and building meaningful relationships.

Activity 4 - Suns and Moons: Trusting in Uncertainty

Dimension of Competence
Lean into Fear

Objective of the Activity
To explore the relationship with uncertainty, vulnerability, and mutual trust through a physical experience in which participants are gradually asked to let go of control and rely on one another. The activity allows participants to explore the meaning of mutual care, shared responsibility, and coordination as fundamental elements for navigating situations of fear and vulnerability within a relationship.

Duration
Approximately 15–20 minutes

How to Conduct the Activity
The group forms a circle. The facilitator invites participants to count off alternately with the numbers 1 and 2 and then asks those who received the number 1 to turn to the right and those who received the number 2 to turn to the left. This creates pairs distributed throughout the space while maintaining the circle.

Those with the number 1 represent the **suns**, while those with the number 2 represent the **moons**. In the first phase, both the suns and the moons keep their eyes open, with the suns taking on the role of guiding the movement of their partner, while the moons experience the feeling of trusting the person supporting them.

The movement occurs through hand contact: the sun takes the moon's right hand with their own right hand and gently guides the movement toward the next sun. The rotation occurs alternately: one sun guides the moon from the left to the right, the next "sun" from the right to the left, and so on, creating a circular dance in which each "moon" is progressively entrusted to different people.

After an initial phase in which everyone can orient themselves through sight, the facilitator introduces an additional level of difficulty by asking the "moons" to close their eyes as well. In this second phase, participants experience a greater sense of uncertainty and are called upon to rely on each other's presence, coordination, and the group's care.

At the end of the experience, the group is invited to share their feelings: How did it feel to let yourselves be guided? How did the experience change when those being guided had to give up their visual reference? What made it possible to feel supported? What emotions emerged during the activity?

This reflection allows us to delve deeper into the meaning of **dwelling in fear**: uncertainty and vulnerability are part of the processes of relationship-building and interaction and cannot be completely eliminated. However, they can be navigated when there is a relational context grounded in trust, care, and shared responsibility.

The experience also allows us to explore the meaning of mutual trust: on the one hand, the possibility of allowing oneself to be guided and accepting that one does not have full control; on the other, the responsibility to care for the person who trusts us. The dynamic between the suns and moons shows that trust is not a one-way process, but a shared construction that requires listening, attention, and mutual coordination.

From this perspective, the activity draws on the principles of dialogic pedagogy: the relationship is not based on one person controlling and another simply receiving, but on a process in which each person contributes to the construction of a shared space. Even when roles differ, both people actively contribute to the quality of the relationship through presence, care, and shared responsibility.

Guidelines for the Facilitator
Before the activity, it is important to establish a framework of trust and clarify that each person can adapt their level of participation to their own capabilities.

The facilitator should pay attention to physical contact, ensuring that it is always respectful and consensual, and guide the group in their reflection without offering interpretations in advance.

The focus of the activity is not on the correctness of the movement, but on the emotional experience linked to trust, mutual care, and the opportunity to navigate uncertainty together.

Activity 5 - Examining Intentions: From Gesture to Relationship

Competency Dimension Involved
Examining One's Own Intentions

Objective of the Activity
This activity aims to develop awareness of the role of intentions in relationships and dialogic processes. Through a physical experience of trust, care, and mutual responsibility, participants are invited to reflect on how their actions and words may be guided by different intentions and produce different effects in other people. The goal is to help the group recognize that, in Nonviolent Debate, it is not only what is communicated that matters, but also the motivation behind the communication and the impact it has on the relationship.

Duration
Approximately 60 minutes

Materials
- No materials are needed for the first part of the activity;
- Paper and pens for the final individual reflection.

Activity Procedure
The activity begins with participants pairing up randomly. Each pair is asked to designate one person to initially take on the role of **sculptor** and another to take on the role of **statue**.

The sculptor's task is to shape the statue into the position of their choice, using the other person's body as the medium to be transformed. Verbal communication is not permitted throughout the activity. Once the creation is complete, the sculptors are invited to move around the space to observe the various statues created by the group.

Next, the roles are reversed: whoever was the statue becomes the sculptor and vice versa, repeating the same experience.

At the end of the second phase, there is a moment of collective reflection on the experience. The discussion can begin with a few questions:

- How did you feel in the role of sculptor?
- How did you feel in the role of a statue?
- How mindful were you of the other person while shaping them?
- Did you try to create a comfortable position, or did you focus mainly on your own idea?
- How did you communicate your intention through your gestures?
- How aware were you of the impact of your actions on the other person?

Building on the reflections that emerged, the facilitator introduces the connection to the dimension of **examining intentions** in the Brave Space. In fact, even in a debate, every word, question, or comment stems from an intention and has an effect on the other person. The same statement can help open up a space for dialogue or can become a tool for attack, defense, or self-assertion.

To explore this aspect further, participants are asked to individually think of an issue on which they hold a very strong position. This is a topic on which they often find themselves in conflict, since they may feel they have certain convictions that are difficult to question.

Starting from this situation, participants are invited to reflect on the following questions:

- Am I sharing this idea to foster dialogue, or mainly to defend my position?
- What is the reason behind my words and actions?
- What would I like to see happen as a result of my words or behavior?

Participants can keep their responses as a personal tool for reflection. Alternatively, you can suggest sharing in pairs, allowing participants to decide for themselves how much they wish to reveal.

The reflections gathered can serve as a guide for observing how we participate in the discussion: not only what we say, but also the intention behind what we choose to say.

Facilitation Guidelines
It is important that the facilitator not preempt the meaning of the activity, allowing reflections to emerge from the lived experience.

During the first phase, it is helpful to observe the dynamics of care, respect, and listening among the participants, without judging the approaches they take.

In the debriefing, it is important to guide the group from the level of personal experience to the dimension of dialogue: intentions influence the way we relate to others and the way other people receive our words and actions.

The final reflection should remain a voluntary space: participants can choose how much to share regarding their beliefs and experiences.

3.2 Active listening: Dialogue as an Exploration of Possible Worlds

> «To broaden the range of options, we need: someone who opens up the range of possibilities, someone else who agrees to collaborate, and the ability to implement the solutions found or devised. In other words: active listening, a joyful spirit, and a humorous approach».
>
> Marianella Sclavi, *The Art of Listening and Possible Worlds*

3.2.1 Why Active Listening is the Second Pillar

While the first pillar of Nonviolent Debate consists of creating a Brave Space, where everyone can feel sufficiently supported to speak up, the second pillar concerns what truly makes the encounter between different perspectives possible: active listening. Creating the conditions for everyone to express themselves is, in fact, only the first step. For dialogue to become a genuine learning experience, people must be willing not only to share their own point of view but also to allow themselves to be challenged by the perspectives of others.

In everyday language, listening is often considered a spontaneous and almost automatic action, equivalent to simply hearing what the other person says. In educational processes and in contexts characterized by conflict, polarization, or strong emotional involvement, however, listening is a complex skill that requires intentionality, awareness, and practice. Listening means paying attention not only to words, but also to the meanings, emotions, needs, values, and experiences that shape what is being expressed. It means recognizing that each person interprets reality through their own history, cultural context, and life experiences, and that these interpretations - even when they differ from our own - deserve to be understood before they are judged.

This skill takes on even greater importance in contexts of conflict. When discussions touch on controversial issues or deeply meaningful identities, there is a risk that dialogue will quickly turn into a series of monologues, in which each person is preoccupied with defending their own position, seeking confirmation of their beliefs, or preparing their next response, without truly engaging with what the other person is communicating. In these situations, the problem is not a lack of speech, but a lack of listening: people speak, but they gradually stop constructing shared meanings.

The findings from the research confirm the centrality of this aspect. Both young people and youth workers identify mutual listening as one of the essential conditions for addressing controversial issues constructively. Young people express the need to feel heard without being immediately judged or pigeonholed into predefined categories, while professionals emphasize that the main challenge in facilitation lies not so much in the presence of differing opinions as in the ability to create the conditions under which people are genuinely willing to listen to one another.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, listening is therefore not a communication technique aimed at making the discussion more effective, but an educational practice oriented toward building democratic relationships. Listening means recognizing the other person as a legitimate interlocutor, valuing their experience, and accepting that dialogue can change - at least in part - the way we understand reality. The goal is not to reach an agreement quickly, but to create the conditions under which different perspectives can come together without canceling each other out.

Active Listening also serves a function closely linked to the first methodological pillar. While a Brave Space makes it possible to express different perspectives, it is listening that allows these perspectives to truly engage with one another. The two pillars feed into one another: without a Brave Space, people are unlikely to be willing to open up; without listening, the Brave Space risks becoming a place where each person expresses their own point of view without truly allowing themselves to be transformed by the encounter with the other.

For this reason, in Nonviolent Debate, listening is conceived as a transformative skill. It does not require sharing the other person's opinions or renouncing one's own convictions, but it does imply a willingness to understand the meaning of others' experiences, to recognize the partiality of one's own point of view, and to view the exchange as an opportunity for mutual learning. It is precisely this disposition that allows dialogue to transform conflict from a dynamic of opposition into an opportunity for collective understanding and growth.

3.2.2 Active Listening: Theoretical References

Active listening represents one of the fundamental concepts in contemporary thinking on communication, education, and conflict transformation. Although it has been developed within different theoretical traditions, the approaches that have most influenced its evolution share a common conviction: listening does not simply mean receiving information, but rather building a relationship in which it becomes possible to understand the other person in all their complexity, recognizing their emotions, needs, experiences, and systems of meaning.

Among the first authors to develop a theory of listening as a relational practice was **Carl Rogers** (1970). In the person-centered approach, listening constitutes a fundamental quality of the educational relationship and is based on three essential conditions: empathy, understood as the ability to understand the world from the other person's perspective; congruence, that is, the authenticity of the person facilitating the relationship; and unconditional positive regard, which consists of recognizing the person's worth regardless of the opinions they express.

From this perspective, listening creates the conditions for people to express themselves freely, explore their own experiences, and develop new insights. **Marshall Rosenberg's** (2003) **Nonviolent Communication** builds upon these foundations, expanding the meaning of listening by introducing the dimension of recognizing needs. According to Rosenberg, behind every message – even when it takes on judgmental, accusatory, or confrontational forms – there are needs, emotions, and values being expressed that often lack effective means of communication. Empathetic listening therefore consists of shifting the focus from positions to needs, seeking what unites people rather than what divides them. This perspective offers a fundamental contribution to the nonviolent transformation of conflicts, as it allows us to move beyond the logic of opposition and direct dialogue toward mutual understanding.

The primary theoretical reference for the Nonviolent Debate model, however, is the work of **Marianella Sclavi** (2003), who interprets listening as a practice of decentralization, curiosity, and creativity.

According to Sclavi, conflicts do not stem exclusively from the clash of interests or values, but very often from the encounter between people who attribute different meanings to the same reality. Each individual perceives the world through their own experiences, cultural context, and interpretive frameworks; consequently, what seems obvious to one person may take on a completely different meaning for another.

From this perspective, listening means, first and foremost, recognizing the partiality of one's own point of view and developing a willingness to explore the other person's perspective with genuine curiosity. This process, which Sclavi defines as "**decentering**," does not require giving up one's own convictions, but rather temporarily suspending judgment in order to understand how the other person constructs their own meaning of reality. Dialogue thus becomes a process of shared exploration in which the comparison of different perspectives is not an obstacle but a resource for broadening mutual understanding.

One of the most original aspects of Sclavi's contribution lies in attributing a profoundly **creative** dimension to listening. The encounter with different perspectives, in fact, offers the opportunity to question one's own interpretive frameworks and to imagine new ways of understanding reality. From this perspective, conflict is not merely a problem to be managed, but a learning opportunity capable of generating meanings that neither party could have constructed on their own.

Linked to this vision is the **humorous methodology**, through which Sclavi invites us to approach dialogue with lightheartedness, openness, and a willingness to be surprised. Humor is not understood as irony directed at the other person or as a trivialization of conflict, but as the ability to loosen the rigidity of one's own interpretive categories, embrace the unexpected, and view a change in perspective as a resource rather than a threat. Curiosity, creativity, and humor thus become essential conditions for building an authentic and transformative dialogue.

This perspective is summarized in the *Seven Rules of the Art of Listening*, through which Sclavi describes listening as a practice of continuous learning, based on the suspension of judgment, the recognition of the plurality of viewpoints, the valuing emotions, and curiosity about the other person's "possible worlds." Rather than prescribing specific behaviors, these principles outline an epistemological attitude that guides how we engage in relationships and address conflict.

The Nonviolent Debate model integrates the contributions of Rogers, Rosenberg, and Sclavi into a unified methodological framework. From the person-centered approach, it draws on the centrality of the educational relationship; from Nonviolent Communication, the focus on needs and empathetic listening; and from the work of Marianella Sclavi, it adopts decentralization, curiosity, creativity, and a humorous approach as foundational elements of active listening skills. It is above all this latter perspective that guides the framework proposed in this curriculum, in which the Seven Rules of the Art of Listening constitute the main theoretical reference for defining the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors that educators and youth workers are called upon to develop.

3.2.3 Active Listening Skills in Nonviolent Debate

The theoretical references presented outline a conception of listening that goes beyond the communicative dimension, framing it as an essential educational skill for facilitating processes of dialogue, participation, and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts. In the Nonviolent Debate model, this competency is translated into an integrated set of **knowledge, skills, attitudes, and observable values and behaviors** that educators and youth workers can develop through training, reflective practice, and field experience.

The main theoretical framework for this approach is represented by the Seven Rules of the Art of Listening proposed by Marianella Sclavi (2003). Rather than prescribing specific behaviors, they describe an epistemological attitude grounded in curiosity, decentralization, and a willingness to question one's own interpretive frameworks. In the Nonviolent Debate model, these principles are reinterpreted as cross-cutting elements of professional competence.

The seven rules can be summarized as follows:

1. **Do not rush to conclusions.** Conclusions are the most fleeting part of inquiry. Suspending judgment allows you to continue exploring the complexity of situations and to avoid premature interpretations.
2. **What you see depends on your perspective. To see your own perspective, you must change your perspective.** To truly recognize your own point of view and understand that of others, you must acknowledge that every perspective is inevitably partial.
3. **If you want to understand what someone else is saying, you must assume they are right and ask them to help you understand how and why.** The goal of listening is not to immediately verify the accuracy of their statements, but to understand their internal logic.
4. **Emotions are fundamental tools of understanding if you know how to interpret their language. They do not tell you what you see, but how you see it. Their code is relational and analogical.** Anger, fear, discomfort, enthusiasm, and surprise provide valuable information both about yourself and about your relationship with the other person, and they deserve to be acknowledged and listened to.
5. **A good listener is an explorer of possible worlds. The most important signals for them are those that present themselves to consciousness as both negligible and bothersome, marginal and irritating, because they are inconsistent with their own certainties.** Listening means approaching with curiosity the ways in which other people interpret reality, allowing oneself to be surprised by unexpected perspectives.
6. **A good listener willingly embraces the paradoxes of thought and communication. They view disagreements as opportunities to practice in a field that fascinates them: the creative management of conflicts.** The clash of different points of view is not an obstacle to dialogue, but a condition that allows for a broader understanding of reality and generates new learning opportunities.
7. **To become an expert in the art of listening, you must adopt a humorous approach. But once you've learned to listen, humor comes naturally.** Humor consists of the ability to lighten the rigidity of one's own interpretive categories, embrace the unexpected, and experience a shift in perspective as an opportunity for growth, without trivializing conflict or undermining people's dignity.

Based on these principles, the Nonviolent Debate model breaks down the skill of Active Listening into the following four dimensions.

Knowledge

Active Listening, in the Nonviolent Debate model, is based first and foremost on a body of knowledge that enables educators and youth workers to understand the complexity of communicative, relational, and conflictual processes. This knowledge concerns not only the functioning of interpersonal communication but also includes an awareness of the mechanisms through which people construct meaning, interpret reality, and attribute value to their own experiences. Listening thus becomes a skill grounded on the understanding that every interaction takes place between people who bring with them different stories, perspectives, and systems of meaning.

A fundamental starting point concerns the subjective and situated nature of the perception of reality. As highlighted by Marianella Sclavi in the second Rule of the Art of Listening, "what one sees depends on one's point of view": each person observes and interprets what happens through specific cultural, social, and experiential frameworks. Understanding this principle means recognizing that differences in perspective do not necessarily represent an obstacle to dialogue, but rather constitute an inevitable feature of human experience. In the context of Nonviolent Debate, this awareness allows us to move beyond a conception of conflict based on the idea that one one side possesses the correct view of reality while the other is simply mistaken.

Linked to this dimension is knowledge of the main theoretical approaches that have helped define the contemporary concept of active listening. Educators and youth workers must be familiar with the contribution of Carl Rogers' person-centered approach, which identifies empathy, authenticity, and positive acceptance as the fundamental conditions for a meaningful communicative relationship. Alongside Rogers, another helpful perspective is that of Nonviolent Communication, which invites us to recognize needs, emotions, and values (which often are not immediately visible) in people's messages. Finally, just as important to consider is the contribution of Marianella Sclavi, who interprets listening as a practice of decentralization, curiosity, and the shared construction of new meanings.

Another area of knowledge concerns the relationship between listening and conflict. In contexts characterized by strong emotional involvement or the presence of controversial issues, people frequently tend to interpret the exchange as a clash between incompatible positions. Active Listening, on the other hand, requires an understanding of the dynamics that can stifle dialogue: the search for confirmation of one's own beliefs, the tendency to quickly judge others' experiences, the attribution of negative intentions, and the reduction of people's complexity to individual opinions or affiliations. Understanding these mechanisms allows those facilitating dialogue to recognize obstacles to listening and to create conditions more conducive to mutual understanding.

Another key aspect of this knowledge is an awareness of the role of emotions in communication processes. The fourth Rule of the Art of Listening by Sclavi states that emotions are tools of knowledge: anger, fear, discomfort, enthusiasm, or surprise are not merely elements that interfere with the rationality of the exchange, but valuable information for understanding what is meaningful to the people involved. Competent listening therefore requires an understanding of the connection between emotions, needs, and the construction of meaning, avoiding the interpretation of the emotional dimension as something to be eliminated or controlled.

Finally, Active Listening implies an awareness of the transformative value of difference. The fifth and sixth Rules of the Art of Listening invite us to view the other person as the bearer of a potentially different way of seeing the world and to regard differences as a resource for broadening our understanding of reality. This perspective profoundly changes the role of the dialogue facilitator: the goal is not to eliminate differences in order to quickly reach a consensus, but to create the conditions for different perspectives to come together and generate new possibilities for interpretation and action.

In summary, the knowledge underlying Active Listening concerns an understanding of the complex, situated, and relational nature of human communication. It enables educators and youth workers to develop a perspective capable of going beyond the simple transmission of information, recognizing listening as a practice for exploring possible worlds, transforming conflict, and building democratic relationships.

Skills

While knowledge forms the theoretical foundation of Active Listening, skills pertain to the ability to translate these principles into the practice of educational relationships. In the Nonviolent Debate model, active listening means taking intentional actions that foster mutual understanding, the exploration of meanings, and the building of authentic dialogue.

In particular, educators and youth workers are called upon to develop the ability to:

- **Suspend judgment and keep the exploration open,** avoiding premature interpretations and dwelling on the complexity of situations. As Marianella Sclavi (2003) reminds us in the first Rule of the Art of Listening, conclusions represent only a provisional stage of understanding and not its starting point.
- **Formulate open-ended and exploratory questions** capable of delving deeper into the meaning of the experiences shared without steering or judging the response. To ask means accompanying the other person in articulating their own point of view, assuming that it possesses its own internal coherence even before evaluating it.
- **Use paraphrasing, reformulation, and mirroring** to verify your understanding and reflect back both the content and the emotional dimension of what has been expressed. These techniques allow you to slow down communication, prevent misunderstandings, and foster mutual recognition.
- **Recognize the emotions, needs, and underlying meanings behind the positions expressed**, going beyond the superficial level of opinions to understand what is truly important to the person. From this perspective, emotions become tools for understanding rather than obstacles to dialogue.
- **Facilitating the exchange of different perspectives**, valuing the diversity of viewpoints as a resource for collective learning, fostering balanced participation and helping the group transform differences into opportunities for mutual understanding.
- **Design educational experiences that allow participants to practice Active Listening**, using participatory methodologies that alternate between individual work, work in pairs, small groups, and whole-group sessions, while also valuing forms of nonverbal communication.
- **Recognize the distinction between an educational relationship and a specialized helping relationship**, knowing how to differentiate between what Active Listening can offer within the educational role and what requires skills specific to psychological support or other specialized services.
- **Use silence, waiting, and uncertainty as educational resources**, avoiding the urge to immediately fill every pause or seek quick solutions, but instead guiding the group in the shared construction of new meanings.

These skills enable the transformation of the theoretical principles of Active Listening into concrete facilitation practices, creating conditions in which dialogue can become a process of mutual learning and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

Attitudes and Values

Active Listening, within the Nonviolent Debate model, cannot be reduced solely to a set of communication techniques or procedures. It requires a particular disposition toward the other person, toward conflict, and toward knowledge itself. The attitudes and values that underpin this competency relate to the way in which educators and youth workers choose to engage in the

educational relationship: with what openness they approach others' experiences, how willing they are to question their own interpretations, and what meaning they attribute to difference.

A first fundamental attitude is **curiosity** toward the other person and toward their way of interpreting reality. In Marianella Sclavi's (2003) approach, listening means adopting an exploratory stance toward the other person's "possible worlds," recognizing that every experience contains meanings capable of broadening one's own understanding of reality. This disposition echoes the fifth Rule of the Art of Listening: a good listener does not seek confirmation of their own beliefs, but allows themselves to be guided by curiosity toward unexpected perspectives.

This openness requires a second essential disposition: the **suspension of judgment**, accompanied by what we might call genuine **epistemological humility**. As the first Rule of the Art of Listening reminds us, suspending judgment does not mean renouncing one's own convictions, but rather recognizing that every interpretation is inevitably partial. For those who facilitate dialogue processes, this also implies developing a constant **awareness of one's own biases, cultural frameworks, and interpretive habits,** recognizing how these influence the way one listens, understands, and attributes meaning to the other person's words. Authentic listening therefore requires a continuous practice of self-reflection and decentring.

A central value of Active Listening is also the **recognition of the dignity and legitimacy of the other person's experience**. Listening means valuing the story, experiences, and meanings that each person brings to the relationship, even when they differ from one's own. This attitude does not mean agreeing with or automatically accepting the opinions expressed, but rather choosing to regard every interlocutor as worthy of being listened to and understood.

Another key element is **trust in the transformative power of dialogue**. In Nonviolent Debate, the exchange of differing perspectives is not seen as a threat to group cohesion, but as an opportunity to foster new understandings. This trust goes hand in hand with an **openness to complexity, uncertainty, and surprise**, acknowledging that not all situations can be quickly reduced to simple explanations or immediate solutions.

From this perspective, the seventh Rule of the Art of Listening - which concerns the use of humor - takes on particular significance. For Sclavi, humor is not a means of ridiculing the other person or downplaying the suffering associated with conflict, but rather the ability to step back from the rigidity of one's own interpretive frameworks. This mindset allows one to embrace the unexpected, acknowledge complexity, and experience a shift in perspective as an opportunity rather than a loss of security.

Finally, Active Listening is grounded in the value of reciprocity. The listener does not occupy a neutral or external position with respect to the relationship, but participates in a process in which their own way of seeing the world can also be transformed. Authentic listening therefore implies a willingness to allow oneself to be transformed by the encounter, recognizing that understanding the other person also means accepting that dialogue can alter one's own perspectives, broaden one's interpretive frameworks, and generate new possibilities for understanding.

In summary, the attitudes and values of Active Listening define a particular educational approach grounded in curiosity, openness to complexity, critical self-awareness, and recognition of the plurality of viewpoints. It is these dispositions that enable knowledge and communication skills to truly become tools for transforming conflict and building democratic spaces for dialogue.

Behaviors

The behavioral dimension represents the concrete expression of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that make up the competency of Active Listening. In the Nonviolent Debate model, effective listening is recognized not only by the facilitator's intentions but also by the actions through which a relationship is built: one founded on mutual recognition, the possibility of expression, and the shared exploration of meanings.

A key aspect of Active Listening is creating the conditions that allow everyone to speak and be heard. Competent educators and youth workers pay attention to the distribution of speaking time, ensuring that the dialogue is not dominated by the most confident voices or the most widely represented viewpoints. This means encouraging the participation of those who tend to remain silent, acknowledging less visible contributions, and fostering an atmosphere in which people can express themselves without fear of being immediately judged or dismissed. In this sense, Active Listening is a practice closely linked to the creation of a "Brave Space": it is not enough to offer the formal opportunity to speak; rather, it is necessary to create the relational conditions so that everyone can feel acknowledged and validated in their contribution.

A second key practice involves the ability to listen without interrupting and to give genuine attention to the person who is speaking. This implies not focusing exclusively on formulating one's own response, but remaining open to understanding the meaning of what is being expressed. From this perspective, the first and third Rules of Sclavi's Art of Listening find practical application: temporarily setting aside the need to reach a conclusion and assuming that what the other person is communicating possesses its own internal coherence that deserves to be explored. The goal is not to immediately determine whether a statement is correct or agreeable, but to understand what experience, reasoning, or system of meanings underlies it.

A central aspect of Active Listening also lies in the ability to convey what has been understood through practices such as **paraphrasing** and **mirroring.** These practices make the listening process visible, allow one to verify one's own understanding, and contribute to building a relationship based on trust.

Paraphrasing involves rephrasing the content expressed by the other person in one's own words, without adding interpretations, judgments, or evaluations. Through paraphrasing, the listener conveys the main meaning of the message received and offers the speaker the opportunity to confirm, correct, or elaborate on what has been understood. This practice is particularly important in contexts involving controversial or conflictual issues, where the risk of misunderstanding can quickly lead to polarization. Slowing down the exchange through paraphrasing allows for the establishment of a common ground of understanding before proceeding to compare different positions.

Mirroring, on the other hand, primarily involves reflecting the emotional dimension and the experiences that accompany the other person's account. Through this practice, the listener acknowledges the emotions expressed or implied in the narrative, validating them without immediately attempting to correct, minimize, or resolve them. Phrases such as "It seems to me that this situation made you feel…" or "I get the impression that this aspect is particularly important to you because…" allow the listener to show attention not only to what is being said but also to the meaning that experience holds for the person. Mirroring draws on the concept of empathic reflection developed by Carl Rogers and is linked to the fourth Rule of the Art of Listening by Sclavi, according to which emotions are tools of understanding capable of offering valuable insights into the needs, values, and experiences of the people involved.

Another fundamental behavior concerns the ability to recognize and value differences in perspective. Those who possess Active Listening skills avoid reducing the other person to the position they express, but instead seek to understand what experiences, values, or needs underpin that view of reality. This behavior puts Sclavi's fifth and sixth Rules into practice: viewing the other person as the owner of a potentially different world and recognizing differences as a resource for broadening collective understanding. In this sense, the goal of listening is not to eliminate diversity of viewpoints, but to create the conditions for it to become an opportunity for mutual learning.

In group settings, Active Listening also manifests itself in the ability to facilitate the exchange of different perspectives and to guide the group through conflict. Competent educators and youth workers intervene when generalizing judgments, oversimplifications, or exclusionary dynamics emerge, helping people shift their focus from the opposition of positions to the exploration of the meanings they contain. The role of the facilitator is not to resolve the conflict on behalf of those involved, but to create the conditions for them to develop a greater capacity for mutual understanding.

Finally, a distinctive feature of Active Listening is the ability to remain flexible and open in the face of the unexpected. The humorous approach proposed by Sclavi allows us to challenge rigidity, automatic responses, and entrenched interpretations, fostering an atmosphere in which it is possible to shift one's perspective without perceiving that change as a threat. From this perspective, humor does not mean reducing the complexity of conflict or minimizing people's experiences, but rather cultivating an attitude capable of embracing surprise and generating new possibilities for understanding.

In conclusion, the behaviors of Active Listening make visible the transition from a conception of dialogue as a simple exchange of opinions to an educational practice oriented toward transformation. Through concrete actions such as creating space, listening without judgment, paraphrasing, reflecting emotions, valuing differences, and facilitating connection, educators and youth workers contribute to building contexts in which dialogue can become an opportunity for mutual learning, democratic participation, and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

Table 3.2 – The "Active Listening" Skill in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Dimension of the Competence	Goal	Key Elements
Knowledge	Understand the theoretical foundations of Active Listening and its role in building dialogic relationships and in the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.	To become familiar with the main theoretical approaches to listening (Rogers, Rosenberg, Sclavi); to understand the subjective and situated nature of interpretations of reality; to understand the role of emotions, needs, and values in communication processes; to understand the dynamics of polarization, judgment, and misunderstanding in conflicts; to recognize listening as a practice of decentring, exploration of possible worlds, and shared construction of meaning.

Skills	Apply listening practices that foster mutual understanding, recognition of different perspectives, and constructive dialogue.	Suspend judgment and keep exploration open; use paraphrasing and rephrasing to verify understanding; ask open-ended and exploratory questions (which often emerge during the paraphrasing process); practice mirroring to recognize emotions and experiences; identify needs and meanings underlying expressed positions; facilitate the comparison of different perspectives by valuing differences as a resource; design activities that allow young participants to experiment with and practice active listening within the group; design activities that also value forms of nonverbal listening and that incorporate variable group configurations, ranging from pairs to small groups to the entire group.
Attitudes and Values	Adopt an educational approach grounded in curiosity, openness, and a willingness to be transformed by the encounter with another person.	Curiosity about the other person's possible worlds; suspension of judgment; epistemological humility and awareness of the partiality of one's own point of view; recognition of the dignity and legitimacy of others' experiences; trust in the transformative power of dialogue; openness to complexity, uncertainty, and surprise; the use of humor as a way to challenge rigid interpretations; and, as educators and youth workers, being aware of one's own biases when listening and of the personal mental frameworks that undermine the ability to listen actively.
Behaviours	Apply Active Listening skills in the daily practice of facilitation and educational relationships.	Create conditions that allow everyone to express themselves and be heard; listen attentively without interrupting or preparing a response in advance; demonstrate understanding through paraphrasing, rephrasing, and mirroring; recognize and value the emotional dimension of communication; encourage the emergence of different perspectives; intervene in dynamics of judgment, exclusion, or polarization; guide the group in the shared construction of meanings and possibilities for action.

3.2.4 From Competence to Practice: Activities to Develop Active Listening

As with the Brave Space, the skill of Active Listening cannot be acquired solely through theoretical learning but requires a process of experiential training in which reflection and practice feed into one another. The knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors described in the preceding paragraphs are developed through experiences that allow participants to directly engage with the complexity of listening, confront their own interpretive biases, and critically reflect on how they relate to others.

In line with Marianella Sclavi's thinking, the Nonviolent Debate model prioritizes activities that invite people to suspend judgment, shift perspectives, recognize the role of emotions, and view conflict as a learning opportunity. Rather than teaching communication techniques, these experiences foster the development of an educational approach grounded in curiosity, open-mindedness, and a willingness to be transformed by encountering different perspectives.

Many of the proposed activities draw directly on Marianella Sclavi's Seven Rules of the Art of Listening, translating their epistemological principles into concrete learning experiences. Each activity allows students to explore a specific aspect of Active Listening in depth and contributes to the progressive development of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize this competency.

Table 3.3 – Activities Inspired by the Seven Rules of the Art of Listening

Rule of the Art of Listening	Activity	Educational Goal
1. Don't rush to draw conclusions. Conclusions are the most fleeting part of research.	**Grab Grab**	Become aware of the tendency to make hasty interpretations and judgments, and experience the value of suspending judgment and exploring complexity.
2. What you see depends on your perspective. To see your own perspective, you must change your perspective.	**Optical Illusions** **Washing the Elephant**	Understand the subjective nature of perception and recognize how different perspectives can coexist without necessarily being incompatible.
3. If you want to understand what someone else is saying, you must assume they are right and ask them to help you understand how and why.	**Barnga**	Develop cognitive defocusing by learning to seek the meaning behind others' actions and behaviors before interpreting or judging them.
4. Emotions are fundamental tools of knowledge if you know how to understand their language.	**Guided Self-Reflection and Pair Work**	Develop emotional awareness and recognize the role of emotions as a source of self-knowledge and insight into relationships.

5. A good listener is an explorer of possible worlds.	**The Nine Dots** **The Parking Space Number** **Matchstick Puzzles**	Cultivate divergent thinking, curiosity, and a willingness to question one's own interpretive frameworks.
6. A good listener willingly embraces the paradoxes of thought and communication. They treat disagreements as opportunities to practice creative conflict resolution.	**The Magic Stick**	Experiment with creative ways of managing conflict and view disagreements as opportunities for learning and innovation.
7. To become an expert in the art of listening, you must adopt a humorous approach. But once you've learned to listen, humor comes naturally.	**Receptionist and Customer**	Reflect on the role of cognitive flexibility, humor, and the ability to embrace the unexpected in communication and listening processes.

Activities inspired by the Seven Rules can be supplemented with exercises specifically designed to develop the communication skills associated with active listening. These exercises allow participants to directly experience fundamental tools such as paraphrasing, mirroring, suspending judgment, and cognitive defocusing, thereby fostering critical reflection on their own communication style and the quality of their educational relationships.

Table 3.4 - Cross-Curricular Activities for Developing Active Listening

Activity	Educational Goal	Developed competences
Fake Listening	Recognize behaviors that hinder authentic listening and reflect on the impact of not listening on the educational relationship.	Presence in the relationship, communicative awareness, recognition of dysfunctional behaviors, empathetic listening.
Your Worst Enemy	Suspend judgment regarding people or positions perceived as distant, and practice cognitive decentralization by exploring the other person's needs, values, and experiences.	Suspension of judgment, empathy, cognitive decentralization, understanding of different perspectives, constructive conflict management.

Activity 1 - Grab, Grab

Don't rush to draw conclusions. Conclusions are the most fleeting part of research.

Objective of the Activity

This activity aims to develop the ability to suspend judgment and to question immediate interpretations of reality. Through a simulation characterized by rules that are seemingly simple but open to different strategies of action, participants experience the tendency to draw quick conclusions and to base their behavior on assumptions rather than on a shared understanding of the situation.

The experience also encourages reflection on the dynamics of cooperation and competition, demonstrating how premature conclusions can hinder the development of collective solutions. Within the Nonviolent Debate model, the activity introduces the principle that listening means keeping the exploration of reality open before attributing definitive meanings to events or other people's intentions.

Duration

Approximately 20-30 minutes

Materials

- A large number of **dried beans** (alternatively, small dried pasta or other small, easy-to-handle objects);
- One or more tables;
- A poster with the game rules.

Activity Procedure

Set up one or more tables in the center of the space so that participants can move comfortably around them. The activity can be conducted with a single group or, in the case of large groups, carried out simultaneously at multiple tables by dividing the participants into subgroups. Eight to ten people actively participate at each table, while the rest of the group initially takes on the role of observers, standing behind them.

On each table, **n items** (such as dried beans or pasta) are placed, where n corresponds to the number of active players. If ten people are participating, there will be 10 items to start with.

The facilitator presents the poster with the rules and reads them aloud with the group.

Rules of the Game

- The winner is whoever collects **2n + 2 items**;
- When the signal "**Go**" is given, each participant may freely take items from the table;
- When the signal "**Stop**" is given, the number of items remaining on the table is doubled;
- Between "Go" and "Stop," participants may not speak to one another;
- The facilitator may not answer participants' questions.

In most cases, during the first round, participants immediately collect all the available items. The game thus ends very quickly, since there are no items left to double and no one can reach the number needed to win. At this point, the facilitator stops the activity, invites the group to carefully reread the rules, and offers a second chance.

