



METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

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Project's overview

The project's general objective is to strengthen the capacity of youth organisations and youth workers to empower young people as active, critical, and globally aware citizens. It focuses on developing practical educational tools and methods based on Global Citizenship Education, supporting youth to navigate disinformation, democratic challenges, and social polarisation. The project enables organisations and young people to act as multipliers of democratic values, solidarity, and civic engagement across Europe.

Project's target group

The target audience of the project:

Direct:

- Youth Workers (YW) and Non-Formal Education (NFE) Trainers: youth educators who will use POP.Ed methods and strengthen participatory and GCE-related skills.
- Young People (YP) aged 16- 29: participants and co-creators of content and the Youth Manifesto, building civic engagement and belonging.
- Youth Work Institutions / Organisations: youth NGOs, youth centres, and education providers integrating project resources and best practices into regular work.
- Decision-Makers/ Policy Stakeholders: local and national authorities receiving direct youth and youth worker input through the Youth Manifesto and LAG engagement.
- Local Action Groups (LAG) Members & Local Stakeholders: locals supporting participatory output development, rollout actions, and community engagement.

Indirect:

- Wider youth communities: young people reached through rollouts, dissemination, and peer-to-peer sharing of POP.Ed outputs.
- Local communities in partner countries: communities impacted by youth civic actions and increased inclusion and awareness.
- European youth work & education community: organisations and educators beyond the partnership who will access and reuse open resources after the project ends.
- Civil society networks and NGOs: organisations working in civic education, inclusion, democracy, and GCE that may replicate or scale the methodology.

Chapter 1: What This Guide Is and How to Use It

This document sets out the methodological foundations of the *POP-Ed: POP Culture for Global Citizenship Education* project and serves as a practical guide for partners, as well as for youth workers, trainers, and educators who wish to apply the POP.Ed methodology in their own practice. It provides the conceptual and pedagogical framework that guides the development of the POP.Ed Curriculum (A2.2) and the POP.Ed Toolkit (A3.1), ensuring coherence between theory, methodology, and practical application. By outlining key principles, learning approaches, and methodological directions, the guide supports users in designing relevant, participatory, and youth-centred Global Citizenship Education activities through the use of pop culture.

Popular culture refers to a widely accepted and participated method of expression that involves a variety of genres, including film and television, novels, pop music, social media, games and trends adopted by many in society to know, use and share at a certain time, often serving as a shared form of identity and everyday experience. Its accessibility and adaptability, and more significantly, its entertainment value has made it particularly influential and well-received among young learners (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). For the POP.Ed project, this means using the “language” and formats of contemporary pop culture (memes, short videos, games, music, influencers, digital storytelling, etc.) as entry points to explore global interdependencies, rights and responsibilities, democracy, sustainability and social justice. It connects three key elements: a clear GCE competence framework, youth-friendly content and formats, and participatory processes where young people co-create content and recommendations, culminating in tools such as the POP.Ed Toolkit and the Youth Manifesto.

This guide can be used in several ways:

- As a **step-by-step manual** when planning and running workshops based on the 10 learning units of the POP.Ed Curriculum (e.g. Intercultural Competence, SDGs, Environmental Sustainability, Active Citizenship, Global Perspectives in Pop Culture, Practical Action Projects).
- As a **reference** when adapting existing methods or designing new activities using pop culture (aligned with the competence matrix and learning outcomes defined in A2.1).
- As a **support** when engaging with Local Advisory Groups, roll-out pilots or other participatory processes where youth workers and young people co-design GCE activities.

Chapter 2: Why Pop Culture Works in Youth Work

How young people engage with pop culture today

Pop culture plays a central role in the everyday lives of young people. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, gaming environments, music- and video streaming services, and online communities are not just spaces of entertainment but environments where identity, a sense of belonging, as well as social interaction are constructed. Through these digital and cultural environments, young people communicate with peers, express personal values, develop creative skills, and participate in wider social conversations.

Petrone (2013) suggests that young people actively shape these platforms rather than simply consuming them. The development of participatory online cultures, points to the creation of videos, remix content, memes, comment on trends, or shared stories demonstrates that youth are already practicing forms of storytelling and critical interpretation in their daily lives. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, MySpace, Reddit, and YouTube evolved partly through the practices and interactions of their users, especially younger audiences who constantly redefine how content circulates and gains meaning.

