

# Facilitator Manual



Life  
Worth  
Living

*Caring for our  
Educators and Principals*



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**LIFE Partners**

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Jonge denkers. Grote doeners.

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# 1. Introduction

**Life Worth Living: Caring for our Educators and Principals (LIFE, 2022-1-IS01-KA220-SCH-000088285)** is an Erasmus+ project that aims to increase the *well-being of educators and principals* by increasing their sense of meaning in life. The **LIFE** course (based on the **Life Worth Living** approach from Yale University) invited educators and principals from five countries (Iceland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy and Greece) to participate in the **LIFE** journey over the course of nine months. **LIFE** launched with a facilitator training intensive which prepared teams of facilitators from each country to design the **LIFE** course for educators and principals in their countries. Equipped with methods, session structures, templates and the order of **LIFE** questions the facilitators continued to meet online and share their expertise as each pair planned, designed, chose texts and implemented **LIFE** in their countries. The **LIFE** course was structured with two in-person national retreats, two national asynchronous and online sessions and a final international retreat bringing together all participants into one **LIFE** learning community.

The **LIFE** course is a unique journey designed and implemented by the **LIFE** facilitators. As such, **LIFE** is the epitome of diversity in which every aspect of **LIFE** is strengthened and enriched by the diversity in text choices and methods of facilitation. This manual draws on facilitator expertise and experiences over the course of the **LIFE** project and aims to offer a guide that supports the on-going training of new **LIFE** facilitators. While it “stands on the shoulders” of many who have developed **Life Worth Living**, **LIFE** has developed a unique journey organized and structured in new ways and which has intentionally built a robust and dynamic **LIFE** community.

The unique LIFE journey is built up in the following ways:

- 1.) it is structured around seven profound and thought-provoking questions that guide the learning journey. The questions are often approached with an intentional layering of diverse modalities
- 2.) it blends intensive in-person experiences with both asynchronous engagement with material and the learning community and on-line participatory workshops and a specially designed LIFE learning platform to foster continuous connection and growth; Getting participants away from their “regular lives” surrounded by nature, provides them with an opportunity to make space for the LIFE journey.
- 3.) it integrates meaningful rituals, connections to nature, and embodied practices to create, nurture, and sustain a reflective and supportive learning community, engaging participants in a holistic and transformative way.



- 4.) it offers organizing structures for facilitators in training as they design the LIFE journey for their participants.
- 5.) it is developed within an explicit educational framework using a learning outcome approach which articulates the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes and which combined result in new competences for the participants.

**LIFE** is a personal development experience in which participants are invited to become part of a cohort of teachers and principals who are given a moment to pause, consider fundamental questions of life, to share and to listen with others, to gather their thoughts, so that they are empowered to clarify what matters in their life. **LIFE** is a journey in which participants excavate their sense of meaning and purpose in life through collective self-reflection, engagement and critical self-questioning. Through this personal transformation a strong potential for an inter-personal and professional transformation exists. This transformation is pursued through the process of coming together to explore, connect, think deeply and contemplate the meaning and shape of a good life by contemplating some of the most fundamental questions in life:

To whom am I responsible?  
How do I act?  
What should I hope for?  
How should I respond to failure?  
What role does suffering play in a good life?  
What is worthy of my time?  
How does the good life feel?

The collective experience, wisdom and input from 16 facilitators (from Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Iceland, and Italy) trained in the LWL approach is reflected in these pages. As a partnership they designed and brought **LIFE** to life!

This manual presents the fundamental principles upon which the **LIFE** course is built. It is intended for organizations and individuals who are interested in becoming **LIFE** facilitators and offers methods and ideas to those interested in learning more.



## 2. Philosophy as an examination

The **LIFE** course is organized around several philosophical questions which participants explore by reading philosophical texts from diverse traditions, cultures and religions, across time and from various regions of the world. Participants reflect on them through various participative educational practices based on dialogue in one form or another. The topics are the good life, the worthy life, and how teachers and principals can be supported in making the quest for the good life central to their own lives and work.

The principal mode of inquiry is discussion, or rather *dialogue*. This ordinary English word, *dialogue* comes from ancient Greek, *dialogos*, and is composed of two parts, *dia* which means *between* and *logos*, which can mean *reason*. In a dialogue the reason emerges between the participants through the activity of listening and responding – speaking responsively and listening attentively.

Each participant will, no doubt, take different messages from the readings and the dialogues. By reading the texts together and engaging with them in a community of learning, participants deepen their understanding of the texts, the questions and their own lives. Through the reading and discussion of texts, participants engage with certain content, but the focus is not on the content as such but on much wider understanding and on certain skills, such as the skills to think about the big questions in life, to help others think critically about those questions, and to think aloud in a community of inquiry. By organizing the work through in-person retreats and asynchronous learning and online meetings, participants are given an opportunity to take a break from their busy lives, to pause, reconnect with their own thinking, and develop new and energizing relationships with colleagues in their field. During these sessions there is ample opportunity to engage deeply with the thinking of diverse philosophers, but also, and no less importantly, with the diverse understanding of the material as shared by others.



### 3. Reflective spaces

The **LIFE** learning modules are not just about discussing challenging questions and reading (sometimes obscure) texts. They are also about pedagogy. Thus, during the sessions participants explicitly reflect on the pedagogical methods used and how they impacted them as learners (debrief sessions). Like *dialogue*, *pedagogy* is an old Greek word, *paidagōgos*. It is composed of two other words, *paidos* which means *child* and *agōgos* which refers to someone who leads. Initially the word referred to the slave that would accompany the child to school but later it came to refer to a person who leads in the process of learning. Throughout the course, participants support each other – or lead each other – in a learning process as they experience the **LIFE** journey themselves and prepare the journey for others. A strong component of the pedagogy behind the course is a conviction – and a commitment – to the idea that learning is a communal process and is most successful when taking place in a democratic community of learners.