New strategies generally emerge during the second attempt. The group begins to discuss the possibility of voluntarily leaving some items on the table so they can be doubled, gradually realizing that collaboration can be more advantageous than immediate competition. At the same time, dynamics of trust, negotiation, leadership, opportunism, or conflict may arise, especially when some participants decide to break shared agreements in an attempt to win individually.

To make the experience more dynamic, the facilitator can suddenly give the "Go" signal while the group is discussing, observing how strategies and power dynamics shift. If time permits, the activity can be repeated by switching the roles between players and observers.

If the activity is conducted at multiple tables, it is advisable to schedule a plenary discussion at the end so that the various subgroups can share the strategies they adopted and reflect on the different dynamics that emerged, even though they participated in the same game with the same rules.

Debriefing

The debriefing is the central part of the activity, as it allows participants to transform their lived experience into learning.

In the first phase, active participants are asked to share their impressions, describing the strategies they adopted, what guided their decisions, and how they experienced the group dynamics. Next, the observers speak, sharing their observations regarding individual and collective behaviors.

The reflection can be guided by the following questions:

- What was your initial interpretation of the rules?
- Did you try to understand the situation, or did you act immediately?
- When did you begin to question your initial interpretation?
- What factors facilitated or hindered collaboration?
- How did trust or distrust develop within the group?
- At what points did you assume you already understood the situation?
- What did you observe when comparing the dynamics that emerged at the different tables? (if the activity was conducted in subgroups).
- What similarities can you identify between this experience and the situations of dialogue or conflict you encounter in daily life?

Based on the reflections that emerged, the facilitator connects the experience to the **first Rule of the Art of Listening** proposed by Marianella Sclavi. Just as in a game we tend to quickly interpret the rules without exploring all their possibilities, in everyday communication we often jump to immediate conclusions about other people's intentions, ideas, or behaviors. Active Listening, on the other hand, invites us to temporarily suspend judgment, keeping the exploration of the situation open before assigning it a definitive meaning.

If the activity was carried out at multiple tables, comparing the different strategies adopted also highlights how, starting from the same rules, different groups can develop different interpretations and ways of acting. This reflection foreshadows a central element of the second Rule of the Art of Listening: the awareness that each person observes reality from a partial perspective and that engaging with different points of view is a resource for broadening one's understanding.

Facilitation Guidelines

It is important that the facilitator neither suggest strategies nor clarify the implicit meaning of the rules during the game. The initial ambiguity is, in fact, the central pedagogical element of the activity, as it allows the group to directly experience the tendency to act based on their own interpretations.

During the activity, it is helpful to carefully observe how dynamics of cooperation, competition, leadership, negotiation, and exclusion emerge, without intervening prematurely in their development. If the activity is conducted at multiple tables, it is advisable for the facilitator or any co-facilitators to observe each subgroup, noting the different strategies adopted so that they can be highlighted later during the debriefing.

During the debriefing, it is essential to guide the group in distinguishing between **observation, interpretation, and conclusion**, helping participants recognize how many misunderstandings and conflicts arise from the immediate attribution of meanings rather than from an actual exploration of the situation. The goal is not to identify a "right" strategy for winning the game, but to experience how suspending judgment and a willingness to remain in uncertainty are fundamental skills of Active Listening. Through this experience, participants begin to understand that conclusions are not the starting point of dialogue, but rather the possible outcome of a process of listening, discussion, and the shared construction of meaning.

Activity 2 - Optical Illusions and Washing the Elephant

> *What you see depends on your perspective. To see your own perspective, you must change your perspective.*

Optical Effects

Objective of the Activity

This activity introduces the concept of perspective by demonstrating that reality is not perceived objectively but is interpreted through each person's point of view. By observing several optical illusions, participants experience how identical images can be interpreted in different ways and how the input of others is often necessary to see what initially escapes notice.
This experience helps participants understand that changing one's perspective does not mean giving up one's own interpretation, but rather expanding it. In the Nonviolent Debate model, this represents a fundamental skill of Active Listening: recognizing that one's own point of view is always partial and that engaging with different perspectives allows for the development of a richer and more complex understanding of reality.

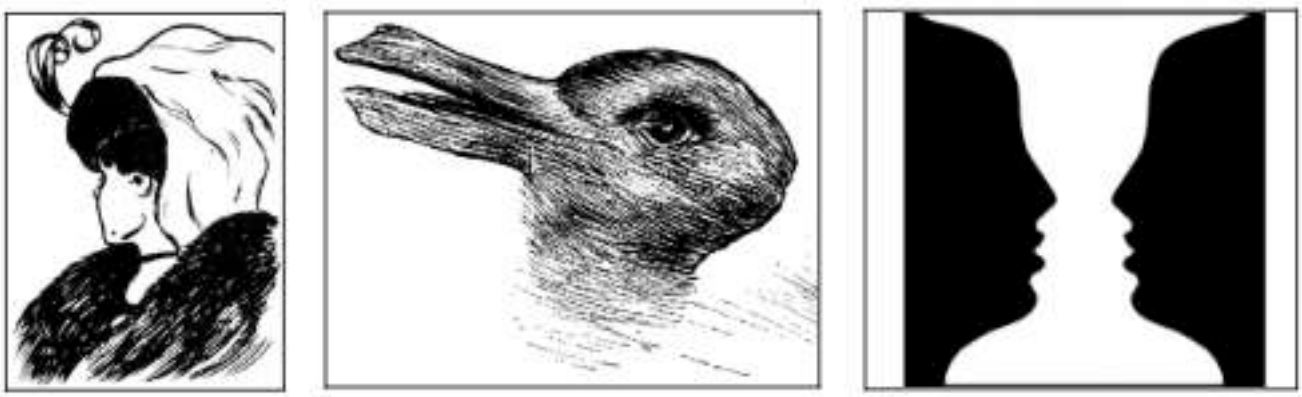
Duration

About 15 minutes

Materials

- Printouts of various optical illusions (for example: the young woman and the old woman, the rabbit and the duck, the Rubin vase, etc.).
- Projector or hard copies.
- Flip chart or whiteboard.

Figure 3.1. Optical Illusions for Exploring Perspective-Taking



Activity Procedure

The facilitator shows the first optical illusion without providing any explanation and invites participants to spontaneously share what they see. Responses are acknowledged without confirming or refuting any interpretation.

Next, the group is invited to look at the image again, listening to others' descriptions and trying to identify what they initially failed to see. The same process is repeated with other optical illusions.

At the end of the observation, a group discussion about the experience takes place.

Debriefing

Reflection can be guided by the following questions:

- What did you see first?
- Was it easy to see the other image as well?
- What helped you change your perspective?
- How did you feel when other people saw something you couldn't see yet?
- Have you ever realized that a situation could be interpreted in different ways?
- What connection do you see between this experience and the way we listen to others' opinions?

Building on the reflections that emerged, the facilitator connects the activity to the second Rule of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi. Just as an image can hold multiple interpretations at the same time, situations involving dialogue and conflict can also be understood from different perspectives. Active Listening does not consist of deciding which interpretation is correct, but rather of developing the openness to recognize that one's own interpretation is only one of many possible readings of reality. Changing one's perspective allows us to see elements that were previously invisible and is an essential condition for truly understanding another person's point of view.

Facilitation Guidelines

It is important never to reveal the second image in optical illusions beforehand. The facilitator should let the participants discover it on their own, emphasizing the importance of mutual discussion. During the debriefing, it is helpful to avoid talking about "right" or "wrong" perceptions, instead highlighting how every interpretation represents a partial perspective that can be broadened by listening to others.

Washing the Elephant

Objective of the Activity

This activity allows participants to experience how people quickly construct a shared interpretation of reality based on partial information. Even in the presence of an incongruous element, the group generally tends to recognize the overall action (washing an elephant), automatically attributing a coherent meaning even to the gesture that is not coherent.

At the same time, the activity highlights how, when people act based on different information without realizing it, misunderstandings, confusion, and attempts to interpret others' behavior can arise. In the Nonviolent Debate model, this experience highlights the importance of setting aside one's own interpretations and verifying others' intentions before attributing meanings to their behaviors.

Duration

Approximately 10–15 minutes

Materials

No specific materials required

Activity Procedure

The facilitator asks three volunteers to temporarily leave the room.
The first two people are given the same task: they must act out washing an elephant. The first person is asked to wash the snout and the second, the body, the third person must wash the tail. But, before returning to the plenary session,the third person, without the others being able to hear, is instead given a different task: he/she must act out washing a motorcycle.
Once back in the room, the three volunteers simultaneously begin performing their movements without speaking, while the rest of the group observes the scene and tries to guess what they are acting out.
In most cases, the group easily recognizes the act of washing an elephant and tends to interpret the incongruous gesture as part of this scene as well, attributing a meaning to it that is consistent with the overall action.
At the same time, the three volunteers may begin to look at one another with surprise or confusion, trying to understand why one of them is making movements that seem different from their own. This element is an important part of the experience and is revisited during the reflection session.

Debriefing

Reflection can be guided by the following questions:

- How did you figure out that this was an elephant being washed?
- Did you notice any gestures that seemed different from the others?
- Why didn't that detail change your interpretation?
- For the volunteer: What was it like to carry out the activity?
- Did you get the feeling that someone was doing something different?
- What did you think at that moment?
- Did you try to adapt to the other person, or did you continue to follow your instructions?
- In everyday life, do you ever interpret others' behavior without knowing the information or intentions behind their actions?
- How does this experience relate to the topic of Active Listening?

Based on the reflections that emerged, the facilitator connects the experience to the second Rule of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi. The activity reveals two complementary dynamics. On the one hand, the group spontaneously constructs a shared narrative, incorporating even elements that seem to contradict it. On the other hand, participants in the activity may experience the difficulty of understanding another person's behavior when each person has different information. Something similar often happens in dialogue as well: we quickly interpret words and behaviors based on our own perspective, without knowing what experiences, information, or intentions are guiding the other person. Active Listening, on the other hand, invites us to suspend our conclusions, keep our curiosity alive, and verify the meaning attributed to others' actions before considering it definitive.

Facilitation Guidelines

The different instructions must be communicated to the third volunteer without the others being able to hear them. During the activity, it is important to observe both the group's reactions and the interactions among the three volunteers, as both provide valuable material for the debriefing. In the debriefing, the facilitator should highlight both the group's ability to quickly construct a shared meaning and the confusion experienced by those receiving different information, while avoiding presenting the activity as a "trap." The goal is to help participants recognize how much our interpretations are influenced by the perspective from which we view reality, and how much dialogue requires curiosity, verification, and a willingness to question our initial interpretations.

Activity 3 - Barnga

> *If you want to understand what someone else is saying, you must assume they are right and ask them to help you understand how and why.*

Activity Objective

This activity allows participants to experience how people who follow different rules can easily come into conflict even while acting in good faith. Through a card game in which each group uses slightly different rules, participants experience situations of misunderstanding, frustration, and negotiation, discovering how natural it is to attribute mistakes or bad intentions to others instead of assuming they are simply following a different frame of reference.
In the **Nonviolent Debate** model, this experience introduces the third Rule of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi, demonstrating how understanding others requires a willingness to suspend judgment and to assume that their behavior follows a logic worth exploring, at least temporarily.

Duration

About 50–60 minutes

Materials

- One deck of cards for each group;
- One sheet with the game rules for each table (different for each group);
- Numbered signs to identify the tables.

Activity Procedure

Each group receives a deck of cards and a sheet containing the rules for their table. Although the game appears identical, the rules have some differences (such as the value of the ace or the trump suit), which must not be revealed to the other groups. Participants have about 10 minutes to read the rules and play a few practice hands until everyone understands how the game works. The rule sheets can be downloaded from the MOMO– More Monitoring Action in the EU

Once the practice phase is over, the facilitator collects all the rule sheets and announces that from this point on, verbal communication and writing are no longer allowed. Participants may interact exclusively through gestures.
The tournament then begins. Each match lasts just a few minutes. At the end of each round, the player with the best result moves to the next-numbered table, while the player with the worst result moves to the previous-numbered table. In the event of a tie, the person whose name comes first alphabetically moves to the next table. The tournament continues for several rounds, so that everyone has the opportunity to play in groups with different rules

As the players move from table to table, misunderstandings inevitably arise. The participants notice that the game at the other tables seems to follow different rules, but they cannot explain why. Many thus begin to interpret others' behavior as mistakes, foul play, or attempts to cheat, while others try to adapt by closely observing what is happening. The activity thus highlights how natural it is to attribute meanings to others' behavior when we do not have the same information.

Debriefing

Reflection can be guided by the following questions:

- How did you feel when you changed tables?
- Did you think the others were wrong, or did you question your own rules?
- What helped you adapt to the new situation?
- Did you try to understand the other person's point of view?
- Did you ever attribute negative intentions to those who played differently?
- What situations in daily life does this experience remind you of?

Based on the reflections that emerged, the facilitator connects the experience to the third Rule of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi. Often, in conflicts, we interpret others' behavior as wrong or unreasonable, when in reality they are simply following rules or perspectives different from our own. Active Listening, on the other hand, invites us to assume that the other person has their own logic and to let curiosity guide us in understanding them before judging them.

Guidelines for Facilitation

It is important that the facilitator not clarify the differences between the rules during the game and uphold the ban on verbal communication. During the debriefing, it is helpful to assist the group in distinguishing between observed behavior and interpretations attributed to others, emphasizing how many misunderstandings stem from different frames of reference rather than from people's ill will.

Activity 4 - Guided Self-Reflection and Pair Sharing

> *Emotions are fundamental tools of understanding if you know how to interpret their language. They do not tell you what you see, but how you see it.*
> *Their code is relational and analogical.*

Emotions do not simply describe an external reality: they reveal the way we relate to that reality. For this reason, they can become valuable tools for self-awareness and for understanding our own modes of interpretation.
As Marianella Sclavi suggests, what we often attribute to others ("So-and-so is unpleasant," "Such-and-such is difficult," "This person makes me angry") can be reinterpreted as information about our experience of the relationship: not just "How is the other person?", but "What happens to me when I'm in a relationship with the other person?"

Objective of the Activity

This activity aims to develop the ability to recognize one's own emotions as useful signs for understanding one's approach to relationships.

Through the analysis of a real-life situation, participants are invited to shift their focus from an other-centered perspective ("What did this person do?") to a self-reflective perspective ("What did this situation trigger in me?").
The goal is not to deny what is happening in the relationship, but to broaden one's perspective, recognizing that every emotion contains information about both the situation and the way we interpret it.

Duration

Approximately 45–60 minutes

Materials

Paper and pens.

Activity Procedure

The facilitator invites each participant to choose a recent or significant interpersonal situation in which they experienced an intense emotion, such as anger, irritation, sadness, fear, discomfort, or frustration.

- The task is to reflect individually on the situation using the following guiding questions:
- What did I notice about myself?
- What did I notice about the other person?
- What did I feel?
- What does that emotion tell me about myself?

The goal is not to find an immediate explanation for the emotion, but to explore its meaning: what need, expectation, fear, or personal belief might have made that situation particularly significant.
After individual reflection, the experience is shared in pairs.
The listener should not try to give advice or interpret the situation, but should practice active listening, showing curiosity and attention toward the other person's experience.

Debriefing

The group discussion can be guided by the following questions:

- What changed when you shifted your focus from the other person to yourself?
- Did you discover anything about the situation that you hadn't noticed before?
- Did your emotion reveal something to you that wasn't just about the other person?
- Which emotions do we tend to attribute to others more easily, rather than exploring them within ourselves?
- What happens in relationships when we view our emotions as information rather than merely as reactions?

Building on the reflections that have emerged, the facilitator connects the activity to the fourth Rule of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi.
Emotions are not simply obstacles to be controlled or eliminated, but cognitive tools that can help us understand our relationship to what is happening.
When we say "this person is unbearable," we risk limiting ourselves to a single interpretation of reality. Active Listening, on the other hand, invites us to ask an additional question: *"What does this relationship evoke in me?"*
Recognizing the relational nature of emotions allows us to open up a space of greater awareness: we see not only other people, but also the way in which we ourselves view other people.

Guidelines for Facilitation

It is important to create an atmosphere of trust, because the activity involves personal experiences and may lead to the sharing of sensitive personal stories.
The facilitator should avoid turning the discussion into a search for blame or responsibility. The point is not to determine who is right in the situation being described, but to explore the meaning of the emotional experience.
During pair sharing, it is helpful to remember that listening does not mean solving the other person's problem, but rather offering a space where they can more clearly observe what they are feeling and what that emotion might reveal.
The ultimate goal is to experience how emotions can become a gateway to understanding oneself, others, and the relationship that unites us.

Activity 5 - The 9 Dots, the Number in the Parking Lot and Matchstick Problems

> *A good listener is an explorer of possible worlds.*
>
> *The most important signals for them are those that present themselves to consciousness as both negligible and bothersome, marginal and irritating, because they are inconsistent with their own certainties.*

Objective of the Activities

The proposed activities aim to develop the ability to recognize the limitations of one's own perspectives and to explore alternatives to conventional interpretations.
Through seemingly simple problems - designed to challenge automatic thought patterns - participants experience how the difficulty in finding a solution often depends not on the complexity of the problem, but on the implicit assumptions through which we view it.

These experiences allow participants to reflect on how, even in dialogue, we tend to select information that confirms what we already think, while overlooking details that are peripheral, contradictory, or difficult to integrate into our view of reality.
Within the Active Listening model, these activities highlight the importance of remaining curious in the face of what appears incongruous, viewing it not as an obstacle but as a potential gateway to new perspectives.

Duration

About 30 minutes

Materials

- Representation using nine dots (as shown in the image below);
- Image of a parking lot with a missing number;
- Equations with Roman numerals/matches for logic challenges (as shown in the image below);
- Paper and pens.

Activity Procedure

The facilitator presents a series of short individual problems, inviting participants to find a solution without providing additional guidance.

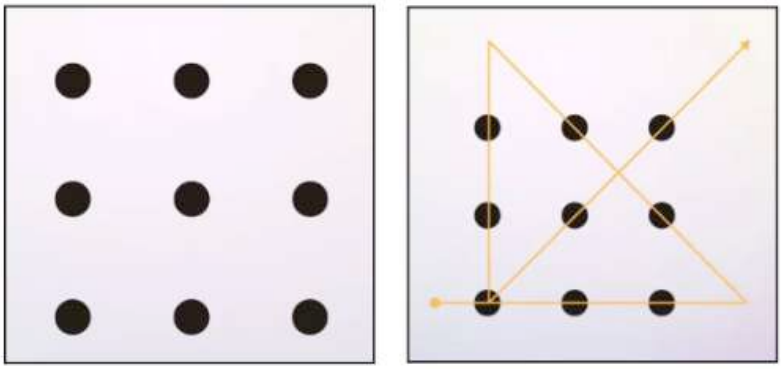
The goal is not to arrive at the correct answer quickly, but to observe one's own thought process, the attempts made, and the obstacles encountered.

The Nine Dots

Each participant is given a sheet of paper with nine dots arranged as shown in the diagram.
The task is:

Connect all nine dots using only four straight lines, without ever lifting your pen from the paper. Each new line must start from the point where the previous one ends.

Figure 3.2. The nine dots exercise: challenging self-imposed boundaries



Before arriving at the solution, participants are asked to quickly try at least three different approaches, making visible even the paths that seem pointless or do not lead to the solution.

The difficulty of the task stems from the fact that many people unconsciously construct an 'imaginary square' around the dots and seek a solution whilst remaining within this boundary.

To solve the problem, however, it is necessary to go beyond a boundary that is not actually present, but which is introduced by one's own interpretation.

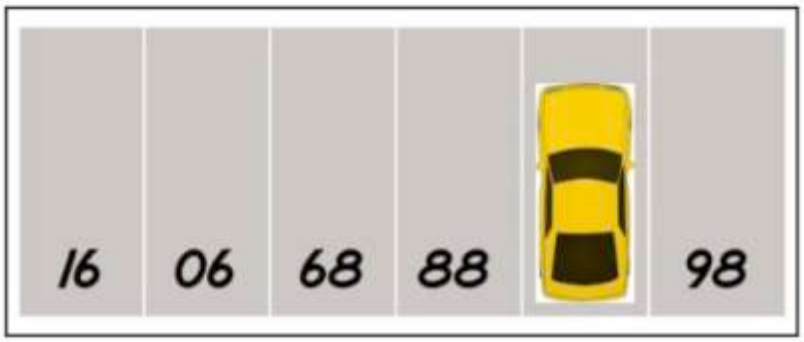
The Car Park Number

The facilitator shows the group a picture of a car park with a series of numbers:

16 – 06 – 68 – 88 – ? – 98

and asks you to work out which number is hidden beneath the car.

Figure 3.3. The car park number puzzle: changing perspective to reveal new meanings



Most people initially try to interpret the sequence using mathematical logic, looking for a pattern between the numbers.

However, the solution only becomes clear when you change your perspective: by looking at the image upside down.

By rotating the sheet by 180 degrees, the numbers become:

86 – ? – 88 – 89 – 90 – 91

The missing number is therefore:

87

This activity demonstrates how the way we look at a problem profoundly influences what we are able to see.

Equations with Matches

The facilitator presents the group with a number of equations made using matches or segments and asks them to find a solution by moving just one match.

The equations given are:

IV = III + III

IX = VI - III

The aim of the activity is not merely to arrive at the correct solution, but to observe the process by which participants tackle the problem: which possibilities they consider, which they rule out, and which rules they take for granted.

The difficulty often stems not from the complexity of the equation, but from the tendency to keep the initial structure unchanged, seeking a solution within constraints that no one has actually imposed.

It may happen, for example, that participants treat the symbols present, the meaning of the operations or the very form of the numbers represented as fixed.

To solve the problem, it is necessary to broaden the range of possibilities and question certain automatic interpretations, whilst also considering alternatives initially ruled out: changing a symbol, transforming a digit or looking at the equation from a different perspective.

The activity thus allows participants to experience how, often, what limits the search for a solution is not the problem itself, but the interpretative framework through which we view it.

Debriefing

The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

- What was the first thing you took for granted?
- Which aspect of the problem did you initially overlook?

- When did you start to consider a different perspective?
- What prevented you from seeing the solution straight away?
- Did you find yourself looking for a solution whilst adhering to certain rules that nobody had actually imposed?
- What did you take for granted, and what initially prevented you from seeing other possibilities?
- In everyday conversations, what do we tend to overlook because it doesn't fit with what we already think?
- What might help us change our perspective during a difficult discussion?

Building on the reflections that have emerged, the facilitator links the activities to the fifth Rule of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi.
The exercises demonstrate how each person perceives reality through their own interpretative framework. Often, we fail to see certain possibilities not because they are hidden, but because our habitual way of looking at things leads us to automatically exclude them.

Something similar happens in dialogue: we may ignore information, emotions or the other person's points of view because they seem inconsistent with our initial interpretation.
Active Listening, on the other hand, requires the ability to pay attention precisely to what disturbs, surprises or challenges our certainties, because it is often there that new possibilities for understanding are found.

Just as in the problems presented, the solution emerges when we change our perspective and question elements that seem obvious, so too in conversations the most valuable elements may lie precisely in the aspects we initially overlook.
A good listener does not merely seek confirmation of their own ideas, but remains curious in the face of what appears incongruous, because it can open the door to new points of view and new possible worlds.

Guidelines for Facilitation
The facilitator should allow space for participants to try things out without suggesting strategies or anticipating the solution.
It is important to emphasise the process of exploration rather than the final outcome.
During the debriefing, it is helpful to refocus attention on the thought processes that emerged, helping participants to distinguish between what was actually present in the situation and what was added by their own interpretation.
The aim is not to demonstrate that there is a 'correct' perspective, but to explore how changing one's point of view can open up new possibilities for understanding.

Activity 6 - The Magic Sticks

> *A good listener readily embraces the paradoxes of thought and communication.*
> *They view disagreements as opportunities to practise in a field that fascinates them: the creative management of conflicts.*

Aim of the Activity
The activity aims to demonstrate how, in moments of difficulty or disagreement, the group may automatically resort to dynamics such as assigning blame, seeking a wrongdoer or oversimplifying the problem.

Through an apparently simple yet paradoxical experience, participants can observe how others' behaviour is often interpreted before the overall dynamics of the situation are understood.
The aim is to develop the ability to remain curious in the face of conflict, recognising that what appears to be an individual mistake may be the result of a collective dynamic.

Duration
Approximately 10–15 minutes

Materials

- Lightweight wooden sticks (with a diameter of 5 millimeters and a length of 2 meters,one for each group);
- Sufficient space to allow the groups to move around.

How the Activity is Carried Out
The facilitator divides the group into sub-groups from **6 to 8 people**.
Each group is given a long, thin and very light wooden stick.

The instructions are:
Everyone must position themselves along the stick and support it solely on their index fingers. Their fingers must be stretched outwards and positioned beneath the stick. They must not grip it, hook it or hold it with their hands.

The aim is for the group, whilst maintaining contact simultaneously and in a synchronised manner, to slowly lower the stick until it reaches the ground, keeping their fingers in contact with the stick at all times.
During the exercise, a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon often occurs: instead of going down, the stick tends to rise.
The lightness of the material means that even small, involuntary movements of the fingers produce tiny upward thrusts. The group, in trying to correct the movement, may end up unwittingly exacerbating the problem, finding themselves with their arms raised higher and higher.

In this situation, various communication dynamics may emerge: frustration, attempts to exert control, contradictory instructions and the search for someone to blame.
In particular, there may be a tendency to attribute the difficulty to a single person in the group ("it's you who's causing this", "you're not keeping up", "you're doing it wrong"), even though the problem stems from the interaction between all members of the group.
This dynamic may be even more evident in established groups, where pre-existing roles, expectations or patterns of interaction may be in place.

Debriefing
The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

- What happened within the group when the stick didn't behave as expected?
- What was the first explanation you gave for the difficulty?
- Did you look for someone to blame? Why?
- What changed when you stopped focusing on individual mistakes and started observing how the group was functioning?
- What emotions emerged during the activity?
- How did you deal with disagreement or frustration?
- In everyday conflict situations, do we tend more readily to look for someone to blame or to explore the overall dynamics?

Building on the reflections that have emerged, the facilitator links the activity to the sixth Rule of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi.
Experience shows that in times of difficulty, we often seek a simple and immediate explanation: someone who is at fault, someone who is standing in the way, someone responsible for the problem.

Active Listening, on the other hand, invites us to dwell on complexity and embrace paradox: sometimes the behaviour we observe cannot be understood by isolating a single person, because it arises from the interaction between multiple factors.
As in the case of the stick, the problem is not necessarily "someone doing something wrong", but a collective dynamic that produces an unexpected outcome.
Managing conflicts creatively therefore means shifting from the question "who caused the problem?" to the question "what is happening between us and how can we understand it together?"

Guidelines for Facilitation
The facilitator should allow the group to experience the difficulty without immediately intervening with suggestions or explanations.
It is important to observe and note what emerges: who takes control, who withdraws, who is blamed, how decisions are made, and how the group reacts to frustration.
During the debriefing, it is essential to avoid judging the dynamics that have emerged. The point of the activity is not to demonstrate that the group was wrong, but to highlight certain common mechanisms in communication and conflict management.
The ultimate aim is to experience how dissent and difficulty can become opportunities for learning, if approached with curiosity and a willingness to observe the relationship rather than the behaviour of individual people.

Activity 7 - Receptionist and Customer

> *To become an expert in the art of listening, you need to adopt a humorous approach.*
> *But once you have learnt to listen, humour comes naturally.*

Humour allows you to view situations from a different perspective, setting aside for a moment the need to be right or to have complete control over the meaning of what is happening.

In Active Listening, humour does not mean mocking or belittling the other person, but rather the ability to recognise the paradoxical nature of human situations and to remain curious even when communication seems difficult or uncertain.

Humour also plays a fundamental role in relationships: it helps to lighten the mood, reduce tension and create a space where it is easier to connect with one another. The ability to laugh at oneself, to recognise one's own limitations and not to take oneself too seriously all the time helps to reduce the rigidity of positions and can become a valuable resource even in moments of conflict.

When we manage to smile at our own convictions or our failed attempts to control a situation, it becomes easier to listen without feeling threatened.

Aim of the Activity
The activity aims to allow participants to experience both the difficulty and, at the same time, the possibility of communicating even when the usual tools for understanding are lacking.

Through a deliberately absurd situation, participants can observe how, when faced with a lack of understanding, we spontaneously tend to seek meaning, interpret signals, adapt and form hypotheses.

The aim is to develop the ability to remain open-minded in the face of what we do not immediately understand, by using creativity, listening to non-verbal cues and being willing to change our perspective.

Duration
Approximately 15–20 minutes

Materials
- No specific materials required;
- Sufficient space to form a circle.

How the Activity is Carried out
The facilitator invites the group to form a circle.

Two people are chosen:
- One will play the role of **receptionist**;
- One will play the role of **hotel guest**.

It is important that the two people use a language that the other person does not understand. These can be real languages or made-up sounds and languages, provided that neither participant can literally understand what the other is saying.

The receptionist leaves the room.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group helps the client to come up with an absurd situation, a particular problem to convey to reception.

Possible examples:
- An impossible request within the hotel;
- A problem that appears serious but is paradoxical;
- A situation that is difficult to explain without using understandable words.

When the receptionist returns, the conversation begins.

The client explains the problem in their own language, whilst the receptionist tries to understand the situation and find a solution using only their own language.

The two participants may only assist each other through:
- Tone of voice;
- Gestures;
- Facial expressions;
- The rhythm of the conversation;
- Intuition and trial and error.

The rest of the group observes without intervening.
After a few minutes, the facilitator interrupts the conversation.

Debriefing
The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

- How did you feel when you couldn't understand the other person's words?
- What strategies did you use to try to understand?
- Did you try more to 'translate' or more to put yourselves in the other person's shoes?
- When did you stop worrying about understanding everything and start playing with the uncertainty?
- What role did humour play in the communication?
- What happens when we accept that we do not immediately have control over the meaning?
- In everyday conversations, how often do we interpret what the other person is saying before we have actually listened?

Experience shows that communication is not made up solely of words and pre-defined meanings, but also of interpretations, expectations and attempts to construct a shared meaning.
When we cannot rely on immediate understanding, we are forced to slow down, observe more closely and become more curious about what the other person is trying to communicate.
Humour stems precisely from the ability to embrace paradox: recognising that we may find ourselves in confusing, unpredictable or absurd situations without having to immediately dismiss or correct them. It allows us to shift our perspective, but also to lighten the burden of difficult situations.

In conflicts, this ability can be particularly valuable: a shared laugh, the chance to acknowledge one's own mistakes with a touch of humour, or the ability not to identify completely with one's own position can open up a new space for dialogue.

A good listener does not fear uncertainty, misunderstanding, difference or disagreement, but uses them as creative opportunities to build new forms of relationship and understanding.

Guidelines for Facilitation
The facilitator should create a relaxed and safe atmosphere, making it clear that the aim is not to communicate perfectly, but to observe what happens when the usual means of communication are no longer available.
It is important that the activity is experienced as a game and not as a test of linguistic ability.
During the observation, the group can pay attention not only to what the two participants are doing, but also to their own reactions: the desire to help, laughter, frustration or the need to find an explanation.
The debriefing allows the humorous experience to be transformed into a reflection on listening: often, understanding another person requires, first and foremost, a willingness to remain within the space of misunderstanding.

3.2.5 Cross-Cutting Activities for Developing Active Listening

Alongside the activities linked to the Seven Rules of the Art of Listening, it is possible to propose a number of cross-cutting exercises designed to provide practical experience of some of the fundamental communication skills involved in Active Listening.

The following activities enable participants to put into practice tools such as being present in the relationship, paraphrasing, mirroring, suspending judgement and cognitive decentring, through experiences that encourage observation of one's own communication style and relational dynamics.

Activity 1 - Pretend Listening

Aim of the Activity

The activity aims to make participants aware of behaviours – often automatic and unconscious – that can hinder genuine listening, and of the impact such behaviours have on the relationship.
Through direct experience, participants explore the difference between merely appearing to be present and a genuine willingness to listen, observing how small verbal and non-verbal cues can profoundly influence the quality of communication.
The aim is not to judge certain behaviours as 'wrong', but to develop greater awareness of one's own communication habits and of the factors that foster or hinder a relationship based on listening.

Skills Developed

- Presence in the relationship;
- Communication awareness;
- Recognition of behaviours that hinder listening;
- Empathetic listening;
- Ability to offer a response centred on the other person.

Conducting the Activity

The facilitator divides the participants into pairs. Each pair is asked to have a short conversation: one person takes on the role of the speaker, whilst the other takes on the role of the listener.

The speaker is asked to share a personal experience, a situation they have been through or a meaningful topic. It does not need to be a particularly problematic experience: the aim is to observe the quality of the communicative relationship.

Before the activity begins, the facilitator asks those who are to play the role of the listener to leave the room, on the pretext of reviewing some theoretical concepts relating to Active Listening.

Once they are outside the group, however, the facilitator gives them instructions on how to **pretend to listen**, explaining that they must enact three progressive stages of not listening.

During the activity, the facilitator will guide the transition from one stage to the next using an agreed hand signal, without interrupting the conversation.

The three stages are:

Stage 1 - Distraction

In this first phase, the listener maintains only an apparent presence, showing inattention through non-verbal cues.
They may, for example:

- Avoid eye contact;
- Look around;
- Adopt a posture that is not particularly oriented towards the other person;
- Show little engagement.

The aim is to allow participants to experience how, even without saying anything, the body communicates openness, interest or distance.

Phase 2 - Self-Centredness

In the second phase, the listener gradually shifts the focus of the conversation onto themselves.

They may:

- Constantly link the other person's story to their own experience;
- Interrupt to recount personal anecdotes;
- Steer the conversation back to their own experiences, opinions or emotions;
- To ask questions whose purpose is not to help the speaker but to provide information that can help the listener interpret the situation;
- The implicit message becomes: what matters most in the conversation is one's own experience.

Phase 3 - Unsolicited Advice

In the third phase, the listener adopts a solution-oriented attitude, offering advice and guidance without being asked.

They may:

- Suggest what the other person should do;
- Propose immediate solutions;
- Try to solve the problem rather than helping the person to find his/her own solution.

This phase allows us to observe how even seemingly positive behaviour, such as offering help, can become an obstacle if it comes before understanding.

At the end of the exercise, the facilitator interrupts the conversation and invites the pairs to share their feelings.

Afterwards, a second brief stage can be introduced in which participants practise authentic listening, using some Active Listening techniques, such as paraphrasing, mirroring and open-ended questions.

Debriefing

The discussion can be guided by the following questions:

- Did you feel listened to during the activity? Why?
- If you didn't feel listened to, what behaviour made you feel there was a greater sense of distance or a lack of attention?
- If, on the other hand, you did feel listened to, what signals gave you that impression?
- In which of the three stages did you most strongly perceive an obstacle to communication?
- What difference did you notice between someone who listens and someone who is simply waiting for their turn to speak?
- Have you ever unconsciously adopted one of these behaviours in your daily life?
- Why is it that sometimes, even with good intentions, we switch from listening to the need to share our own experience or offer a solution?

During the discussion, it is useful to emphasise that the various forms of not listening are not perceived in the same way by everyone.

Some participants may find the first stage – that of distraction – very upsetting, because the lack of eye contact or signs of attention can be interpreted as disinterest, aloofness or a failure to acknowledge the other person.

Others, on the other hand, may perceive certain behaviours – such as offering unsolicited advice – as less problematic, or even positive, especially when they are associated with helpfulness, care or a desire to help.

This difference allows us to introduce an important point for reflection: in relationships, it is not only the communicator's intention that matters, but also the effect that their behaviour has on the other person.

Building on the reflections that have emerged, the facilitator links the activity to the principles of Active Listening.
Experience shows that listening does not simply mean having good intentions or trying to help, but creating a space in which the other person can feel that their experience is acknowledged.
Active Listening therefore requires us to pay attention not only to what we do, but also to how what we do is received by the other person.

Guidance for the Facilitator
It is important to explain to the group, at the end of the activity, that the behaviours demonstrated do not represent negative personal traits, but rather very common communication patterns that can arise automatically in everyday relationships.

