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CHEAT SHEET FOR EDUCATORS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

#basics #educators_competences #attitude

#checklist #reflection #tips

About the author

(Photo Credit: Vika Shishorina)

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is a trainer and facilitator of educational processes who creates and conducts programs for young people from the Republic of Moldova. She has a background in journalism and exact sciences. She believes in creating methodologies and writing articles as means of disseminating and initiating changes on a larger scale than one she can reach in individual or group work with her participants. Over the past few years, Aina has worked extensively on the topics of human rights, minority rights, social entrepreneurship, cultural management, critical thinking, and non-formal education. She spent one year as a school teacher, which led her to realize she wanted to work with teachers and to contribute to innovation and change in the educational system. Aina accepted the transition to online work during the pandemic, embracing its potential for the modernization of youth development work. The war in Ukraine has shaken her perspective and motivated her to seek a new formula for initiating more sustainable changes in the educational process, along with methods that can help participants stay intrinsically motivated, find resources for recovery, and embrace diversity, freedom, and human rights.

"Crisis is always an opportunity for human beings to rise beyond themselves."

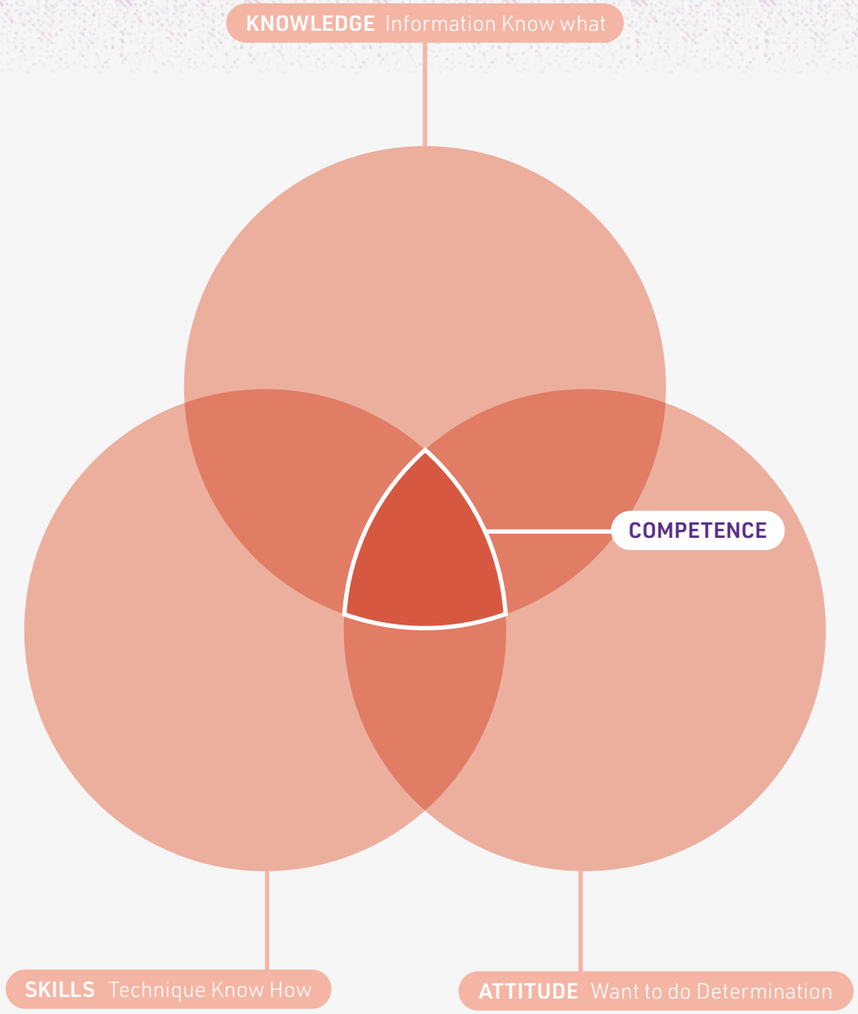
Sadhguru

Being **a teacher, educator, facilitator** and working mostly with people and communities in other roles, I observed that not all our familiar competencies make us resilient to situations and processes that may occur during crisis periods. In addition to those competencies that need to be developed to train and facilitate people and learning processes, there are specific competencies that are directly related to the delivery of citizenship education. Implementing citizenship education in times of crisis is a complex and demanding endeavor. Citizenship education covers sensitive topics and those emotions and attitudes that are vulnerable and are attacked first in times of crisis, much like those we are in today.