During the in-person sessions participants also reflect on the impact that the place or space has on the learning process. Thus, questions such as the following are like reflective companions during the journey:

Do spaces have a seat of power?

Do spaces influence communication and control?

Do spaces teach and encourage and discourage activities?

Participants are inspired to align their own methods with the **LIFE** approach, foregrounding critical self-awareness, intellectual generosity, and truth-seeking pluralism. The aim is to help participants to develop greater fluency with and capacity for truth-seeking conversations about the good life across important and enduring lines of difference as they simultaneously integrate their experience and expertise as they shape the **LIFE** journey for others.





## 4. Is this a step-by-step guide?

This manual describes nine sessions of the **LIFE** course. The middle seven each focus on one question while the first and last sessions frame the course with the intentional opening and closing of the journey. Each session is given a framework and suggestions for how it can be held as part of **LIFE**. Does this mean that there is only one way of implementing the **LIFE** course? Is **LIFE** a course that moves along one narrow path where everyone must follow exactly in the steps of those who developed this? The answer to these questions is “No”. And although we call this a “facilitators’ manual” it is not describing a step-by-step way of successfully completing some task. Different facilitators can, and must, find their own specific ways of moving through the different sessions of the course. And yet, each sessions has a specific role; there is a good reason why the course is composed the way it is, and the descriptions of the activities have been adjusted after various trial and error attempts by different facilitators in multiple countries. Anyone attempting to travel the path of **LIFE** must find their own distinctive way and create their own unique **LIFE** sustaining community.

The first session is about coming together, it is about building trust, and it is about shaping the space in which the participants come together. Thus, the first session focuses on the question “Who are we?” Different spaces, different participants, different times, may require different means, but the aim is the same: facilitating a coming together to initiate a vibrant community of learners. To set the course in motion, it is good to think a ritual that connects the participants to the place they are in, to the work that lies ahead, and to each other.

The second session takes up the question “To whom are we responsible?” The texts listed have proved to be useful, but different texts might work better with different participants. The methods described for engaging with the question are silent conversation and a version of community of inquiry combined with careful reading of the texts where participants get to share in small groups and with the whole community.

For the third session, the question “How do I act?” is engaged with through a method of meditation and reflection. The reflection can then be taken further, shared with others, either in pairs or in groups.

Session four moves the attention from the present and the past, as it were, to the future by asking “What should I hope for?”. For this question we suggest using again a version of a community of inquiry which takes place online and which is first supported by asynchronous learning.

Session five and six take up questions that can be challenging, namely about failure and suffering. Although there is not a “right” order in which to approach the questions which frame the **LIFE** course, these two questions are best addressed once the safe learning community is established, when the participants have had time to get to know each other and the community has become respectful and trusting.

Session seven takes up the question, “What is worthy of my time?” In



**LIFE**, this is another asynchronous and online session that supports participant exploration of both the meaning of time and worth, a review of the span of their lives thus far, careful consideration of how they spend their time and whether that offers them meaning.

The eighth session takes up the question “How does the good life feel?”. Here participants explore the role emotions play in their vision of a good life. This session lends itself to the incorporation of ritual and additional embodied practices such as music, dance, writing, and art. It is also an opportunity to use the “silent conversation” method in which participants reflect in writing on a short quote that is written on a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper. This gives them different means to reflect, but it also gives them an opportunity to experience being together in total silence.

The final session is a closing ceremony where participants show their gratitude to each other for the time and the mental and emotional work they have been going through together. It is important to bring the whole journey to an end. Thus, for the final session we advise developing a respectful ceremony and ritual.



## 5. Session 1 ~ Who are we?

**Objectives:** Get to know the facilitators and the community • listen attentively to others • identify and articulate initial thoughts on how the good life is shaped

**Activities:** Short presentations • condense life into a few words • reflect back on one's own life • share your thoughts with the group

*“To be an educator is to stand on holy ground – people’s lives.”*  
Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*

### *Opening and setting the learning community*

Fundamental to the **LIFE** journey is the intentional creation and maintenance of a vibrant and safe learning community in which every member has a voice, feels confident, capable of sharing of themselves and sitting without judgement as they encounter one another. Setting the community can take many forms, however **LIFE** utilizes rituals to “frame” the space and to set the culture of the learning community. Many facilitators use a bonfire as a central focus and developed various rituals to help participants introduce themselves and prepare to be fully present for themselves and one another.

### *Beginning the journey*

The second stage of setting the learning community culture is through an explicit invitation to join the community, to take part in honest and direct conversation about a set of questions that everyone answers every day (mostly unintentionally) and to bring intentionality and clarity to the answers they articulate along the way. Many facilitators have found that opening with a poem is an effective opening. Here are two examples. One by American poet and humanist, Walt Whitman (Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings) and the other by Joseph Conrad, a Polish-British writer and one of the most influential novelists in English literature.

#### *O Me! O Life!*

O ME! O life!... of the questions of these recurring,  
Of the endless trains of the faithless—of cities fill'd with the foolish,  
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and  
who more faithless?)  
Of eyes that vainly crave the light—of the objects mean—of the struggle  
ever renew'd,



Of the poor results of all—of the plodding and sordid crowds I see  
around me,  
Of the empty and useless years of the rest—with the rest me inter-  
twined,  
The question, O me! so sad, recurring—What good amid these, O me, O  
life?

*Answer.*

That you are here—that life exists, and identity,  
That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.

Walt Whitman

### *Hunting the Light*

“It is the privilege of youth to live in advance of its days in that beautiful continuity of hope which knows no pauses and no introspection. The gate of childhood is left behind, and the enchanted garden lies before, with its alluring paths that wind beneath the radiant glow of promise. Not that it is an undiscovered country. The footprints of all humanity are there, plain upon the road. The charm lies in that universal experience from which one expects an uncommon or personal sensation — a bit of one’s own. In recognizing the footsteps of predecessors, one moves forward, excited and amused, accepting both good and ill fortune — the roses and thorns, as the saying goes — in the rich, variegated fate that awaits those who merit or perhaps simply chance upon it.”