During the activity, the facilitator should observe not only the listener's behaviour, but also the reactions of the person speaking: changes in engagement, difficulty in continuing the story, a sense of frustration or a desire to interrupt the conversation.

During the debriefing, it is helpful to guide the group away from judgement towards observation, shifting the question from 'What is wrong with the other person's behaviour?' to 'What effect does this approach have on the relationship?'.

The ultimate aim is to experience that the quality of listening depends on the ability to offer presence, attention and recognition, not merely on the willingness to be available.

Activity 2 - Your Worst Enemy

Aim of the Activity
This activity aims to develop the ability to suspend judgement regarding people, ideas or positions perceived as very different from one's own.

By comparing opposing viewpoints, participants experience just how difficult it can be to maintain a listening attitude when the other person challenges deeply held beliefs or takes a stance opposite to their own.

The aim is to practise key Active Listening skills in a practical way, such as suspending judgement, cognitive decentring, paraphrasing and mirroring, whilst experiencing how these become particularly important in situations of conflict or strong disagreement.

The activity also aims to highlight that Active Listening cannot be acquired through theoretical knowledge of its principles alone. Like any interpersonal skill, it requires constant exercise, practice and training. Testing oneself in complex communicative situations enables participants to recognise their own automatic reactions and to gradually develop increasingly mindful ways of listening.

Skills Developed

- Suspension of judgement;
- Empathetic listening;
- Cognitive defocusing;
- Paraphrasing;
- Mirroring;
- Communication centred on one's own experience;
- Constructive conflict management.

Conduct of the Activity

The facilitator asks the group to identify a significant topic on which one person holds deep convictions and a well-defined position.

This may be a social, educational, cultural or relational issue, provided it is a topic capable of generating personal engagement.

On a voluntary basis, a participant is asked to share their point of view on that topic.

A second participant is then asked to play the role of the 'worst enemy', that is, a person who holds a strongly opposing view.

If no one volunteers for this role, the facilitator may take it on.

Before the discussion begins, the facilitator briefly reviews the Active Listening techniques practised during the programme, inviting the person presenting their viewpoint to try to use them during the conversation.

The person playing the 'worst enemy' is tasked with defending their position with conviction, truly putting their discussion partner to the test. They may ask probing questions, challenge the arguments put forward and defend their point of view resolutely.

The aim is not to provoke or make personal attacks on the other person, but to create a situation challenging enough to make it difficult to maintain a listening attitude.

The person presenting their point of view is encouraged to put into practice the Active Listening techniques tried out in previous activities, seeking to understand before responding, using paraphrasing and mirroring, suspending judgement and speaking from their own experience.

During the discussion, the facilitator closely observes the communication process.

When the dialogue strays from the principles of Active Listening or risks turning into a personal confrontation, the facilitator may temporarily interrupt the conversation to help the participants recognise what is happening.

They may, for example, invite the participant to rephrase a statement, ask for a paraphrase of what has just been said, or draw attention to the difference between responding to understand and responding to persuade.
Examples of possible requests for rephrasing:

- Speaking in the first person ("I think", "I feel", "it is important to me…");
- Avoiding generalisations ("everyone", "nobody", "people are…");
- Describing one's own experience and values;
- Avoiding attacking or disparaging the other person's position.

Examples of possible intervention strategies might include:

- "If I've understood correctly, what's important to you is…"
- "It seems to me that behind this position lies the need for…"
- "What I'm beginning to understand is that this experience means…"

Once the facilitator has finished speaking, the discussion resumes.

The aim is not to reach an agreement or to determine who is right, but to explore the possibility of maintaining a relationship even in the face of strong disagreement.

Debriefing
The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

- How did you feel when your position was challenged?
- At what point did you feel the strongest urge to interrupt, defend yourself or try to persuade the other person?
- Which Active Listening techniques helped you most to stay engaged in the dialogue?
- Was it harder to listen or to be listened to?
- What made it possible to continue the discussion without it turning into a confrontation?
- What differences did you notice between understanding a viewpoint and agreeing with it?
- What did you discover about the way you react when someone challenges your beliefs?

Building on the reflections that have emerged, the facilitator links the experience to the principles of Active Listening.

The activity demonstrates that conflict does not necessarily starts from differing opinions, but from the way we relate to that difference.

When we feel challenged, it is natural to feel the need to defend ourselves, counter-argue or persuade the other person. Active Listening, however, suggests a different approach: understanding before responding.
Suspending judgement does not mean giving up one's own beliefs, but creating the space needed to understand the meaning the other person attributes to their own experience.

Experience also helps us recognise that Active Listening is not a technique that is learnt once and for all, but a skill that is developed through practice.

As with sport, music or any other complex skill, knowing the theory is merely the starting point: it is continuous practice that enables us to acquire new ways of relating and gradually make them part of our own way of communicating.

Every discussion, especially when it is difficult, thus becomes an opportunity to practise one's listening skills.

Guidelines for Facilitation
It is important to choose a topic that encourages genuine discussion without unduly exposing the participants.

The role of the **"worst enemy"** must be sufficiently credible and challenging to truly test those practising Active Listening, without, however, resorting to personal attacks, sarcasm or offensive behaviour.

The facilitator's task is to constantly monitor the communication process, intervening when the discussion risks getting out of hand or when behaviours incompatible with Active Listening emerge.

Interruptions do not serve a corrective or evaluative purpose, but represent learning opportunities: they allow participants to observe what is happening in the interaction, reflect on their own automatic reactions and experiment with alternative ways of communicating.
The ultimate aim is not to eliminate conflict, but to help participants experience that it is possible to maintain a relationship even when differences are profound and dialogue becomes complex.

3.3 Understanding Conflict: Recognising Escalation Processes and Power Dynamics

> «Step by step, the conflict enters the realm of more unconscious and subconscious forces within human beings and social institutions, adding new, uncontrollable energy to the existing conflict».
>
> Friedrich Glasl, *Confronting Conflict: A First-Aid Kit for Handling Conflict*

3.3.1 Why Reading the Conflict is the Third Pillar

Whilst the first pillar of Nonviolent Debate consists of creating a **Brave Space**, in which every person can feel sufficiently supported to speak out, and the second concerns the development **of Active Listening**, which enables a genuine encounter between different perspectives, the third pillar concerns the ability to understand what happens when these perspectives come into tension. Conflict is, in fact, an inevitable aspect of any dialogical process: whenever people with different experiences, values, needs and world views come together, differences, misunderstandings and disagreements emerge; these are not anomalies in dialogue, but a natural part of relational and democratic life.

In everyday language, conflict is frequently associated with a clash to be avoided, a breakdown in relations or a problematic situation to be resolved as quickly as possible. In educational contexts, this perspective risks turning conflict into something to be contained or neutralised, thereby depriving it of its educational potential. The Nonviolent Debate model, however, takes a different perspective: the problem is not the presence of conflict, but rather the inability to understand its dynamics and to navigate them constructively. When conflict is avoided, suppressed or interpreted solely as a failure of the relationship, the opportunity to transform it into an experience of learning, participation and growth is lost.

For this to be possible, however, it is not enough simply to create a "Brave Space" or to develop Active Listening skills. Educators and youth workers are also called upon to develop the ability to **interpret conflict**, recognising the relational processes that are triggered during discussions and observing how interactions between participants evolve. Interpreting conflict means going beyond the content of the opinions expressed to grasp what is happening within the relationship: recognising changes in the group's atmosphere, identifying signs of polarisation, observing how speaking time is distributed, and understanding how emotions, communication styles and power relations influence the course of the dialogue.

This skill takes on particular importance in educational contexts characterised by cultural, social and political diversity, where discussions often concern controversial issues or deeply meaningful identities. In such situations, the risk lies not so much in the presence of conflict as in the way it is addressed. When discussion turns into a competition aimed at asserting the superiority of one's own position, opinions tend to become increasingly entrenched, listening gives way to the defence of one's own convictions, and dialogue loses its cognitive function. At the same time, relational dynamics may emerge in which some people gradually acquire greater legitimacy and influence, whilst others see their scope for participation and recognition diminish.

The findings of the research confirm the central importance of this aspect. Both young people and youth workers recognise that conflict is not necessarily a problem, but highlight the difficulty of addressing it constructively. Young people express a need for spaces where they can voice their disagreement without feeling judged, excluded or discredited, whilst professionals emphasise that one of the main challenges of facilitation lies in promptly recognising the dynamics that risk undermining dialogue, intervening before the discussion turns into a rigid and polarised confrontation.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, therefore, analysing conflict does not mean quickly identifying a solution or preventing tensions from arising. Rather, it means developing a capacity for systemic observation that enables us to understand how conflict takes shape, how it evolves over time, and what relationships are formed between those involved. This perspective enables educators and youth workers to intervene not to eliminate conflict, but to preserve the conditions that make possible a dialogue based on mutual recognition, democratic participation and the equal dignity of all people. It is precisely this ability to analyse processes of escalation, relational dynamics and power imbalances that underpins the theoretical framework presented in the following section.

3.3.2 Theoretical Framework: Understanding Conflict to Transform It

The ability to analyse conflict is a fundamental skill for educators and youth workers involved in facilitating Nonviolent Debate. Observing a conflict means, in fact, looking beyond the content of the opinions expressed to grasp the relational, emotional and social processes that influence the way in which dialogue takes shape and develops. Conflict is not merely a simple disagreement between people, but constitutes a complex phenomenon in which needs, interests, emotions, values, identities, relationships and power dynamics are linked.

For this reason, no single theoretical model is sufficient, on its own, to grasp its full complexity. In the Nonviolent Debate model, the ability to interpret conflict is based on the integration of three complementary perspectives, which allow conflict to be observed from different yet deeply interconnected viewpoints. **Johan Galtung's** theory of conflict offers a framework for understanding the structure and dimensions that constitute conflict; **Friedrich Glasl's** model enables us to understand its evolution through processes of escalation; finally, **Pat Patfoort's** contribution introduces a reflection on power dynamics and the principle of **Equivalence**, offering an ethical and educational framework that guides how we engage with conflict and facilitate dialogue. Together, these three perspectives constitute the main theoretical reference for the third pillar of Nonviolent Debate.

Conflict As a Complex Phenomenon: Johan Galtung

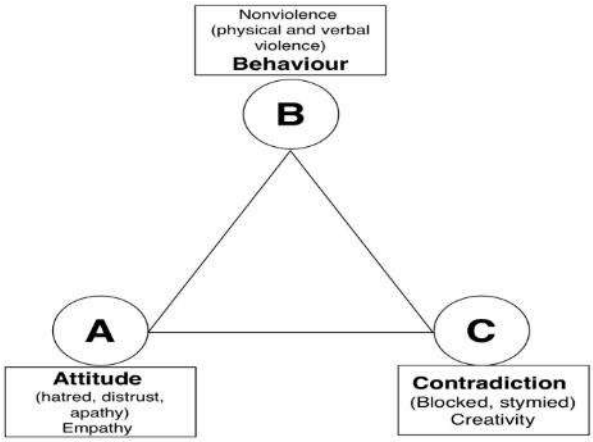


Figure 3.4. Galtung's ABC Triangle of Conflict.

The ABC Triangle illustrates conflict as the dynamic interaction between attitudes, behaviours, and contradictions. Rather than viewing conflict as a purely negative phenomenon, the model highlights its complexity and provides a framework for understanding the multiple dimensions that influence its development and transformation.

Source: Adapted from Galtung (2000).

One of the most significant contributions to our understanding of conflict comes from Johan Galtung

(2000), who proposes moving beyond an exclusively negative conception of conflict, interpreting it as an inevitable component of human relations and democratic life. From this perspective, conflict is not synonymous with violence nor does it necessarily represent a destructive event: it arises from the presence of objectives, needs, interests or values perceived as incompatible and can, if addressed constructively, constitute an important opportunity for change, learning and transformation.To describe the multidimensional nature of conflict, Galtung proposes the **ABC Triangle** model, according to which every conflict consists of the interaction between three fundamental dimensions: **attitudes**, which include emotions, perceptions, stereotypes and mutual representations; **behaviours**, that is, the ways in which people interact; and **contradictions**, which concern interests, needs or objectives perceived as incompatible. These three dimensions influence one another and help to determine how the conflict evolves. Alongside this analytical model, Galtung also proposes a transformative perspective on conflict, represented by the so-called 'transformative' triangle, which identifies three necessary actions: promoting **nonviolent behaviour**, developing **empathetic and cooperative attitudes**, and addressing contradictions through a **creative search for solutions** capable of meeting the needs of the parties involved. From this perspective, the transformation of conflict requires simultaneous action across all three dimensions.

This perspective is complemented by the distinction between **direct, structural and cultural violence**, through which Galtung highlights how conflicts are influenced not only by the behaviour of those involved, but also by the social, cultural and institutional conditions in which they unfold. For educators and youth workers, this perspective represents an invitation to broaden their perspective: analysing a conflict means learning to distinguish between what is immediately visible and the less obvious dimensions underpinning it, observing not only what people do or say, but also the needs, emotions, structural conditions and meanings that fuel the confrontation.

Conflict as a Process: Friedrich Glasl

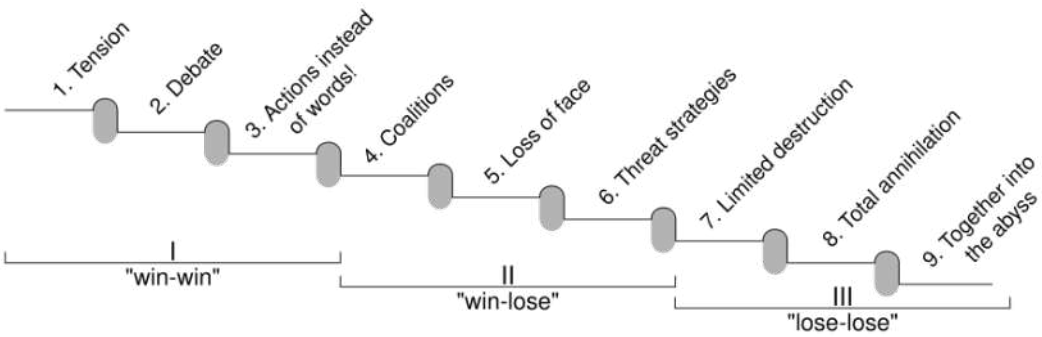
Whilst Galtung helps us understand the structure of conflict, the model developed by Friedrich Glasl (2019) provides the tools to analyse its evolution. According to Glasl, conflict is not a static event, but a dynamic process that tends to develop progressively through a sequence of stages characterised by an intensification of tensions and a gradual reduction in the possibilities for cooperation.

The author describes this process through the model of **the nine stages of escalation**, organised into three macro-phases. In the first phase, dialogue is still possible and differences can be addressed through discussion and negotiation. As the escalation progresses, however, people gradually harden their positions, mutual mistrust increases, and they begin to perceive the other party as an adversary rather than a discussion partner. In the more advanced stages, the conflict ultimately takes on increasingly destructive characteristics, to the point of undermining the very possibility of dialogue.

Figure 3.5. Glasl's model of conflict escalation.

The model describes conflict as a gradual process of escalation, progressing from manageable disagreement to destructive confrontation. Understanding these stages helps facilitators identify when dialogue is at risk and adopt strategies that support constructive communication and relationship-building.

Source: Adapted from Glasl (2019)



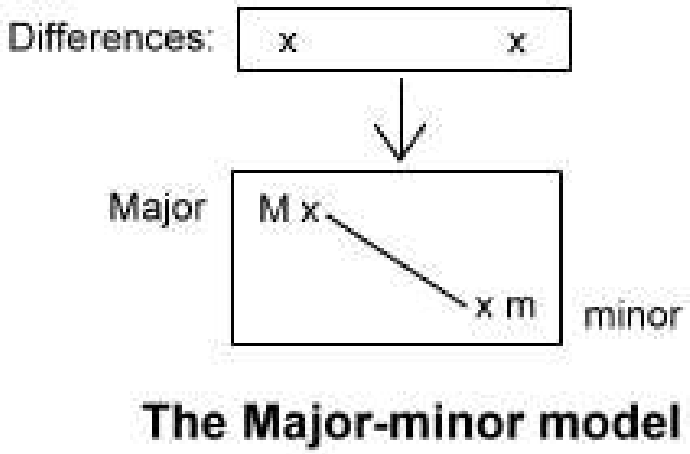
For educators and youth workers, this model serves above all as an observational tool. Reading conflict means recognising the signs that indicate a shift from constructive discussion to progressive polarisation, promptly identifying changes in the atmosphere of the interaction, in the quality of listening, in how speaking time is allocated, and in the ways in which people perceive one another. Rather than offering techniques to 'resolve' conflict, Glasl encourages the development of an interpretative skill that enables one to choose when and how to intervene, whilst preserving the conditions necessary for dialogue to continue.

Conflict as a Relationship: Pat Patfoort's Equivalence Model

Figure 3.6. Pat Patfoort's Major–Minor model.

The model illustrates how asymmetrical power relationships contribute to conflict escalation by positioning one perspective as superior to another. Recognising Major–Minor dynamics helps facilitators promote relationships based on mutual recognition and the principle of Equivalence, which underpins the Nonviolent Debate methodology.

Source: Adapted from Patfoort (2013)



Whilst Galtung helps us understand **what** constitutes conflict and Glasl enables us to recognise **its evolution**, Pat Patfoort's (2013) contribution introduces a third perspective, particularly significant for the Nonviolent Debate model: the analysis of **the power dynamics** that underpin every relationship. According to Patfoort, many conflicts do not arise simply because of differences between people, but because of the way in which these differences are experienced and managed. When a person, group or institution presents their point of view as superior to that of the other party, a **Major-Minor** relationship is established, in which one position is considered more just, more competent, more rational or more legitimate than the other. In such situations, the conflict tends to escalate because the party in the **'Minor'** position, in turn, seeks to escape that status by demonstrating the superiority of their own perspective. This creates a dynamic in which both parties seek to occupy the **'Major'** position, fuelling a spiral of confrontation, mutual delegitimisation and escalation.

The conflict, therefore, intensifies not only because of the presence of divergent interests, but because each party seeks recognition through an asymmetrical power relationship. The central issue is no longer simply a matter of **who is right**, but **who occupies the position of greater legitimacy** within the relationship.

As an alternative to this dynamic, Patfoort proposes the **model of Equivalence**, based on the recognition of the equal dignity of those involved in the conflict. Equivalence does not imply that all opinions have the same epistemological value, nor that every statement must be considered equally well-founded. Rather, it means recognising that every person possesses equal dignity as a dialogue

partner and that every perspective deserves to be heard and understood before being critically assessed. From this perspective, it becomes possible to challenge ideas, arguments or behaviours without calling into question the value of the person expressing them.

This principle represents one of the theoretical foundations of Nonviolent Debate. Facilitating dialogue does not, in fact, consist of deciding who is right or of seeking consensus quickly, but of creating relational conditions in which people can engage with one another without having to prove the superiority of their own position. The principle of Equivalence thus guides the way in which educators and youth workers observe the group, give the floor to participants, recognise situations of exclusion and intervene to re-establish conditions of mutual recognition.

Interpreting the **Major-Minor** dynamics therefore becomes a fundamental tool of facilitation. It enables us to recognise when conflict is evolving towards relationships of domination, exclusion or delegitimisation and when, on the other hand, the group manages to maintain a space for discussion in which differences can be expressed without compromising the dignity of those involved.

A Systemic Analysis of Conflict in Nonviolent Debate

The Nonviolent Debate model integrates the contributions of Johan Galtung, Friedrich Glasl and Pat Patfoort into a unified methodological framework. From Galtung's theory of conflict, it draws on the idea that conflict is a complex phenomenon, comprising emotional, relational and structural dimensions; from Glasl's model, it adopts a process-oriented understanding of escalation, which enables the evolution of conflict dynamics to be recognised and the most appropriate moment for intervention to be identified; from Patfoort's Equivalence model, it derives its focus on power relations and the recognition of the equal dignity of those involved in the dialogue.

The ability to interpret conflict thus takes the form of a **systemic analysis** of dialogical processes. It requires educators and youth workers to observe three fundamental dimensions simultaneously: **what** constitutes the conflict, **how** it evolves over time, and **which power relations** influence the interaction between people. Rather than interpreting conflict as a problem to be eliminated, Nonviolent Debate invites us to recognise it as a potential opportunity for learning, democratic participation and the transformation of relationships.

Although the model incorporates the contributions of all three authors, it is primarily the **Equivalence model** developed by **Pat Patfoort** that guides the educational approach set out in this curriculum. The **Major-Minor** dynamics and the principle of **Equivalence** constitute, in fact, the main theoretical framework for defining the competence of **'Reading Conflict'**, as they enable us to understand how power relations influence dialogue and offer an educational approach capable of transforming conflict into an opportunity for mutual recognition and shared learning. From this perspective, facilitation does not consist of determining who is right, nor of seeking a quick agreement, but of creating the conditions for discussion to take place within relationships based on Equivalence, in which it is possible to question ideas, arguments and behaviours without compromising the dignity of the people expressing them. It is from this perspective that, in the following section, the competence of **'Reading Conflict'** is elaborated across its four dimensions: knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and behaviours.

3.3.3 The Development of Competence

The theoretical contributions of Johan Galtung, Friedrich Glasl and Pat Patfoort enable us to view conflict from different yet complementary perspectives: as a complex phenomenon in which

personal, relational and structural dimensions interact; as a dynamic process characterised by different levels of escalation; and as a relationship in which power asymmetries and dynamics of mutual devaluation may emerge.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, these contributions are not merely theoretical tools for interpreting conflict, but form the basis for the development of a specific professional competence for youth workers: the ability to interpret, support and transform conflictual processes within groups and communities.

Among these contributions, the Equivalence model developed by Pat Patfoort plays a particularly central role in defining this competence. Whilst Galtung and Glasl offer fundamental tools for understanding the structure and evolution of conflict respectively, Patfoort's model enables us to examine how power relations influence dialogue and how people position one another within the relationship. The distinction between Major-Minor dynamics and the principle of Equivalence is, in fact, an essential framework for understanding how conflict can transform into a relationship of domination, delegitimisation or exclusion, but also how it can be navigated through mutual recognition and equal dignity.

For this reason, in Nonviolent Debate, the ability to interpret conflict is not merely about identifying the causes of tension or recognising the signs of escalation; above all, it involves the ability to observe the quality of the relationship that is being built between the people involved. The youth worker is called upon to ask themselves not only 'what' generates the conflict or 'how' it evolves, but also 'what kind of relationship' the conflict is producing and what conditions might enable the re-establishment of a space based on Equivalence.

From this perspective, the youth worker does not assume the role of an arbitrator called upon to determine which position is correct, nor that of a mediator necessarily focused on reaching an agreement. Their task is to create the conditions so that the conflict can be navigated without turning into a 'greater-lesser' dynamic, by supporting processes in which it is possible to question ideas, behaviours and positions without compromising the dignity of those involved. Thus, interpreting conflict means, above all, learning to distinguish between disagreement and relational asymmetry.

The skill of interpreting conflict is deeply intertwined with the two preceding pillars. The **Brave Space** enables different perspectives to emerge. **Active Listening** is the means through which people learn to move beyond the expression of positions to the expression of interests and needs. The recognition that all human beings share the same needs is the prerequisite for seeking forms of nonviolent conflict transformation and win-win solutions. Finally, the ability to interpret conflict enables us to navigate the tensions that inevitably arise during this process, transforming them into opportunities for learning and collective growth. The three pillars are mutually supportive and constitute the necessary conditions for Nonviolent Debate to fulfil its educational purpose.

Building on these theoretical frameworks, the Nonviolent Debate model breaks down the skill of **'Reading Conflict'** into the following four dimensions.

Knowledge

In the Nonviolent Debate model, the ability to read conflict is based on knowledge of the main processes that characterise the emergence, development and transformation of conflictual dynamics. For the youth worker, this knowledge does not simply consist of acquiring theoretical models, but of the ability to develop a complex understanding of conflict as a relational, dynamic and situated phenomenon.

A fundamental aspect of this knowledge involves moving beyond a conception of conflict as a mere opposition between conflicting positions. Youth workers must understand that what emerges in dialogue represents only part of the conflictual dynamic and that, behind the positions expressed, there may lie different needs, emotions, values, experiences and social conditions. Interpreting conflict therefore means acquiring the ability to distinguish between what is immediately visible and the less obvious processes that contribute to shaping the conflictual relationship.

From this perspective, the contributions of Galtung, Glasl and Patfoort provide complementary interpretative tools. They enable the facilitator to observe conflict from different perspectives: as a phenomenon comprising multiple dimensions, as an evolving process, and as a relationship shaped by power dynamics. An understanding of these perspectives helps to avoid oversimplified interpretations and to develop a systemic view of conflict situations.

A key element concerns, in particular, understanding the power dynamics that may emerge within relationships. Through Pat Patfoort's Equivalence model, the youth worker gains an awareness that conflict does not depend solely on differences between people, but also on the way in which these differences are organised within the relationship. Recognising Major-Minor dynamics therefore makes it possible to identify situations in which certain perspectives are considered more legitimate than others and in which the exchange risks turning into a struggle for recognition.

Understanding conflict also involves a self-reflective dimension. The facilitator must be aware that their own interpretation of the situation is also influenced by their personal history, values and interpretative frameworks. Developing this competence therefore means recognising one's own potential biases and continually questioning one's own perspective, whilst avoiding the assumption that one's own interpretation is the only possible reading of reality.

Finally, the competence to interpret conflict requires an understanding of the youth worker's specific role in conflictual processes. Their function is not to identify a 'correct' solution or to determine which position should prevail, but to understand the dynamics at play and to create conditions in which the conflict can be navigated through respectful, participatory and nonviolent means.

In summary, the knowledge underpinning the ability to interpret conflict enables one to develop a perspective capable of grasping the complexity of situations, recognising relational dynamics and directing one's educational practice towards the nonviolent transformation of conflict.

Skills

Whilst knowledge enables the development of a complex understanding of conflict, skills relate to the ability to translate that understanding into the practice of facilitation. In the Nonviolent Debate model, reading conflict means observing, interpreting and accompanying conflictual processes as they take shape within the group, choosing ways of intervening that are consistent with the principles of nonviolent transformation.

In particular, educators and youth workers are called upon to develop the ability to:

- **Observe conflict in all its complexity**, looking beyond the explicit content of positions to recognise the needs, emotions, values, fears, past experiences and relational dynamics underpinning the confrontation. This ability draws on Johan Galtung's ABC triangle model, which encourages us to interpret conflict through the interplay of attitudes, behaviours and contradictions.

- **Design and facilitate educational activities that promote young people's ability** to analyse and understand the dynamics of violence and foster a transformative approach to conflict.
- **Recognising escalation processes**, identifying at an early stage changes in the quality of the relationship and signs indicating a gradual hardening of the confrontation. Friedrich Glasl's nine-stage model offers a guide to understanding how conflict can evolve from a simple disagreement to the gradual breakdown of the relationship, enabling facilitation to be adapted to the level of escalation reached. In this context, Pat Patfoort's contribution is also useful; according to her, escalation can develop through a progressive 'Major–Minor' dynamic, which, when applied to the Nonviolent Debate model, involves three successive stages: initially, there is a tendency to place one's own opinion, position or interpretation in a position of greater value; subsequently, the other person's opinion is devalued, placing it in a position of lesser legitimacy; finally, the devaluation extends from the position to the person themselves, undermining mutual recognition and further fuelling the conflict.
- **Identify the power dynamics at play within the group**, recognising when certain people tend to assume a position of greater legitimacy, influence or control, whilst others are progressively marginalised, silenced or choose not to participate. From this perspective, Pat Patfoort's Equivalence model helps to identify Major-minor dynamics and to promote relationships based on the equal dignity of all people. It is also necessary to map the dynamics of violence present within the youth groups with whom one works, from the micro (interpersonal) level to the macro level.
- **We must distinguish between the content level and the relational level**, recognising when difficulties in dialogue stem from the opinions expressed and when, instead, they are fuelled by the ways in which people interact, communicate and recognise one another.
- **Choose facilitation strategies appropriate to the development of the conflict**, assessing when it is appropriate to slow down the discussion, encourage moments of mutual listening, adjust the structure of the activity, propose different participatory approaches, or allow the group to work through the situation independently. In Nonviolent Debate, intervening does not mean eliminating tension, but creating the conditions for it to be navigated constructively.
- **Guide the group from the confrontation of opposing positions towards an exploration of the underlying reasons for those positions**, using exploratory questions, active listening techniques and participatory methods that help people move beyond the opinions expressed and reflect on the factors that shape their understanding of reality. In Nonviolent Debate, this ability enables the discussion to be gradually shifted from the 'who is right' mindset towards a deeper understanding of differences, paving the way for an exploration of the foundations underpinning the various positions.
- **Maintaining a self-reflective stance during facilitation**, observing how one's own emotions, interpretations, values and ways of intervening influence the group process. The ability to interpret conflict, in fact, requires continuously monitoring one's own role within the educational relationship.
- **Understand how the group perceives your educational and facilitation role**, recognising that the ways in which educators and youth workers are perceived by young people profoundly influence relational dynamics and the development of conflict. Being perceived as an ally, an authority figure, an arbitrator, a representative of the institutions or a partisan figure does, in fact, alter the level of trust, the willingness to express oneself and expectations regarding the intervention.

These skills enable youth workers to transform their theoretical understanding of conflict into a conscious facilitation practice, aimed not at suppressing differences, but at creating contexts in which conflict can become an opportunity for learning, democratic participation and the transformation of relationships.

Attitudes and Values

The ability to interpret conflict is not based solely on theoretical knowledge and methodological skills, but requires a specific personal and ethical stance on the part of the youth worker. In the Nonviolent Debate model, the way in which the facilitator positions themselves within the conflict profoundly influences the process's potential for transformation. For this reason, developing this competence means cultivating attitudes and values that guide one's approach to observing relational dynamics and supporting the group through the discussion.

A key initial attitude concerns the ability to maintain a stance of **equivalence** towards those involved in the conflict. In peacebuilding studies, equivalence refers to the ability to remain in relationship with all parties involved, recognising their equal dignity without identifying with any single perspective. This does not mean considering all positions equally valid, nor does it imply adopting an attitude of indifference in the face of situations involving violence, discrimination or human rights violations. On the contrary, it involves creating the conditions so that every person can be heard and understood, whilst upholding the principles of non-violence, respect for human rights and democratic participation.

This stance is therefore distinct from neutrality. The youth worker is not an external observer who merely refrains from taking a stance, but a facilitator who intervenes to safeguard the quality of the process and of relationships. They can counteract dynamics of exclusion, delegitimisation or oppression without attributing greater value to any of the people involved, but rather by fostering conditions for dialogue based on mutual recognition.

From this perspective, the principle of **Equivalence** developed by Pat Patfoort takes on particular significance; according to this principle, conflict can be transformed when differences are not organised according to **Major-Minor** relationships, but within relationships based on the equal dignity of individuals. For the youth worker, this means always distinguishing between the value of the person and a critical assessment of the ideas, arguments or behaviours that they express. The Major–Minor model can also creep into the educational relationship, and we must continually ask ourselves whether we are placing the young people we work with in a 'Minor' position, sometimes with a paternalistic or victimising outlook.

Another essential attitude concerns an awareness of **the partiality of one's own perspective**. Facilitators inevitably bring with them experiences, values, beliefs and interpretative frameworks that influence the way they interpret conflict. For this reason, it is necessary to develop an attitude of epistemological humility, recognising one's own biases and continually questioning one's own interpretations, without assuming them to be the only possible interpretation of reality.

Interpreting conflict also requires faith in its **transformative potential**. Conflict is not interpreted as a failure of communication, but as an inevitable part of living together that can become an opportunity for learning, change and collective growth. This perspective requires a willingness to embrace complexity and uncertainty, avoiding the search for immediate solutions and supporting the group even in moments of tension, when the meaning of the discussion is not yet fully defined.

Finally, this competence is founded on **nurturing relationships**. In Nonviolent Debate, the quality of the process is an integral part of the outcome: the way in which people are listened to, engaged and acknowledged is just as important as the results of the discussion. The youth worker therefore takes on the responsibility of safeguarding a space in which conflict can be expressed without leading to the exclusion, delegitimisation or dehumanisation of the other person.

In summary, the attitudes and values underpinning the competence to interpret conflict define an educational approach based on reciprocity, the principle of equivalence, epistemological humility, trust in the transformability of conflict, and the nurturing of relationships. It is this approach that enables the youth worker to support the group without shying away from conflict or being overwhelmed by it, transforming it into an opportunity for learning, democratic participation and peace-building.

Behaviours

The behavioural dimension represents the practical application of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that make up the competence to interpret conflict. In the Nonviolent Debate model, a competent youth worker does not merely understand conflict processes or recognise their own personal stances, but makes these competences visible through operational choices that influence the way in which the group navigates the discussion.

A key initial behaviour concerns the ability to **intentionally observe the process before intervening**. The youth worker does not react immediately to the most obvious manifestations of conflict, but pays attention to the overall dynamics that are unfolding: who speaks up and who remains silent, which perspectives are acknowledged and which are marginalised, what emotions emerge, and how the relationships between those involved change over time.

This capacity for observation helps to avoid impulsive interventions based solely on the need to reduce tension in the immediate term and instead allows the youth worker to choose support strategies consistent with the nature of the conflict.

A key aspect of this approach is also the ability to **create conditions for balanced participation**. From a perspective based on Pat Patfoort's concept of Equivalence, the youth worker pays particular attention to the 'Major-Minor' dynamics that may emerge within the group, intervening when some people assume a dominant position or when others face obstacles in expressing their point of view.

This can take the form of concrete actions such as redistributing speaking time, inviting less-represented perspectives, slowing down exchanges characterised by strong opposition, or introducing alternative communication methods that allow for more inclusive participation.

A further aspect concerns the ability to **recognise and halt processes of escalation**. The youth worker observes the signs indicating that a conflict is at risk of shifting from a clash of ideas to a confrontation between individuals: personal attacks, generalisations, attributing negative intentions, dismissing others' experiences, or a gradual refusal to listen.

When such dynamics emerge, the youth worker's intervention is not aimed at determining who is right, but at re-establishing the relational conditions necessary for dialogue to continue. This may involve referring to agreed rules, rephrasing messages, asking participants to articulate underlying needs or meanings, or introducing a reflective pause.

A distinctive feature of Nonviolent Debate also concerns the ability to **shift the focus of the discussion from positions to the elements underpinning those positions**. The youth worker facilitates processes in which people can move beyond the immediate expression of their opinion to explore what it represents: which values are involved, which personal experiences influence it, and which needs or fears are linked to it.

This shift makes it possible to transform conflict from a clash between different answers into a shared exploration of the questions and meanings underlying the disagreement.

Another key aspect is the ability to **use tools and methodologies appropriate to the level of conflict present**. The facilitator can introduce listening practices, generative questions, moments of individual reflection, small-group work or participatory methodologies that help the group to slow down the process and broaden the scope for mutual understanding. The choice of tools is therefore not neutral, but depends on the ability to assess the situation and identify what the group needs at that moment.

A further aspect concerns the ability to **make the dynamics of the conflict explicit without blaming those involved**. The youth worker helps the group to recognise what is happening within the relationship, transforming implicit dynamics into subjects for shared reflection. Pointing out polarisation, an uneven distribution of speaking time or a dynamic of exclusion allows the conflict itself to be transformed into a learning opportunity.

Finally, a youth worker skilled in conflict analysis demonstrates the ability to **reflect on their own intervention and learn from the process**. Following a conflictual exchange, it is important to consider which dynamics emerged, which choices facilitated or hindered dialogue, and how to improve one's future practice. Competence therefore does not lie in 'perfectly managing' every conflict, but in the ability to engage in continuous learning based on lived experiences.