For many young people, maintaining a digital presence is closely linked to maintaining a presence in society. The visibility that comes through digital networking, through posts, shares, comments, or creative production contributes to social recognition and belonging. Pop culture therefore functions as a language through which young people communicate values, humour, identity, and opinions about society.

Research on participatory digital cultures suggests that young people's engagement with popular culture can involve sophisticated interpretive, analytical, and creative skills, such as interpreting narratives, recognising patterns in trends, evaluating credibility/authenticity, and remixing or producing media (Jenkins et al., 2009). These forms of digital and media literacy may be less visible in formal school settings, yet they represent meaningful capabilities that youth workers can build on when designing participatory learning activities.

This perspective challenges earlier narratives that portray young people primarily as passive consumers or victims of media influence. Some public debates around “declining literacy” point to reflections of anxiety about changing forms of literacy, particularly digital and media literacy. When these forms of literacy are recognised and integrated into educational environments, they can become powerful tools for engagement and learning.

Pop culture as a gateway to global and civic topics

Popular culture offers a powerful entry point for discussing complex global and civic topics as it connects abstract issues to stories and cultural references that young people already understand (UNESCO, 2015). Films, music, games, and online narratives often address themes such as identity, justice, inequality, environmental challenges, or social conflict. These themes mirror many of the central concerns of Global Citizenship Education.

Through pop culture, young people can explore how societies construct ideas about race, gender, class, sexuality, consumerism, and power. When youth workers invite participants to analyse cultural texts such as films, song lyrics, viral videos, or online discussions, young people begin to question how narratives are produced and how they shape social attitudes (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Kellner & Share (2007) and Hooks (1994) further note that media engagement becomes particularly powerful when it moves beyond analysis toward creation. When young people produce their own media (videos, podcasts, blogs, social media campaigns, performances or digital storytelling) they gain a deeper understanding of how communication works, and at the same time, they develop civic agency. The ability to produce and share messages publicly is increasingly essential for democratic participation and social change.

Research therefore suggests that digital literacy should extend beyond critical consumption of media. It should also empower young people to create, publish, collaborate, and innovate. In doing so, the youth become active civic participants capable of contributing to public debates and shaping social narratives (Jenkins et al., 2009; Jenkins et al., 2016).



Benefits and limitations of using pop culture in learning

While pop culture offers many advantages for learning and engagement, its use in educational contexts must be approached thoughtfully. The table below summarises both the benefits and potential limitations identified in research.

Dimension	Benefits	Limitations
Engagement	Pop culture connects learning to young people's interests and everyday experiences.	Risk of superficial engagement if cultural references are used only as attention-grabbers.
Diversity	Introduces multiple perspectives and cultural forms beyond traditional educational materials.	Some pop culture texts may reinforce stereotypes or narrow representations.
Critical literacy	Encourages analysis of media messages, social narratives, and systems of influence.	Without facilitation, participants may reproduce dominant narratives rather than question them.
Civic participation	Media production allows young people to express opinions and advocate for change.	Digital platforms are shaped by economic and political interests that influence visibility and discourse.

Jenkins et al., (2009) often raised concerns about the idea of “bridging”. In some educational models, popular culture is used merely as a stepping stone toward what is considered more legitimate academic knowledge. In such cases, pop culture is treated as temporary or instrumental rather than recognised as meaningful cultural knowledge in its own right. This approach risks reinforcing hierarchies between “official” knowledge and young people’s lived cultural experiences.

The POP.Ed methodology therefore treats popular culture not simply as a hook for engagement, but as a legitimate cultural domain worthy of critical analysis and reflection.

Ethical and cultural considerations

Working with pop culture also requires attention to ethical and cultural dimensions. Popular culture both reflects and shapes social norms. It can provide spaces for creativity, resistance, and identity exploration, but it can also reproduce dominant ideologies and social hierarchies.

Youth workers must therefore approach pop culture critically and inclusively. Activities should encourage participants to explore multiple perspectives, question stereotypes, and reflect on how media influences beliefs and behaviours. Facilitators should also remain attentive to cultural sensitivity, representation, and diversity within media examples used during workshops.

When approached thoughtfully, popular culture can become a powerful tool for dialogue about identity, inclusion, justice, and social change.