In this course, we will ask and begin to answer the most important question of our lives.

Joseph Conrad

### *What is a life worth living?*

Each facilitator prepares a thoughtful opening that *they* can speak authentically. Some points to consider are:

No one is an expert in answering these questions

Everyone is responsible to these questions

Everyone lives answers to these questions already

In this journey you encounter diversity and difference – in the texts and with one another

Different texts make distinct truth claims, they are NOT all saying the same thing

State your hope for your participants in the journey

Explicitly invite the participants to answer together:

*What in life is worth wanting for yourself, your children,  
your family, your community?*

### *Being present*

This journey only works if the learning community is in the journey together and present (physically, mentally and emotionally) all the time. It



is a learning community that reflects difference in backgrounds, experiences, understandings, after the journey people will go in their own directions, but during the journey – everyone is committed to the learning and the community.

**LIFE** suggests beginning the journey with a set of exercises and questions (with participants sitting in a circle where everyone can see everyone) that lasts approximately 2-3 hours with a group of 12-18 people. Here are some concepts to consider.

- It is often helpful to invite participants to share in some way what they expect from the journey and what they might need to release to be fully present.
- Use some ways that are simple and fun for the first round of introductions, in which participants share their names and some fun facts about themselves.
- Devise thoughtful questions that deepen in each round and ease the participants into increasingly intimate modes of sharing about their lives, and which ends with a question that explicitly connects to the **LIFE** journey, such as: Who has most shaped your vision of what matters in life and why?

Reflective spaces are also those that reflect the people within them. During **LIFE** various methods are used to create a sense of “sacred” space. Consider some of these ideas (which can be incorporated into the closing ceremony):

- Participants write a letter to their future selves about their hopes for the journey, what they will give to it and what they will receive.
- Offer envelopes with participants’ names and sticky notes at every session, where participants can share their appreciations of one another.

### **\*\*\* Debrief and reflect \*\*\***

Debrief sessions are designed to reflect on the experience during the session and its immediate impact. Reflections are an essential aspect of **LIFE**, and transformative learning processes, which require completing the learning experience with reflection both individually and in groups. Some suggestions are:

Reflect on the experience.

Reflect on question/methods and their impact



## 6. Session 2 ~ To whom are we responsible?

**Objectives:** Read texts that address the question • consider what you would change if texts were true • listen to others' thoughts or beliefs • share your own thinking or beliefs

**Activities:** Shared reading of a text (partner reading with questions)  
• group reading of a text • community of inquiry

**Readings:** Singer, *The Life You Can Save* • Luke 10:25–37 • Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 28–29 • Analects 1.2, 2.21, 12.11, 13.18; • *The wisdom of Confucius* • Ólafur Páll Jónsson, *Chronicle of life in a busy world* • *The Wisdom of the Duwamish*

### *Community of inquiry*

The session, like others begins with a careful reading of the texts in pairs, small groups or individually. In this case the activity is set up as a community of inquiry in which the texts act as the stimuli for the question creation and following conversation. Begin by dividing the group into smaller groups of three. Each group of three reads carefully excerpts from the chosen texts.

Staying in the small groups, participants are asked to discuss the texts with these prompts:

- What is the main conclusion (in the first text)
- What does the second text mean to them
- Select one sentence that brings out the key message in another the text
- These thoughts are shared with the whole group.

Having heard from the other groups, each group of three is given a short time (5 minutes or so) to formulate one question to discuss further. When the time is up, the facilitator collects all the questions on a board (whiteboard, flipchart, ...) so that everyone can see. Then, after a short silent reflection, participants are asked to vote for the question they want to discuss further. The most popular question is then discussed in the group until the time is up. If the question does not sustain a long discussion, the facilitator can move to the next question.

This process is a version of what is called “**A community of inquiry**”. It can vary but central elements are: (1) A prompt, something the group



experiences together and which will ignite the discussion. (2) A time for reflection. (3) The group expresses what it would like to discuss. (4) The group selects a question to discussion. (5) The discussion takes place. (6) Final thoughts. (7) Reflection on the discussion.

Many other methods can be used and can be layered on this one to deepen the conversation about the question. As you plan the session and the timing, consider using more than one method to approach a question which offers participants more time and perspectives on it. For example, **the Silent Conversation method** can be utilized here. In this method participants respond in writing *only* to a statement written on a large paper hanging on the wall, or on a white board. Every participant has a marker, and they use it to agree, disagree, and ask a question of the statement. They also have ample opportunities to respond to others' questions and ask questions of others. This method invites participants to engage in a "dialogue" through writing and allows for prolonged engagement in one area, even as simultaneously many "conversations" may be taking place. An additional benefit is that there are always some participants who prefer to quietly think and engage when they are ready, without having to speak. Some potential prompts are:

- "The decisions we make today should lead to a sustainable world seven generations into the future."
- "For whom or what do I act?"

### **\*\*\* Debrief and reflect \*\*\***

Following this session, it is important to carve out time for reflection on the experience and the impact of the methods utilized. Consider inviting participants to reflect on:

On the careful reading of the texts.

What was the community of inquiry or silent conversation like?

- To whom are we responsible?
- What is the larger story that my life is held within?
- What are some of the stories that guide my way of being in the world? Who am I guided by?
- Who do I answer to? Who do I belong to?



## 7. Session 3 ~ How do I act?

**Objectives:** Experience a guided meditation as a method for exploring the question • discern how others have come to their understanding of how to act and what is a good action • listen actively to other participants.