In summary, the behaviours associated with the competence of 'reading conflict' reveal a facilitation practice based on observation, balanced relationships, the prevention of escalation and the creation of conditions for dialogue. Through these actions, the youth worker guides the group not towards the elimination of conflict, but towards its transformation into an opportunity for mutual understanding, democratic participation and peacebuilding.

Table 3.5 – The "Reading Conflict" Competence in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Dimension of the Competence	Objective	Characterising Elements
Knowledge	To understand conflict as a relational, dynamic and transformable phenomenon, moving beyond an interpretation limited to the opposition between positions.	To be familiar with the main theoretical models for analysing conflict (Galtung, Glasl, Patfoort); to understand the relationship between attitudes, behaviours and contradictions; to recognise processes of escalation and power dynamics; to distinguish between positions, needs, emotions and values; to develop awareness of one's own interpretative frameworks and potential biases.
Skills	To observe, interpret and support conflict processes, selecting facilitation strategies consistent with the evolution of the dialogue.	Recognise early signs of escalation; interpret participation and power dynamics; distinguish between the content level and the relational level; use exploratory questions and facilitation tools to explore needs, values and meanings in greater depth; adapt methodologies and interventions according to the level of conflict present within the group.
Attitudes and Values (Attitudes)	Adopt an educational approach geared towards the nonviolent transformation of conflict and the quality of relationships.	Cultivate a stance of 'equivicinance', distinguishing it from neutrality; recognise the equal dignity of all people in accordance with the principle of Equivalence; develop epistemological humility and an awareness of the partiality of one's own perspective; have faith in the transformative potential of conflict; navigate complexity and uncertainty whilst nurturing the relationship and the process.
Observable Behaviours	Translate expertise into facilitation practices that foster participation, mutual recognition and conflict transformation.	Observe the process before intervening; monitor speaking time and rebalance participation; recognise and interrupt dynamics of escalation, exclusion or delegitimisation; make relational dynamics visible without blaming individuals; choose tools appropriate to the context and critically reflect on one's own intervention to improve professional practice.

3.3.4 Suggested Activities

The activities proposed in this section aim to translate some of the key elements of the 'Reading Conflict' competence into practical experience. Through simulated situations and experiential activities, participants can observe how relational dynamics, modes of participation and strategies for managing confrontation emerge.

For those working as youth workers, direct experimentation is a fundamental tool for developing awareness of their own approach to conflict and the dynamics that may emerge within groups. The activities therefore do not aim to propose predefined solutions, but to create opportunities for observation, reflection and shared learning.

The debriefing session plays a central role: it is by reflecting on the experience that the dynamics that have emerged can be linked to the theoretical concepts discussed and transformed into useful tools for facilitating dialogue processes.

Activity 1 - Two-Handed Drawing on Equivalence

Aim of the Activity

The activity aims to provide a practical experience of the meaning of the principle of **Equivalence** developed by Pat Patfoort, highlighting the gap that can exist between the theoretical understanding of a concept and its application in everyday relational dynamics.

Through a seemingly simple task, participants are invited to engage with a situation in which they must achieve a common goal without being able to use their usual means of communication. The need to share a space, coordinate their actions and implicitly negotiate how to collaborate allows us to observe how dynamics of 'MAjor-minor', control, adaptation or the search for balance may emerge.

The aim is not to produce a 'correct' drawing, but to make visible the relational processes that accompany the achievement of a shared goal: who takes the initiative, who adapts, who takes up more space, who gives up their own intention, and how a relationship based on equivalence is (or is not) constructed.

The activity also provides an opportunity to reflect on the difference between **formal equality** and **relational equity**: even when the starting conditions appear to be the same for everyone (one sheet of paper and one marker pen each), power dynamics may emerge that influence the ability to participate fully in the process.

Skills Developed

- Awareness of power dynamics in relationships;
- Understanding of the principle of equivalence;
- Ability to recognise 'Major-minor' dynamics;
- Collaboration and negotiation;
- Non-verbal listening and mutual coordination;
- Reflection on one's own ways of participating in groups.

Carrying out the Activity

The facilitator divides the participants into pairs.

Each pair receives:

- A single sheet of paper;
- One marker pen per person;
- Two different colours within the pair.

The facilitator explains the task to the pair:

«Work together to draw a representation of the concept of "equivalence" on the same sheet of paper, without speaking».

Verbal communication is not permitted during the activity. Participants must therefore find their own way to coordinate and complete the shared task.

The activity can be carried out simultaneously by several pairs.

At the end, each pair looks at the result they have produced and is invited to reflect not so much on the final drawing as on the process that led to its creation.

Debriefing

The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

On the process

- How did you decide what to do?
- Did you spontaneously find a way to coordinate your efforts?
- Who took the lead?
- Were there times when one person tended to go along with the other's choices?
- How did you deal with any differences in intention?

On the relationship

- Did you feel you were on an equal footing during the activity?
- Was there one person who had more say in decision-making than the other?
- How did you perceive the relationship between your two actions?
- What would have changed if one person had had a bigger marker pen or a colour considered 'more important'?

Theoretical Link

The facilitator introduces the link to Patfoort's model:

Experience shows that even in a seemingly equal situation, **"Major-Minor"** dynamics can emerge. One person may assume a dominant position through greater initiative, speed of decision-making or confidence in their choices; the other may find themselves in a subordinate position through adaptation or concession.

The principle of Equivalence does not mean that everyone does exactly the same thing or has the same role, but that each contribution is recognised as equally legitimate and that no one should assert their own position by devaluing that of another.

The activity therefore invites us to reflect on a central question for those who facilitate educational processes: *how can we create conditions in which differences can exist without turning into relationships of domination?*

Guidance for Facilitators

It is important to ensure that the debriefing does not focus exclusively on the aesthetic outcome of the drawing. The central element of the activity is the relational process.

The facilitator should observe:

- Who takes the initiative;
- Who seeks control the most;
- Who adapts to others' decisions;
- How moments of disagreement are handled;
- Whether a spontaneous search for balance emerges.

It is useful to guide the group from describing behaviour to analysing the dynamics: not 'who was in charge?' but 'what conditions enabled one person to take up more space than another?'

Activity 2 - The War of the Chairs

Aim of the Activity

The activity aims to allow participants to experience the dynamics of conflict escalation and to understand how a lack of shared information can transform a potentially cooperative situation into a competitive and destructive dynamic.

Through a simulation game, participants experience how conflict can intensify when people act solely on the basis of their own position, without knowing the needs, interests and objectives of others.

The activity introduces a fundamental distinction in understanding conflict: the difference between **positions** and **interests**. Positions represent what people say they want; interests, on the other hand, concern the deeper needs and objectives that motivate those demands.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, this distinction is central because it enables us to move beyond the logic of a clash between seemingly incompatible positions and to seek ways of transforming the conflict.

Skills Developed

- Ability to analyse conflict dynamics;
- Recognition of the differences between positions and interests;
- Understanding of escalation processes;
- Awareness of the impact of competition on relationships;
- Ability to seek cooperative and creative solutions;
- Analysis of power dynamics within groups.

How the Activity is Carried out

The group forms a circle. The facilitator assigns each participant an individual task, whispering it so that no one else can hear.

There are three possible tasks:

- To arrange all the chairs in a circle;
- To get all the participants to sit on the chairs;
- To arrange all the chairs around a table (or another item in a corner of the room. It would be important that eventually the item can be moved).

Each participant knows only their own objective.

The facilitator announces just one rule:

«The aim is to win by completing your task».

You are not allowed to speak during the game. The activity begins and the participants try to achieve their objective. Competitive dynamics may gradually emerge: people moving chairs, obstructing others, trying to impose their own solution or preventing others from achieving their objective. After a few minutes, or when the conflictual dynamics have become sufficiently apparent, the facilitator stops the game.

Debriefing

The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

Reflection on the experience

- What happened during the game?
- How did you experience the situation?
- What emotions came to the surface?
- When did you start to perceive the situation as a conflict?

Analysing the conflict

- Did you understand what the other person's objectives were?
- Did you ever try to ask yourselves why the other party was doing what they were doing?
- What were your positions?
- What, on the other hand, was the common interest?

Transformation

- Was there a solution in which everyone could have 'won'?
- Why were we unable to identify it?
- What would have changed if we'd been able to communicate?
- What role did competition play in the transformation of the conflict?

Theoretical Link

The facilitator links the experience to models of conflict analysis.

The situation shows that conflict does not necessarily arise from a genuine incompatibility of objectives, but also from the way people interpret the situation.

People acted on the basis of their own position ("I have to arrange the chairs this way"), without having access to the other person's interests ("we all want to achieve a goal and succeed").

The lack of communication fuelled a process of escalation similar to that described by Glasl: the relationship gradually shifted from the possibility of cooperation to confrontation.

The exercise therefore allows us to introduce a fundamental question for those who facilitate conflicts:

«Are we trying to defend our position, or are we trying to understand the need behind that position?».

Guidelines for Facilitation

During the game, the facilitator should allow the dynamics to emerge without intervening immediately.

It is important, however, to monitor the level of emotional involvement and to stop the activity before the conflict becomes genuinely aggressive or causes distress.

During the debriefing, it is essential to avoid a moralising interpretation ("you were wrong because you argued") and instead use the experience as an opportunity for analysis.

The key point is not that the group produced a conflictual dynamic, but to understand what conditions transformed a potentially cooperative situation into a competition.

3.4 Exploring the Fundamentals: Going Beyond Positions

> «Every criticism, judgement, diagnosis, and expression of anger is the tragic expression of an unmet need.»
>
> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*

3.4.1 Why Recognising the Underlying Needs is the Fourth Pillar of Nonviolent Debate

In Nonviolent Debate, discussion does not end with the exchange of opinions or the contrasting of arguments. In fact, each position represents only the visible part of a broader set of experiences, values, needs, emotions and meanings that shape the way each person interprets reality. When dialogue remains confined to the level of positions, there is a risk that differences will be perceived as irreconcilable and that the discussion will gradually turn into a competition aimed at establishing who is right.

The research carried out as part of the project also confirms this dynamic. The youth workers involved highlighted how the most challenging situations arise when the discussion becomes deadlocked over the opinions expressed and people struggle to recognise what others are actually trying to communicate. At the same time, many young people expressed a desire to be able to discuss complex issues without feeling reduced to their own ideas or judged solely on the basis of the positions they took during the debate. This evidence suggests that the quality of dialogue depends not only on the possibility of expressing different opinions, but also on the ability to explore what makes them meaningful to those involved.

The Nonviolent Debate model therefore proposes a further step beyond the three previous pillars. Whilst the **"Brave Space"** creates the relational conditions for people to speak out with confidence, **"Active Listening"** enables an understanding of different perspectives, and the ability to **recognise escalation processes and power dynamics** helps to interpret what is happening within the group; the fourth pillar invites educators and youth workers to guide the dialogue beyond the surface of positions, encouraging an exploration of the underlying factors that underpin them.

Recognising the **foundations** of positions does not mean seeking consensus or eliminating dissent. Rather, it means creating the conditions for people to understand and acknowledge the complexity of the experiences that shape different points of view, and to transform the exchange into an opportunity for mutual learning.

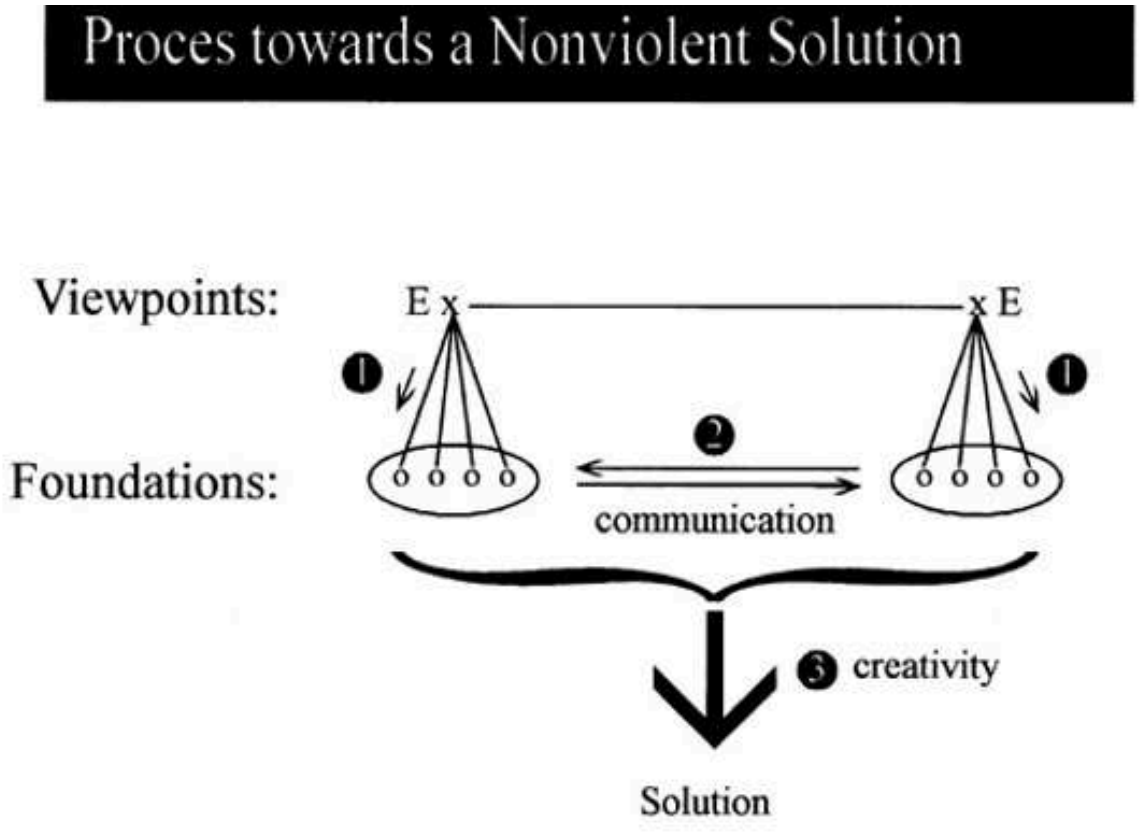
3.4.2 Theoretical Framework: the Foundations Model

The main theoretical reference for this pillar is the **Foundations model** developed by **Pat Patfoort** (2013), which constitutes one of the central tools of his **Equivalence** model. Whilst, as illustrated in the previous chapter, the Major-Minor model describes the dynamics through which conflict can fuel relationships of superiority and inferiority, the Foundations model proposes an alternative form of dialogue, geared towards mutual understanding rather than confrontation.

Figure 3.7. Pat Patfoort's Equivalence Model.

The Equivalence Model illustrates how dialogue can move beyond the dynamics of superiority and inferiority by recognising the equal dignity of all participants. Rather than focusing on defending positions, the model encourages the exploration of the underlying foundations - such as values, needs, emotions, experiences, and beliefs - that shape each person's perspective, creating the conditions for mutual understanding and constructive dialogue.

Source: Adapted from Patfoort (2013)



According to **Patfoort** (2013), the positions expressed during a conflict represent only the visible part of the confrontation. Underlying these lies a set of deeper elements – the **foundations –** consisting of experiences, values, needs, emotions, fears, beliefs, expectations and cultural references that give meaning to each person's point of view. Understanding a conflict therefore means not stopping at the opinions expressed, but exploring what underpins them and makes them important to those experiencing them.

This perspective complements **Johan Galtung**'s (2000) interpretation of conflict through the **ABC triangle**. Whilst the ABC model highlights how every conflict is characterised by the interaction between attitudes, behaviours and contradictions, the Foundations model allows us to delve deeper, in particular, into the dimension of attitudes, exploring the elements that help shape the way people interpret reality and attribute meaning to their own positions. Values, needs, emotions, experiences and beliefs are, in fact, some of the foundations through which the attitudes that guide behaviour during conflict take shape. In this sense, Patfoort's contribution does not replace Galtung's perspective, but complements it, offering a tool for a deeper understanding of what underpins the various positions.

Exploring these foundations, however, requires a particular mode of communication. Patfoort (2013) emphasises that these foundations must be expressed as personal experience rather than as absolute truths.

Phrases such as:

- «For me, it is important…»;
- «In my experience…»;
- «I'm afraid that…»;
- «I feel…»;
- «I fear that…».

These phrases help to convey the personal significance of a viewpoint without turning it into a universal statement that the other person is expected to accept.

This way of communicating is fundamental because it allows us to distinguish between expressing one's own experience and claiming to define reality in a single, indisputable way.

At the same time, the other person is called upon to listen to these insights with interest and openness, **without confusing understanding with agreement.** Understanding why a position is important to someone does not necessarily mean sharing that position, but rather recognising the legitimacy of the experience from which it arises.

This perspective also aligns with Marshall Rosenberg's (2003) **Nonviolent Communication**, according to which judgements, accusations and expressions of anger often conceal human needs that have not been acknowledged or met.

Whilst developing a different theoretical model, Rosenberg highlights an element that is also central to the exploration of underlying principles: visible behaviours and positions often represent attempts - sometimes ineffective or conflictual - to respond to deep-seated needs.

In Patfoort's model, needs constitute one of the possible foundations of positions, alongside values, emotions, experiences and other meanings that contribute to shaping an individual's perspective. The integration of these approaches therefore enables us to understand how, behind an explicit conflict, there may lie personal and relational dimensions that deserve to be explored before seeking solutions.

The search for these foundations also forms part of the tradition of dialogical pedagogy, according to which knowledge is not simply transmitted but constructed through the encounter between individuals who bring with them different experiences and interpretations of reality (Buber 1993, Freire 1970).

From this perspective, dialogue is not aimed at establishing who is right, nor at bringing the other person round to a shared position, but at understanding how each individual constructs their own point of view and how that perspective can be transformed through their relationship with the other.

Exploring these foundations therefore takes on an eminently educational value: it enables us to recognise the plurality of human experiences, develop capacities for mutual understanding, and construct new meanings through dialogue.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, these elements converge in a specific skill of the youth worker: guiding groups and individuals to gradually shift their focus from positions to the underlying principles that underpin them.

The role of the youth worker is not to interpret or explain people's reasons from the outside, but to create the conditions for those reasons to emerge through a dialogical process based on listening, curiosity and mutual recognition.

In this way, dissent can be transformed from a source of division into an opportunity for understanding, learning and democratic participation.

3.4.3 The Dimensions of Competence

The 'Foundations' model proposed by Pat Patfoort offers a theoretical perspective that allows us to rethink dialogue not as a clash between opposing positions, but as an exploration of the experiences, values, needs and meanings that underpin them. In the Nonviolent Debate model, this perspective is translated into a specific professional competence for the youth worker, who is called upon to facilitate processes in which people can move beyond simply defending their own opinions and develop a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives.

This is a complex skill, which does not consist of automatically identifying the foundations of the positions expressed, but rather of creating the conditions for these to emerge through dialogue. This requires the ability to guide the group in exploring the meanings attributed to the various positions, fostering a discussion geared towards mutual understanding rather than the pursuit of consensus or persuasion.

In the following paragraphs, this skill is explored through the four dimensions adopted in the Nonviolent Debate model, with the aim of providing educators and youth workers with a framework for designing and facilitating dialogue experiences capable of going beyond a mere comparison of positions and promoting a deeper mutual understanding.

Knowledge

The competence to recognise the foundations of positions is based, first and foremost, on an understanding of the distinction between **positions** and **foundations**. In the model developed by **Pat Patfoort** (2013), positions represent what people state, defend or assert during a discussion, whilst the underlying reasons correspond to the deeper elements that give meaning to those positions:

values, needs, emotions, experiences, beliefs, fears, expectations and cultural references. Understanding this distinction enables us to move beyond an interpretation of conflict limited to the opinions expressed and to recognise the complexity of the motivations that guide people's behaviour.

A second point of understanding concerns the relationship between **underlying principles and the construction of meaning**. People do not interpret reality in a neutral way, but attribute meaning to events on the basis of their own experiences and frames of reference. From this perspective, conflict arises not only from differing opinions, but from different ways of making sense of reality. It is therefore essential for youth workers to understand that every position represents the expression of a process of meaning-making, which can be explored through dialogue without claiming to establish which interpretation is the only correct one.

This perspective ties in with **Galtung's** (2000) interpretation of conflict. As illustrated by the **ABC** triangle, the attitudes people adopt during a conflict are not random; rather, they develop from the meanings, emotions and beliefs through which they interpret the situation. Understanding this relationship enables us to see how exploring the underlying factors helps not only to clarify the positions expressed, but also to understand the attitudes that fuel the conflictual dynamics.

A further area of understanding concerns the role of **needs** in the formation of positions. **Marshall Rosenberg**'s **Nonviolent Communication** (2003) highlights how, behind judgements, accusations and demands, there are often universal human needs that guide people's behaviour. In the Nonviolent Debate model, needs represent an important component of the underlying issues, but not the only one: they are interrelated with values, emotions, identities, affiliations and experiences, helping to shape the complexity of an individual's point of view.

Finally, educators and youth workers must recognise the educational value of exploring these underlying factors. As suggested by Patfoort (2013) and the tradition of **dialogical pedagogy** (Buber 1993, Freire 1970), understanding the foundations of a position does not mean seeking consensus or persuading the other person to change their mind. Rather, it means creating the conditions for different perspectives to be understood in all their complexity, thereby fostering processes of mutual learning, recognition and democratic participation.

Skills

In the Nonviolent Debate model, recognising the foundations of positions means guiding people beyond the level of expressed opinions, creating the conditions for the experiences, values, needs, emotions and meanings that underpin the different viewpoints to emerge.

This skill does not involve interpreting people's motivations from the outside or trying to identify a hidden explanation behind every position. The role of the youth worker is not to attribute underlying reasons to other people, but to facilitate a process through which people themselves explore and bring to light the elements that underpin their own point of view.

The skills associated with recognising underlying principles translate into the ability to:

- **Distinguish between positions and underlying reasons**, recognising when the discussion becomes stuck at the level of expressed opinions and opposing arguments. The youth worker knows how to identify moments when the dialogue risks turning into a mutual defence of one's own ideas and can guide the group towards exploring the elements that make those positions meaningful.

- **Formulate open-ended and exploratory questions** that guide people in reflecting on the deeper meanings of their own positions without steering or suggesting the answer. Questions such as "What makes this aspect important to you?", "What experience leads you to see the situation in this way?" or "What values do you feel are involved?" help to bring the underlying principles to the fore whilst maintaining an attitude of curiosity and respect.
- **Facilitate the transition from opinions to meanings**, helping people to link what they say to the experiences, values, needs and emotions that underpin it. This requires avoiding external interpretations and instead supporting a process in which people themselves give meaning to their own experiences.
- **Encouraging the expression of underlying reasons in the first person**, by promoting communication styles centred on personal experience, such as "for me…", "in my experience…", "I feel…", "it's important to me…". This approach helps transform absolute statements and generalisations into personal narratives, reducing the risk of the discussion becoming deadlocked.
- **Encourage active listening to the other person's core beliefs**, creating the conditions to ensure that understanding is not confused with agreement. The youth worker helps the group recognise that it is possible to understand the meaning of a position even when one does not share it.
- **Recognise shared connections and underlying principles even where positions differ**, helping people to identify common values, needs or concerns that can form a basis for greater mutual understanding. These elements are not used to eliminate dissent, but to make the discussion more nuanced.
- **Facilitating the mutual exploration of underlying principles**, creating an atmosphere in which people are encouraged to understand the other side's reasons before evaluating or refuting them. This requires the ability to sustain a dialogue based on curiosity, active listening and recognition of the complexity of perspectives.
- **Guiding the group in the shared construction of new meanings**, supporting processes of reflection in which engagement with different perspectives can broaden understanding of the situation. The youth worker's role is not to steer the group towards a predetermined conclusion, but to facilitate the emergence of more informed and nuanced interpretations.

The skills associated with recognising underlying principles therefore enable the discussion to be transformed from an exchange of opposing arguments into a process of shared exploration of meanings.

Attitudes and Values

The ability to recognise the foundations of positions is not based solely on theoretical knowledge or communication skills, but requires a specific relational approach on the part of the youth worker.

Guiding people beyond the level of positions means, in fact, adopting an attitude characterised by curiosity, openness and a willingness to explore complexity. To facilitate a dialogue aimed to mutual understanding, the youth worker must recognise that each person constructs their own point of view based on experiences, values and meanings that deserve to be explored, even when such perspectives are very different from their own.

The attitudes and values associated with this competence involve an approach aimed at:

- **Cultivating curiosity towards different perspectives**, viewing other people's positions not as obstacles to be corrected or overcome, but as opportunities to understand different experiences and ways of interpreting reality.
- **Developing epistemic humility**, recognising that one's own interpretation of a situation is just one perspective amongst many, and that even what appears evident or obvious may be influenced by one's own history, values and experiences.

- **Embracing the complexity of people and situations**, avoiding simplistic interpretations that reduce individuals to their opinions or the positions they express at a given moment.
- **Remain open to dissent**, viewing disagreement not merely as a difficulty to be managed, but as an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding and broaden one's own perspective.
- **Set aside the immediate urge to evaluate or categorise**, creating a space where it is possible to listen and understand before forming judgements or proposing solutions.
- **Recognise the legitimacy of others' experiences**, distinguishing between acknowledging a person's lived experience and personal meanings and whether or not one agrees with their beliefs or positions.
- **Have confidence in people's ability to construct new meanings through dialogue**, adopting an educational perspective in which discussion is not aimed at persuading or correcting, but at fostering processes of mutual learning.
- **Accept uncertainty and the absence of immediate solutions**, understanding that exploring the fundamentals requires time, active listening and a willingness to remain within an open-ended process.

These attitudes are essential to ensure that facilitation techniques do not become mechanical tools, but are underpinned by a genuine intention to understand.

In Nonviolent Debate, moving beyond positions does not mean seeking a common truth or eliminating differences, but developing the ability to navigate a plurality of viewpoints whilst recognising the dignity of different experiences.

The youth worker's approach thus becomes an educational tool in its own right: through the way they listen, ask questions and navigate conflict, they help to create a model of relationship based on mutual recognition, curiosity and the opportunity to learn from differences.

Observable Behaviours

The competence to recognise the underpinnings of positions becomes observable through concrete behaviours that demonstrate the youth worker's ability to facilitate a dialogue aimed at mutual understanding.

A youth worker who possesses this competence:

- **Encourages people to explore the reasons underpinning their positions**, asking questions that help to explore experiences, values, needs and emotions without suggesting a predetermined answer.
- **Rephrases the positions expressed to check understanding**, distinguishing between what a person is saying and what might be interpreted from the outside, whilst avoiding attributing unstated intentions or meanings.
- **Helps the group recognise the difference between opinions and personal experiences**, encouraging language centred on individual experience rather than generalisations or judgements directed at others.
- **Intervenes when the discussion becomes deadlocked over positions**, guiding people to explore what makes a particular perspective important to those who hold it.
- **Uses exploratory questions rather than immediately proposing solutions or interpretations**, supporting a process in which the participants themselves develop greater awareness of their own motivations.
- **It recognises and values the complexity of the perspectives within the group**, avoiding the simplification of positions or their reduction to rigid categories.

- **It fosters an atmosphere of mutual listening**, ensuring that people can express their own point of view and that others have the opportunity to understand its meaning before responding or challenging it.
- **Highlights any common elements that emerge from the discussion**, such as shared values, needs or concerns, without using them to negate differences or force an agreement.
- **Maintains a balanced stance during the discussion**, avoiding taking sides with either party and supporting the process of exploring different perspectives.
- **It welcomes disagreement as part of the dialogue process**, demonstrating through one's own behaviour that the presence of differences does not prevent the building of a respectful and meaningful relationship.
- **They encourage moments of metacognitive reflection on the dialogue process**, helping participants to recognise how their own interpretations, emotions and beliefs influence the way they listen and respond.

Through these behaviours, the youth worker brings to life the central principle of the fourth pillar of Nonviolent Debate: a position never represents the whole person, but is the visible expression of a story, a set of meanings and profound elements that can be explored through dialogue.

Table 3.6 - The Competence "Exploring the Foundations: Going Beyond Positions" in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Dimension of the Competence	Objective	Characterising Elements
Knowledge	To understand positions as a visible expression of deeper experiences, values, needs and meanings.	Be familiar with Pat Patfoort's 'Foundations' model; distinguish between positions and foundations; understand the role of values, needs, emotions and experiences in the formation of viewpoints; recognise the connection with Galtung and Rosenberg.
Skills	To facilitate the exploration of the meanings underpinning different positions, fostering mutual understanding and constructive dialogue.	To formulate exploratory questions; to guide the transition from opinions to personal experiences; to encourage first-person expression; to foster listening and understanding without requiring agreement; to identify shared elements without eliminating dissent.
Attitudes and Values	Adopt a dialogical approach characterised by curiosity, an appreciation of complexity and mutual recognition.	Cultivate openness and curiosity towards different perspectives; develop epistemic humility; suspend judgement; recognise the legitimacy of others' experiences; view conflict as an opportunity for learning.
Observable Behaviours	Act as a facilitator of dialogue, encouraging a shift from fixed positions to an understanding of underlying principles.	Ask open-ended questions; rephrase to check understanding; distinguish between opinions and lived experiences; intervene when the discussion becomes at an impasse; encourage personal expression; value complexity and maintain balance in facilitation.

3.4.4 Proposed Activity

The activity proposed in this section aims to translate the skill of **exploring underlying principles and moving beyond positions** into a concrete experience. Through a guided discussion on potentially divisive topics, participants can experience how the opinions expressed represent only the most visible layer of deeper meanings linked to experiences, values, needs and emotions.

For those working as youth workers, direct experimentation is a fundamental tool for practising the ability to listen beyond stated positions and developing greater awareness of the processes through which people construct their own viewpoints. The activity does not aim to change individual beliefs or to reach an agreement, but to create a space in which it is possible to explore what makes a particular position important to those who hold it.

Like any relational skill, the ability to recognise underlying principles requires practice and training. Theoretical knowledge of Active Listening models and tools provides a starting point, but it is through practical experience, discussion and reflection on one's own way of listening that these approaches can gradually become a habitual approach in one's relationship with others.

The debriefing session plays a central role: it is by reviewing the experience that participants can recognise their own interpretative patterns, observe what tends to remain hidden behind the positions expressed, and link the experience to the principles of Pat Patfoort's 'Fundamentals' model.

The activity therefore provides a training space to experiment with the transition from positions to meanings, transforming dissent from an element of conflict into an opportunity for mutual understanding.

Activity - Exploring the Fundamentals, or: Practice, Practice, Practice

Aim of the Activity

The activity aims to develop the ability to look beyond the positions expressed in order to explore the foundations underpinning them: personal experiences, values, needs, emotions and meanings.

Through a discussion on potentially polarising topics, participants are invited to experience the difference between arguing to defend one's own position and engaging in dialogue to understand what makes a particular perspective important to the person expressing it.

The aim is not to persuade people to change their minds or to reach an agreement, but to develop the ability to explore different perspectives using the tools of active listening: non-judgemental listening, mirroring, paraphrasing and probing questions.

The activity also allows participants to experience that the ability to recognise underlying principles is not developed solely through the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, but requires practice, exercise and continuous training. As with the development of any interpersonal skill, it is through practical experience that these approaches can gradually become a habitual way of engaging in dialogue.

Skills Developed

- Ability to distinguish between expressed positions and the underlying principles that support them;
- Exploration of personal values, needs, emotions and experiences;
- Active listening and suspension of judgement;

- Ability to ask exploratory questions;
- Use of mirroring and paraphrasing;
- Understanding of different perspectives without the need for agreement;
- Reflection on one's own interpretative frameworks and beliefs;
- Ability to engage in constructive discussion on divisive issues.

Conducting the Activity

The facilitator introduces the activity by explaining that every position expressed during a discussion represents only the most visible part of a broader set of personal experiences, values, needs and meanings. The first phase consists of a spatial positioning exercise. The facilitator presents a series of potentially polarising statements (for example: *"Military conscription at the age of 18 should be compulsory"*) and asks participants to position themselves along an imaginary line ranging from 0% agreement to 100% agreement.

Alternatively, participants can be asked to suggest, using Post-it notes, some controversial or divisive topics they would like to discuss. The facilitator collects the suggestions and reads them aloud, noting which topics generate the greatest differences in opinion within the group. During this initial phase, the facilitator observes how the group is distributed across the various topics, identifying a topic where positions are particularly far apart and which could offer a significant opportunity for exploration.

The facilitator then forms pairs consisting of people with differing or widely divergent views, so as to encourage discussion with perspectives that may challenge participants' own beliefs more deeply. Those who position themselves towards the centre of the spectrum and do not hold a particularly defined view may take on the role of observers and are distributed amongst the various pairs.

Each pair then begins a 'reflective walk'. The aim is not to convince the other person of one's own position, but to explore the foundations underpinning their respective perspectives.

The conversation begins with an explanation of one's own position, but is gradually guided towards deeper levels through the techniques of Active Listening. People are encouraged to listen, rephrase what they have understood, ask questions and try to explore the personal significance of the other person's position.

A central element of the activity is the use of the question **"Why?"**, intended not as a request for justification or a challenge, but as an invitation to explore what makes that position meaningful.

To explore the underlying reasons, questions such as the following can be used:

- Why is this opinion important to me?
- How did I come to form this opinion?
- What experiences have influenced the way I view this situation?
- What values do I feel are at stake in this position?
- What do I fear might happen if the situation were handled differently?
- What personal need or concern do I recognise behind this position?

During the discussion, the facilitator should bear in mind that the aim is not to find a common position, but to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning each person attributes to their own point of view.

Debriefing

The final discussion can be guided by a few questions:

On personal experience

- What did you discover about your own position by looking beyond your initial opinion?
- Did you recognise elements of your personal history that influence your point of view?
- Was it easy or difficult to talk about the foundations of your own position?

On the discussion with the other person

- What surprised you about the other person's perspective?
- Did you find anything you could understand even if you didn't agree with it?
- What difference did you notice between understanding a position and agreeing with it?

On the listening process

- What changed when you started asking yourselves 'why'?
- Which Active Listening tools helped you the most?
- What makes it difficult, in everyday life, to move beyond positions?

Theoretical link

This activity allows you to experience in practice the central principle of Pat Patfoort's Foundations model: a position is not the same as the person, but represents the visible expression of a story, experiences and deeper meanings.

In everyday conflicts, we often tend to confront one another directly at the level of opinions, trying to prove that our position is correct or to highlight the other person's mistakes. This keeps the dialogue on a confrontational level where differences risk becoming irreconcilable.

Exploring the Fundamentals, on the other hand, requires a shift in perspective: asking not only *"what does the other person think?"*, but also *"what makes this way of seeing reality important to them?".*

From this perspective, understanding does not mean approving or agreeing, but recognising the complexity of the other person's experience and creating the conditions for a more informed discussion.

Guidelines for Facilitation

It is important to make it clear from the outset that the aim of the activity is not to reach a consensus or to change the participants' opinions.

The facilitator should focus primarily on the dialogue process, observing:

- Whether participants manage to remain in an exploratory rather than a persuasive mode;
- Whether judgements or generalisations emerge;
- Whether active listening techniques are being used;
- Whether participants are able to speak about their own experiences in the first person;
- Whether the discussion remains focused on mutual understanding.

During the activity, the facilitator may need to intervene when the dialogue reverts to confrontation, reminding participants of the initial instruction: not to prove who is right, but to explore what underpins the different perspectives.

The facilitator's role is not to steer the content of the discussion, but to support the process, helping participants to keep their focus on the reasons, experiences and meanings underpinning the different positions.

3.5 Dilemmatic Thinking: Navigating Complexity without Seeking Simple Answers

> «Education as inquiry is the opposite of education as transmission».
>
> Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*

3.5.1 Why Dilemmatic Thinking is the Fifth Pillar

Whilst the **Brave Space** creates the conditions for everyone to have their say, Active Listening allows different perspectives to truly engage with one another; the skill of Reading Conflict enables us to recognise the dynamics at play within that relationship, and work on the Foundations helps us understand how values, experiences, affiliations and frames of meaning shape the way each person interprets reality; the fifth pillar of Nonviolent Debate concerns the ability to navigate complexity without prematurely reducing it to simple answers.