Chapter 3: The POP.Ed Approach at a Glance

Core ideas behind the POP.Ed method

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) aims to empower learners to understand global interdependencies and to act responsibly within increasingly interconnected societies. It encourages individuals to recognise shared human challenges such as inequality, environmental sustainability, peace, and human rights and to develop the competencies necessary to address them collaboratively (UNESCO, 2015).

Andreotti (2006) highlights the two key dimensions GCE is built upon as global consciousness and global competencies. Global consciousness refers to the ethical and moral awareness of global challenges, while global competencies refer to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable individuals to engage constructively with these challenges.

The development of global citizenship competencies includes several interconnected elements:

- Understanding multiple levels of identity and recognising shared humanity across cultural and social differences
- Knowledge of global issues such as sustainability, social justice, human rights, and global interdependence
- Cognitive skills including critical thinking, systems thinking, and the ability to consider multiple perspectives
- Social and emotional skills such as empathy, communication, and intercultural understanding
- The capacity to act responsibly and collaboratively in addressing global challenges

Traditional approaches to Global Citizenship Education often rely on theoretical discussions or formal learning environments. While these approaches provide important knowledge, they may not always resonate with young people's everyday experiences (Andreotti, 2006).

The POP.Ed methodology addresses this gap by combining Global Citizenship Education with youth work practices and the cultural language of popular media. By integrating films, music, gaming, storytelling, and social media into learning activities, the project creates an environment where global topics can be explored through familiar narratives and participatory formats.

The approach is therefore based on the interaction of **three core elements**:

Element	Function within POP.Ed
Global Citizenship Education	Defines the learning objectives and ethical framework.
Youth Work	Provides participatory methods, safe spaces, and facilitation processes.
Pop Culture	Serves as the entry point for engagement and exploration of global themes.

Through this combination, POP.Ed seeks to transform popular cultural references into opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and civic engagement.



What makes POP.Ed different from traditional GCE approaches

Many traditional educational models still rely on fixed curricula that prioritise canonical texts and formal academic knowledge (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2004). These models often fail to reflect the cultural realities of contemporary youth, whose experiences are deeply shaped by digital media and participatory online cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

At the same time, youth populations are increasingly diverse in terms of cultural background, language, and identity. When educational materials do not reflect this diversity, young people may feel disconnected from the learning process (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2009).

The POP.Ed approach recognises that young people are not only consumers of culture but also creators and influencers within cultural ecosystems. Digital platforms allow youth to shape narratives, produce content, and influence public conversations. Education must therefore acknowledge and integrate these realities. At the same time, these platforms are structured by algorithms and economic interests that influence visibility and participation, making critical analysis essential (Boyd, 2014; van Dijck, 2013).

POP.Ed also emphasises the importance of storytelling in civic engagement. Young people are often motivated by narratives that involve meaningful struggles, collective action, and the possibility of change (Kellner & Share, 2007). By connecting civic participation to stories of real-world challenges, environmental movements, human rights struggles, or social justice campaigns, youth workers can help participants see themselves as active contributors to social transformation (Ganz, 2011; Share, 2007).



From Principles to Practice: How POP.Ed Works

Relevance and identification

Effective engagement begins with recognising the cultural realities of young people's lives. Pop culture is not external to youth identity; it is deeply intertwined with how young people communicate, form relationships, and express their values (Jenkins, 2006).

Research shows that youth frequently demonstrate high levels of creativity, analytical thinking, as well as media literacy when engaging with popular culture (Freire, 1970; Jenkins et al., 2009). Music, gaming communities, social media platforms, and digital storytelling spaces allow young people to interpret cultural symbols, negotiate social meanings, and produce their own narratives.

Recognising these competencies helps challenge deficit perspectives that portray young people as disengaged or vulnerable to media influence. Instead, youth should be viewed as knowledgeable cultural participants capable of contributing meaningfully to discussions about society and global issues (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Participation and co-creation

A central principle of the POP.Ed methodology is participation. Young people are not only invited to analyse cultural texts but also to produce their own interpretations and creative responses (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Co-creation activities may include:

- producing short videos or podcasts on global issues
- creating social media campaigns addressing sustainability or inclusion
- designing community awareness initiatives inspired by cultural narratives
- developing digital storytelling projects

Participatory processes strengthen engagement and encourage ownership of learning outcomes. They also reflect the participatory culture that characterises contemporary digital environments.