In this article, I reflect on how our teachers', trainers', and facilitators' practice may be improved during a crisis, and I also offer some recommendations informed by my work with learners and teachers online with people from Ukraine who came to Moldova because of the war. Here I list my observations about some specific areas of educators' competencies and behaviors that need rethinking when working in contemporary crises.

Let me write a bit about the notion of **competence**: "Competence is an overall system of values, attitudes and beliefs as well as skills and knowledge, which can be put into practice to manage diverse complex situations and tasks successfully."[1]

1 SALTO Youth, "A Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally," 2022, https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3460/CompetencemodelForYoutworker_Online-web.pdf



Competence here means the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that are in permanent development. A competent professional is a person aware of their level of knowledge, their ability to apply skills, and their awareness and demonstration of certain attitudes. These three components result in specific behaviors.

Example:

COMPETENCE: Active listening

SKILL: Listens carefully to others without interrupting and in an unbiased manner, encourages sharing and expression using adequate methods

KNOWLEDGE: Understanding of the various dimensions and elements of active listening and non-verbal communication

ATTITUDE & VALUES: Non-judgmental and engaging attitude

Education and learning can become a safe space for those in need of it during an unsafe time. There are several tools for educators' competencies, one of which is the ETS Competence Model for Trainers from SALTO.[2] I have chosen a few indicators and recommendations from different levels – knowledge, skills, attitudes – which I consider to have an urgent priority now.[3]

- Acceptance of ambiguity, uncertainty, and change
- Showing a willingness and ability to look at identity, culture, and related aspects, and dimensions from different perspectives
- Maintaining an awareness of own identity
- Ability to initiate critical reflection
- Reflecting and using diverse methods to increase self-awareness
- Exhibiting the willingness to support and empower others
- Being able to apply, explain, and defend human rights principles even if their defense is not applicable in crises happening today
- An ability to listen actively (with a non-judgmental and engaging attitude)
- Openness to the clear expression of thoughts, feelings, and emotions and the ability to explain them
- Awareness of conditions and personal experiences of people coming from conflict areas and from groups affected by the crisis
- Awareness of trauma and other effects of crisis and conflict, knowledge of how to deal with physical and psychological traumas
- Ability to reflect on one's own civic engagement, values, and beliefs and to act responsibly and constructively
- Ability to create a safe space, raise awareness and acceptance about this safe space, openly discussing with learners what their needs are
- Consideration and integration of learners' needs in the learning space, process, and program
- Sensitivity to and interest in the values and beliefs of the learners

In the next section, I will explore some ideas and recommendations resulting from the list of competencies, focusing on concrete observations of what works and what doesn't seem to work in implementing training activities.

2 "SALTO Youth - ETS Competence Model for Trainers," n.d., https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainercompetencedevelopment/trainercompetences/.

3 Anne Strauch, "GRETA – a Competence Model for Teachers in Continuing Training," EPALE - European Commission, December 13, 2018, https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/greta-competence-model-teachers-continuing-training; "Competence Area," SALTO Youth, 2020, https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3752/180320_SALTO-CompetenceModel_Trainer_08_o.pdf.

Accept that war and other crises are real and are inside the classroom or training space

Large-scale national and global crises influence the emotional and physical state of many people. Those emotions, attitudes, questions, frustrations, and protracted uncertainty cannot exist in the space of learning without being addressed and openly discussed. In the facilitators' community, we always use a metaphor in such cases: That the big elephant in the room (difficult emotions, frustrations, uncertainty, etc.) occupies the attention of the participants and cannot be treated as invisible by the facilitator, educator or trainer. They should not permit this elephant to stay in the learning space, ignored, but should instead be discovered. At the same time, while teaching math or Spanish the existence of the elephant cannot be ignored either, even if this is not the main subject. Topics related to politics, health, environmental, and sociological issues may get raised during many other lessons and not only in specific lessons on civic education. Not avoiding the elephant is the first step towards fostering the feeling that we are all on the same page.