Indeed, most of the conflicts that permeate contemporary societies do not arise from a lack of information, but from the presence of values, needs and principles that may come into tension with one another without there being a solution capable of fully satisfying them all. Freedom and security, equality and merit, self-determination and collective protection, justice and reconciliation are examples of tensions that characterise democratic life and which cannot be resolved simply by identifying who is right.

In educational contexts, however, there is often a persistent tendency to treat such tensions as problems to be solved, steering the discussion towards the search for the 'correct' answer or the 'best' position. Many forms of traditional debate also tend to reinforce this logic, asking people to defend a thesis until they have demonstrated its superiority over the opposing view.

Nonviolent Debate, on the other hand, offers a different perspective. The aim is not to find a shared solution quickly, nor to convince the other party, but to develop the ability to recognise that some issues are inherently dilemmatic. In such cases, the educational value of the discussion lies precisely in the opportunity to explore the existing tensions, understand the reasons underpinning different perspectives, and critically examine one's own assumptions as well.

Dilemmatic Thinking therefore represents the skill that enables us to resist polarisation and oversimplification. It invites us to replace the question 'who is right?' with more complex questions: what values are at stake?; what needs are in conflict?; what principles underpin the different positions?; what do we risk losing by choosing one direction over another?

This perspective also profoundly alters the role of educators and youth workers. Facilitating a dialogue does not mean guiding the group towards a predetermined conclusion, but rather creating

the conditions for people to dwell on the dilemma long enough to grasp its complexity. The task of facilitation does not consist in eliminating uncertainty, but rather in turning it into a generative space for learning.

The findings from the needs analysis confirm the importance of this skill. The research shows that educators and youth workers frequently face the challenge of facilitating discussions on controversial issues without the debate quickly turning into a clash between irreconcilable positions. At the same time, there is a need for tools capable of guiding young people in exploring the values, needs and underlying principles that shape different positions, fostering a dialogue that does not end with a quest to determine who is right, but opens the way to an understanding of the complexity and diversity of perspectives.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, Dilemmatic Thinking therefore constitutes a fundamental educational skill because it enables conflict to be addressed without reducing it to a binary opposition. It fosters the development of citizens capable of living with uncertainty, recognising the diversity of perspectives and participating in democratic processes without disregarding the complexity of reality.

3.5.2 Theoretical Framework: Dilemmatic Thinking as an Educational Skill

The ability to think in dilemmatic terms is a fundamental skill for educators and youth workers who facilitate Nonviolent Debate processes. When faced with controversial issues, the most common risk is not, in fact, a lack of opinions, but the tendency to interpret reality through rigid, dichotomous categories: right or wrong, true or false, us or them, winners or losers. This way of thinking simplifies the complexity of situations, makes discussions more rigid and makes it harder to keep the dialogue open when profound differences emerge.

Dilemmatic Thinking offers a different way of approaching conflicts and decisions. Rather than immediately seeking the correct answer or the definitive solution, it invites us to pause and reflect on the tension between different needs, recognising that many educational, social and political issues involve values that are all legitimate but may potentially conflict with one another. The dilemma is therefore not interpreted as an obstacle to be overcome quickly, but rather as an opportunity to deepen one's understanding of reality, to question one's own convictions and to engage critically with different perspectives.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, this skill is developed through the integration of three complementary theoretical frameworks. The **Betzavta** method offers an experiential approach to bringing to light the dilemmas that underpin democratic life. **John Dewey's** reflective thinking, on the other hand, interprets doubt as the starting point of any authentic learning process, whilst **Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children** conceives of dialogue as a community of inquiry in which knowledge is constructed through the comparison of different perspectives.

Although they stem from different theoretical traditions, these contributions share a fundamental premise: education does not mean imparting correct answers, but creating the conditions for people to develop the ability to question, argue, listen and critically review their own way of interpreting reality. Dilemmatic Thinking fits precisely within this perspective, transforming complexity from an obstacle into an educational resource.

The Dilemma as a Democratic Experience: the Betzavta Method

The main theoretical reference for this pillar is the **Betzavta** method. The term *Betzavta*, which literally means 'together', expresses the idea that democracy does not equate to the absence of conflict, but to the ability to address conflicts without denying the freedom and dignity of those involved.

Underpinning the method is the idea that many conflicts do not simply arise from the opposition of incompatible interests, but from the tension between equally legitimate democratic values. Freedom and equality, autonomy and responsibility, security and inclusion are examples of principles that may come into conflict without one being considered, in absolute terms, superior to the other.

For this reason, Betzavta uses experiential activities built around real-life dilemmas. Through these experiences, participants directly experience the difficulty of reconciling values which, in theory, they often claim to share. Confronting these tensions brings their own contradictions to light and encourages deeper reflection on the criteria that guide their decisions.

Betzavta's contribution plays a central role in Nonviolent Debate because it shifts the focus from seeking a winning position to exploring the tensions that characterise democratic coexistence. The aim is not to demonstrate which alternative is the correct one, but to understand the complexity of the choices and learn to live with it together.

Doubt as the Driving Force of Learning: John Dewey

A second fundamental perspective is offered by the reflective thought of **John Dewey** (1938), who interprets doubt as the origin of every authentic learning process.

According to Dewey, critical thinking arises when experience disrupts our certainties and confronts us with a problematic situation that requires reflection. Education should therefore not be limited to transmitting pre-organised knowledge, but should help people to formulate questions, analyse complex situations, explore alternatives and progressively construct independent judgements.
From this perspective, the dilemma takes on fundamental educational significance because it disrupts cognitive automatisms and forces us to question established interpretations. Rather than providing solutions, the task of education consists in facilitating processes of shared inquiry in which the comparison of different perspectives becomes an opportunity for growth.

Nonviolent Debate adopts this approach, recognising that dialogue fosters learning not when it confirms existing beliefs, but when it raises questions capable of changing the way people interpret a particular issue.

The Community of Inquiry: Matthew Lipman

Matthew Lipman's contribution (2003) further expands this perspective through **Philosophy for Children (P4C).**

According to Lipman, critical thinking develops within a community of inquiry, in which people explore philosophical, ethical and social issues together without necessarily aiming to reach a single, definitive answer. Learning arises from dialogue, mutual discussion and a willingness to critically review one's own positions in the light of engagement with others.

In this model, the educational value lies not so much in the conclusion reached as in the quality of the shared inquiry process. Learning to ask questions, argue one's own ideas, listen to different lines of reasoning and adjust one's own point of view forms the heart of the educational experience.

Dilemma-Based Thinking in the Nonviolent Debate Model

The Nonviolent Debate model integrates these three contributions within a unified methodological framework.

From **Betzavta**, it draws on the idea that democracy is built by learning to live with dilemmas, recognising the tension between equally legitimate values without seeking to artificially eliminate it. From **Dewey**, it adopts the principle that doubt constitutes the starting point for reflective thinking and learning. From **Lipman**, it derives the conception of dialogue as a community of inquiry, in which the comparison of different perspectives serves as a tool for the shared construction of knowledge.

Although dilemmatic thinking integrates these three theoretical frameworks, it is above all the Betzavta method that guides its educational approach. The concept of the dilemma is, in fact, at the heart of this competence: educators and youth workers are called upon not so much to guide the group towards a 'correct' answer, but rather to design and facilitate experiences in which the tensions between values can emerge, be explored and understood collectively.
From this perspective, dilemmatic thinking represents an essential competence for the creation of democratic spaces for dialogue. It enables us to counter polarisation, develop critical thinking and foster a culture of debate in which complexity is not simplified but recognised as an educational resource.

3.5.3 The Dimensions of the Competence

Dilemma-based thinking can be described as a competence comprising knowledge, skills, attitudes and values – observable behaviours – which educators and youth workers are called upon to develop when facilitating Nonviolent Debate.

This competence consists of the ability to guide individuals and groups in exploring complex issues without prematurely reducing them to simplistic dichotomies or unambiguous answers. It means creating contexts in which it is possible to recognise the tensions between values, rights, needs and legitimate interests, fostering a process of reflection that keeps complexity open rather than seeking to eliminate it.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, Dilemmatic Thinking is not merely a form of individual reasoning, but a facilitation skill. Facilitators are called upon to design experiences that help the group to question their own criteria for judgement, recognise the plurality of perspectives present, explore the implications of the various possible choices, and develop a greater awareness of the values and assumptions that shape the way they interpret reality.

The aim is not to guide the group towards a predetermined conclusion, but to support processes in which doubt, the comparison of different perspectives and shared reflection become resources for learning. From this perspective, the educational value of dialogue lies not so much in reaching a common answer, but in the ability to navigate complexity, question one's own certainties and build more nuanced understandings of the issues at hand.

Knowledge

The development of Dilemmatic Thinking requires, first and foremost, that educators and youth workers understand the nature of dilemmas and their educational value. Facilitating the dilemmatic dimension in mind does not mean presenting a problem with a hidden solution or guiding the group towards an answer deemed correct, but rather creating the conditions for genuine tensions to emerge between equally legitimate values, needs, rights or interests. This awareness is the first prerequisite for competence: recognising that many issues characterising democratic coexistence cannot be resolved through simple dichotomies or unambiguous answers.

A fundamental aspect of this knowledge concerns the distinction between a **problem**, a **conflict** and a **dilemma.** A problem generally presupposes the existence of an optimal solution that can be identified through appropriate knowledge or procedures; a conflict, on the other hand, concerns the presence of interests, needs or objectives perceived as incompatible between individuals or groups. A dilemma lies on a different plane: it arises from the tension between principles or values that may be simultaneously legitimate but difficult to realise in their entirety. Understanding this difference enables facilitators to choose educational tools consistent with the nature of the situation the group is called upon to address.

Educators and youth workers must also **be aware of the main cognitive mechanisms** that lead people to seek simple answers when faced with complex issues. The tendency towards polarisation, the need for internal consistency, the search for confirmation of one's own beliefs, and the difficulty in accepting uncertainty can, in fact, limit the ability to explore alternative perspectives. Developing Dilemmatic Thinking also means recognising these processes, understanding how they influence the way we form our own opinions and interpret those of others.

A further area of knowledge concerns the **relationship between dilemmas and democracy.** Democratic societies are characterised by constant tensions between rights, freedoms, responsibilities and differing interests that cannot be definitively resolved. Dilemma-based Thinking enables us to view these tensions as a structural feature of democratic coexistence, rather than as an anomaly to be corrected. For educators and youth workers, this means understanding that educating for participation does not mean imparting agreed-upon answers, but rather supporting people in developing the ability to engage critically with complexity.

Finally, it is essential to recognise the **pedagogical value of doubt and shared inquiry**. Dilemmatic Thinking is, in fact, based on the idea that learning does not stem solely from the acquisition of new information, but from a willingness to question one's own interpretations, to compare them with those of others, and to progressively construct more nuanced understandings of reality. From this perspective, changing one's mind, recognising a contradiction or temporarily suspending judgement are not signs of weakness, but natural outcomes of an authentic learning process.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, this understanding enables educators and youth workers to interpret the dilemma not as a situation to be resolved, but as an educational space in which complexity becomes an opportunity for reflection, dialogue and democratic growth.

Skills

Developing this competence means being able to design and facilitate processes in which the group can engage with complex issues without reducing them to rigid oppositions or seeking a single solution.

The main skills include:

- **Recognising the dilemmas present in educational situations.** Not all conflicts are dilemmas, and not all questions encourage reflective thinking. The facilitator is able to identify situations in which equally legitimate values, needs or principles come into tension, helping the group to explore them without oversimplifying or resolving them prematurely.
- **Designing experiences that bring dilemmas to the fore.** A key competence lies in knowing how to design experiential activities that allow people to directly experience the tensions between different values. Through simulations, cooperative games, case studies or activities inspired by the Betzavta method, educators and youth workers foster awareness of the contradictions that may arise between stated principles, needs and actual behaviour, transforming these tensions into learning opportunities.
- **Formulating generative questions**. Dilemma-based thinking develops through questions that open up possibilities for reflection rather than steering towards an expected answer. To be effective, questions should be simple and clear, thought-provoking, capable of arousing curiosity and inviting the group to explore the situation in greater depth. They should also help to bring to light what remains implicit, opening up new possibilities for interpretation and reasoning rather than narrowing the discussion down to a single possible answer.
- **Facilitating the exploration of different perspectives.** An equally important skill is guiding the group to understand the internal logic of different positions, helping participants to reflect on the values, needs, fears and experiences that underpin viewpoints different from their own. The aim is not to persuade people to change their minds, but to foster a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the various perspectives.
- **Supporting the group through uncertainty.** In educational processes, there is often a need to reach a shared conclusion quickly or to identify the 'correct' answer. Facilitators, however, must be able to validate doubt, recognise the value of collective inquiry, and help the group remain engaged in the process of exploration even when no immediate solutions emerge. This skill involves the ability to manage silence, ambivalence and the suspension of judgement as integral elements of learning.
- **Encouraging reflection on one's own thought processes.** One of the core skills of Dilemmatic Thinking is guiding participants to question the way in which they form their own opinions. The facilitator helps the group to recognise the values, experiences, affiliations and possible cognitive biases that influence their interpretation of reality, fostering greater awareness without turning this reflection into an exercise in self-criticism or judgement.
- **Supporting the shared construction of meaning.** Finally, educators and youth workers develop the ability to support processes in which the group builds increasingly nuanced understandings of the issues addressed. Their role is not to validate a final answer, but to facilitate connections between different perspectives, highlight the learning that has emerged, and help participants recognise how discussion can change the way they interpret reality.

The skills associated with Dilemmatic Thinking thus enable the discussion to be transformed from a search for the 'right' answer into a process of shared exploration of complexity. In this way, Nonviolent Debate fosters the development of reflectiveness and the ability to engage with dissent as a learning opportunity.

Attitudes and Values

Dilemma-Based Thinking cannot be reduced to a technique for formulating questions or facilitating discussions. It requires a specific educational approach on the part of educators and youth workers, based on the way in which they choose to engage in dialogue, guide the exploration of dilemmas and relate to complexity. The attitudes and values underpinning this competence relate to one's relationship with knowledge, with conflict and with the people involved in the learning process.

A first fundamental attitude is the **willingness to live with uncertainty.** Facilitators recognise that many of the issues addressed in Nonviolent Debate do not have simple or definitive answers, and that the educational value of the discussion lies in the opportunity to explore their complexity. This implies the ability to set aside the need to reach a conclusion quickly and to regard disagreement as a natural component of democratic processes and learning.

A second attitude concerns **awareness of one's own underlying assumptions.** Facilitating a dilemma means recognising that every person, including the facilitator, interprets reality through perspectives that are necessarily partial, influenced by their own history, values, experiences and interpretative frameworks. This awareness requires constant self-reflection and a willingness to question one's own interpretations, whilst avoiding implicitly steering the group towards a particular response.

A further value is **curiosity about the diversity of perspectives.** The facilitator regards every point of view as an opportunity to broaden the collective understanding of the issue, seeking to comprehend the reasons, values, needs and experiences underpinning different positions, even when they do not share them.

Dilemma-Based Thinking also requires **trust in the transformative potential of dialogue.** Facilitation does not aim to convince people to adopt a particular position, but to create the conditions in which everyone can deepen their own reasoning, critically examine their own beliefs and, where appropriate, revise them in the light of discussion with others.

Finally, this competence is based on **valuing complexity** as an educational resource. Educators and youth workers are called upon to resist polarisation and dichotomous interpretations of reality, promoting a culture of dialogue in which the value of dialogue does not depend on reaching a consensus, but on the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of an issue through the contribution of different perspectives.

Behaviours

The competence of Dilemmatic Thinking becomes observable through the behaviours that educators and youth workers exhibit when designing and facilitating dialogue. It is not merely a matter of presenting dilemmas or encouraging the exchange of differing opinions, but of actively creating the conditions that enable the group to explore complexity without feeling forced to take a stance or identify a definitive answer.

A first behaviour involves **formulating and presenting authentic dilemmas**, avoiding questions that implicitly suggest a 'correct' answer or that simply pit a 'right' position against a 'wrong' one. The dilemmas presented concern open-ended issues, characterised by the presence of values, interests or rights that are all legitimate but potentially in tension with one another, thereby fostering a genuine exploration of complexity.

A second approach involves **facilitating the exploration process,** helping the group to focus on the tensions present in the dilemma without steering the discussion towards a predetermined conclusion. The facilitator encourages participants to articulate the reasons behind their positions, to consider the consequences of the various options, and to recognise the elements of value present even in perspectives different from their own.
A further approach involves **using generative questions** that keep the reflection process open. Rather than asking what the correct answer is, educators and youth workers invite the group to consider what makes a choice difficult, the values at stake, the needs that emerge, and possible alternatives that have not yet been explored. The questions thus become tools for broadening reasoning rather than for testing knowledge or steering the discussion towards a conclusion.

This competence is also evident in the ability to **recognise and value shifts in perspective** that may emerge during dialogue. When a person modifies, elaborates on or questions their own position, the facilitator does not interpret this change as a sign of inconsistency or weakness, but recognises it as an indicator of learning and the development of critical thinking. Similarly, value is placed on the ability to integrate elements from different perspectives without the need to adhere fully to any one of them.

One particularly significant aspect concerns the ability to **make explicit the implicit dilemmas** that emerge during the discussion. Discussions often become deadlocked because people defend seemingly irreconcilable positions without recognising the underlying tension that unites them. Through facilitation, the group is helped to shift its focus from the responses to the dilemmas they express, thereby making the underlying values, needs and contradictions visible.

The skill of Dilemmatic Thinking is also evident in the ability to **avoid polarising dynamics,** by intervening when the discussion becomes entrenched in simplistic oppositions or when certain perspectives are ridiculed, delegitimised or excluded. In such cases, facilitation does not consist of mediating between the parties or seeking a compromise, but of guiding the group back to exploring the complexity of the issue.

Finally, educators and youth workers demonstrate this competence when they **conclude the process without feeling the need to resolve the dilemma by forcing a synthesis.** The value of the activity is not measured by the achievement of a consensus or the identification of a shared solution, but by the quality of the questions raised, the depth of the reasoning and the greater awareness gained regarding the complexity of the issue addressed. From this perspective, even a dilemma that remains unresolved can represent a significant educational outcome, as it demonstrates the group's ability to navigate uncertainty without abandoning dialogue.

Table 3.7 – The "Dilemma Thinking" Skill in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Scope of the Competence	Objective	Key Elements
Knowledge	To understand the theoretical foundations of Dilemmatic Thinking and its role in the development of critical thinking, in managing complexity and in building democratic dialogical processes.	To understand the concept of a dilemma as a tension between legitimate values; to understand the contribution of the Betzavta method, John Dewey's reflective thinking and Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children; to recognise the difference between problems and dilemmas; to understand the role of doubt, complexity and the plurality of perspectives in educational processes; to understand the cognitive mechanisms that encourage polarisation and simplification.
Skills	To facilitate reflection processes that help the group explore complex issues without seeking immediate or polarised answers.	Ask open-ended and generative questions; construct and facilitate authentic dilemmas; distinguish between positions, interests, needs and values; bring tensions and contradictions to the fore; guide the group in exploring different perspectives; recognise and value shifts in perspective; use doubt as an educational resource; support processes of collective reflection without influencing their outcomes.
Attitudes and Values	To adopt an educational approach centred on complexity, dialogue and the shared exploration of controversial issues.	A willingness to live with uncertainty; epistemological humility; curiosity about the diversity of perspectives; confidence in the transformative potential of dialogue; and an appreciation of complexity and doubt as fundamental elements of democratic learning.
Observable Behaviours	Act as a facilitator of dialogue, encouraging a shift from fixed positions to an understanding of underlying principles.	Ask open-ended questions; rephrase to check understanding; distinguish between opinions and lived experiences; intervene when the discussion becomes at an impasse; encourage personal expression; value complexity and maintain balance in facilitation.

3.5.4 Suggested Activities

The activities presented in this section translate Dilemmatic Thinking into active learning experiences, in which participants are invited to engage with situations characterised by tensions, ambivalence and seemingly irreconcilable interests. Through experiential methodologies inspired in particular by the **Betzavta** method, these activities do not aim to identify the 'correct' solution, but rather to highlight the dilemmas that underlie relationships, to recognise the complexity of situations and to develop the ability to explore different perspectives without resorting to polarisation.

Activity 1 - The Majority Decides

Aim of the Activity

This activity invites participants to critically examine the relationship between democracy, rights and the principle of majority rule, challenging the often-taken-for-granted idea that every collective decision must be entrusted to a majority vote.

Through a series of dilemmas, participants are guided to explore the criteria that inform their choices, going beyond the immediate response to reflect on the values, beliefs and principles underpinning them.

The aim is not to determine which answers are correct, but to bring to light the reasoning behind one's own thinking, fostering awareness of any tensions, inconsistencies or paradoxes present within one's own value system.

Skills Developed

- Dilemma-based thinking;
- Recognition of one's own criteria for judgement;
- Awareness of the values that guide decisions;
- Ability to justify one's reasoning;
- Willingness to question one's own beliefs;
- Tolerance of complexity and ambivalence.

Carrying out the Activity

The facilitator distributes a worksheet containing a series of controversial issues. For each statement, participants must individually answer **"Yes"** or **"No"** to the question:

«Should this decision be taken by a majority?».

The issues might include, for example:

- A ban on smoking in public spaces;
- The display of religious symbols in schools;
- The introduction of a universal basic income;
- The construction of a regional nuclear power station;
- Immigration policies;
- The right to abortion;
- Access to gender affirmation treatments for minors;
- The right to end one's life;

- The legalisation of cannabis;
- Their country's entry into war.

Statements can be modified according to the most polarized topics in the educational contexts youth worker is operating and taking into account the specific context. It is important to clarify that participants are not being asked to express their opinion on the issue, but solely to decide whether that specific issue should be left to the will of the majority or whether it requires other decision-making criteria.

It is also important to remember that the decision must not be influenced by how one person thinks the majority would vote on the various issues, but should be based on what each person believes should or should not fall within the mandate of the majority.

Once everyone has completed their individual forms, participants spend a few minutes re-reading their answers, trying to identify any recurring themes or inconsistencies.

Subsequently, the discussion can take place in pairs during a **reflective walk,** or in a plenary session.

The focus is not on individual answers, but on the principles that underpin them.

Debriefing

The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

- What criteria guided your answers?
- Is there a common thread running through your 'yes' and 'no' answers?
- Did you notice any contradictions in your reasoning?
- Were there any questions that you found particularly difficult? Why?
- Which values seem to guide your decisions the most?
- During the discussion, did you discover aspects of your way of thinking that you had never previously articulated?
- Did you change any of your beliefs after listening to others' reasoning?

In the final debriefing, it is useful to emphasise that the aim of the activity is not to reach a consensus, but rather to highlight the dilemmas inherent in our way of thinking.

In line with the **Betzavta** method, the focus is not on identifying the 'correct' answer, but on recognising the internal tensions between principles that we consider equally important, such as freedom, equality, security, self-determination or the protection of rights.

Guidance for Facilitators

It is essential that the facilitator maintains a position of **equidistance** with respect to the various perspectives that emerge, avoiding steering the group towards specific conclusions.

Attention should be continually shifted from the content to the reasoning processes, helping participants to articulate the values, experiences and beliefs that underpin their positions.

Should polarisation arise, it may be useful to invite the group to temporarily set aside the search for the 'right' answer and explore the underlying dilemma, asking themselves which principles are in tension and why.

Activity 2 - How Free Are We?

Aim of the Activity

This activity enables participants to explore the concept of freedom by linking theoretical reflection with practical experience.

Through an initial phase of group discussion followed by a practical experience, participants discover how seemingly shared values take on different meanings and how, in practice, freedom is constantly intertwined with the needs, limitations and freedom of other people.

The aim is to highlight the relational nature of freedom and to encourage reflection on the tensions that arise between individual autonomy, mutual responsibility and democratic coexistence, potentially bringing to light the contradictions between theory and practice.

Skills Developed

- Dilemma-based thinking;
- Critical exploration of values;
- Awareness of the tensions between individual rights and relationships;
- Ability to negotiate shared meanings;
- Reflection on democratic dynamics;
- Willingness to question one's own beliefs.

Conducting the Activity

The facilitator first invites participants to position themselves in the room by answering the question:

«How important is freedom to you?».

The closer a person stands to the centre of the room, the greater the importance they attach to freedom.

The group is then divided into sub-groups of five or six people. The groups can be formed by bringing together people with similar or very different positions, depending on the educational objectives.

Each group is given the task of developing a shared definition of **freedom**.

The definitions are then presented to the whole group and discussed.

At the end of the discussion, the facilitator hands out a piece of wool to each person.

Each person decides for themselves how long their thread should be. But they must not be told what the wool yarn will be used for

Next, each group must tie themselves together using only the thread they have been given. The thread can be tied around their wrists, hands or fingers, and each group is free to decide on the arrangement.

When all the groups are ready, the facilitator announces that the break has begun and that, until the end of the activity, no one may untie the knots.

The break lasts approximately from fifteen to thirty minutes.

During this time, participants spontaneously experience the consequences of their choices and learn the need to coordinate continuously with others.

Once the break is over, the groups disband and the debriefing begins.

Debriefing

The discussion can be guided by a few questions:

- What happened during the break?
- How did you make decisions within the group?
- Did any conflicts or conflicting needs arise?
- How did you feel?
- Did you feel that your freedom was restricted in any way?
- How did you try to reconcile individual needs with those of the group?
- Did the principles set out in the initial definition of freedom remain the same throughout the experience?
- Has your understanding of freedom changed?
- How democratic is the way we make decisions when our needs conflict with those of other people?

In the final debriefing, it is useful to highlight that the dilemma is not about choosing between freedom and the lack of freedom, but about how individual freedom is inevitably intertwined with that of other people.

In line with the **Betzavta** method, the activity reveals how many values, whilst appearing to be shared in theory, take on different meanings when put to the test in real-life relationships.

Guidance for Facilitators

During the break, it is important for the facilitator to observe without intervening, noting the strategies spontaneously adopted by the groups, their decision-making processes, any emerging leadership roles, and dynamics of inclusion or exclusion.

During the debriefing, it is useful to constantly redirect attention from the behaviour of individual participants to the dilemmas that the experience has brought to light.

The aim is not to assess how collaborative the group has been, but to help participants recognise the tensions between autonomy, mutual responsibility, coexistence and democratic participation, showing how values are not abstract principles but concepts that take on meaning in real-life situations.

3.6 Facilitating Dialogue: Techniques for Leading Group Discussions

> «No one educates anyone else; no one educates themselves: human beings educate one another, through the mediation of the world».
>
> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

3.6.1 Why Facilitation Techniques Represent the Sixth Pillar

With the sixth pillar, the Nonviolent Debate model moves from establishing an educational stance to translating this into the practice of facilitation. Whilst the previous chapters have defined the skills required to support dialogue (e.g. Space of Courage, Active Listening, Dilemmatic Thinking), this chapter focuses on how these skills are put into practice when leading group discussions.

The research that accompanied the development of the curriculum has highlighted how educators and youth workers recognise the educational value of dialogue on controversial issues, but frequently encounter difficulties in managing it in practice. The main challenges relate to facilitating discussions in the face of polarisation, ensuring balanced participation, managing emotions and allocating speaking time, without assuming a directive role or steering the outcome of the discussion. Rather than new theoretical frameworks, there is therefore a need for methodologies that enable the principles of Nonviolent Debate to be transformed into concrete facilitation practices.

Facilitation techniques constitute this operational dimension of the model. They are not merely organisational tools or procedures to be applied mechanically, but pedagogical mechanisms through which the approach developed in the five preceding pillars takes shape in interaction with the group. Every methodological choice – from the layout of the space to the rules for taking the floor, from the formulation of questions to time management – contributes to shaping the quality of the dialogue, the opportunities for participation and the relationships between participants.

Facilitating a discussion therefore means designing and guiding processes in which the group can put into practice the skills that the model considers fundamental. The methodologies become tools to support mutual listening, make conflictual dynamics observable, explore different perspectives without fuelling polarisation, and encourage participation based on the equality of those involved.

From this perspective, facilitation skills form the linchpin of the entire Nonviolent Debate model. They put into practice the pedagogical principles developed in the previous chapters and offer methodologies consistent with a conception of dialogue understood not as a search for the correct answer, but as a process of shared learning, democratic participation and the collective construction of meaning.

3.6.2 Theoretical Framework: from the Educational Approach to Facilitation Techniques

Facilitation techniques represent the methodological dimension of Nonviolent Debate. Rather than a repertoire of tools, they constitute the means through which the educational approach described in the previous pillars takes shape in practice. Indeed, the same methodology can generate very different experiences depending on the intentions with which it is proposed, the facilitation choices adopted and the facilitator's ability to interpret what is happening within the group.

For this reason, in the Nonviolent Debate model, facilitation is not merely the management of activities. To facilitate means creating the conditions for dialogue to become a learning experience, in which people can participate meaningfully, engage with different perspectives, navigate conflict without being overwhelmed by it, and explore complexity without reducing it to a clash between irreconcilable positions.

Methodologies are therefore not neutral tools. Every choice regarding the layout of the space, the composition of groups, time management, the procedures for taking the floor, or the type of questions asked helps to shape the relationships between participants and influence the quality of

the discussion. Techniques do not merely organise an activity: they create opportunities for participation, distribute power, make certain voices more or less visible, and encourage specific modes of interaction. From this perspective, the principles developed in the previous pillars constitute the criteria that guide the selection and use of methodologies.

Methodological competence therefore lies not so much in knowing a wide repertoire of activities, but in knowing how to select, adapt and use techniques in a way that is consistent with the educational objectives of Nonviolent Debate. It is this pedagogical intent that transforms a methodology into a tool capable of promoting democratic participation, shared learning and the collective construction of meaning.

3.6.3 The Dimensions of Competence

Facilitating dialogue represents the most practical dimension of the Nonviolent Debate model. Although it is expressed in practical terms through methodologies and tools, its effectiveness depends above all on the competence with which educators and youth workers design, lead and support the processes of discussion. Facilitation does not, in fact, mean applying techniques in a standardised way, but consciously selecting and adapting methodologies in accordance with the educational objectives, the characteristics of the group and the dynamics that emerge during the dialogue.

Knowledge

In the Nonviolent Debate model, group facilitation is based first and foremost on an understanding of the processes that enable authentic dialogue and meaningful participation. Methodologies represent, in fact, only the most visible part of the facilitator's work: their effectiveness depends on the ability to interpret the context, understand group dynamics and select tools consistent with the educational objectives and the needs that emerge during the process.

A key area of knowledge concerns how **groups function as dynamic systems**. Educators and youth workers must understand that every group develops, over time, balances, roles, implicit norms and power relations that profoundly influence the quality of participation. The distribution of speaking time, the level of mutual trust, the presence of informal leadership, or the tendency of some people to remain on the sidelines are not secondary elements, but factors that affect the very possibility of building a genuinely participatory dialogue. Facilitation therefore means being familiar with these processes and understanding how they can be supported or rebalanced through informed methodological choices.

A second fundamental area of knowledge concerns the **relationship between methodology and educational aims**. Each facilitation technique opens up different possibilities: some encourage the expression of individual opinions, others foster mutual listening, whilst others enable participants to explore the complexity of a topic, construct shared meanings or stimulate processes of critical reflection. Competent facilitation therefore requires not only knowledge of different methodologies, but above all the ability to understand which tool is most appropriate in relation to the stage of the process, the objectives and the characteristics of the group.

It is also necessary to understand that **methodologies are not neutral tools**. Every organisational choice – from the layout of the space to the composition of sub-groups, from time management to the procedures for speaking, right through to the type of question asked – influences relationships within the group and determines which voices manage to emerge, which perspectives are valued and which, by contrast, risk remaining invisible. Facilitation therefore requires an awareness of the profoundly pedagogical nature of methodological choices.

Knowledge of facilitation also includes an understanding of **the conditions that enable people to take the risk of engaging in dialogue**. Addressing controversial issues involves, in fact, exposing oneself, questioning one's own perspectives and confronting potential disagreement. For this reason, educators and youth workers must know how to design *"Brave Spaces"*, so that vulnerability can become a resource for learning rather than an obstacle to participation.

Finally, competent facilitation requires knowledge of **the** specific **educational approach of Nonviolent Debate**. The facilitator's role is not to direct the discussion, steer conclusions or lead the group towards a shared position, but to create the conditions for dialogue to unfold through mutual listening, the recognition of differences and the exploration of diverse perspectives. Methodologies thus become tools at the service of an educational process in which meaning is collectively constructed through participation.

Overall, knowledge relating to facilitation therefore concerns the ability to understand group processes, the role of methodologies and their educational impact. It enables one to design and use methodologies in a purposeful way, selecting the most appropriate tools on a case-by-case basis to support learning, participation and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

Skills

In the Nonviolent Debate model, facilitation skills relate to the ability to translate the principles of nonviolent dialogue and knowledge of group processes into concrete methodological choices. These skills are not merely about mastering a repertoire of techniques, but encompass the ability to select, adapt and use different tools in relation to the context, the educational objectives and the dynamics that emerge during the discussion.

Educators and youth workers develop this competence through their ability to:

- **Design and structure group discussions in line with educational objectives**, defining methods, timings, spaces and tasks that encourage meaningful participation and create the conditions for dialogue to unfold in a safe and inclusive manner.
- **Select and adapt facilitation methods in line with the context and the group's needs**, using techniques not as rigid procedures but as flexible tools to be tailored according to the level of trust, the group dynamics, the complexity of the topic and the objectives of the programme.
- **Manage the allocation of speaking time and promote balanced participation**, recognising communication imbalances, highlighting less visible perspectives and creating opportunities for each person to contribute to the discussion according to their own abilities and preferences.
- **Facilitate the emergence and exploration of different perspectives**, using open-ended questions, reflective exercises and participatory methods that help the group move beyond simplistic interpretations and delve deeper into the values, needs and assumptions underpinning the various positions.
- **Navigate situations of tension, disagreement and conflict within the group**, keeping the discussion within an educational and transformative framework, without seeking to eliminate conflict or steer the group towards a predetermined solution.
- **To use facilitation methods to support critical thinking and Dilemma Thinking**, helping people to recognise the complexity of the issues at hand, explore the consequences of different possibilities and question their own criteria for judgement.
- **To observe and assess the quality of the dialogue process**, paying attention not only to the content that emerges, but also to the ways in which participants interact, the level of participation, the presence of the conditions of the 'Space of Courage', and the consistency between the methodology used and the educational objectives.

Facilitation skills therefore represent the means by which the principles of Nonviolent Debate are transformed into concrete practices for supporting groups. They enable educators and youth workers to use these methodologies as educational tools capable of fostering listening, participation, the comparison of different perspectives and the shared construction of meaning.

Attitudes and Values

In the Nonviolent Debate model, attitudes and values represent the dimension of the educational stance that guides how one applies one's knowledge and facilitation skills. Methodological techniques, in fact, do not automatically produce inclusive and transformative dialogical processes: their effectiveness depends on the way in which they are presented, the intentions that guide them and the quality of the relationship built with the group.

Facilitation competence therefore requires the development of an approach based on trust in the dialogic process, on the recognition of the plurality of perspectives, and on a willingness to embrace uncertainty without seeking to eliminate it through immediate answers or predefined solutions.