**Activities:** Guided meditation • reflection • sharing of thoughts.

**Readings:** Pirkei Avot 1.1–3 • Deuteronomy 6:1–25 • Mill, **Utilitarianism**, 137 • Mark 1:16–20 • John 12:23–26 • John 15:1–5, 9–15 • Analects 2.5–8, 2.12, 7.1, 7.6, 7.9, 7.27, 13.18 • What is life? - Black Elk, Oglala Sioux and Spiritual Leader • Stoicism is the key • Danilo Dolci, *Each One Grows Only if Dreamed*

### *Meditation*

In **LIFE**, meditation is offered as an effective method to help participant explore their own lives; a method to learn to read their lives as if it were a text. This helps participants understand why they feel, think and believe what they do, better listen and understand the same about others and to recognize that each one has come to their ideas and conclusions based on their background and experiences. Furthermore, this type of exploration helps participants think critically about whether they choose to continue to accept these beliefs and ideas or whether they have found that other truths speak more loudly to them.

In a guided meditation the facilitator takes the participants into a relaxing state and then with guiding questions asks them to think about a moment in their lives, people in their lives and to “uncover” what has brought them to certain understandings. In the case of the question, “How should I act?” facilitators help the participants think back to a time when someone was good to them. The goal is for participants to get a strong sense of the situation, the people, the interaction and then to come together as a group to analyse what made it a “good action”. Remember that it is as important to slowly bring participants into the meditation as it is to bring them gently out of it. This can be an emotional experience for many participants.

Back in the large group, facilitators help the learning community reflect on what they “saw” and asks questions to help them reflect and uncover how this moment and person shaped their understanding of the “good” and what a “good action” is. Facilitators create a set of questions to help the participants explore these ideas and how they may have changed over time.





## *Journaling*

Invite participants to take some quiet time to themselves to write down their thoughts and feelings in a personal journal. It is often helpful to have participants answer the question for themselves in that moment. Remind them that the answer is not a final answer, it is an evolving answer, nonetheless, answer it for this moment in time. Once they have finished journaling, or the time has come to an end, offer participants an opportunity to share some of their thoughts in the group. This is also a time for reflection on the experience and the methods used.

### **\*\*\* *Debrief and reflect* \*\*\***

Consider inviting participants to reflect on:  
The meditation experience.  
insights and new perspectives they heard

- What should I do?
- How can I live deliberately?
- Am I free to do whatever I feel like doing?
- Am I obliged to follow a rule or command?



## 8. Session 4 ~ What do I hope for?

Objectives: Discern how each has come to their understanding of hope • listen actively to other participants.

Activities: Discussion in a community of inquiry.

Readings: Letters to the Next Generation 2, Letter 5 • Call of Abraham: Genesis 17 • Karl Marx, *German Ideology*, 106, 129 • Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream & My Pilgrimage to Non-Violence* • Yordon Yovkov, *On the Wire* • Danilo Dolci, *We are often asked what we want for our valleys*

### *Community of inquiry*

As described earlier, **LIFE** is a journey and course that combines in-person with asynchronous and online meetings. The question, “What do I hope for?” utilizes the **LIFE** learning platform and offers participants readings and reflections to do individually, or in pairs, before coming together for an online meeting. However, the asynchronous learning is structured, it is important that it gives participants an opportunity to read, reflect and take part in asynchronous conversations on the platform (with ample time), which is then followed by an online meeting. Experienced facilitators in online environments can use all sorts of participatory methods during the online meeting. As a suggestion, it is possible to use the **Community of Inquiry method** online. It is recommended that facilitators consider activating the participants to offer their own texts, pictures, songs so that the stimulus for the community of inquiry can be voted upon by them. The online meeting needs a shared writing space (online white board, Miro, Padlet, Mural, etc). The structure stays the same: everyone watches/looks at/listens to the same stimulus. Then participants are sent into breakout rooms to discuss it and to come up with 2-4 questions to put to the entire group for a vote. Those questions are gathered on the shared writing space. Once the presentation of the questions is complete, the conversation focuses on the voted upon question.

### **\*\*\* Debrief and reflect \*\*\***

Take time to reflect as a group on the experience and the method.

Reflect on your own experience of working on the question:

*What do I hope for?*

*How did the online community of inquiry feel/go?*

- What should we hope for?
- What matters most?
- What is worth wanting?



## 9. Session 5 ~ What should I do when I fail?

**Objectives:** Experience fishbowl • discern how each has come to their understanding of failure and how to recover from it

**Activities:** Fishbowl

**Readings:** Chödrön, *Start Where You Are*, 72–75 • Tarsin, *Being Muslim*, 107–8 • Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, “The Wanderer and His Shadow,” §323 • *The Gay Science*, §§274–75 • Writings from the Late Notebooks 10.108 • Romans 7 • 1 John 1:5–2:2 • Mat Pelletier, *Embracing Failure* • Luci (song in Sicilian)

### *Failure in a fishbowl*

As stated earlier the next two questions can be quite personal and even challenging to discuss. As such it is recommended that they only be engaged with once the learning community has been well established. While participants might open up and share very personal information, it is important to remind them that these can be difficult conversations and that they need to care for themselves.

This session can be organized around a discussion method known as **Fishbowl**. The fishbowl is a method to limit the active conversation to a smaller group while keeping all participants engaged and ready to step into the active conversation. Here is one way to run a fishbowl:

- Put three chairs in the centre of the circle relatively close together.
- Ask three people to volunteer to sit in them.
- The chairs in the centre are the “fishbowl” and only people in the fishbowl can talk. Those that are outside of the fishbowl, cannot speak, they watch and listen.
- The facilitator asks questions and the participants in the fishbowl answer the questions in a discussion with each other.
- In order to speak, participants need to signal to someone in the circle that they want to sit in their place.

The facilitator in this session finds the balance between keeping the discussion lively and giving time for silence and thought. Prepare a set of questions to “feed” into the fishbowl that help participants think about failure, below are some suggestions. Notice that these questions begin with personal memories and connections and then expand outward from the individual, they also incorporate questions on how to recover from failure.