Value volunteering, civic involvement, and proactivity

"Of course, we knew that we have a lot of volunteer-directed people, but so many …" – a friend from Ukraine recently told me.

Volunteer participation and involvement in solving social problems and supporting vulnerable areas and groups look different in times of crisis or military conflict. Volunteering can be life-threatening in some cases. At a critical time, people who are proactively involved in volunteering can have specific experiences and trauma. It is important to understand here that both volunteers who are residents within the country and volunteers who are physically outside the conflict but who are involved in working with refugees all need support. So, when organizing a program or training for volunteers, don't forget to include some practices for overcoming burnout or processing trauma.

Dealing with conflict management

Basic conflict management skills are now indispensable. Disinformation campaigns strengthen people's attachment to certain positions and values. Because crises influence many people, opinions and situations are discussed daily in families and schools. Propaganda often paints the picture of "black and white" situations even to those uninterested in politics, global issues or the economy. This is because the consequences of such crises affect everyone.

Create a space for the improvement of inner peace and emotional, psychological support

Acquire a general overview and get acquainted with practices that help keep balance in the group. It is also important to have access to a specialist who can cover participants' psychological states. If there is an opportunity to co-facilitate or partner with a psychologist or psychotherapist, it would be helpful to give additional psychological support to participants.

Specific support for inner peace and psychological needs of active citizens, volunteers, and activists

Active citizens – activists, youth workers, human rights defenders, people from nongovernmental and public associations, advocacies, charities, and others – often teeter on the brink of burnout, depression, and crippling anxiety due to their emotional attachment and commitment to environmental and social causes. These individuals are much more prone to mental health issues even in stable conditions, even in stable conditions, let alone in times when the majority of the population resides in the panic zone.[4] So after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, I observed (and even felt) the following tendencies:

4 See also "Zone of Proximal Development," Wikipedia, December 3, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_of_proximal_development.

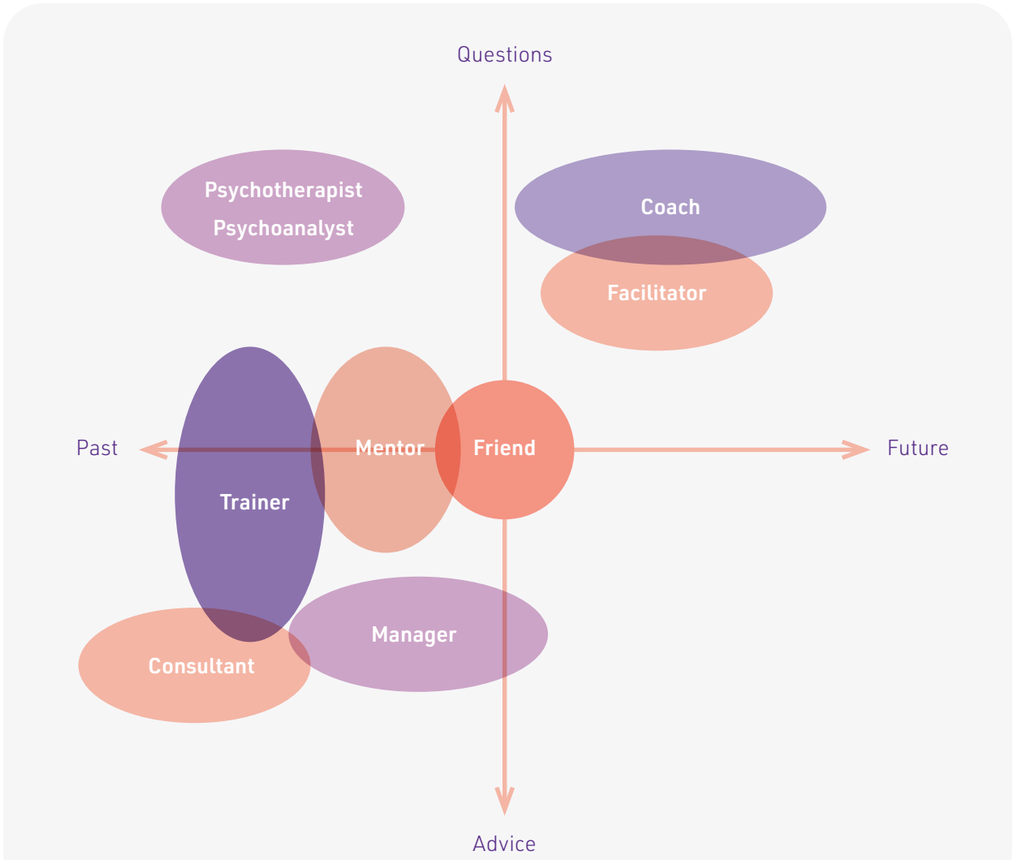
- Active citizens put their own activities on hold to provide immediate solutions needed for the refugees.
- Active citizens, especially those previously involved in educational and community development activities, now face the situation when values, principles (such as democracy, liberty, acceptance of different opinions, dialogue, etc.) are not relevant anymore, and will remain so for the near future under the conditions of the state of emergency. They are committed to building equity-oriented, non-discriminatory, and diversity-cherishing attitudes, without knowing when or how they will start rebuilding these attitudes and values.