Educators and youth workers develop this aspect through their ability to:

- **Cultivate openness and curiosity towards different perspectives**, recognising that every position expressed in a discussion stems from experiences, values, needs and interpretations of reality that deserve to be explored before being judged.
- **Embrace complexity and uncertainty as integral elements of democratic dialogue**, avoiding pressure to reach quick conclusions and recognising the educational value of processes of exploration, reflection and discussion.
- **Maintain a stance of 'Equivicinanza' (Engaged Equal Proximity) towards the different positions within the group**, facilitating the exploration of perspectives without assuming the role of determining which opinion is more legitimate or which conclusion should emerge in an empathic way and recognising illegitimate interests.
- **Recognise the educational value of conflict and disagreement**, viewing them not as obstacles to be eliminated, but as opportunities through which to develop mutual understanding, critical thinking and democratic awareness.
- **Develop patience and trust in the pace of the process**, understanding that authentic dialogue often requires pausing to consider open-ended questions, navigating moments of ambiguity and allowing the group to progressively construct new shared meanings.
- **Assume ethical responsibility for the power of facilitation**, recognising that every methodological choice influences opportunities for participation, relational dynamics and the visibility of the different voices within the group.
- **To practise epistemic humility and a willingness to reconsider one's own viewpoints**, recognising that the facilitator is also part of the dialogical process and can learn from encountering different perspectives.

The attitudes and values of facilitation therefore represent the dimension that ensures the use of methodologies is consistent with the principles of Nonviolent Debate. They ensure that techniques are not used as tools to control the discussion, but as means to create conditions for participation, mutual listening and shared learning.

Observable Behaviours

Facilitation competence becomes observable through the practical ways in which educators and youth workers plan, lead and support group discussions. These behaviours do not simply represent

the technical application of a methodology, but the ability to integrate tools, an educational approach and attention to relational dynamics in order to support dialogical processes consistent with the principles of Nonviolent Debate.

Educators and youth workers demonstrate this competence when:

- **They prepare and structure dialogue activities in a deliberate manner**, defining objectives, timings, participation methods and tasks consistent with the group's level of maturity, the topic being addressed and the educational aims of the programme.
- **They select and use facilitation techniques appropriate to the context**, justifying their methodological choices and adapting tools and working methods in response to the dynamics that emerge whilst working with the group.
- **They create conditions that encourage broad and meaningful participation**, using facilitation methods that allow people with different levels of confidence, experience or communication skills to find their place in the discussion.
- **They consciously manage time, space and speaking turns**, intervening to rebalance participation where necessary and fostering an atmosphere in which dialogue can develop without being dominated by a few voices.
- **They formulate questions and tasks that support reflection and deeper exploration**, avoiding steering the answers and using tools that help the group explore the topic at hand in a more nuanced way.
- **They observe and recognise group dynamics during the discussion**, paying attention to verbal and non-verbal cues, levels of engagement, potential exclusions and changes in the group atmosphere.
- **They intervene during moments of tension or communication difficulties whilst maintaining the focus on the process**, using facilitation strategies that enable the group to navigate disagreement without interrupting the dialogue.
- **They use methodologies as tools to support collective learning**, linking the activities carried out to processes of listening, discussion, participation and the shared construction of meaning.
- **At the end of the activities**, **they reflect on the facilitation process**, assessing the effectiveness of the methodological choices made, the level of participation achieved and any adjustments needed for future sessions.

Taken together, these behaviours demonstrate a facilitation competence understood not merely as the technical management of a discussion, but as the ability to guide groups and individuals through structured, inclusive and constructive dialogue experiences.

Table 3.8 – The "Facilitating Dialogue" Competence in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Dimension of the Competence	Objective	Key Elements
Knowledge	To understand the principles, processes and methodologies that enable the effective facilitation of group discussions, recognising the role of techniques as educational tools in the service of dialogue and participation.	Understand how groups function as dynamic systems; understand the relationship between methodology, educational objectives and participatory dynamics; be familiar with various facilitation techniques and the purposes they serve; understand how the structure of the space, timing and modes of participation influence relationships within the group; recognise the role of facilitation in creating inclusive and participatory contexts; to understand the principles of Nonviolent Debate that guide the selection and use of methodologies.

Skills	To use facilitation techniques and methodologies in a deliberate and flexible manner, adapting them to the context, the educational objectives and the dynamics emerging within the group.	Design and structure group discussions; select methodologies appropriate to the context; adapt tools and activities to the group's needs; manage time, space and ways of participating; encourage a balanced distribution of speaking time; formulate effective questions and instructions; navigate moments of tension or communication difficulties; observe and evaluate the dialogue process; use techniques as tools to support listening, participation and collective learning.
Attitudesand Values	Adopt an educational approach focused on the process, inclusive participation and trust in the transformative potential of group dialogue.	Trust in participatory processes; attention to and sensitivity towards relational dynamics; flexibility and a willingness to adapt one's approach; awareness of one's role and impact on the group; valuing the participation of all individuals; fostering a positive group atmosphere; responsible use of methodologies; a willingness to reflect on and learn from the facilitation experience.
Observable Behaviours	Applying facilitation skills to the practical conduct of group discussions in line with the principles of Nonviolent Debate.	Preparing activities with appropriate objectives, timings and methods; selecting and using techniques appropriate to the context; creating conditions conducive to participation; managing speaking turns and group dynamics; using questions and prompts that encourage discussion; recognising signs of exclusion, tension or imbalance in participation; intervening to support the dialogue process; adapting the methodology where necessary; reflecting on the effectiveness of the facilitation and on possible improvements.

3.6.4 Facilitation Techniques for Conducting Dialogue

Facilitation competence is concretely expressed through the ability to select and use methodologies appropriate to the different stages of a dialogue process. The techniques presented in the following sections are tools through which educators and youth workers can guide groups in fostering discussion, adapting methods, timing and structures to the characteristics of the context and emerging needs.

Each technique serves specific educational purposes: to encourage the start of a discussion, to support balanced participation, to bring out different perspectives, to explore a controversial topic in depth, or to manage moments of disagreement. The choice of methodology therefore does not depend on the application of a pre-established procedure, but on the facilitator's ability to read the group and identify the tool most consistent with the objective at that moment.

The methodologies proposed constitute a collection of tried-and-tested practices designed to support processes of participatory and nonviolent dialogue. For each technique, we will describe how it works, its educational aims, possible ways of using it and key considerations for the facilitator, offering practical guidance that can be adapted to different groups and educational contexts.

The aim is not to provide a single model for facilitation, but to make available a set of flexible tools through which the principles of Nonviolent Debate can be translated into the daily practice of facilitation.

Sociometries

Educational Aims

Sociometries are facilitation techniques designed to make visible the positions, perceptions and orientations present within the group regarding a specific issue. Through spatial positioning, they allow people to express their point of view immediately and not necessarily verbally, bringing to light the diversity of perspectives present before a more in-depth discussion begins.

In the Nonviolent Debate model, the purpose of the technique is not to measure consensus or identify a prevailing position, but to make the group's complexity observable. The spatial arrangement thus serves as a starting point for dialogue: it enables the recognition of common ground, differences and nuances, creating the conditions to explore the reasons underpinning the various positions without turning them into rigid affiliations or opposing camps.

Description and Method of Use

The technique involves presenting the group with a question, a statement or an issue, in relation to which each participant is invited to position themselves in the space according to their degree of agreement, disagreement or proximity to what has been expressed.

The layout can be organised along a continuum, for example using an imaginary line running from total agreement to total disagreement, with all possible intermediate positions. In this case, participants position themselves along the axis according to their perceived stance, creating a spatial representation of the various nuances present within the group.

A second method, however, involves the facilitator acting as the central reference point within the space. Depending on the instructions given, the centre may represent a position of total agreement, total disagreement or a neutral stance on the issue at hand. In this configuration, the facilitator may stand on a chair or at a raised point, so as to have an overall view of the group's arrangement and observe the distribution of positions within the space.

In the case of the continuum, the arrangement tends to be more frontal; in the central-point method, the space takes on a more circular structure. In both methods, the central element is not the final position reached by the participants, but the process through which the group makes its differences visible and can begin to explore the reasons behind them.

After positioning, a discussion phase may follow in which the facilitator invites some participants to share the reasons behind their choice, paying attention both to the most distant positions and to the intermediate or less immediately visible ones. The ensuing discussion allows the simple representation of opinions to be transformed into an opportunity for listening and deeper exploration.

When to Use it

Sociometries can be used at various stages of the dialogue process. At the start of an activity, they enable the group's starting point to be explored, making the distribution of positions visible and providing the facilitator with useful insights into the level of complexity surrounding the proposed topic.

They can also be repeated at the end of the discussion, as a tool for reviewing the process that has taken place. Repositioning within the space allows us to observe whether and how listening to different perspectives, the emergence of new elements or a deeper exploration of the issue have altered the way in which people interpret the topic under discussion.

A change in position should not be seen as an indicator of the debate's success, nor as a goal to be pursued. A person may change their position, maintain it, or make it more nuanced and informed. The educational value of the technique lies in its ability to make the process of reflection visible, showing how dialogue can transform not necessarily opinions themselves, but the way in which they are understood, argued and related to those of others.

Links with Nonviolent Debate

Sociometries contribute to the creation of **a 'Space of Courage'** because they invite each person to take the risk of taking a stand within the group, without immediately requiring them to defend or justify their choice. When accompanied by careful facilitation, the technique allows for the recognition of the diversity of perspectives present and helps create a context in which dissent can be made visible without turning into confrontation.

Sociometries are also an effective tool for developing **Dilemmatic Thinking**, as they highlight that a controversial issue can rarely be reduced to just two opposing positions. The presence of intermediate positions, nuances and different lines of reasoning helps the group to recognise the complexity of the issues at hand and to navigate dissent without reducing it to a binary logic.

Points for the Facilitator to Bear in Mind

The facilitator is asked to introduce the technique by making it clear that positioning represents a snapshot of how each person interprets the issue at that moment, and not an identity label or a position to be defended.

During the debriefing, it is important to steer the discussion towards exploring the reasons behind the different choices, ensuring that the discussion does not turn into a confrontation between opposing sides or a search for the most convincing position.

It is also important to explain to the group that the chosen position is not necessarily final; whilst exploring and listening to one's own motivations and those of others, it is possible to change one's position freely.

When sociometry is repeated at the end of a process, it is equally important to avoid attributing a positive value in itself to a change of position. In Nonviolent Debate, the aim is not to change people's opinions, but to promote a more informed and nuanced understanding of the issues addressed and the perspectives present within the group.

World Café

Educational Aims

The World Café is a facilitation method that encourages the shared exploration of complex issues through a series of small-group conversations. The structure of this technique allows a large number of people to exchange views informally, gradually bringing together different ideas, experiences and perspectives.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, the World Café does not aim to produce a common position or steer the group towards a consensus, but rather to create the conditions in which different perspectives can come together, enrich one another and contribute to the collective construction of new meanings. Rotating between tables allows ideas to circulate within the group, fostering a dialogical process in which each conversation builds on what has emerged in previous ones.

Description and How to Use it

Participants are divided into small groups, generally comprising four to six people, each of which takes their place around a table dedicated to a specific question or topic. Each table addresses the same issue or different aspects of a broader topic, depending on the objectives of the activity.

A spokesperson is appointed for each table, who remains at the same table for the duration of the activity. The other participants discuss the proposed question for a set period of time, noting down ideas, keywords or connections that emerge during the conversation.

At the end of each round, the participants move to a new table, whilst the spokesperson remains at their station. Before starting the new discussion, the spokesperson briefly summarises what emerged in the previous groups, thus providing a basis on which the new group can further develop their reflections. In this way, each conversation links to the previous ones and contributes to the gradual development of a shared understanding of the topic.

The facilitator guides the process by ensuring clear instructions, managing the timing and fostering a constructive discussion environment. In the final phase, there may be a collective debriefing session in which the key points emerging from the various tables are brought together, highlighting connections, differences, unresolved issues and new questions.

When to Use it

The World Café can be used at various stages of a dialogue-based process. In the early stages, it allows participants to explore the knowledge, experiences and perceptions within the group, creating an initial overview of perspectives on the topic under discussion.

It is particularly effective when the group is large and the aim is to ensure broader participation than a plenary discussion would allow, or when tackling complex issues for which it is necessary to gather multiple points of view before proceeding to a more in-depth discussion.

The technique can also be used after a phase in which positions have been identified – for example, following a sociometry exercise – to facilitate the transition from the expression of opinions to the exploration of the reasons, values and experiences underpinning those positions.

It can also be used in the concluding phase of a process as a tool for collective reflection, enabling the group to recognise what they have learnt, changes in their perspectives and new questions that have emerged through discussion.

Links with Nonviolent Debate

The World Café contributes to the creation of **a "Brave Space"**, as it organises dialogue in small groups where participants can gradually take on the risk of engaging in discussion. The continuity ensured by the spokesperson and the opportunity to build each conversation on the work done by others foster shared responsibility for the quality of the dialogue and the collective construction of meaning.

The technique supports **Active Listening**, as each group is called upon to take on board and build upon the contributions left by previous groups, recognising the value of the perspectives that have already emerged rather than starting from scratch each time. Listening thus becomes a prerequisite for moving the discussion forward.

The World Café also encourages the exploration **of the values, needs and experiences** that underpin the various positions. The sequence of conversations allows for a progressive deepening of the issues addressed, going beyond the mere expression of opinions.

Through the circulation of ideas between tables, the methodology also supports **Dilemmatic Thinking**, helping the group to recognise the complexity of the topics under discussion and to relate different perspectives to one another without reducing them to a conflict between irreconcilable alternatives.

Points for the Facilitator to Bear in Mind

It is important to clarify that the World Café is not a technique designed to rapidly produce consensus or reach a shared decision. The educational value of the methodology lies in the process of collective exploration and in the opportunity to broaden understanding of the topic through engagement with different perspectives.

The facilitator must ensure that the role of spokesperson does not turn into a position of leadership or control over the conversation. Their function is to preserve the record of the dialogue and facilitate continuity between the different groups, not to present a definitive summary or determine which contributions are most relevant.

It is also important to carefully design the guiding questions, avoiding formulations that are too generic or geared towards an expected answer. Open-ended, exploration-oriented questions enable deeper conversations that are consistent with the principles of Nonviolent Debate.

Finally, the facilitator must take into account the group's level of familiarity with participatory dialogue and provide clear guidance on how to interact, so that the constant reordering of groups does not lead to a loss of focus but becomes an opportunity for mutual learning and the shared construction of meaning.

Daisy

Educational Aims

'Daisy' is a facilitation technique that allows for an alternation between moments of discussion in small groups and moments of dialogue between representatives of those same groups. Its structure encourages the collective development of positions, distinguishing between the time spent on shared deliberation and that spent on their public presentation.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, the aim of the technique is not to ensure that certain positions prevail or to seek consensus, but to promote a form of dialogue in which every contribution arises from a process of collective reflection. The discussion thus shifts from the expression of individual opinions to the exploration of the reasons, values and experiences developed within the groups, making dialogue a process of shared meaning-making.

The Daisy also introduces a particular conception of representation. The spokesperson does not assume the role of a leader or a delegate called upon to speak on behalf of the group according to their own interpretation, but rather that of a custodian of a collective process, for which they remain constantly accountable to the group itself. Representation thus becomes a dynamic and shared process, founded on shared responsibility rather than on the delegation of decision-making power.

Description and Instructions for Use

Participants are divided into small groups and invited to discuss a topic, a question or a prompt proposed by the facilitator. Each group is asked to explore the issue, share different points of view and identify the main points that have emerged from the discussion.

At the end of the discussion, each group appoints a spokesperson, tasked with representing the work carried out collectively. However, the spokesperson's mandate remains in the hands of the group, which continues to support and monitor their work throughout the discussion phase.

The spokespersons then gather in the centre of the space, forming a circle, whilst the other participants take their places behind their respective representatives, symbolically forming the 'petals' of the daisy. During the discussion, the group continues to support the spokesperson's work, ensuring that their presentation remains consistent with what has been collectively developed.

Should the spokesperson deviate significantly from the mandate received or introduce purely personal considerations, the group may request a time-out, in which case a brief period of internal discussion takes place, or they may identify another person to take on the role of spokesperson and request a change to make additions. In this way, representation remains a tool for presenting the collective work and does not become an exercise in individual leadership.

The activity concludes with a plenary session dedicated not only to the content that has emerged, but also to the process of formulating positions and the ways in which dialogue has developed between the groups.

When to Use it

The Daisy method can be used when you wish to explore a complex topic in depth through a structured comparison of different perspectives, particularly in large groups where a plenary discussion might risk marginalising certain voices.

It is particularly suitable when the group needs to develop collective positions or discuss controversial issues, as it allows for an initial phase of reflection in small groups in a safe space before presenting views publicly.

It can also be used following a phase in which individual opinions have been expressed – such as a sociometry exercise – to facilitate the transition from the expression of positions to their further elaboration and deeper understanding.

Links with Nonviolent Debate

The Daisy supports the creation of **a "Brave Space"** because it alternates between moments of discussion in small groups and moments of public presentation, gradually guiding participants towards taking the risk of dialogue. The opportunity to develop a position together before presenting it in the joint discussion fosters shared responsibility and makes public presentation more accessible, without eliminating the complexity or vulnerability that such discussion entails.

The technique promotes **Active Listening**, as it requires both the spokesperson to listen to and represent the group's thinking, and participants to accept the positions developed by other groups without immediately reducing them to opposing positions.

The particular form of representation envisaged by the Daisy also reflects the principle of **equivalence** that underlies the Nonviolent Debate model. Those who take on the role of spokesperson do not acquire a position of greater power than the group, but exercise a temporary function of reporting back, whilst remaining constantly connected to the people they represent. In this way, the technique prevents delegation from turning into a power dynamic and maintains the responsibility for dialogue as a shared process.

Through the process of constructing a shared position, the technique also encourages the exploration of **the values, needs and foundations of the various positions**, as the group must consider which elements are truly significant and which aspects can be linked to different perspectives.

Finally, the methodology supports **Dilemmatic Thinking**, as it highlights that even within the same group, nuances, doubts and differing interpretations can coexist. The position reached therefore does not represent a single, unambiguous truth, but a provisional synthesis built through dialogue.

Points for the Facilitator to Bear in Mind

It is important to clarify that the spokesperson's role is not to assume a leadership position or to represent themselves, but to give voice to the group's collective work.

The facilitator must ensure that the process of reaching a shared position does not become a means of pressuring the group into consensus or of eliminating internal differences. An effective synthesis may, in fact, include doubts, tensions or unresolved issues. It is also important to monitor power dynamics in the selection of spokespersons, ensuring that the role is not automatically assumed by those with greater communicative confidence or recognition within the group.

This technique must be accompanied by a continued focus on the process of listening and representation, ensuring that the exchange between spokespersons does not turn into a competition between groups or a mere defence of individual positions. Even the option to request an internal discussion or to replace the spokesperson is not a tool for control, but a way of preserving the collective nature of representation.

At the end of the activity, it is useful to set aside time for reflection not only on the content that has emerged, but also on how the group developed its positions, managed internal differences and represented the diversity of perspectives.

Speed Debating

Educational Aims

Speed debating is a facilitation technique that enables participants to discuss the same topic through a series of brief one-to-one conversations. Rotating participants encourages interaction with different interlocutors, offering the opportunity to hear a variety of experiences, arguments and viewpoints within a limited timeframe. The technique is particularly useful in the early stages of a process, when the aim is to bring out different ideas, experiences and interpretations regarding a topic, or as a preparatory activity for a more in-depth discussion.

In the nonviolent debate model, the aim of the technique is not to convince the other person or to defend one's own position, but to practise the ability to repeatedly engage in dialogue with different perspectives. The sequence of meetings allows for the gradual challenging of oversimplified interpretations of reality, recognising the variety of interpretations present within the group.

Description and How to Use it



Participants arrange themselves in two concentric circles, one inner and one outer, so that each person in the inner circle faces a person in the outer circle.

The facilitator poses a question, a statement or a prompt for reflection. Each pair has a limited amount of time, generally between one and three minutes, to discuss the proposed topic. Depending on the objectives of the activity, the time may be divided equally between the two people or left to the pair to manage as they see fit.

At the end of the allotted time, the outer circle moves one position round, either clockwise or anti-clockwise, whilst the inner circle remains stationary. This forms new pairs, who then tackle a new question or the same question with a different conversation partner. The cycle can be repeated several times, allowing each participant to engage with different people and perspectives.

At the end of the activity, a plenary discussion provides an opportunity to share the most significant points that emerged during the various exchanges and to reflect on how engaging with different people has enriched or altered their understanding of the topic.

When to Use it

Speed Debating is particularly suitable in the early stages of a dialogue-based process, when the aim is to quickly encourage participation and foster mutual understanding of the different perspectives within the group. It can also be used as a preparatory activity for more structured methodologies, allowing participants to explore a variety of viewpoints before engaging in discussions in small groups or in a plenary session. The technique is particularly effective with large groups, as it offers everyone the chance to speak and engage directly with several other participants.

Links to Nonviolent Debate

Speed Debating contributes to the creation of **a "Brave Space"**, providing numerous opportunities for dialogue in pairs in which participants can gradually gain experience of engaging with different people. The brevity of the exchanges does not eliminate the complexity of the dialogue, but makes it easier to take the risk of speaking up and engaging with different perspectives.

Speed debating promotes **active listening**, as each new conversation requires participants to embrace different perspectives without being able to rely on established relational dynamics. Repeated encounters with different interlocutors encourage participants to suspend judgement and pay attention to the reasons expressed by the other person.

The technique also encourages **dilemmatic thinking**, as it exposes participants to a variety of interpretations of the same issue, demonstrating how complex topics can be viewed through different criteria, values and experiences. Rather than reinforcing a particular position, repeated discussion helps participants to recognise the complexity of the issues at hand and to enrich their own thinking.

Points for the Facilitator to Bear in Mind

It is important to make it clear from the outset that the time limit is not intended to turn the dialogue into a competition or to identify who argues best, but to provide numerous opportunities for discussion with different people.

The questions posed should be open-ended and encourage the exploration of the experiences and reasons underpinning the various positions, avoiding phrasing that leads to exclusively dichotomous answers or those geared towards competitive debate.

Choosing to repeat the same question over several consecutive rounds can be a way of encouraging participants to deepen their level of self-reflection and to deepen into the search for their own underlying principles, drawing on the insights gained from their own contributions and those of their discussion partners.

Finally, it is useful to set aside time for a concluding collective reflection, during which the focus is placed not so much on the opinions that have emerged, but on the experience of engaging with different participants and on what each person has discovered by listening to different perspectives.

Fishbowl

Educational Aims

The Fishbowl is a facilitation technique that structures dialogue by alternating between periods of conversation and periods of observation. Its aim is to encourage an in-depth discussion on a specific topic, creating conditions that allow participants to listen carefully to different perspectives and to reflect not only on the content that emerges, but also on the way in which the dialogue unfolds.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, the Fishbowl encourages progressive participation, in which each person can choose when to speak and when to listen. In this way, the technique recognises that both speaking and listening are significant forms of participation in the dialogue process.

Description and How to Use it

The participants arrange themselves in a large circle. Two chairs are placed in the centre of the space, representing the focal point of the conversation. In the Nonviolent Debate model, a variation of the Fishbowl is proposed in which the dialogue unfolds solely through these two central chairs. This configuration encourages a more focused conversation, facilitates the rotation of speakers and makes it easier to join the dialogue, supporting progressive and voluntary participation.

The facilitator poses a dilemma or a topic for discussion and invites two people to begin the discussion by sitting in the centre. Those in the outer circle participate by listening and observing, following the development of the conversation and reflecting both on its content and on the ways in which the dialogue takes shape.

When someone from the outer circle wishes to contribute, they may take one of the two central seats, replacing one of the people there, who then returns to the outer circle. The conversation thus continues through a succession of dialogues between different pairs, maintaining a common thread whilst progressively being enriched by new perspectives.

The facilitator guides the process without directing the content of the discussion, paying attention to the rotation of participants, the quality of listening and adherence to speaking times. The activity concludes with a collective debriefing focusing on both the content that emerged and the dynamics observed during the dialogue.

When to Use it

The Fishbowl is particularly suitable when addressing complex or controversial topics that require in-depth discussion without involving the whole group in the conversation at the same time.

It can also be used to develop greater awareness of the ways in which the group engages in dialogue, helping participants to observe the quality of listening, the distribution of speaking time, the handling of disagreement and the relational dynamics that emerge during the discussion.

Links to Nonviolent Debate

This technique contributes to the creation of a **'Brave Space'**, as it allows each person to choose for themselves when to take the risk of speaking up. Participation is not imposed, but stems from a willingness to contribute to the dialogue when one feels they can enrich the discussion.

The Fishbowl also promotes **Active Listening**, valuing listening as a fully-fledged form of participation. Observers do not take on the role of mere spectators, but contribute to the process through mindful attention to the perspectives expressed and the ways in which the conversation unfolds.

Finally, the technique promotes an understanding of **conflict dynamics**, as it makes visible the communicative processes through which consensus, dissent, alliances and any imbalances in participation are formed. The continuous rotation of participants in the two central chairs also reinforces the principle of **equivalence**, preventing the right to speak from becoming a fixed position of power and ensuring that the dialogue is a truly shared space.

Points for the Facilitator to Bear in Mind

It is important to clarify that those in the outer circle do not constitute an audience, but participate actively through listening and observation. The distinction between the centre and the rest of the group is purely a methodological choice aimed at supporting the quality of the dialogue.

The facilitator should monitor the rotation of participants in the central seats, encouraging balanced participation and preventing certain voices from consistently dominating the conversation. At the same time, it is important not to force those who prefer to spend more time listening to speak, recognising that this too is a meaningful form of participation.

In the final debriefing, it is useful to invite the group to reflect not only on the content that emerged, but also on how the dialogue unfolded, which conditions fostered mutual listening, and which dynamics, by contrast, made participation or discussion more difficult.

Open Space Technology

Educational Aims

Open Space Technology (OST), developed by Harrison Owen in the 1980s, is a participatory methodology that enables even very large groups to tackle complex issues through a process of self-organisation. Unlike more structured facilitation techniques, in OST it is not the facilitator who sets the agenda or forms the discussion groups: it is the participants themselves who identify the issues they consider most significant, taking responsibility for proposing them, developing them and jointly formulating possible reflections or courses of action.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, this methodology represents one of the most advanced forms of democratic participation. The aim is not to guide the group towards a predetermined conclusion, but to create the conditions in which people can share what they consider important, engage freely with one another and contribute to the collective construction of knowledge. OST thus promotes autonomy, shared responsibility and trust in the ability of groups to organise themselves and learn together.

Description and How to Use it

The facilitator introduces the general theme of the session and outlines the principles that will guide the entire experience. Unlike other methodologies, no detailed programme of activities is set out: the group itself will progressively shape the content of the work.

The first symbol presented is the **heart**, which serves as a reminder to focus on what truly lies close to one's heart. Each participant is invited to consider which topic, issue, question or proposal they feel is worth exploring in greater depth. The idea does not need to be fully developed yet: it may simply be an intuition, a concern or a possibility yet to be explored.

Anyone wishing to take charge of a topic is not required to present it immediately to the whole group. They can begin to reflect on it, gradually formulate it, make it visible (e.g. on a poster/sheet of paper) and let others approach them spontaneously if they are interested in contributing. In this way, groups form not by assignment, but through the mutual recognition of shared interests.

The facilitator then introduces the symbol of **the two feet**, which represents the main rule of Open Space Technology.

The Rule of the Two Feet states that, if at any time a person realises they are not learning anything or cannot make a meaningful contribution to the group they are in, they have a responsibility to use their feet to move to another place where they can learn more or contribute more effectively.

This law places the responsibility for their own learning and contribution on each participant, moving beyond the idea that it is the facilitator's role to ensure everyone's involvement.

The Rule of the Two Feet gives rise to two complementary modes of participation, represented by the symbols **of the bee** and the **butterfly**.

The bee represents those who bring with them an idea that is still incomplete and choose to move between different groups to enrich it through discussion. Like a bee carrying pollen from one flower to another, this figure connects different conversations, gathers contributions, asks questions and fosters the cross-pollination of ideas.

The **butterfly**, on the other hand, symbolises those who prefer to observe, listen and move freely between different conversations without settling permanently in a single group. Although it may appear less active, the butterfly plays a fundamental role: it allows ideas to circulate, encourages unexpected encounters and helps to create connections between people and topics that would otherwise remain separate.

Another symbol is **the clock**, which highlights the value of time as a shared responsibility. In Open Space Technology, the time allocated to working sessions is generally generous, so that groups can organise themselves without undue pressure. At the same time, adhering to the timetable is a collective responsibility: when it is time to start, we start; when it is time to finish, we finish – even if not all issues have been fully explored.

These symbols are rooted in the four principles formulated by Harrison Owen, which encourage an attitude of trust in the participatory process.

The first principle states that **whoever takes part is the right person**: the value of the discussion does not depend on the number of people present, but on the genuine contribution of those who choose to be there.

The second principle reminds us that **whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened**, encouraging the group to embrace the course of the discussion without constantly comparing it to expected or ideal outcomes.

The third principle maintains that **whenever you start is the right time**, recognising that creative and participatory processes do not always follow rigidly scheduled timelines.

Finally, the fourth principle states that **when it's over, it's over**, reminding us that every discussion has its own natural cycle and that prolonging it artificially does not necessarily lead to more meaningful learning.

At the end of the working sessions, each group reports back to the plenary on the main points that emerged during the discussion, sharing reflections, open-ended questions and possible avenues for further development.

When to Use it

Open Space Technology is particularly effective when the aim is to draw out needs, ideas, proposals or priorities directly from the group, without imposing a pre-defined agenda.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, Open Space Technology is particularly useful in the initial phase of the process, when the aim is to bring to the fore, in a participatory manner, the themes and issues that the group considers most significant to discuss. Rather than proposing topics defined from outside, the methodology allows participants to collectively identify priorities, bringing different interests, needs and points of view to the fore.

Open Space thus facilitates the shared construction of the debate agenda, increasing participants' engagement and sense of responsibility towards the process. It can also be used to gather questions, identify the most contentious issues to be addressed, or define the topics to be explored in subsequent debate sessions, creating the conditions for an inclusive, open discussion focused on mutual listening.

The methodology is particularly suitable for medium to large groups, where it would be difficult to address all issues simultaneously through a plenary discussion.

Links to Nonviolent Debate

Open Space Technology represents a practical application of the **'Brave Space**', as it empowers participants to bring to the group what they consider significant and to take the risk of proposing topics, questions or ideas that are still taking shape. The freedom of movement and choice also helps to create a context in which each person can identify the areas of discussion that are most meaningful for their own learning journey.

The methodology also promotes **Active Listening**, as people are continually encouraged to engage with different conversations, to listen to diverse perspectives and to allow themselves to be transformed by the exchange rather than seeking confirmation of their own beliefs.

OST also supports **Dilemmatic Thinking**, allowing complex questions to emerge spontaneously and valuing the diversity of perspectives without steering the group towards predefined or consensus-based solutions.

Finally, this technique represents one of the most comprehensive expressions of **participatory facilitation** skills, as the facilitator's role consists primarily of safeguarding the process, whilst responsibility for content, connections and the construction of knowledge is progressively taken on by the group itself.

Points for the Facilitator to Bear in Mind

The facilitator should make it clear from the outset that Open Space Technology is not a rule-free space, but a methodology based on individual and collective responsibility.Freedom of movement is not the same as randomness, but rather to the conscious choice to participate where one can learn the most or make a meaningful contribution.

It is important to explicitly value both the role of the 'bee' and that of the 'butterfly', emphasising that both represent different but equally legitimate ways of participating. Similarly, it is worth remembering that even a topic that is still somewhat undefined can become the starting point for meaningful reflection, provided it stems from a genuine interest.

During the session, the facilitator intervenes as little as possible regarding the content, focusing instead on managing the process, ensuring the schedule is adhered to, and maintaining the conditions that enable the group to organise itself. In the final debriefing, attention should be paid not only to the proposals that have emerged, but also to the way in which the group has collectively built knowledge, experimenting with forms of democratic participation based on trust, autonomy and shared responsibility.

Silent Floor

Educational Aims

The **Silent Floor** is a facilitation technique that enables the group to discuss a complex question through an entirely non-verbal conversation. Participants communicate exclusively via short messages written on Post-it notes, which are progressively placed in the shared space and linked together. Silence slows the pace of the discussion, encourages individual reflection and allows everyone to participate at their own pace and in their own way.

Within the Nonviolent Debate model, this technique aims to ensure that the discussion is less influenced by the power dynamics that often characterise spoken discussions. The floor is not monopolised by those who are more confident or more accustomed to speaking, but instead allows for a gradual and collective construction of the dialogue. At the same time, the spatial arrangement of contributions highlights points of agreement, differences and nuances, demonstrating how positions are not necessarily opposed but can occupy a range of intermediate shades.

Description and Instructions for Use

The facilitator sets out a large grid on the floor (or on a large table), in the centre of which a question, statement or dilemma is placed for the group to reflect upon.

Each participant is given a few Post-it notes and a marker pen. Speaking is not permitted for the duration of the activity: discussion takes place exclusively through written messages.

Each person writes reflections, questions, arguments, doubts or examples on the Post-it notes that they consider relevant to the proposed topic and places them freely within the quadrant.

The arrangement of the Post-it notes is not random. Each new contribution may be placed close to another when it shares the same meaning, or further away when it expresses a different perspective or introduces an element of discontinuity. The space thus becomes a visual representation of the dialogue: proximity highlights points of convergence, whilst distance reveals divergences, tensions or alternative perspectives.

During the activity, participants can read the contributions already present, add new Post-it notes, move their own reflection, bringing it closer to or further away from other ideas, or respond directly to other people's messages, creating a written conversation that evolves progressively over time.

At the end of the silent exploration, the facilitator guides the group through a collective debriefing, observing the final layout of the board together and inviting participants to reflect both on the content that has emerged and on the form the conversation has taken.

When to Use it

The Silent Floor is particularly suitable when addressing complex, sensitive or potentially polarising issues, where it is important to encourage personal reflection before a verbal discussion.

It can be used in the early stages of a process to gather the group's perspectives, beliefs and questions, or as a preparatory activity for a subsequent debate. The technique is also effective when the aim is to provide equal opportunities for participation, even for those less inclined to speak publicly.

Links to Nonviolent Debate

The Silent Floor helps to build a **'Brave Space'**, as it offers different ways of participating from those of oral discussion and allows even the most reserved people to express their point of view without the immediate exposure of public speaking.

The technique promotes **Active Listening** in a particular way: carefully reading others' contributions before adding one's own encourages participants to hold back from an immediate response and to allow themselves to be influenced by the perspectives already present in the shared space.

The Silent Floor also supports **Dilemmatic Thinking**, as it makes the diversity of positions visible and shows how there are many nuances between agreement and disagreement. The spatial representation of ideas helps the group recognise the complexity of the issues being addressed, avoiding the reduction of the discussion to a simple opposition between two sides.

Finally, the technique develops skills in **facilitating group discussions**, demonstrating how even silence can become a tool for dialogue and how the physical arrangement of ideas can support more inclusive and participatory processes of shared reflection.

Points for the Facilitator to Note

Before the activity begins, it is important to clarify that silence is not a limitation, but a methodological resource that allows the discussion to slow down and promotes higher-quality reflection. The facilitator should invite the group to read the existing contributions carefully before adding new ones, ensuring that the Silent Floor does not become a mere collection of independent opinions.

During the activity, it is advisable to allow sufficient time for the written conversation to develop spontaneously. The facilitator's role consists mainly of observing the process, without intervening on the content or directing the arrangement of the Post-it notes.

In the concluding debriefing, it is useful to focus not only on the ideas that emerged, but also on the layout of the space: which contributions sparked the most dialogue, where areas of consensus emerged, which Post-it notes remained isolated, and which new questions arose from the encounter between different perspectives. In this way, the group is guided to reflect not only on **what** they think, but also on **how** collective thinking has progressively taken shape through dialogue.