1. In the home where you were raised, was it acceptable to fail or make mistakes? Why or why not?
2. What thoughts or associations come to mind when you hear the term “moral failure”?
3. How have you approached and managed ethical mistakes in your life?
4. Can you recall a time when you saw someone fail or make a mistake and then recover successfully? What steps did they take to recover?
5. Are there any practices from your religious, cultural, or family traditions that you rely on to handle failure effectively? (e.g., offering an apology, taking corrective or healing actions, confessing, repenting, doing penance, or something else?)

#### *Small group discussion*

Following the fishbowl break the group into small discussion groups to continue the conversation. The small groups allow for more intimate conversations as the participants delve more deeply into shame, remorse, corrective action and individual and collective failure. However, depending on how the group is functioning it is of course possible to continue the conversation in a large group. This follow up to the fishbowl is an opportunity to bring the texts into the conversation.

#### **\*\*\* Debrief and reflect \*\*\***

As a group conduct a reflection on the experience and the methods. Consider these questions as options as well:

*What insights have you heard from others?*

*What lingering questions do you have?*

What practice or discipline might you adopt to recover from failure?

- How should I respond to failure?
- Was it ok to fail in the household you grew up in?
- Was it ok to fail at school?



## 10. Session 6 ~ What is the role of suffering?

**Objectives:** Experience story-sharing as an exploration method • discern how each has come to their understanding of suffering as a part of the good life • experience location as teacher

**Activities:** Story sharing & witnessing

**Readings:** The Four Noble Truths: The Wheel of Law 4-6 • Life of the Buddha 5.1–39 • Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 9-11 • WLN8.2, BGE 225 • Ezra 3:10-13 • Pirkei Avot 4:19 • Romans 8:18-39 • Wiman, *My Bright Abyss*, 146-147, 154-156, 161 • Oscar Wilde, *The nightingale and the rose* • Tal Ben-Shahar, *The Role of Suffering* • Jorge Bucay, *Why do we Suffer?*

This question is often the most emotionally difficult for participants. One powerful way to begin the session on suffering is to situate the participants in a local place of suffering. Begin by telling that story of suffering before moving into the personal questions for discussion. Here, again, it is important to consider the nature of the question and the size of the group. Beginning with small groups helps maintain a sense of trust when conducting more intimate conversations. This method combines personal storytelling with clear instructions for carefully listening to and witnessing others' stories. This means that there is a set time for listeners to respond by sharing what they heard, what resonated with them, what challenged them. It is a practice of listening, showing compassion, and empathy. These are suggested prompts for the personal storytelling, here notice that the prompts begin more generally before they move to the personal level. Make sure to give enough time for the telling of stories in each round (10-15 minutes).

Prompts to consider:

- Tell about a time a story in the news of suffering or someone else's grief impacted you. Followed by a witness round.
- Describe a moment of suffering that profoundly altered the way you viewed the world, yourself, or your life. Followed by a witness round.
- Share a time of grief—an experience you thought would break you but instead gave rise to something new within you. Followed by a witness round.

Back in the large group reflect on questions linked to the texts, what

they have to say about suffering and responding to suffering and the conversations in smaller groups.

- What insights do these stories offer about the nature of suffering?
- Reflect on your religious, cultural, or family background. How were you taught to approach suffering, and what beliefs or values shape your response to it today?
- Do we have a responsibility to alleviate suffering?
- Can positive outcomes arise from experiencing suffering?

**\*\*\* Debrief and reflect \*\*\***

As a group conduct a reflection on the experience and the methods. Consider these questions as options as well:

*What impact did gathering in a place of historical suffering have on you?*

*How was it to share your stories and to be “witnessed”?*

- Can I be suffering, and life still be good?
- How should I respond to suffering?



## 11. Session 7 ~ What is worthy of my time?

**Objectives:** Reflect on the meaning of time and the meaning of worth in consideration of the answer to the question

**Activities:** 90 years in dots • eulogy writing • wheel of life • dialogue  
• group discussion • online meeting

**Readings:** *Greetings from Seneca to his friend Lucilius* • *Moral letters to Lucilius/Letter 1* • *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (六祖壇經, Liùzǔ Tánjīng) • *The Byrds, Turn Turn Turn* • Matsuo Basho, *From Time to time* • Brian Nelson-Palmer, *Reimagining the actual value of time* • Dino Buzzati, *Il Deserto dei Tartari*

This is the second **LIFE** asynchronous learning and online meeting session. In this session participants are offered texts for reading asynchronously in consideration of the meaning of time and worth. Breaking apart these two concepts can be helpful for critical engagement in the conversation and to assure that the conversation moves beyond a time audit.

Participants are also given a set of exercises to complete before the online meeting. All materials and exercises are presented on the **LIFE** platform with enough time for completion before the online meeting. Here are some examples:

- 90 years in dots, a visual representation of the participants' own lives in dots
- Journaling about the same daily activity before and after the readings – reflect on the experience
- Completing the wheel of life as an actual time audit and also as a desire for how participants would want their time to be spent

Participants gather online for a facilitated meeting in which they share their experiences with the exercises in small break out rooms as well as in the large group using a participatory approach appropriate for the intended discussion.

### **\*\*\* Debrief and reflect \*\*\***

As a group conduct a reflection on the asynchronous and online experience and the methods. Consider these questions as options as well:

*How did the readings change your experience of your daily activity?*

*What insights did you gain from listening to other participants?*



## 12. Session 8 ~ How does the good life feel?

**Objectives:** Reflect on the role of feelings and emotions in the good life and experience embodied practices.

**Activities:** Silent conversation • embodied practices • dialogue • group discussion • critical text readings

**Readings:** Sacks, *Letters to the Next Generation 2*, Letter 4 • Ghazi, *Postscript: Happiness* • Oscar Wilde, *De profundis*, 105–107; • Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* • Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* • Bart Moeyaert, *The Conductor* • Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, pp. 389–390, 398–401 • Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination*, 168–172

This is often the last question as it completes an arc that takes participants through a series of questions that became more emotionally challenging and now culminates in a question about the role emotions play in a vision of a good life. Here it is important that this question doesn't assume that a good life feels good, it specifically asks, how does a "good life" feel? As such bringing in various embodied practices like music, dance, creative writing and art supports participants in connecting with their emotions. Nonetheless, engaging with the texts and rooting the experiences in diverse thinking is essential for helping participants engage critically with the question.