Critical thinking and reflection

Pop culture provides an accessible entry point for critical reflection on social issues as pointed out by (Kellner & Share, 2007; Buckingham, 2003).

Facilitators can encourage participants to ask questions such as:

- Who created this message?
- Whose perspectives are represented or excluded?
- What ideas about identity, power, or social norms are being promoted?
- How does this narrative influence how people think about society?

Through guided discussion and media analysis, participants learn to examine cultural narratives more critically and understand the broader systems political, economic, technological that shape media production

Inclusion, diversity, and safe spaces

Youth work environments must prioritise inclusion and respect for diversity. Pop culture discussions often involve topics related to identity, representation, and social inequality.

Facilitators should therefore ensure that discussions remain respectful and that all participants feel safe expressing their perspectives (Hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Council of Europe).

Creating safe learning spaces includes:

- establishing clear guidelines for respectful dialogue
- encouraging multiple viewpoints
- recognising cultural diversity within the group
- ensuring representation in media examples used during activities

When these principles are respected, pop culture becomes a productive space for exploring questions of identity, belonging, justice, and global responsibility.



Chapter 4: POP.Ed Walkthrough – From Pop Culture to Learning

This chapter translates the POP.Ed approach into a practical, step-by-step process that youth workers and educators can apply when planning and facilitating sessions. It is designed to help users move from an engaging pop culture entry point to structured Global Citizenship Education learning outcomes through participatory activities, critical reflection, and follow-up. The walkthrough reflects the POP.Ed premise that pop culture is a pedagogical bridge rather than an end in itself, and that meaningful learning requires intentional facilitation so that engagement goes beyond entertainment toward critical awareness and democratic learning.

The chapter draws on the partner mapping process, which is explicitly practice-based: partners contributed already-used or tested methods across a range of formats (film, music, social media, gaming, storytelling, visual culture, and hybrid approaches) and reflected on strengths, risks, inclusion aspects, and transferability. These mapped practices function as the evidence base for how POP.Ed can work in real youth work settings.

The walkthrough is organised into five steps:

- Step 1** Choosing the right pop culture reference
- Step 2** Framing global and civic questions
- Step 3** Designing participatory activities
- Step 4** Facilitating dialogue and reflection
- Step 5** Closing the session and follow-up

A simple way to remember the flow is:



What is the POP.Ed Walkthrough?

The POP.Ed Walkthrough is a planning and facilitation sequence that supports youth workers in:

- selecting pop culture references that are relevant, accessible, and safe for the
- specific group and setting;
- translating cultural content into global and civic learning questions (not only personal opinions);
- designing participatory and co-creative activities that promote ownership and engagement;
- guiding dialogue and reflection so that young people develop critical awareness and civic agency;
- closing sessions with clarity, care, and a realistic follow-up pathway.

Across the mapped partner practices, one consistent finding is that pop culture increases motivation and lowers barriers to participation, but learning outcomes depend on structure, particularly structured questioning, planned reflection moments, and clear facilitation norms. EUROBOX describes this clearly: without careful facilitation, pop-culture-based activities risk staying at the level of entertainment or personal opinion, whereas critical learning occurs when pop culture is treated as an object of analysis and reflection is built into the method.



Step 1. Choosing the right pop culture reference

Aim

To choose a reference that the group can access and relate to, and that can realistically open up a global/civic learning conversation in a safe and inclusive way.

Key considerations (based on partner practice)

In the mapped practices, effective pop culture references tend to be:

1. **Recognisable or quickly understandable**

The reference does not need to be universally loved, but participants must be able to “enter” it quickly (e.g., a short clip, a single post, a short scenario, a set of images, a lyric excerpt).

2. **Accessible**

Consider language level, cultural familiarity, paywalls, device access, and sensory or learning needs. EUROBOX notes that inclusion improves when methods offer multiple ways to participate beyond verbal or academic skills, and that blended or non-digital alternatives can prevent exclusion when digital access is uneven.

3. **Relevant to lived realities**

References should connect to youth everyday media culture and the group's context. A practical POP.Ed approach is to invite participants to bring their own examples (social media content, game experiences, images) to ensure relevance and diversity of perspectives.