Apply a learner-centered approach:

In non-formal civic education, we have always talked about the learner-based approach and an individual's personal learning needs and goals. In the environment of conflict or an unsafe space, this point becomes even more crucial. People whose basic needs, according to Maslow's pyramid, are unmet on various levels and degrees cannot be effectively involved in the learning process with the same involvement and motivation as participants whose basic needs are met.

Learn to diversify your roles according to the objective and target group

Educators need to diversify the roles they have and accept the different responsibilities each of those roles may entail. Citizenship education is about diversity and personal learning trajectory. Taking on the role of facilitator enables you to take care of the group processes and interactions, but less so of the results or the content. As a trainer, you can deliver and direct the group/individuals to learn something specific, for example how to work with the media, or deal with stressful situations. Finally, a coach uses questions to support the learner in identifying their individual strategy, decisions, and future areas of development. This awareness of different responsibilities with each role makes it easier to adapt and adopt the right persona in different learning contexts and settings.



[International Erickson University of Coaching]

Creating a safe learning space

When a trigger or a painful issue is very fresh, you can't be certain that your expressions or actions won't break someone's emotional posture. This is also normal: not being prepared or ready for all the things that can happen unexpectedly. To be as prepared as I can be, and to enhance the potential of safe space, I consider the following issues while preparing and organizing the training or workshop space:

- Avoid mentioning the names of companies and structures that could bring bad memories or lead to bad associations.
- Some types of sounds and music used during the sessions and lessons (sound from the clapperboard, siren, balloon popping) are better excluded.
- In discussions or fun activities, including about relationships with grandparents, parents, and other relatives, a trainer or teacher cannot know whether these people were affected by COVID or military conflict, or even if they are alive today.
- Using questions and exercises about the place you'd like to visit, to be in now – especially when working with refugees – before fun activities can lead in another direction of thinking. It's better to use questions and topics regarding place, family, hobbies, and daily activities carefully and consciously.
- The topic of future plans and desire where to go next [for education, to live] also should be addressed carefully, using preparatory steps.
- Be more sensitive with energizers and any type of exercise that involves physical contact for potentially traumatized participants, which forces them to exit their comfort zone while in the company of new people, show emotions, and speak loudly.

Attitudes – the pillars of resilience

One question that often made me think is how to develop or improve attitudes. The following list is not a set of recommendations, but more a set of practical suggestions from my personal experience:

- Discuss with people who either have the same position or the opposite one and be open to critically assessing your own and others' views.
- Call into question and challenge your opinion and position, analyze and identify what is doable and what represents a crucial truth for you.
- Demonstrate and describe your position in discussions using strong and concrete arguments – observe what you feel.