### Text Sessions

#### Paired reading of the texts

Participants have hopefully read the assigned texts, but if they haven't, they are still able to fully engage in this paired reading of the text. Sitting in pairs, participants work on the assigned texts using these instructions

1. Read the text to your partner out loud
2. Discuss what the text says
3. Discuss what the text means
4. Answer: If this text were true, what would have to change in my life to align with what it says? (This question is direct and specific; it asks participants to think about their lives and how they would have to conduct their lives differently if they were to follow the truth claim in the text.)





### Save the Last Word for Me

Participants prepare for this session by having read all the assigned texts and highlighting/underlining words and/or phrases that resonated with them. Split participants into groups of 4-5. Beginning with one text, each participant takes the group to a section they underlined. In a circle each participant takes a turn to respond to that word/statement. The person who originally chose that section responds to the text and the comments made by the group and has the “last word”. Every person in the circle has an opportunity to lead the group to a section of text and to have the last word for every text. This method expands participants’ thinking about and understanding of the text as they integrate others’ thinking and understanding into their own

### *Creative and Embodied Practices*

Drawing on the experiences and interests of the facilitators, facilitators create diverse sessions for the participants framed around the question “How does the good life feel?”. Sessions can include dance, found poetry, collage making, creative writing, music and voice, amulet making – really anything that facilitators can bring to the group. This offers participants an entirely different way to engage with the question as well as hopefully offering them a choice in how they want to engage.

### *Silent conversation*

Gather the participants in front of a whiteboard or a chalk board, or some other surface where they can write freely on. On the board write a statement, a short sentence saying something specific even if not very clear. The statement can be something like the following:

“A good life feels as good as possible.”

“Only pleasure is good in and of itself.”

“Happiness is the greatest good.”

### **\*\*\* Debrief and reflect \*\*\***

Bring participants together for a joint reflection. Consider some of these questions:

*What was it like to do the silent conversation?*

*How might the silent conversation activity be helpful for participants in a journey like this?*

*What was the text session like?*

*Did you have any illuminations, “lightbulb” moments during the session?*



## 13. Session 9 ~ Closing ceremony

**Objectives:** To close the **LIFE** journey meeting in such a way that participants feel that there is closure, appreciation, gratitude and symbolic ritual.

**Activities:** Sharing in a group • addressing each other • ritual • parting words

### *The end of the **LIFE** journey*

Bringing the **LIFE** journey to an end in a way that acknowledges the vibrant learning community, the contributions made individually and communally, as well as offering a ritualized closing is an essential component for closing the journey participants took together. Participants have committed fully to the experience and while the journey will continue to impact them in diverse ways, they are coming to a close with this particular aspect of it. It is important to offer every participant the space to close this step. It is also a time for participants to share their answers to:

What is the shape of a flourishing life?

What does it mean to me for life to feel right?

Does it matter?

Can I be sad, angry, fearful and life still be good? Why or why not?

What does it mean to deal with my feelings constructively?

### *Create the atmosphere and the aspects of the closing*

In preparation for the closing all participants are invited to write or document in some way their answers to the *big* question: What is the shape of a flourishing life? Which can also be asked as: What is a life worthy of my humanity? What is my vision of a good life?

The participants are gathered in a space that allows for privacy, intimacy, and hopefully beauty. Consider creating the right atmosphere with candles, herbs, a fire, flowers, some way to create a “sacred” space. The facilitator opens the circle with their own words from the journey and then explains how the next segment of time will unfold. This closing is specific to the participants and their journey and the facilitators leading them. There may be aspects to the closing that reflect on earlier activities (participants may have written a letter to their future selves at the beginning that facilitators collected for this closing; participants may have been sharing their appreciations in envelopes for each participant throughout; etc).

Some aspects of the closing that **LIFE** found to be powerful are described here:

- Participants share any appreciation or gratitude they have for this journey.
- Every participant reads their vision of a life worth living.
- Parting words:

These words function as a final wish/blessing/hope for each participant (connected to meaning, purpose, the journey). The ritualized reading of the same words over each participant has shown to be a powerful experience for everyone. They are prepared and written by the facilitators and are tailored to the participants. Consider using a structure such as “May you live/dare/feel...” Repeat this structure with careful thought.

The words are written out on a piece of paper from which everyone takes turns reading. Place a chair in the centre of the circle. One person sits in the chair, the person to her right stands in front of them, says the person’s name and then reads the prepared text. The person that was sitting stands up and the next person in the circle sits in the chair. Now the person has the text read over them. This continues until everyone has read out the words and everyone has had the words read over them.



## 14. Final Words

This manual serves as inspiration for the **LIFE** journey. Within it is reflected wisdom, diversity and broad experience. Once trained, each facilitator brings of themselves to the journey. They are free to mix and match methods with questions, layer experiences to deepen them and incorporate new methods and design new rituals. For further information and facilitator training opportunities\* contact any of the **LIFE** partners to learn more.

\*Training opportunities with partners include detailed methods, scripts, structures and templates for facilitators



## 15. Overview of methodologies

In this section we describe some of the methods used very briefly, trying to convey the main ideas and practices. While reading this section, bear in mind that these are not precise descriptions of methods that must be followed closely. Each method is developed around some core idea but context – the place and the participants as well as the facilitators or teachers – always influences the way things develop.

### Rituals

Rituals serve as the connective tissue of communities, providing a shared sense of meaning, purpose, identity, and continuity. They mark transitions, deepen relationships, and remind us of our belonging to something greater than ourselves. When people gather to undertake a task like the **LIFE** journey, it is important to generate communal feeling and purpose from the beginning. One way to do that is to do use ritual which is both (a) shared in the sense of everyone having an equal part in it, and (b) symbolic. It is even more powerful if it incorporates an element of playfulness or creativity. Rituals are a cornerstone of the **LIFE** experience and should be considered and planned for in as many meetings as possible.