Table 3.9 – Discussion Facilitation Techniques in the Nonviolent Debate Model

Technique	Educational Aim	When to Use it	Link to Nonviolent Debate
Sociometries	To make the group's opinions, experiences and positions visible through movement within the space.	To open an activity, energise the group, explore a topic, and bring out a variety of viewpoints.	It helps to build a '**Brave Space**', makes the different perspectives within the group visible and introduces **Dilemmatic Thinking**, highlighting the complexity of the positions.
World Café	Building collective reflections through informal conversations in small groups and the gradual cross-pollination of ideas.	In-depth exploration of complex themes, gathering of ideas, participatory planning, evaluation of experiences.	It promotes Active Listening, the shared construction of knowledge and the harnessing of collective intelligence.
Daisy	To facilitate the summarising of small groups' reflections and the comparison of collective positions.	Presentation of group work, comparison of perspectives developed separately, and the formulation of shared positions.	Strengthens shared responsibility, democratic representation and the ability to distinguish between personal opinion and the group's position.
Speed Debating	Increase opportunities for discussion through brief one-to-one conversations with constantly changing discussion partners.	Encouraging dialogue, mutual understanding and an initial exploration of controversial issues.	Develops **active listening**, openness to different perspectives and **dilemmatic thinking**, encouraging engagement with a variety of interpretations.
Open Space Technology	Bringing out ideas, needs, proposals and possible actions through processes of group self-organisation.	Participatory planning, setting priorities, generating ideas, and developing collective actions.	Promotes autonomy, shared responsibility, democratic participation and trust in the group's ability to collectively build knowledge.
Silent Floor	Encouraging a silent conversation through written contributions and the spatial representation of relationships between ideas.	Sensitive or controversial topics, gathering individual reflections, preparation for an oral discussion.	It slows down the exchange of views, supports active listening, highlights the complexity of positions and encourages inclusive participation, whilst also valuing those who prefer non-verbal forms of expression.

3.7 Conclusions

The approach developed in this chapter has outlined the model of Nonviolent Debate as an integrated set of skills, methodologies and educational practices aimed at building a culture of dialogue. The six pillars presented are not, in fact, independent tools, but closely interlinked dimensions which, taken together, define a specific educational approach based on listening, participation, reflection and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

The proposed model does not stem exclusively from theoretical elaboration. It represents the result of an ongoing dialogue between the relevant literature, the needs analysis carried out as part of the research, and the comparison with methodologies developed and tested within the project's international partnership, which involved organisations from Italy, Poland, Kosovo, Türkiye and Ukraine. Each partner has contributed based on their own educational experience and their specific social, political and cultural context: some operate in areas directly affected by war, whilst others work in contexts characterised by reconciliation processes, identity-related tensions or social polarisation. The strength of the model lies precisely in the opportunity to bring these different experiences into dialogue, identifying common pedagogical principles and practices capable of promoting dialogue, democratic participation and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

The research has enabled a critical re-examination of these experiences in the context of youth work, identifying the common elements that underpin their educational effectiveness and organising them within a unified framework of competencies. The six pillars of Nonviolent Debate therefore represent a methodological approach that integrates contributions from different theoretical traditions and educational practices tested in diverse contexts, translating them into a coherent model for the training of educators and youth workers.

The activities and techniques presented in this chapter do not constitute a repertoire of exercises to be applied in a prescriptive manner, but rather examples of how the model's principles can be translated into educational practice, adapting to the needs of groups, contexts and the objectives of different training programmes. What the various proposals have in common is not their structure, but rather the pedagogical intent that guides them: to create conditions in which dialogue can become an opportunity for mutual learning, conflict a chance for growth, and difference a resource for building new shared understandings.

The model developed therefore represents an open methodological framework, designed to be reinterpreted and adapted to different educational and social contexts. As the following chapter will show, the principles of Nonviolent Debate find different applications depending on the specific challenges characterising each region: from supporting dialogue in war-torn contexts, to reconciliation processes in post-conflict societies, to the use of theatrical practices as a tool for expression, participation and social transformation. An analysis of the experiences developed by the international partners will thus enable us to observe how the same methodological framework can take on different forms, whilst maintaining a common educational aim: to make dialogue a tool for peace-building, democratic participation and an understanding of complexity.

4.

4. Nonviolent Debate in Contexts of War, Post-conflict and Deep Polarisation

Nonviolent Debate is based on a number of methodological principles that can be considered universal: the centrality of listening, the creation of a sufficiently safe space for dialogue, the recognition of complexity, and the transformation of conflict through relationship rather than confrontation. However, a nonviolent method cannot be applied as an identical procedure in every context.

Adaptation is not an exception to the methodology, but an essential condition of it. A nonviolent approach cannot be standardised: it requires listening to the context alongside the people involved, recognising their history, their wounds, power imbalances and the risks that dialogue itself may entail.

Every region carries with it a different history, made up of collective memories, unresolved conflicts, experiences of violence, conflicting identities, inequalities and social tensions that profoundly influence the way people speak, listen, participate and build trust. What may foster dialogue in one context may prove ineffective or even risky in another.

For this reason, during the 'Participation Needs Nonviolent Debate for Conflict Transformation' project, the partner organisations did not simply replicate a common methodology. They undertook a process of adaptation, asking themselves which elements to keep unchanged and which to rethink in light of local specificities. This meant dealing with very concrete questions: how does one create a space for dialogue in a country devastated by war? How can one address issues that remain deeply divisive in a society engaged on a path towards reconciliation? How can one facilitate discussion in contexts where certain identities or narratives may be subject to tension, discrimination or repression?

The three contributions that follow describe this process of adaptation. They are not merely examples of how the method is applied, but demonstrate how Nonviolent Debate can become a deeply contextual practice, capable of responding to the needs of individuals and communities without compromising its founding principles. Although they originate from very different realities, a common thread emerges: the need to create spaces where dialogue can continue to exist even when conflict, fear, or polarisation seem to make it impossible.

4.1 Ukraine (edited by the Centre for Euroinitiatives)

The full-scale war has significantly altered the context of youth work in Ukraine. Young people are living in conditions of constant danger, information overload, emotional stress and social polarisation. In such circumstances, youth work requires approaches that not only support the expression of personal opinions, but also help to maintain dialogue, empathy, critical thinking and nonviolent communication.

The methodology of nonviolent debate is one such approach that creates a safe space - or rather, a brave space - to discuss complex issues, develop a democratic culture and support young people's participation.

Whilst implementing local initiatives in the Sumy region, we observed that young people have a particular need for spaces where they can be heard without fear of judgement or aggression. For many participants, nonviolent debate has become not only an educational experience, but also a space for mutual support and understanding.

Unlike traditional debate formats, which focus on winning an argument, nonviolent debate emphasises deep listening, respect for differing opinions, the ability to argue a case, recognition of social complexity, the search for constructive solutions, and the prevention of aggression and polarisation.

In the context of war, this methodology becomes not only an educational tool, but also a practice fostering social resilience and support for young people. War influences the ways in which young people communicate. Constant stress, loss, anxiety and an information-overloaded environment often lead to emotional communication, aggression, intolerance towards differing opinions, rapid polarisation, the spread of disinformation, and a loss of a sense of agency in personal and community life.

Working with this methodology, we have realised that nonviolent debate helps young people to learn safe ways of communicating, to express disagreement without humiliating others, to manage their emotions, to critically analyse information, to construct their own arguments, to listen to different perspectives, and to regain a sense of agency and voice.

The methodology of nonviolent debate is highly relevant in our context, particularly in the face of the challenges posed by war. It enables complex and controversial issues to be discussed without aggression or condemnation.

Today, Ukrainian society frequently deals with issues that have a high potential for polarisation: political, religious, social and linguistic matters, as well as other sensitive topics. Nonviolent communication creates a space for free expression without imposing beliefs or causing psychological harm.

In our experience, this methodology gives the best results when combined with a trauma-informed approach. This ensures attention is paid to emotional safety, voluntary participation and the avoidance of topics that might trigger traumatic reactions.

For us, it is essential that nonviolent debate is not about debating skills, but above all about creating a safe environment, respecting dignity and human rights, and fostering trust in a society affected by war. Furthermore, this methodology contributes to the development of a democratic culture and strengthens social cohesion within communities.

What, then, are the fundamental principles of the nonviolent debate methodology that we have identified during the training of multipliers and by observing the work with young people?

1. **A Fundamental Principle is to Change the Way in Which Participants Perceive People Who Express Opposing Views.**

Instead of viewing one another as rivals, participants are encouraged to understand the needs and reasons underlying the different positions. It is important to support young people so that they learn to:

- See the person behind the opinion;
- Avoid viewing ‘winning’ as the main objective;
- Explore the motivations behind different points of view;
- Distinguish between disagreement and conflict.

Young people are accustomed to the traditional education system, where classical debates are more commonly used; for this reason, it is necessary to constantly remind them that the aim of the discussion is not to win, but to understand the other person.

2. Listening is Just as Important as Speaking.



Young people often have limited experience of safe and attentive listening. For this reason, we realised that, when preparing for debates, it is important to include activities that develop active listening, paraphrasing, asking for clarification, responding empathetically and the ability not to interrupt the other person.

Whilst implementing local initiatives, we observed that listening skills became one of the most significant outcomes of participating in these activities for many young people.

Participants said:

> «I've learnt not only to speak, but also to listen».

> «This training has changed the way I view debate: now I see the other person as a conversation partner, not an opponent».

These comments show just how important it is for young people to experience safe and respectful communication.

3. Expressing Emotions in the Context of War

In the context of war, young people may react very emotionally to certain topics. For this reason, it is important to bear in mind that emotions are part of the process and that this is normal. It is important to validate young people's emotions during nonviolent debates.

The methodology of nonviolent debate does not require emotions to be 'set aside'. However, it is also important to incorporate activities into the debate preparation process that help participants become aware of their own emotions, talk about them without aggression, avoid projecting their emotional reactions onto other participants, and learn self-regulation strategies.

We have also realised that it is important for facilitators to recognise young people's right to feel emotions and not to dismiss their experiences.

During the training sessions, the young people also spoke openly about the difficulty of self-regulating their emotions:

> «Sometimes it was difficult to control my emotions, but I realised how important this is».

For us, this was an important confirmation that nonviolent debate helps young people not only to develop communication skills, but also to better understand their own emotions and reactions.

4. Psychological Safety When Working with Young People During Wartime

When working with young people during wartime, psychological safety must be a priority.

This means not forcing participation, allowing participants to refrain from answering difficult questions, avoiding retraumatisation, creating a supportive atmosphere, and paying attention to the group's emotional state.

In some cases, it is more important to bring an activity to an end earlier than planned rather than continue a discussion that causes severe emotional exhaustion or leads to conflict.

During nonviolent debates, it is important to organise a safe space so that young people have the opportunity to express their opinions.

What have we done to achieve this?

Co-Creating Group Rules.

At the start of the work, it is important to agree on the fundamental rules of interaction and to develop them together with the group. When rules are co-created, young people are more likely to tolerate them.

Preparing to Work in Unstable Conditions.

War requires youth workers to be highly adaptable. It is necessary to be prepared for air raid alerts, changes of venue, switching to an online format, a reduction in the programme's duration, and participants' emotional exhaustion.

The nonviolent debate methodology adapts well to different formats, provided that the fundamental principles of safe and respectful communication are maintained.

Whilst implementing the initiatives, we also realised how much the security situation influences work with young people. In some communities, organisers observed that, under safer conditions, training activities could have been carried out more consistently in person. At the same time, even under conditions of constant risk, the methodology proved to be effective and adaptable.

Plan an Emotionally Satisfying Conclusion to the Session.

After discussing complex issues, it is important to allow space for reflection, a brief moment for sharing, stabilising exercises and a positive conclusion to the activity. It is not advisable to end a session whilst the group is in a state of high tension.

We would also like to highlight the skills development we observed in young people whilst using the methodology.

1. **Critical Thinking and Media Literacy -** During nonviolent debates, young people learn to analyse arguments, verify sources of information, distinguish facts from manipulation, and form their own positions based on evidence. In wartime, these skills are extremely important due to the vast amount of disinformation and content characterised by a strong emotional component.
2. **Nonviolent Communication Skills -** The methodology helps young people to express disagreement without aggression, to respond constructively to others' opinions, to seek common solutions and to discuss complex issues respectfully. These skills are important for both interpersonal communication and civic participation.

3. **Civic Participation and Youth Leadership -** Nonviolent debate helps young people feel that their voice matters. Young people acquire the tools to express their views, gain experience of participating in democratic dialogue, develop confidence in public communication and strengthen their motivation to engage in community life.

It is particularly important that young people begin to see themselves not as passive observers of events, but as active participants in social processes.

The Role of the Youth Worker

The methodology of nonviolent debate involves adults taking on a different role in the learning process. The youth worker acts not as a controller or arbiter, but as a facilitator of a safe dialogue.



This means promoting equal participation, not imposing one's own position, helping the group to listen to one another, ensuring the safety of the process and creating a climate of trust.

A **partnership-based approach** is particularly important when working with young people during wartime, when they need a space where their experiences are recognised and taken seriously.

Those who have implemented local initiatives have also highlighted changes in their professional approach. Youth workers, educators and facilitators have stated that they have begun to view young people more as partners in the learning process than as participants to be controlled.

One facilitator stated:

> «It is clear that when you, as a teacher, become a partner to young people in the learning process rather than merely a supervisor, the students' level of trust increases».

For many multipliers, taking part in the project also represented an experience of professional and personal development. They noted that the nonviolent debate methodology helped them to facilitate sensitive topics more effectively, to work with the group's emotions and to build more trust-based communication with young people.

How to Deal with Polarisation and Controversial Issues

War intensifies dichotomous thinking and social polarisation. For this reason, when addressing contentious issues, it is important to:

- Avoid an approach based on 'who is right and who is wrong';
- Encourage the exploration of different perspectives;
- Help participants formulate arguments without aggression;
- Remember the value of human dignity;
- Prevent dehumanisation.

At the same time, it is important to remember that nonviolent debate does not imply neutrality with regard to human rights violations or violence. The methodology is aimed at promoting respectful communication, not towards abandoning one's own values.

Which Topics Work Best When Working With Young People

The topics that prove most effective are those directly linked to young people's lives:

- Social media;
- Disinformation;
- Human rights;
- Discrimination;
- Young people's participation in decision-making processes;
- Hate speech;
- Information security;
- Experiences of life during war;
- The role of young people in community reconstruction.

These topics help young people to grasp the practical value of dialogue and debate.

Practical Tips for Facilitating Nonviolent Debates

1. **Use Short Sessions**

Due to emotional strain and fatigue, young people often find it difficult to maintain concentration for long periods. Short discussion sessions, varying the format of activities, interactive exercises and working in small groups prove most effective.

2. **Check in With the Group Regularly**

Useful questions might include:

- How are you feeling right now?
- Do you feel comfortable continuing?
- Do you need a break?

This helps to maintain a safe atmosphere.

1. **Do not Demand "Correct" Answers**

In nonviolent debate, the process of reflection is more important than reaching a single 'correct' position.

2. **Emphasise the Value of Diverse Opinions**

The aim of the methodology is not to reach complete agreement, but to develop the ability to coexist with differing opinions without aggression or violence.

Based on the implementation of local initiatives in the Sumy region, we have concluded that the nonviolent debate methodology has considerable potential for working with young people in wartime conditions. We have observed that young people not only develop argumentative and

critical thinking skills, but also learn to listen, to manage their emotions, to respect differing opinions and to recognise the value of their own voice within the community.

We have also observed that this methodology influences the youth workers themselves, helping them to rethink their role, build more partnership-oriented relationships with young people and create safe spaces for dialogue.

The nonviolent debate methodology is an effective tool for youth workers in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine. In times of war, it becomes not only an educational approach but also a means of supporting young people, strengthening community resilience and promoting a culture of mutual respect.

4.2 Kosovo (organised by Local Peace)

The local activities carried out by Local Peace provided an important opportunity to trial the Nonviolent Debate model within a context deeply shaped by the history of conflict and peace-building processes. Rather than limiting itself to experimenting individual educational activities, Loca Peace chose to develop a programme capable of integrating non-formal education methodologies, experiential learning and conflict transformation, adapting them to the social, cultural and geographical characteristics of the Kosovar context.

The pilot project was designed to create learning environments in which dialogue could develop through practical experiences, highlighting the role of places, nature, community life and shared activities as elements capable of fostering trust-building, critical reflection and the bringing together of different perspectives. Particular attention was also paid to testing Nonviolent Debate within real-life peacebuilding contexts, in order to assess its effectiveness in addressing complex issues related to memory, identity and coexistence.

The following sections present the main methodologies tested during the local activities, highlighting their educational rationale and the results observed.

1. Using Symbolic and Politically Sensitive Locations

One of the distinctive features of the local activities carried out by Local Peace was the decision to hold some dialogue sessions directly in locations characterised by strong symbolic value and particular political significance, such as Lake Ujman. The choice of location was not merely a logistical necessity, but formed an integral part of the educational methodology adopted.

The aim was to transform the environment itself into an active element of the learning process, inviting participants to engage with one another in a space frequently associated with geopolitical divisions, tensions, and narratives of conflict. Bringing the dialogue into such a context made it possible to challenge their preconceptions, offering young people the opportunity to experience, in practice, forms of interaction based on cooperation and mutual respect.

The experience demonstrated that dialogue, peaceful coexistence and collaboration are possible even in places strongly linked to memories of conflict and dynamics of confrontation. In this way, the setting itself became an educational tool, capable of reinforcing the significance of the experience and making tangible the possibility of building positive relationships even within spaces perceived as divisive.

2. Nature as a Source of Serenity and Outdoor Life as an Educational Environment

Among the methodologies adopted during the pilot project, Local Peace chose to incorporate contact with nature as an essential component of the educational programme. The activities included camping, spending the night in tents and extended periods outdoors, transforming the natural environment into a space for learning and building relationships.



This approach was introduced with the aim of moving away from the formal settings typical of classroom-based training and offering participants an environment capable of reducing stress and tension. This expectation was confirmed, as the evidence gathered showed that nature acted as a factor that promoted relaxation and created conditions more conducive to mutual listening and dialogue.

The results highlighted how the natural setting helped to lower social and psychological barriers between participants from different backgrounds, fostering the building of trusting relationships and the development of more spontaneous interactions than those that normally occur during traditional training activities.

3. Building Community through Shared Living

Alongside structured educational activities, the programme placed particular emphasis on building community through sharing daily life. Participants were involved in preparing meals, cooking outdoors and sharing lunches and dinners as an integral part of the educational experience.

This approach was chosen to foster a sense of shared responsibility and belonging to the group even outside the training sessions. Indeed, daily activities provided informal opportunities for collaboration, allowing participants to continue their discussions in a more spontaneous and less structured setting.

According to Local Peace's findings, the alternation between educational sessions and community life fostered continuity between formal and informal learning. Preparing and sharing meals created times and spaces in which conversations begun during activities could continue naturally, helping to strengthen relationships between participants and the sense of community built up during the programme.

4. Reaching New Groups through Shared Interests: Collaboration with Astronomy Clubs

Among the approaches tested by Local Peace, one of the most innovative involved collaboration with local astronomy associations and groups. The aim was to combine telescope-based stargazing with exercises and discussions inspired by the Nonviolent Debate model, creating an educational setting that brought together scientific curiosity and the development of dialogue skills.

This methodological choice arose from the need to engage young people who would be unlikely to take part in programmes traditionally dedicated to peace-building, dialogue or civic participation.

Linking educational activities to a concrete and shared interest, such as astronomy, made it possible to introduce the theme of nonviolent dialogue in an environment perceived as more accessible and less associated with potentially divisive issues.

The experience demonstrated that the convergence of science, curiosity, and communication fostered an open and inclusive learning environment. Observing the sky through a telescope proved to be a naturally collaborative activity, capable of stimulating cooperation and relationship-building without resorting to forced dynamics. Shared curiosity thus provided common ground on which to progressively build trust and dialogue.

The results showed a high level of participation and engagement, making it possible to reach young people who do not normally take part in peace education activities. The experience also encouraged new participants to engage with the organisation's subsequent training programmes, demonstrating how linking different interests can be an effective strategy for broadening participation and creating new opportunities for dialogue.

5. Putting Nonviolent Debate into Context in Real-Life Conflict Transformation Situations

One of the most significant aspects of the pilot project carried out by Local Peace was the integration of the Nonviolent Debate model into peacebuilding programmes involving young people from Kosovo and Serbia. The methodology was therefore tested not in simulated or purely educational settings, but in situations characterised by genuine relational complexity and experiences directly linked to the history of the conflict.

The decision to work in this context responded to the need to assess the effectiveness of Nonviolent Debate tools in addressing particularly sensitive issues, moving beyond a purely theoretical approach to communication and conflict transformation. The activities enabled participants to engage with issues relating to war, collective memory, identity and coexistence, experimenting with forms of dialogue based on listening, mutual respect and an understanding of different perspectives.

The experience highlighted how addressing issues deeply rooted in personal and collective experiences makes the learning process more meaningful and authentic. Nonviolent Debate proved to be a tool capable of facilitating discussion even on emotionally complex topics, fostering informed participation and shared reflection on the possibilities of building relationships beyond existing divisions.

6. Exploring Narratives of Personal and Collective Conflicts

Another methodology tested during the local activities involved exploring the personal and collective narratives that influence the way people interpret conflict and construct their own view of reality. Through sessions of structured reflection, participants were invited to consider how their own perspectives were influenced by history, their social context and their lived experiences.

The aim of this methodology was to help participants recognise the origins of differing perspectives, demonstrating how even vastly divergent viewpoints can stem from different life stories, collective memories and social contexts. Rather than focusing immediately on comparing opinions, the activities encouraged reflection on the experiences that help shape the way each person interprets reality.

It was observed that this approach encouraged participants to listen to narratives that were profoundly different from their own without immediately reacting defensively or entering into debate. The methodology fostered a greater capacity for listening, a more in-depth reflection on one's own ways of interpreting reality, and a greater willingness to engage with experiences different from one's own.

7. Looking Beyond Opinions: Exploring what Underpins Them

One of the key techniques tried out during the local activities invited participants to shift their focus from the opinions expressed to the factors underpinning them. During discussions on particularly sensitive topics, the facilitators encouraged the group not to stop at the positions expressed, but to reflect on the experiences, values, fears and other personal factors that help shape different points of view.

The aim of this methodology was to reduce the tendency towards polarisation that often characterises debates on controversial issues. Focusing exclusively on opinions can, in fact, reinforce the contrast between positions perceived as incompatible, while exploring the factors underpinning them allows for a deeper understanding of the other person's reasons without necessarily implying that one shares them.

Based on the findings from the trials, this approach helped to reduce the level of polarisation during the activities and fostered a deeper understanding of the reasons why different people interpret and deal with the same situations in different ways.

8. Experiencing Conflict through Simulations of Misunderstanding

To foster a practical understanding of conflict dynamics, Local Peace has carried out simulation exercises in the towns of Ferizaj and Istog, deliberately structured around situations of misunderstanding and limited communication between groups of participants.

The methodology was designed with the aim of demonstrating, through direct experience, how quickly tensions and conflicts can arise even in the absence of any initial real disagreement. By artificially introducing misunderstandings and limitations in communication, participants were able to experience how assumptions, hasty interpretations and a lack of clarity can fuel escalating tensions.

The experience enabled participants to understand these dynamics not only on a theoretical level, but also through personal and emotional involvement, making the role of communication in the emergence and development of conflicts all the more evident.

9. Guided Reflection as a Learning Tool

At the end of each simulation, every activity included a structured period of reflection and debriefing aimed at linking what had been experienced during the exercise to the dynamics of conflicts in everyday life.

The reflection session immediately following the simulation enabled participants to analyse their own reactions, discuss the emotions they had experienced, and identify the communication processes that had contributed to the emergence of misunderstandings. In this way, the practical experience was transformed into an opportunity for conscious learning.

The observations gathered from the report highlighted how this period of reflection strengthened the participants' personal awareness, helping them to more easily recognise their own communication patterns, implicit assumptions and the automatic ways in which they interpret others' behaviour in conflict situations.

10. Communicating Nonviolent Debate through Creative Messages

The pilot project also included activities focused on publicly communicating the messages developed during the programme. Participants were involved in designing stickers, slogans and

visual communication materials, using visual storytelling tools to translate principles such as active listening, empathy and respectful dialogue into simple, easily shareable messages. Among the slogans devised during the activities was 'Debate without Hate', which became one of the project's signature messages.

The aim of this methodology was to provide participants with a practical tool to transform the learning gained during the programme into awareness-raising materials aimed at the wider community. The production and dissemination of this content thus enabled the educational work to extend beyond the group of participants, promoting a broader reflection on the value of nonviolent dialogue.

According to observations made during the pilot, this experience fostered a high level of engagement among the participants, enhancing their creativity and sense of belonging to the project. The distribution of stickers and materials in public spaces and via online channels also helped to broaden the discussion on Nonviolent Debate, reaching a wider young audience.

11. From Dialogue to Action in the Community

The latest methodology tested focused on linking the educational programme with a concrete act of civic engagement. The activities included discussions dedicated to supporting a local centre for children with special needs, with the aim of demonstrating how dialogue and cooperation can translate into concrete initiatives that benefit the community.

This methodological choice was designed to ensure that Nonviolent Debate did not remain confined to the training setting, but instead encouraged reflection on the relationship between dialogue skills, social responsibility and active participation.

In summary, as the pilot project demonstrated, this experience helped participants recognise how empathy, active listening and cooperation can translate into concrete forms of civic engagement and contribute to building more inclusive relationships within the community.

Concluding Remarks

The pilot project carried out by Local Peace highlights how the Nonviolent Debate model can be adapted to contexts characterised by significant social and relational complexity, through experiential methodologies capable of integrating non-formal education, peacebuilding and active participation. The use of symbolic places, nature, community life, shared interests and simulation activities has shown how dialogue can be fostered even in contexts marked by memories of conflict, creating concrete opportunities for listening, critical reflection and relationship-building. Taken together, the practices tested offer a set of replicable tools that can be adapted to other educational contexts seeking to promote Nonviolent Debate and peace education.

4.3 Turkey (edited by UGI-DER)

Theatre as a Preparation for Dialogue: an Experiment in Nonviolent Debate in Polarised Contexts

The pilot project carried out by UGI-DER in Turkey has developed a specific analysis of the relationship between theatre and Nonviolent Debate. Compared with other local initiatives carried out as part of the project, the Turkish contribution does not focus solely on describing the activities implemented, but offers a pedagogical analysis arising from experience in the field.

The starting point for this reflection is a fundamental question: *what conditions must be created for dialogue to truly emerge?*

By using theatre as an educational tool, UGI-DER has explored the role that theatrical practices can play in preparing young people for nonviolent dialogue, working on the emotional, relational and experiential dimensions that precede the expression of an opinion.

From this perspective, theatre is not regarded as an activity separate from nonviolent Debate, but as a potential preparatory practice capable of creating the conditions for dialogue to develop.

1. Dialogue in Contexts of Polarisation and Conflict

Being part of this project as an organisation from Mesopotamia has been a meaningful and inspiring experience for us. This is a land where some of the world's oldest civilisations were born, but it can also be considered one of the places where some of the earliest forms of non-physical and verbal violence emerged, given the profound relationship between civilisation, language and power.

Dialogue does not begin simply when people start talking. It begins the moment a person feels safe and brave enough to express an idea, free enough to disagree, and willing enough to listen without having a response ready.

Particularly in conflict-ridden contexts, many young people tend to become more introverted. We have observed how those who remain silent or who struggle to express themselves may sometimes react more aggressively, not because they are naturally violent, but because they cannot find other ways to communicate how they feel.

This observation is particularly important in contexts where conflict, fear and insecurity have profoundly influenced the ways in which people relate to one another. In such situations, creating a space where it is possible to speak, disagree and listen becomes an essential condition for promoting processes of nonviolent transformation.

Today, creating such spaces has become even more complex. We are, in fact, living in a historical period in which polarisation often grows faster than the capacity for mutual understanding, disinformation contributes to the formation of opinions even before genuine conversations begin, and many social relationships are mediated predominantly through digital platforms.

In contexts marked by war, political tensions, discrimination or protracted social conflicts, these difficulties become even more apparent. Young people carry with them experiences, emotions and memories that they do not always manage to put into words, whilst youth workers are called upon to create spaces in which trust, participation and dialogue can still flourish.

2. Why Theatre before Nonviolent Debate?

Throughout the project and in our activities, our aim has never been to teach debate as a competition in which people defend a position and seek to prevail over others.

Instead, we have sought to reclaim the meaning of debate as a democratic practice: a space in which deep listening is just as important as expressing one's own ideas, curiosity is just as valuable as argumentation, and understanding becomes just as important as the ability to persuade.

Theatre has played a fundamental role in this journey.

Not as an artistic activity.
Not as a form of entertainment.
And certainly not as an end in itself.

Instead, theatre has emerged as a possible answer to a pedagogical question:

Can theatre prepare young people for dialogue even before asking them to debate?

This question became the starting point for our experiment.

As part of the *Nonviolent Debate for Conflict Transformation* project, we organised two international Erasmus+ activities in Diyarbakır - a training course for youth workers and a youth exchange - in which we deliberately chose to integrate theatre with the principles of Nonviolent Debate.

We began to view these two practices not as separate methodologies, but as complementary parts of the same educational process.

Very quickly, we observed something significant.

When participants were asked to debate straight away, some remained silent, uncertain or cautious. After a theatre activity, however, the atmosphere gradually changed.

Through improvisation, role-play, movement and collective storytelling, the participants slowly began to let their guard down. They laughed together, tried out new situations, accepted the risk of making mistakes and discovered that there wasn't necessarily just one correct answer.

Without fully realising it, they were already practising some of the fundamental skills of Nonviolent Debate.

3. Theatre as a Space for Exploration, Empathy and Listening

Theatre created something that debate, on its own, did not always manage to generate: the opportunity to explore, make mistakes and try again.

When a person plays a character, they are not called upon to defend their own opinion. Instead, they are invited to understand a reality different from their own.

The questions become more important than the answers:

Why does this character behave this way?
What is he afraid of?
What do they need?

By putting themselves in someone else's shoes, the participants had the chance to reflect on the experiences underlying behaviours, gradually replacing judgement with curiosity.

Empathy therefore did not remain an abstract concept discussed during the workshop, but became an experience lived through the body and emotions.

The same was true of active listening.

In an improvisation exercise, listening is not simply a communication technique: it becomes a necessity. Each scene arises, in fact, from the participants' ability to observe the other person, respond authentically and embrace what is introduced into the shared story.

If one person stops listening or ignores what the other person brings to the scene, the process comes to a halt.

Theatre therefore transforms listening from a mere theoretical concept into a concrete experience. Furthermore, unlike everyday life, it always offers the chance to pause, repeat and try again.

4. Theatre and Nonviolent Debate: Two Complementary Methodologies

An unexpected yet fundamental element that emerged during this process was the role of humour.

Many of the most significant moments of the activities arose through shared laughter. Humour helped to reduce tensions that formal discussions sometimes tended to amplify.

It allowed participants to take risks without fear of failure and reminded them that dialogue does not necessarily have to begin on a serious note.

Throughout our journey, we have seen how humour does not detract from difficult conversations, but can create the trust needed to make such conversations possible.

Looking back on the project, we have come to realise that theatre and Nonviolent Debate are not simply two methodologies used side by side, but that they address different needs within the same educational journey.

Theatre prepares the ground on which dialogue can flourish.

It helps participants become comfortable with uncertainty, encounter different perspectives and build a relationship even before sharing opinions. It creates a space in which emotions, identities and personal experiences can emerge without being hidden.

Nonviolent Debate, on the other hand, offers a framework through which these experiences can be shared, explored and understood through mutual listening and conflict transformation.

Young people do not come to our activities bringing only opinions.

They arrive bringing with them emotions, memories, identities, fears and hopes.

If we had created only spaces for discussion, we would have heard only part of their experience. Theatre has allowed deeper dimensions to emerge, whilst Nonviolent Debate has provided a respectful framework through which to share and explore them.

Final Reflections: Theatre as a Test of Dialogue

Augusto Boal wrote:

«Theatre is a rehearsal for reality».

Over the course of the project, we began to view this phrase from a different perspective.

If theatre is a test of reality, perhaps it is also a test of dialogue.

And if dialogue can be practised, then empathy, active listening, mutual respect and non-violence can also be practised.

Another dimension that emerged during the activities concerns the relationship between the body and communication. Through theatre, we learnt to pay attention not only to words, but also to gestures, expressions, silences and the non-verbal elements of communication.

This focus has profoundly enriched the quality of the Nonviolent Debate, enabling us to recognise even what remains unspoken.

Perhaps this is one of the most important roles of theatre in contemporary youth work: not to teach young people what to think, but to create the conditions in which they can think, feel, question and speak together.

Because before any meaningful debate, there is something even more fundamental.

There is the courage to begin.

There is a safe space in which to continue.

4.4 One Model, Multiple Contexts: Lessons from Local Experiments

The experiences of our partners in Ukraine, Kosovo and Turkey show how the Nonviolent Debate model can take different forms depending on the contexts in which it is applied, whilst retaining certain fundamental common elements: the centrality of listening, the affirmation of human dignity, the creation of safe spaces for expression, and the possibility of transforming disagreement into an opportunity for understanding.

In war-torn contexts, such as that of Ukraine, Nonviolent Debate has proved to be a tool for supporting individual and collective resilience, offering young people a space in which to express emotions, process difficult experiences and reclaim a sense of their own voice within the community. The experience of the Centre for Euroinitiatives highlights how, in situations of severe stress and polarisation, dialogue cannot be separated from nurturing relationships, emotional security and attention to the dynamics generated by trauma.

In the Kosovar context, however, the Local Peace pilot project has shown how Nonviolent Debate can be integrated into broader processes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The use of symbolic places, nature, community life and experiential activities has highlighted how dialogue arises not only through verbal exchange, but also through the building of relationships, the sharing of experiences and the opportunity to encounter others outside the narratives of conflict inherited from the past.

The reflection proposed by UGI-DER in Turkey added a further dimension, showing that, even before the ability to argue, it is necessary to create the emotional and relational conditions for dialogue to emerge. Through theatre, participants were able to experience empathy, active listening, curiosity and openness towards different perspectives, demonstrating that Nonviolent Debate does not begin the moment people speak up, but much earlier: the moment they feel secure enough to do so.

Although they stem from profoundly different contexts, the three experiences converge on a common element: conflict cannot be transformed merely through the teaching of communication techniques, but requires the creation of conditions in which people can feel acknowledged, listened to and respected. Nonviolent Debate thus emerges not simply as a method for debating more effectively, but as an educational practice aimed at building more democratic and inclusive relationships.

These experiments also confirm the importance of the role of the youth worker and the facilitator. Their task is not to provide answers or guide the group towards a shared position, but to create the conditions for questions, different perspectives and forms of mutual understanding to emerge. Facilitation thus becomes a process of accompaniment in which safety, trust and participation are fundamental elements.

Taken together, the partners' contributions demonstrate that there is no single path to promoting nonviolent dialogue. Each context brings with it specific challenges, memories and resources, and it is precisely this diversity that represents one of the main strengths of the model developed within the project.

From this perspective, the local initiatives carried out in the various countries do not merely represent a phase of experimentation with the model, but constitute a concrete demonstration of its adaptability and its potential as a tool for peace education, democratic participation and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

5.

Evaluation of the Model: Final Research Findings

«We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time».

T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding,* in *Four Quartets*

5.1 Evaluating the Project: Research Objectives and Methodology

The *Participation Needs Nonviolent Debate for Conflict Transformation project* was launched with the aim of developing an educational model capable of supporting youth workers, educators and young people in the constructive management of dialogue, disagreement and conflict. From its very inception, the project adopted an action-research approach, in which the development of the methodology was constantly accompanied by processes of observation, experimentation and shared reflection.

Whilst the research presented in the second chapter of this Curriculum identified the training needs, challenges and skills deemed necessary by youth workers and young people in the various partner countries, the final research was designed with a different aim: to understand the actual impact the training programme had had on those who had taken part. In other words, whilst the initial research served as the starting point for designing the Nonviolent Debate model, this second study acted as a tool for evaluating its educational effectiveness.