- Observe the contradictions in your values and attitudes.
- Go inside communities with alternative and opposite points of view to understand better the causes and effects of their way of thinking.
- Ask people to give you healthy feedback[5] to see something that can open another part of the Johari window.[6]
- Use **reflection and self-reflection** as tools for analyzing attitudes and setting up learning goals to develop them. It can be guided by an external facilitator, or self-guided. In the appendix, you'll find a checklist with a variety of reflective questions that can support the process of analyzing your own attitudes and reactions.

Stay safe! I hope you're able to identify your own pathway for efficient learning processes during the crisis – in a BANI world, we might face a lot of them.[7]

5 *"Give Constructive Feedback in 4 Steps,"* Timely, November 18, 2022, https://timelyapp.com/blog/give-constructive-feedback-in-4-steps.

6 Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. *„The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness."* Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development, 246 (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1955), 2014-2003.

7 The BANI acronym stands for *"Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear and Incomprehensible"* and is meant to replace the VUCA acronym (which stands for *"Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous"*), first coined in the 1980s. For more information, see Stephan Grabmeier, *"BANI versus VUCA: a new acronym to describe the world,"* Stephan Grabmeier, September 23, 2020, https://stephangrabmeier.de/bani-versus-vuca/.

APPENDIX #1
SELF-REFLECTION FOR EDUCATORS

List of questions for self-guidance – choose those that are relevant to you

- What moment irritated you or provoked certain vivid emotions?
- What did you feel at the physical level when the stimulus appeared (for example, something specific was said by a learner or demonstrated by their behavior)? What position did your body take?
- Could you identify your exact feelings (What did you feel in the moment? Right after? The moment you had a reaction? The moment you decided not to react? The moment you decided to react? After some time?) using the circle of feelings[8]? Try to determine which of your values was affected by this situation.
- Recall a time when similar topics were raised: did you feel the same or similarly as you feel now? In what situations did this topic not cause this attitude? Determine what was different at the following levels: environment, characteristic of the group, characteristic of the individual, your mood and mental, physical, psychological statute, level of fatigue, time, and type of experience, previous interactions with the group/person, goal of the activity, type of method, etc.
- What are alternative approaches and views on this topic or experience? Why, of all the alternatives, did you choose to have that attitude? Did you make this choice consciously? At what point in your life and under what circumstances did you decide to make this choice? If this is an unconscious choice that came from external factors, what factors were they: childhood experience, parental experience, a specific situation from life, an organic consequence of trauma, a response to events occurring in the external environment, or something else?
- Do you want to change anything in the attitude you have? If not, clearly formulate your position? If so, formulate what would you want to make it look like.

8 Robert Plutschik, "Feelings Wheel," 2022, https://feelingswheel.com/.

- Does this attitude influence any interactions and educational/facilitation processes with any type of person/group? In what way? With what type of group/person?
- Does this attitude create interpretations or assumptions about any possible learners? If so, how do you ensure neutrality and impartiality towards these learners?
- Does this attitude create interpretations/stereotypes about any people who are not in the role of your participants, in simple everyday life? If so, what kind of interpretation and preconceptions do you have? What changes when these people become your participants, learners?
- Is this attitude aimed at people (learners) or a phenomenon (local, national, global)?
- What are your most recent achievements in education and facilitation?
- What is the area you want to improve your level of knowledge, attitude, skills?
- What is the strongest impact of your work that you have witnessed? How do you measure the impact of the activities you are organizing?
- What does a fruitful relationship and interaction with learners mean to you?
- Where is a "no go" – a boundary you don't cross during your sessions and lessons (in topics, in relations, in communication, in methods, in behavior)?
- How can you take care of yourself during the training and educational processes? How can you take care of participants' feelings during the training and educational processes?
- How can you improve your work and professionalism? From whom could you ask feedback to know what to improve?
- How can you influence things that are frightening you, disappointing you? How can you influence things that are making you happy, proud?