**Spider web:** Participants stand in a circle; a facilitator brings out a ball of yarn. While holding on to the end of the yarn, the ball is thrown across the circle to another person. This can be accompanied by telling one's name, by saying some fun fact about oneself, offering an appreciation or even making a commitment to be present in the journey. The person receiving the ball, then holds on the thread while throwing the ball of yarn again across the circle. This is repeated until everyone has received the ball. When the last person then throws the ball to the facilitator who began the activity.

When the person who began the activity receives the ball again, a web has been formed among all the participants. At this point, it may be good to take a pause and reflect on how everyone is connected to everyone. If possible, each person in the circle might be given a poster tack and the group then walk towards a wall in the room and stick the web onto the wall. That way, the web becomes an image of the relations among the participants which can become part of the space in which the ensuing sessions take place.

**Firepit:** If the place offers the possibility to light a fire, either outside in a firepit or inside in a fireplace, this can make for a powerful initial ritual. First, each person is given a small piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Participants then take five minutes to write down one or two things they want to let go of during the day, or during the whole **LIFE** journey, or even in their whole life. Then, everyone gathers around the fire. Then the participants



form a circle – or a semicircle depending on the wind – around the fire and one by one, they take their piece of paper and throw it onto the fire, watching the thing they want to let go of, burn away.

**Beads:** At the end of a meeting or experience gather the participants together in a circle. Have ready a string of beautiful beads. Explain, that the string of beads represents the community that was formed in the time together. That now as everyone parts and goes back to their lives, we separate. Cut the string and put all the beads in a bowl. Explain, that although we separate for the time being, everyone remains connected through the community they formed, the conversations they had and the journey they are taking together. Then walk around the circle and each participant chooses a bead to keep.

## Guided meditation

As explained in the introduction, places teach, and they are seats of power. Central to the **LIFE** approach is being present in the place and at the time of the work. Meditation is way of generating presence and focus the mind on a certain task – e.g. feeling the body or remembering some past event – while helping avoid distractions from intruding thoughts or feelings.

The facilitator asks the participants to find a comfortable position, close their eyes and then leads the meditation by taking the participants through certain mental activities.

## Sharing personal stories and experiences

Sharing personal stories is an important part of reflecting on oneself; one's history, values, people and places that are of importance. Facilitators need bear in mind that **sharing** a story is not the same as **telling** a story. A story may be told without it being shared.

To share a story with others, the set up must be such as to encourage active listening. One way to do this is to split the group into smaller subgroups of three or four. Then, in each subgroup, participants are asked to share a story of a specific event, say when someone was kind to them, when they were surprised by the help of someone, when they overcame some hardship, etc. The kind of story the participants are asked to share will depend on which question is being worked on. If the participants already know each other and there is mutual trust in the group, the stories might be about suffering or failure:

- (1) One person shares a story, (5 minutes)
- (2) The other people in the small group (two or three) respond saying what they heard, (2 to 3 minutes)



- (3) The person sharing the story says how she feels having shared her story and listened to the others' responses.

Those listening do not give recommendations as to how an issues might be solved, or some failure might be corrected. The person sharing her story is simply doing that – telling her story and being heard. And those listening are simply doing that – listening to a story and assuring the person telling the story that they have been heard.

### **A tree of experiences**

Sitting in a circle outside the facilitator distributes coloured paper and markers to the participants. The facilitator asks the participants to think about a good act that was done to them by someone else. The participants are then given 20 minutes or so to draw a picture that represents this act. The drawings are then hanged, either one by one on the branches of a tree (which then becomes the tree of good acts) or they might be threaded on a string hand hanged like an exposition. Participants are given the opportunity to tell the group what they drew and what it meant to them. The facilitator then guides the conversation about what is good and what common features there are among all the “good acts”.

### **Community of Inquiry**

The idea of a community of inquiry, as it is used in the **LIFE** context, comes from Philosophy for Children and was developed by its founder, Matthew Lipman, during the 1980s. Lipman developed these ideas to challenge teacher-centred models of teaching, where the teacher is at the centre of the activity in various ways: in terms of organization, as the initiator of communication, as the one who selects worthy knowledge, and as the person who evaluates both the process and the outcomes of learning.

In a community of inquiry, the facilitator provides the stimulus but the participants choose the questions they want to explore, which have competing reasonable answers. The participants contribute to the answer, listening to others, reflecting on all the contributions, and directing their thoughts to the inquiry, not the facilitator. The community of inquiry aims to encourage participants to think critically, caringly, creatively, collaboratively and democratically.

Community of Inquiry as a pedagogical model is inspired by ideas from John Dewey and his view that education and democracy are intimately related:

*“Democracy has to be born anew every generation,  
and education is its midwife.”*



A community of inquiry takes this democratic idea to heart and aspires to a collaborative educational setting that is profoundly democratic.

### **Silent conversation**

A short statement is written on a writing wall (a large whiteboard or a big piece of paper hanging on a wall). The choice of statement should somehow reflect the question that is being addressed, but it can do so either directly or indirectly. Examples of statements that have generated good silent conversations are:

- The decisions we take today should lead to a sustainable world seven generations from now.
- The good life feels as good as possible.
- Happiness is the only thing that is desirable in itself.

The sentence must be in the middle of the writing wall so that participants can “respond” to it in all directions. The silent conversation then consists in each participant writing on the wall without uttering any words. Participants may agree or disagree with the statement, or write a comment on a single word, or raise a question, or suggest a replacement of a word – or do this for the comments written by the other participants. They do this by connecting their own writing with a line to the whole sentence, a single word, or to what someone else has already written and then write something.