The evaluative research was carried out at the end of the project activities using a questionnaire addressed to participants in the training and experimentation programmes developed as part of the project. A total of 57 participants took part in the survey; they were asked to reflect on the changes they had experienced during the programme, the learning they had gained, the methodologies they considered most significant, and the possibility of applying what they had learnt to their personal and professional contexts.

The aim of the research was not simply to measure the level of satisfaction with the activities carried out. The questionnaire was designed to explore how the training experience had altered the participants' relationship with dialogue, disagreement and the facilitation of discussions, assessing whether the Nonviolent Debate model had been able to promote changes not only in communication skills, but also in attitudes, interpersonal dynamics and the very concept of the exchange of differing viewpoints.

To achieve this objective, the research combined quantitative and qualitative questions. Alongside a number of closed-ended questions, designed to gauge perceptions of the changes brought about by the training programme, the questionnaire included numerous open-ended questions inviting participants to describe their most significant experiences, the tools they considered most effective, and the ways in which they had begun to apply what they had learnt in their daily and professional

lives. This methodological choice made it possible to supplement the quantitative data with a rich collection of personal reflections, offering a deeper understanding of the learning processes activated during the project.

Taken together, the results paint an extremely positive picture. The responses collected show how the programme has fostered significant changes in the way participants listen, express their opinions, deal with disagreement and facilitate dialogue with others. Many also stated that they had already begun to use the tools and approaches learnt in the fields of youth work, education, peer discussions and professional contexts, suggesting that the learning developed during the project is transferable beyond the training context in which it was acquired.

5.2 From Debate as Competition to Dialogue as a Shared Endeavour

One of the fundamental objectives of the Nonviolent Debate model is to promote a different conception of the exchange of views. As illustrated in the previous chapters, the proposed methodology does not view debate as a competition in which the winner is whoever manages to convince or refute their opponent, but rather as an educational space geared towards mutual understanding, the exploration of differences and the shared construction of meaning.

The final research confirms this shift in perspective particularly clearly. Participants were first asked to reflect on their level of familiarity with debate before the start of the training programme. On a scale of 1 to 5, the average level of comfort in taking part in discussions characterised by disagreement stood at around 3.8, highlighting a mixed picture: alongside people already accustomed to debate, there was a significant number of participants who felt uncertain or uncomfortable about it.

The central question of the research, however, concerned the change brought about by the project. The results show that almost all participants perceived a transformation in the way they approached dialogue and disagreement. Out of 57 respondents:

- 29 stated that their approach had changed significantly;
- 20 indicated a substantial change;
- 8 noted a more modest change.

Only one person stated that they had not noticed any change in their approach to discussions.

Beyond the quantitative data, it is above all the qualitative reflections that highlight the nature of this change. A recurring theme in the responses concerns the shift from a competitive conception of debate to a deeply relational perspective. Many participants describe how the programme helped them to move away from the idea that debating necessarily means being right or getting the better of the other person, and instead to start seeing discussion as an opportunity to better understand different perspectives, listen more attentively and recognise the role of emotions, needs and personal experiences in shaping opinions.

One of the testimonies collected summarises this change particularly effectively:

> «The most important lesson was clearly understanding the difference between traditional debate and nonviolent debate. In traditional debates, you always try to “win” and prove that you are right, whereas here the focus has shifted to understanding the other person’s point of view».

This reflection directly echoes the principle that runs through the entire Curriculum: the value of debate does not lie in asserting one's own position, but in the quality of the relationship built during the exchange. Dialogue thus becomes a space in which differences are neither denied nor overcome, but explored as an opportunity for mutual learning.

A second testimonial shows how this transformation has also changed the way argumentation is conceived:

> «I have learnt that a debate does not necessarily consist of arguing and trying to prove the validity of one's own opinion at all costs, but can be an opportunity to present one's point of view in a constructive and calm manner».

The participant's words highlight a change that goes beyond the acquisition of new communication strategies. In fact, the very purpose of the debate changes: from the aim of persuading others to the opportunity to express one's own point of view clearly, whilst maintaining openness, respect and a willingness to listen.

The responses gathered also show that the programme has fostered personal transformations concerning the way people interpret disagreement and react to differences of opinion.

One participant says:

> «I realised that I had become less radical in my thinking and in the way I express myself, and that I make far fewer emotional and immediate judgements».

This account suggests that the programme has fostered greater awareness of one's own cognitive and emotional automatic responses, developing that ability to suspend judgement which is one of the fundamental conditions of Active Listening and Dilemmatic Thinking.

Another participant describes an even more profound change in the way they view those who hold different opinions:

> «Before this experience, I was genuinely convinced that if someone thought differently from me, it was simply their problem».

Despite its simplicity, this statement captures one of the most significant outcomes of the entire process: the shift from a view centred exclusively on one's own perspective to the recognition of the other as a legitimate interlocutor, bearing experiences, needs and points of view that deserve to be heard and understood.

Taken together, these accounts show that the project has not merely developed communication skills, but has fostered a transformation in the attitude with which participants approach dialogue. The most significant change lies not so much in learning to debate more effectively, but in redefining the very meaning of debate: from a competitive exercise aimed at prevailing over others to a collaborative process of jointly building understanding. It is precisely this transformation that represents one of the most significant confirmations of the validity of the pedagogical model of Nonviolent Debate and forms the central theme of the entire curriculum.

5.3 The Most Significant Learning Experiences: Learning through Experience

One of the objectives of the final research was to understand which learning experiences had contributed most to the development of the skills described by the participants. Rather than

identifying preferred activities, the analysis of the responses revealed certain methodological characteristics common to the experiences considered most transformative.

Although numerous exercises and tools were mentioned, it is clear that the most significant learning does not stem from the transmission of theoretical content, but rather from active participation in experiences that simultaneously involve reflection, interaction and direct experimentation. The activities most frequently mentioned include **Active Listening** exercises, paraphrasing, role-play, simulations, small-group work, World Café sessions, debriefing sessions, physical activities and programmes dedicated to exploring different needs, privileges and perspectives.

Of all the elements that emerged, **Active Listening** is undoubtedly the skill most frequently mentioned by participants. Numerous accounts describe how the listening exercises have changed the way they engage in conversations, shifting the focus from preparing a response to genuinely understanding the other person.

One participant recounts:

> «The paraphrasing exercise particularly struck me. Instead of immediately preparing a counter-argument whilst the other person is speaking, you first need to rephrase their point of view and check that you have understood it correctly».

This account highlights one of the central elements of the Nonviolent Debate model: listening does not mean waiting for your turn to speak, but taking responsibility for understanding the other person before formulating a response.

A second participant describes the impact of these exercises in even deeper terms:

> «Thanks to this experience, I have learnt to listen not only to the words, but also to the feelings and needs that lie behind what is said».

This reflection directly echoes the fourth pillar of the Curriculum, which is dedicated to exploring the foundations of positions. The testimonies show, in fact, that learning is not merely about acquiring a communication technique, but about developing a different way of interpreting the meaning of the opinions expressed by others.

Activities based on **role-play**, simulations and role reversal are also described as particularly meaningful. Several participants emphasise how the opportunity to adopt different perspectives has fostered a greater understanding of others' reasons and a greater ability to suspend judgement.

One of the testimonies collected states:

> «Our task was to ask questions that would help us understand why that person held that position and what experiences had contributed to shaping it».

In this case, learning arises from the opportunity to explore another person's point of view not with the aim of refuting it, but with the intention of understanding its foundations. This outcome confirms the importance of dilemmatic thinking and epistemic curiosity as fundamental skills of Nonviolent Debate.

Many participants also attach particular value to practical simulations and guided discussions, which they regard as concrete opportunities to immediately put what they have learnt into practice.

One participant observes:

> «The greatest impact on my learning came from the practical debate simulations, the work in small groups and the analysis of real-life cases».

This reflection confirms that the acquisition of dialogical skills is closely linked to direct experience. The opportunity to experiment, reflect and receive feedback makes what is learnt more easily transferable to everyday contexts.

Finally, the testimonials highlight the importance of activities dedicated to exploring social differences, perspectives and privileges.

As one participant emphasises:

> «One of the most significant moments was the session dedicated to reflecting on privilege and the position each of us occupies in society».

This type of experience broadens the dialogue beyond the interpersonal dimension, helping participants to recognise how opinions, values and opportunities for participation are also influenced by social, cultural and structural factors.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that the most significant learning has been generated by experiential, participatory and reflective methodologies. Rather than simply conveying content, the activities have enabled participants to gain practical experience of new ways of listening, engaging in dialogue and collaborating. The results thus confirm one of the pedagogical hypotheses that runs through the entire Curriculum: dialogical skills are not acquired primarily through theoretical explanation, but through intentionally designed experiences in which reflection, relationship and practice mutually reinforce one another.

5.4 Conditions that Foster Participation: the Value of the "Brave Space"

One of the aspects most thoroughly explored by the final research concerns the conditions that enable young people to participate actively in dialogue. When asked which methodologies or approaches most effectively fostered participants' engagement, a common element emerged with great clarity: **the quality of the relational space in which dialogue takes shape**.

Even more than the individual techniques used, participants emphasise the importance of feeling welcomed in a setting where it is possible to express opinions, doubts and uncertainties without fear of being judged. The creation of a **safe**, respectful and non-judgemental **space** is the factor most frequently cited as fostering authentic and inclusive participation. This is accompanied by other recurring elements, such as attentive facilitation, small-group work, role-play activities, cooperative games, physical exercises, moments of shared reflection, informal exchanges and dialogic methodologies such as the World Café, Speed Dating and circle discussions.

The testimonies gathered clearly demonstrate that a sense of relational safety is an essential prerequisite for participation.

One participant observes:

> «A safe, non-judgemental space, where teenagers and young people know they will not be judged for an opinion considered "wrong", allows them to open up much more easily».

This reflection directly echoes the concept of a **"Brave Space"** presented in the first pillar of the Curriculum. As discussed in the dedicated chapter, creating a Brave Space does not mean eliminating conflict or disagreement, but rather building a context in which people can take the risk of opening up, expressing different viewpoints and questioning themselves without fear of humiliation or exclusion.

Another participant emphasises how the quality of the educational space also depends on the ability to view every contribution as a learning opportunity:

> «For me, the most effective element was precisely the creation of a safe space. A place where there are no wrong answers, but only opportunities to learn».

Her words highlight a particularly significant shift in perspective. Participation does not stem from the certainty of having the correct answer, but from the realisation that dialogue is a process in which every contribution can become an opportunity for reflection and collective growth.

Alongside the quality of the relational space, many participants also attribute an important role to the organisation of the activities. In particular, working in small groups and in pairs is described as a tool capable of facilitating expression among those who might feel less at ease in plenary discussions.

One participant stated:

> «Group work, in small groups and in pairs, was particularly effective because it created a safe atmosphere in which everyone could express themselves and be truly listened to».

This observation confirms that participation does not depend solely on the individual characteristics of the participants, but also on the methodological choices made by those facilitating the educational process. The size of the groups, the allocation of speaking time and the design of the activities significantly influence the ability to take part in the dialogue.

The responses also highlight the value of cooperative games and physical activities as tools for inclusion. Several participants emphasise how these methods helped to overcome language barriers, reduce initial anxiety and encourage the involvement of even those with limited language or communication skills.

One participant says:

> «Definitely the games, because they allowed everyone to take part, even when there were differences in the language spoken».

This account suggests that participation cannot be viewed solely as a verbal matter. Playful, physical and experiential activities broaden the possibilities for expression, valuing different forms of communication and making dialogue accessible to people with diverse experiences and communication skills.

A final element that emerged strongly concerns the role of informal moments. Several participants observed that mutual trust is not built solely during structured activities, but also through opportunities for socialising, breaks, shared meals and spontaneous conversations. These moments, which may seem peripheral to the training programme, are described as fundamental for strengthening the sense of belonging to the group and creating the relational conditions that make authentic dialogue possible.

These findings confirm that participation does not depend primarily on individual motivation, but on the quality of the educational context in which the exchange takes place. The creation of a **Brave Space**, careful facilitation, participatory methodologies and opportunities for informal interaction are closely interlinked elements that enable people to feel empowered to speak up, listen and contribute to the dialogue. The final research therefore provides significant empirical confirmation of the first pillar of the Nonviolent Debate model, demonstrating how the quality of the educational space is the fundamental prerequisite for any subsequent process of dialogic learning.

5.5 What Practices Foster Respectful and Constructive Dialogue?

The final research also explored which methodologies contributed most to maintaining a respectful and constructive dialogue during the project activities. The responses gathered show a high degree of consensus and confirm, once again, the consistency between the participants' experiences and the pedagogical model presented in the previous chapters of this Curriculum.

The elements most frequently cited include **Active Listening**, **paraphrasing**, **nonviolent Communication**, the shared definition of **group agreements**, the use of **open-ended and non-confrontational questions**, working in small groups, the constant support of the facilitator, moments of reflection and debriefing, and the option to take breaks or *time-outs* during moments of heightened emotional intensity. Although each of these tools serves a specific function, they all appear to contribute to the same objective: to slow down the pace of the discussion and create the conditions for people to understand before responding, explore before judging, and engage in dialogue before taking opposing positions.

Among the most frequently recurring themes is the value attributed to Active Listening as a skill capable of transforming the quality of communication. Many participants noted that the preparation focused on listening and mutual respect represented one of the most significant experiences of the entire programme.

One participant states:

> «All the preparatory work dedicated to listening and respecting the other person - which are often precisely the elements that are missing from debates when they cease to be constructive».

This account suggests that constructive dialogue does not depend solely on the rules of discussion, but on the quality of the interpersonal skills that precede and accompany the exchange. Listening is thus recognised not merely as a communication technique, but as an essential prerequisite for conflict to be transformed into an opportunity for mutual learning.

The responses also highlight the role of facilitation in formulating questions that guide the dialogue. Several participants emphasise how open-ended, exploratory and dilemma-based questions have fostered deeper and less polarised conversations.

As one participant explains:

> «The choice of guiding questions: open-ended, dilemma-based and phrased in such a way as not to invite confrontation».

This observation directly relates to the third pillar of the Curriculum, dedicated to **Dilemmatic Thinking**. The quality of the questions, in fact, shapes the kind of reflection the group is called upon

to develop: whilst closed questions tend to reinforce the opposition between positions, open questions encourage the exploration of complexity, nuances and the different meanings attributed to experiences.

Another set of testimonies highlights the value of integrating communication skills with shared rules of coexistence.

One participant effectively summarises this aspect:

> «The group's shared rules, active listening techniques, paraphrasing, questions for clarification and the opportunity to express one's feelings and needs without aggression».

This reflection shows that respectful dialogue is not the result of a single methodological tool, but of the interaction between several elements: the establishment of shared agreements, the development of dialogical skills, and facilitation capable of guiding the group in managing relational dynamics. From this perspective, respect is not imposed from outside, but built collectively through intentional practices that foster trust, responsibility and shared responsibility.

Finally, a participant's account that highlights the value of shared action as a tool for building dialogue is particularly interesting.

One participant observes:

> «The final phase worked particularly well: when we sat down together to plan concrete initiatives for our communities, a common goal emerged».

This reflection suggests an element that goes beyond dialogical methodologies in the strict sense. Discussions seem to become more respectful when people are not merely called upon to express abstract opinions, but to collaborate in developing shared responses to concrete problems. The presence of a common goal helps to shift the focus from defending one's own positions to seeking collective solutions, thereby strengthening the sense of belonging and mutual responsibility.

The testimonies and outcomes reported in this section confirm that the constructive nature of dialogue does not stem from the mechanical application of individual techniques, but from the coherence between the tools used and the educational approach underpinning them. Listening, open-ended questions, Nonviolent Communication, group agreements, facilitation and reflection are complementary components of a single process aimed at transforming conflict into an experience of mutual understanding. The final research thus provides further confirmation of the validity of the Nonviolent Debate model, demonstrating how the pedagogical principles presented in the Curriculum are reflected in the participants' experiences and reflections.

5.6 Guidelines for Designing Future Nonviolent Debate Programmes

As well as reflecting on what they had learnt during the project, participants were asked which methodologies they would recommend retaining and developing in future training programmes dedicated to Nonviolent Debate. The responses gathered not only highlight the most appreciated activities but also offer a series of methodological guidelines useful for designing educational programmes focused on dialogue and the constructive transformation of conflicts.

Among the most frequently recommended tools are the **World Café**, **active listening** exercises, **role-play**, work in small groups and in pairs, reflection circles, the **Carousel** method (or concentric

circles), brainstorming and in-depth debriefing sessions. Participants also emphasise the importance of continuing to use methodologies that integrate playful and reflective elements, fostering experiential learning in which emotional engagement and critical reflection go hand in hand.

Rather than recommending individual activities, however, the testimonies highlight certain cross-cutting methodological principles that appear to determine the quality of the entire training programme.

A key element concerns the need to devote time to group-building and to the shared definition of the rules governing the dialogue. Several participants emphasise that these initial agreements are not a formal exercise, but constitute an essential condition for the smooth running of subsequent activities.

One participant observes:

> «Group agreements are fundamental, and I believe it is important to devote as much time as necessary to them. Similarly, it is essential to set aside time for an in-depth debriefing at the end of each exercise».

This reflection confirms what has emerged in the previous chapters: the quality of dialogue does not depend solely on the activities proposed, but on the care with which the educational context is constructed. The shared definition of agreements and the moments of reflection following the activities are, in fact, indispensable tools for transforming the experience into conscious learning.

The responses also highlight the importance of designing activities capable of strengthening a sense of belonging to the group and of emphasising what people have in common rather than what divides them.

One participant described one of the exercises they found most meaningful as follows:

> «When people physically draw closer and suddenly realise how much they have in common, the tension eases almost immediately».

This observation echoes one of the principles that runs through the entire Nonviolent Debate model: recognising elements of shared humanity is a fundamental step in addressing conflict without turning difference into opposition. Experiential and physical activities therefore play a role that goes beyond mere initial engagement, helping to create the relational conditions that make authentic dialogue possible.

Alongside these guidelines, the participants also put forward a number of practical recommendations for those who will be facilitating future programmes. Among the most frequently mentioned are the need to devote sufficient time to group agreements, to schedule structured debriefing sessions after each activity, to manage speaking turns in small groups where necessary, to use icebreakers that encourage participants to discover common ground, and to make the most of the materials produced during the programme by ensuring they are visible and accessible to the whole group.

These recommendations therefore confirm that the effectiveness of Nonviolent Debate does not depend on the mechanical reproduction of specific techniques, but on the ability to design programmes consistent with the pedagogical principles underpinning the model. The most highly valued activities are, in fact, those that encourage active participation, shared reflection, the building of trust and the exploration of complexity, offering participants concrete opportunities to experience forms of dialogue that are respectful, collaborative and geared towards mutual understanding.

The findings therefore represent not only a positive assessment of the methodologies tested, but also a set of practical guidelines for educators, youth workers and facilitators who wish to use the Nonviolent Debate model in different educational contexts. In this sense, the final research report does not simply bring the project to a close, but helps to further enrich the Curriculum, offering concrete suggestions for its future application and for the ongoing development of the methodology.

5.7 From Learning to Action: the Transfer of Skills into Real-life Contexts

One of the most significant indicators of the effectiveness of an educational programme concerns the participants' ability to transfer what they have learnt beyond the training context. For this reason, the final research explored whether and to what extent the skills developed during the project had already been used in the participants' daily lives, at work and in their educational activities.

The results show a high level of transferability of learning. When asked about the use of the skills acquired outside the project, 29 participants stated that they applied them frequently, 22 replied that they used them occasionally, whilst only 6 said they had not yet had the opportunity to put them into practice. Overall, the vast majority of participants therefore report that they have already transferred the learning gained during the programme to contexts other than the training setting.

The testimonies gathered show that these skills are applied across a wide range of areas. Participants describe using the Nonviolent Debate model in youth work, in school and university settings, in discussions with peers, in professional environments, in group facilitation, in educational activities and even in online conversations and on social media. This variety of contexts suggests that the tools proposed by the project have been perceived as practical resources adaptable to very different situations, rather than as skills limited to the training experience.

One of the participants clearly describes the practical value of the methodology:

> «I use some of the methods, exercises and the Nonviolent Communication approach in my day-to-day youth work».

This testimony highlights how the project did not merely provide theoretical knowledge, but tools that could be put to immediate use in the planning and delivery of educational activities. The methodology is, in fact, reinterpreted and adapted to different professional contexts, helping to enrich practices in youth work.

A second participant emphasises the professional value of the training experience:

> «Taking part in the programme has enabled me to acquire new practical tools for working with the younger generation».

This reflection confirms one of the project's key objectives: to support educators and youth workers in developing transferable methodological skills that can be integrated into everyday educational practices and adapted to the needs of different groups.

The skills developed during the programme also appear to have had an impact beyond the professional context, influencing the way in which participants deal with challenges in their daily lives.

As one participant explains:

> «This experience has helped me to tackle all discussions relating to current affairs with greater calm and effectiveness».

This testimony shows that the learning gained during the project does not relate exclusively to the delivery of educational activities, but also has an impact on everyday practices of citizenship. The ability to address complex issues with greater awareness, active listening and self-regulation is, in fact, one of the most profound objectives of the Nonviolent Debate model.

Taken together, these results suggest that the programme has fostered not only the acquisition of specific skills, but also the development of a dialogical approach that can be applied to different contexts. The application of the methodologies learnt in everyday relationships, in educational work and in civic participation confirms that the project was not experienced as an isolated event, but as a process capable of bringing about lasting changes in the participants' practices.

The ability to transfer what has been learnt beyond the training context is probably one of the most significant indicators of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model presented in this Curriculum. The fact that participants have begun to spontaneously use tools such as Active Listening, Nonviolent Communication, dialogic facilitation and the exploration of needs within their own life contexts suggests, in fact, that these skills have been internalised as ways of relating and not merely learnt as training techniques. In this sense, the final research confirms that Nonviolent Debate can help to promote educational and social practices geared towards democratic participation, the building of collaborative relationships and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts, well beyond the duration of the project itself.

5.8 What Do Young People Need in Order to Participate Confidently in Dialogue?

The final question in the research invited participants to reflect on what conditions are truly necessary for young people to take part in dialogue with confidence and feel empowered to express their own point of view. The responses gathered provide a particularly meaningful summary of the entire process, as they highlight the elements that participants consider essential for promoting authentic and inclusive participation.

The needs most frequently mentioned relate to the availability of a **safe space**, the opportunity to **be listened to and taken seriously**, the absence of judgement, the development of **active listening** skills, practical opportunities for practice and facilitation, accessible materials, confidence in one's own ability to express an opinion, shared rules that foster mutual respect, the awareness that debate is not a competition between winners and losers, and the opportunity to link discussions to one's own personal experiences. Taken together, these elements show that participation does not depend solely on possessing information or argumentative skills, but above all on the quality of the educational context in which dialogue takes shape.

Among all the responses, the need to feel listened to and recognised as legitimate participants emerges particularly strongly.

One participant sums up this need very simply:

> «First and foremost, to be listened to».

Although extremely brief, this statement echoes one of the fundamental principles of the entire Curriculum. Participation does not arise from a simple invitation to speak, but from the perception that what is expressed has value and is received with attention and respect.

Other accounts highlight how many young people still experience debate as a situation in which they risk being judged or put to the test.

One participant observes:

> «It is important to understand that a debate is not an exam».

This reflection suggests that the fear of making mistakes may be one of the main obstacles to participation. Freeing dialogue from the logic of assessment means creating the conditions for discussion to be experienced as a shared learning process rather than as an individual performance.

The testimonies also confirm, once again, the central role of the **Brave Space** as the cornerstone of the pedagogical model.

One participant states:

> «A safe environment, where you can be sure that even if your argument is challenged, this does not represent a defeat, but an opportunity to learn».

This perspective directly echoes the first pillar of the Curriculum. Feeling free to express ideas, accepting disagreement and viewing debate as an opportunity for growth are, in fact, the conditions that make genuine participation possible.

Another account effectively summarises many of the elements that emerged during the research:

> «What young people need most is a safe space in which to express their thoughts, opportunities to practise arguing their case, active listening skills, and the confidence that their point of view will be respected even when others disagree».

The participant's words highlight how participation is the result of the interaction between individual skills and the quality of the educational environment. It is not enough to learn to speak: one must also learn to listen, to engage with different perspectives and to feel recognised as a legitimate part of the dialogue.

The same theme recurs in another particularly significant reflection:

> «It is essential to ensure that young people feel they are being listened to and taken seriously».

This observation echoes the principle of meaningful participation, according to which people are more motivated to contribute when they feel that their point of view is genuinely taken into account and can have an impact on the collective process.

Finally, one of the testimonies collected expresses the cultural change proposed by the project with particular clarity:

> «It is important to make it clear from the outset that there are no winners or losers: we are simply engaging in dialogue to work together towards a common goal».

In many respects, this reflection encapsulates the entire model of Nonviolent Debate. Dialogue is no longer seen as a competition in which the strongest argument prevails, but as a collaborative process geared towards mutual understanding and the shared construction of meaning.

Taken together, the responses gathered suggest that Nonviolent Debate should not be viewed solely as a set of methodologies or facilitation techniques. Rather, participants describe the need to build an **educational culture of dialogue**, in which listening, mutual recognition, trust, participation and shared responsibility become structural elements of the learning experience. Young people are not simply asking for tools to argue more effectively, but for contexts in which they can feel welcomed, valued and empowered to contribute to the discussion. In this sense, the final research confirms that the Nonviolent Debate model represents not only a methodological approach, but a broader pedagogical perspective geared towards building dialogical, democratic and inclusive communities.

5.9 Participants Concluding Reflections

The final section of the questionnaire provided participants with an open space to share their reflections, observations and final thoughts on the experience. The responses gathered paint an extremely positive picture of the training programme and confirm the findings from the previous sections of the research. Many participants describe the project as a meaningful experience on both a personal and professional level, emphasising how the activities have helped them not only to acquire new skills, but also to change the way they listen, engage in dialogue and relate to people with different points of view.

One of the testimonials collected expresses this perception with particular clarity:

> «I feel that this experience has helped me to develop my communication and active listening skills, to broaden my perspective and to acquire new knowledge».

This reflection highlights how the learning described by the participants does not relate exclusively to technical skills, but also involves the ability to observe reality from different perspectives and to approach dialogue with greater openness.

Another participant emphasises the value of the programme in terms of dealing with more complex and controversial issues:

> «Taking part in these activities has helped me to better understand how to engage in constructive dialogue, even on difficult or controversial topics».

This testimony confirms one of the project's fundamental objectives: to develop skills that enable people to address conflict without avoiding it or turning it into confrontation, but rather by fostering respectful forms of discussion geared towards mutual understanding.

The responses also show how many participants perceived the project as an opportunity for professional development, useful for broadening their methodological repertoire.

One participant notes:

> «The training has enabled me to broaden my perspective and acquire new techniques, methods and approaches to use in my work».

Finally, one reflection is particularly significant, as it sums up the transformative potential of the proposed methodology:

«Nonviolent Debate could represent a real turning point in the way we communicate».

In addition to individual learning, several participants expressed appreciation for the quality of the facilitation, for the atmosphere of trust built up during the course, and for the value of the group's international and intercultural dimension. The opportunity to engage with people from different backgrounds is described as a factor that further enriches the learning process, fostering the exchange of experiences and openness to different perspectives.

Alongside the many positive aspects, some participants expressed a desire to continue the programme through further opportunities for meeting, experimentation and in-depth exploration. This request suggests that the project was perceived not as a concluded experience, but as the start of a journey of personal and professional growth that deserves to be continued over time.

Taken together, the final reflections confirm that the value of the project lies not only in the content provided or the methodologies tested, but above all in the quality of the educational experience itself. The programme appears, in fact, to have contributed to the creation of a learning community in which dialogue, active listening and participation were put into practice even before being studied at a theoretical level.

5.10 Research Conclusions

The results of the final research provide significant confirmation of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model developed as part of **the 'Participation Needs Nonviolent Debate for Conflict Transformation'** project. Analysis of the questionnaires shows, in fact, that the programme has brought about significant changes both in terms of communication skills and in the attitudes with which participants approach dialogue, disagreement and participation.

Throughout this chapter, one shared transformation has emerged with particular clarity: the shift from viewing debate as a competition to seeing dialogue as a process of mutual understanding and the shared construction of meaning. Participants describe a greater ability to listen before responding, to suspend judgement, to recognise the complexity of others' experiences, and to approach conflict as a learning opportunity rather than as a clash between irreconcilable positions.

The research also confirms the central role **of Active Listening**, recognised as the skill that has most influenced the training experience. The testimonies show how learning to listen deeply, use paraphrasing, ask open-ended questions and recognise the other person's needs and emotions forms the foundation of a truly respectful and constructive dialogue.

A second recurring theme concerns the importance of **the 'Brave Space**'. Participants consistently emphasise that the ability to take part in dialogue depends on the presence of a context in which it is possible to express opinions, doubts and vulnerabilities without fear of being judged. The quality of the educational space therefore emerges as an essential condition for fostering participation, learning and the building of mutual trust.

The research also highlights that the most effective methodologies are those of an experiential and participatory nature. Role-play, simulations, small-group work, World Café sessions, paraphrasing exercises, physical activities and debriefing sessions are described not only as engaging activities, but as pedagogical tools capable of tangibly transforming the way people engage in dialogue and relate to one another.

A further, particularly significant finding concerns the transfer of learning to different areas of life. The majority of participants report that they are already applying the skills acquired in youth work, educational activities, school and university settings, professional relationships and everyday conversations. This suggests that the programme did not result in learning confined to the project itself, but rather fostered the development of genuinely transferable and lasting skills.

Finally, the responses addressing young people's needs clearly show that participation cannot be reduced to the mere acquisition of debating techniques. Rather, participants highlight the need to create environments in which everyone can feel heard, respected, valued and free to contribute to the dialogue without fear of being judged. From this perspective, Nonviolent Debate is not merely an educational methodology, but a cultural approach aimed at promoting democratic participation, active citizenship and the constructive transformation of conflicts.

Thus, the research findings confirm that the project succeeded in creating a meaningful learning environment in which participants were able to experiment with new ways of listening, reflect critically on conflict and develop dialogical practices based on mutual respect, equality and shared responsibility. The evidence gathered therefore provides strong support for the dissemination and further development of the **Nonviolent Debate** model, suggesting that it may represent a practical resource for educators, youth workers, facilitators and educational institutions committed to promoting peace, participation and the nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

A Final Reflection

Every educational project leaves behind tools, methodologies and outcomes. More rarely, however, does it also leave behind a question capable of guiding the reader beyond the conclusion of the programme. This, perhaps, is the greatest ambition of **Nonviolent Debate**.

Throughout this Curriculum, we have discussed listening, conflict, participation, facilitation, peace education and conflict transformation. We have proposed activities, practical tools and theoretical frameworks. But, above all, we have sought to describe a different way of understanding dialogue: not as a technique to be applied, but as a daily practice of relationship-building, an exercise in democratic responsibility and a process through which differences can become a resource rather than a threat.

We live in an age where public debate is often characterised by haste, oversimplification, a desire for confrontation and a difficulty in recognising the complexity of human experiences. In this context, choosing to slow down, to listen before responding, to ask questions rather than pass judgement, and to recognise the dignity of others even when we disagree is a profoundly educational act. It means contributing to the building of communities in which diversity is not feared, but recognised as an essential condition of democracy.

Nonviolent Debate does not aim to eliminate conflict or to seek an artificial consensus. On the contrary, it invites us to recognise conflict as an integral part of human coexistence and to develop the skills needed to navigate it without severing the relationship. It is not a matter of convincing the other person, but of understanding what makes their point of view possible; not of winning an argument, but of creating the conditions so that everyone involved can emerge with a richer understanding of reality.

This is probably the deepest significance of the journey undertaken by the partnership. The methodology presented in these pages belongs not only to the project that gave rise to it, but to all

those who choose to experiment with it, adapt it and develop it further. Every workshop, every class, every group and every community will be able to enrich it with new practices, new reflections and new experiences, helping to keep it alive and constantly evolving.

We hope that this Curriculum will become a companion for educators, youth workers, facilitators, teachers and young people, supporting them in creating spaces where dialogue is not the exception, but a daily practice. Because every time we choose to listen before judging, to understand before responding, and to transform conflict into an opportunity for mutual learning, we help to build communities that are fairer, more inclusive and capable of imagining the future together.

After all, **Nonviolent Debate** does not simply teach us to debate better. It teaches us to navigate conflict without losing sight of our relationships, to recognise the other person as a human being before seeing them as an opinion, and to understand that peace does not arise from the absence of differences, but from the ability to navigate them with respect, courage, responsibility and curiosity.

It is with this hope that the partnership presents this Curriculum to educators, youth workers, facilitators, teachers and all those committed to promoting participation, human rights and peace, in the hope that it may contribute to the spread of educational practices capable of transforming dialogue into an everyday tool for democracy, inclusion and social change.

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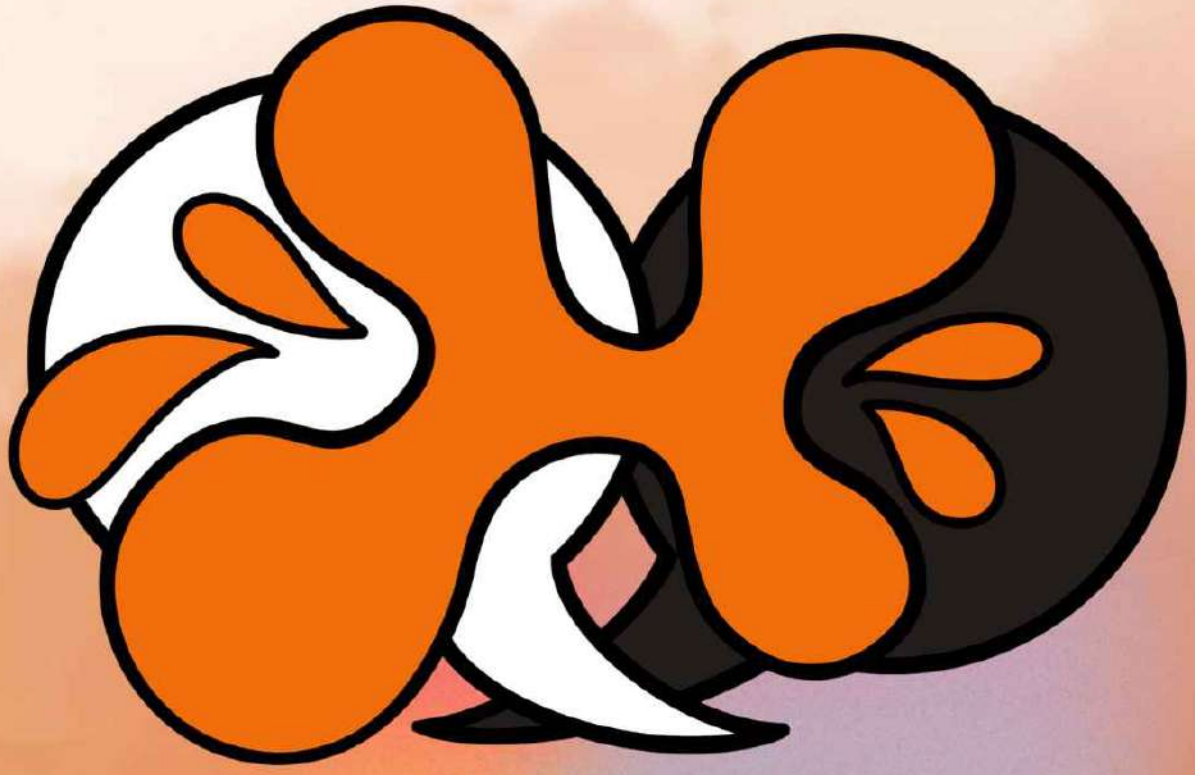
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PARTICIPATION NEEDS NONVIOLENT DEBATE FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

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