APPENDIX #2
REFLECTION PROCESS FOR LEARNERS

(Guided by educator)

While working and dealing with our own attitudes and reactions, we also need to consider the reflection and debriefing of the activities organized for students, participants, etc.

I recommend using a simple method – The 4Fs[9] – for debriefing.

We use this method for many types of activities, especially reflections after:

- small experiential activities that challeng and check the participants' reactions and decisions (Walking Debate[10], Fish Bowl[11])
- discussions and activities based on the agreements of the group and/or individually (The Bomb Shelter Exercise[12], The Drawbridge Exercise – story about the King and Queen[13])
- role playing social games (Step Forward, Tribes, Identity and Labels) and board games with a strong message and space for interpretation. EcoVisio has developed a board game on Climate Change and Politics[14].

THE 4F DEBRIEF FRAMEWORK

Extract		Transfer	
FACTS	**FEELINGS**	**FUTURE**	**FINDINGS**
What happened? What did you see? hear? think?	How do you feel about it? Is this a good or a bad thing?	How can we use/ apply what we have learned? What is going to be different the next time?	What can we learn from this experience? What can we gain from this?

9 Roger Greenway, *"The Four F's of Active Reviewing,"* The University of Edinburgh, November 5, 2018, https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/four-f.

10 *"Walking Debate,"* Creativity & Change, November 24, 2017, https://www.creativityandchange.ie/exercise/walking-debate/.

11 *"Fishbowl,"* Facing History and Ourselves, October 19, 2009, https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/fishbowl.

Below you can find a list of questions for guided discussion with participants and students that support them in the process of reflection and help them identify the educational lesson they took from the experience. **Note** that these questions should be adapted for each context and exercise.

Checklist #1: Reflection on the process

- ☑ At what point did you get more deeply involved in the process?
- ☑ What emotion or feeling was the strongest during the process? At what point exactly did it surface? What is the reason that this emotion arose at a particular moment? Is there any connection or explanation of the origin of this attitude or emotion with an event/incident/ experience from the past?
- ☑ What was this process about, for you?
- ☑ Have you gone through a similar process before (at the level of emotions), and if so, in what context?
- ☑ Did you at any point feel like you wanted to exit the process? What made you stay? What would have happened had you left the process, how would you have felt?
- ☑ What role did you take in the process: an observer or an active participant? Why were you in this role?
- ☑ What events or phenomena in society do you connect with this experience?

12 "The Bomb Shelter Exercise," University of Notre Dame, 2020, https://www3.nd.edu/~jthomp19/AS300/2_Spring%20Semester/Conflict_Management/Student_Handout/Conflict_Management_Student_Handout_V2.pdf.

13 "The Drawbridge Exercise," Millersville University, n.d., https://www.millersville.edu/gened/files/pdfs-faculty-handbook/05-the-drawbridge-exercise.pdf.

14 "Keep Cool – Gambling with the Climate," Climate Game, accessed December 6, 2022, https://www.climate-game.net/en/.

- How did you communicate during the process? Passive, aggressive, restrained, did not communicate? And how did you want to communicate? What prevented you from doing so?
- What would you do differently if given chance for a do-over?

Check-list #2: Reflection on the result

- What is the result of your activity? (It is worthwhile reflecting on this issue even if the result is not positive)
- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the result? For what reasons?
- What key element or elements led to this result?
- What lesson are you taking for your next attempt? (What can you do differently?)
- What is missing for the result to be better? What can you do to improve the result? What will you do next time to make the result better (if you repeat the activity here and now)?
- The result that you expected (if it turned out differently than in reality) – can you trace where the result comes from?
- What are the consequences of the result that you got?
- What strategy did you start with? Does the result match what you originally planned?
- Which of your values manifested differently than you expected? What conclusion can you draw about your attitude towards people in similar events?
- With what emotion did you complete the activity? What actions, events, steps, accidents led you to these emotions? What action can meet your need or change the emotion you feel? Do you want to change your emotional state?

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