For this to work well there must be (a) enough pens for all participants, preferably in different colours, (b) the space for writing must be large enough and accessible to everyone (lower if someone uses a wheelchair), (c) the room with the writing wall must be large enough so that access to the wall is easy, and (d) light must be good so that it is easy to read what is written on the wall.

If the silent conversation is slow to start, the facilitators may begin by writing something, and then they may also have to show how one can respond to what someone else has already written and not only to the initial sentence.

### **Fishbowl discussion**

A fish-bowl discussion is a form of group discussion where (a) a larger group is divided into two, an inner group and an outer group, (b) the inner group has a dialogue on some issue while the outer group is silent but follows the discussion of the inner group, and (c) there is some rule for replacing members of the inner and outer group. This form of discussion is particularly useful for having a dialogue in a large group, say 30 people or more.



With a group of ten or twelve a dialogue can take place with all participating, no one having to wait too long for their turn, etc. When the group becomes larger, this becomes more difficult and once a group reaches the size of, say, 30 a dialogue where everyone participates can be very messy.

**Fish-bowl one:** (a) Arrange participants in a large circle with four chairs in the middle. (b) Decide on a question to be discussed. The group may already have decided on a question through previous activity, or it can do so as the initial step of the activity, or the facilitator can decide on a question. (c) Ask for volunteers for sitting in the four chairs. (d) Once the four chairs are filled, the facilitator explains the rules:

- (i) only those in the middle chairs can talk,
- (ii) a person in the middle can be replaced by someone from the outer circle touching their shoulder and taking their seat,
- (iii) when replacing a person, preferably replace the one having been longest in the inner circle.

(e) The facilitator then initiates the dialogue. From there on, it may go smoothly and develop organically through the participants' own discussion. But if it halts or gets stuck, the facilitator may step in and give a new question to the four in the middle.

**Fish-bowl two:** (a) Divide the group into two. (b) Arrange chairs so that the groups form an inner circle and an outer circle. (c) Only the inner group is allowed to talk, while those in the outer group listen and may take notes. (d) After some time, the groups change places and the "new" inner group can either be given the same question to discuss as the "older" inner group, or it can be asked to pick up from where the "older" group left.

## Vision board

**Collage:** Use old magazines and other "worthless" material, along with pens, markers, crayons, etc. to create a collage representing something particular. The instruction is not simply to make a picture, but to make a picture with a point or a message.

Spread the material across a big table. Make sure all participants have good access to the material, have a pair of scissors and a glue stick, can sit comfortably, and have good space for the cartoon on which the collage will be created. Light music in the background might be good.

The activity is brought to a close by each participant showing their collage to the group and explaining what it shows, why they have chosen those elements, etc. The activity can become very playful, as participants find funny pictures or make strange combinations. But be prepared for some finding the activity very difficult and not being able to do much. In that case, remind the group that the starting point of reflection and think-



ing is perplexity and confusion, and that it is important to give that initial stage enough time. If we try to “jump over” the perplexity to a stage where things are organized and clear, danger is that we miss sight of the important things.

**The rays of lives:** A big sheet of paper, in the shape of a circle, is placed on the floor. The centre of this paper is the NOW, the present moment in time. The participant find their own space around the sheet and draw their own life-lines – life path – from birth to the moment of Now. Gradually, the entire sheet of paper gets transformed into a sun like picture where the rays extending from the centre are the different life-lines. Foreseeing this, the facilitators might use strong red or orange colours for the circle in the middle, so that the image of a “sun of lives” becomes more explicit at the end. Once the participants have drawn their life-lines, they are invited to share with the others the story that they have drawn.

The sheet of paper can then be hanged onto a wall in the space to make it more personal and underline the intention of the course to explore the meaning of life.

## Journaling

Journaling is a powerful way to reflect on one’s own experience. During the opening session, participants are given a journaling book. Part of the session could even be creating a cover for the book or somehow allow participants to “make it their own”. The book is for journaling during the entire duration of the course, but it is important to guide the journaling to begin with, by allocating specific time to writing in the book and talk about what kind of things one might write. To some people journaling is very natural, others need help. It is, therefore, important to make time in the schedule for journaling even if it is a solitary activity.



## 16. Two days, two questions

This is an example of how the **LIFE** journey might be initiated and the first two questions might be addressed in a two-day retreat. Before the opening session, the space must be prepared for the activities of the day. This may involve arranging chairs, preparing the fire pit (if used), set up the envelope wall, make sure there is a writing wall for the silent conversions, etc. Think of light in the space and general atmosphere.

Day 1			
	Time	Activity	Methods
	8:15 - 8:45	Yoga (optional)	
Opening session	9:00-11:00	Get to know each other	Storytelling/sharing
BREAK	11:00-11:30	Walk, get coffee, breath	
Opening session cont.	11:30-12:15	Create expectations for the journey	Envelope wall for gathering appreciations
LUNCH	12:15-1:30		
Question #1	13:30-14:30	To whom are we responsible?	Text reading in pairs
BREAK	14:30-14:50	Walk outside	
Question #1 cont.	14:50-15:35	To whom are we responsible?	Silent conversation
Question #1 cont.	15:35-16:15	To whom are we responsible?	Vision board/collage
Closing session	16:15-17:00	Reflection on the day and the journey	Journaling / Writing letter to oneself

Day 2			
	Time	Activity	Methods
	8:15 - 8:45	Yoga (optional)	
	9:00 – 9:30	Collect letters, check in	
Question #2	9:30-10:30	How do I act?	Guided Meditation
BREAK	10:30-11:00	Walk, get coffee, breath	
Question #2 continued	11:00-12:30	How do I act?	Reading in pairs/ Community of Inquiry
LUNCH	12:30-13:30		
Question #2 continued	13:30-14:30	How do I act?	Fishbowl
BREAK	14:30-14:45		
Closing session	14:45-15:30	Check in / continuing the journey	Reflect on the activities / closing ritual





**Life**  
**Worth**  
**Living**

*Caring for our  
Educators and Principals*