4. **Screened for safety and ethical risk**

Pop culture can carry stereotypes, harmful narratives, or triggering themes. WAVES highlights that when methods involve personal narratives and visibility (e.g., video storytelling), safeguarding must be proactive, consent must be ongoing, and emotional safety must precede depth.

POP.Ed selection checklist (use as a quick filter)

Use the reference if you can answer "yes" to most of the following:

- ✓ Is it recognisable or quickly understandable for this group?
- ✓ Can everyone access it (language, tech, cost, abilities)?
- ✓ Does it connect to one clear civic/global theme (e.g., inclusion, democracy, sustainability, rights)?
- ✓ Can you name the main risk (stereotypes, conflict, distress, exclusion) and plan how to handle it?
- ✓ Is there space for youth choice (youth selecting references or examples)?

Partner-informed examples (how selection decisions play out)

- ✓ In influencer analysis, relevance is high because youth recognise the format, but facilitators must manage the discussion to avoid personal attacks and superficial judgement; selection should therefore include a clear ethical framing plan.
- ✓ In collage methods using magazines and printed images, accessibility is high for multilingual groups and participants with lower literacy, but the reference must still be curated so it supports the intended theme and does not reinforce stereotypes.
- ✓ In participatory video/storytelling methods with vulnerable youth, the reference is not a "topic" but a cultural format (digital storytelling). Selection is therefore also a decision about visibility, anonymity, dissemination, and consent.



Step 2. Framing global and civic questions

Aim

To move from “content” to “learning” by framing questions that connect pop culture references to global issues, civic values, democratic participation, and social responsibility.

Key points to include

Partner inputs show that pop culture sessions become educational when facilitators actively structure the transition from “what we saw” to “what it means” and “why it matters.” EUROBOX notes that structured questions and group debriefings are what move sessions beyond entertainment toward meaning-making.

In POP.Ed, framing questions should be:

- Progressive (starting from observation and moving toward civic/global analysis)
- Impact-oriented (focusing on effects, representation, power, and inclusion)
- Participant-centred (allowing young people to shape or generate questions when possible)

A POP.Ed “question ladder” you can reuse

Level 1: Observe (safe entry)

What do you notice? What happens? What stands out?

Level 2: Interpret (critical meaning)

- What message is being communicated?
- What values or norms are being promoted?
- Whose perspectives are represented or excluded?
- What ideas about identity, power, or social norms appear here?

Level 3: Connect (civic/global relevance)

- What real-world issue does this connect to locally and globally?
- What rights and responsibilities are involved?
- What would fairness, inclusion, or democratic participation look like here?
- What could change, and who has the power to change it?

Co-creating questions (when appropriate)

WAVES' ethical interview lab provides a useful model for how question framing itself can be participatory: instead of imposing questions, participants propose themes and draft questions for one another, producing more nuanced and empathetic prompts than those typically designed by external actors.

This is a **practical example of co-creation** shaping learning logic, not only activity outputs.

Risk 1

Discussions become superficial

("I like / I don't like it")

Prevention:

Use the question ladder and shift discussion from preference to impact and representation.

Risk 2

Judgemental or personal

(common in influencer work)

Prevention:

Set boundaries early. Keep critique on messages, norms, and systems - not individuals.

Risk 3

Personal disclosure

(session pushes into private territory)

Prevention:

Allow engagement through analysis, creative production, or role-based participation.



Step 3. Designing participatory activities

Aim

To design activities where young people actively create meaning together—through analysis, production, collaboration, and decision-making—rather than only consuming content or listening.

What partner mapping suggests (thematic patterns)

Across the mapped methods, participation becomes meaningful when activities are:

- **Hands-on and collaborative** (young people do something together)
- **Structured** (clear steps, roles, time plan)
- **Co-creative** (young people influence content, process, and outputs)
- **Inclusive by design** (multiple participation routes beyond confident speaking)

EUROBOX, for example, emphasises that participation is strengthened when methods allow engagement beyond verbal/academic skills (visual collage, action-based collaboration in games), and that structured reflection must be built in so participation leads to learning outcomes.

A simple menu of participation formats (choose one main format)

1. Analyse + Remix

Participants analyse a cultural text and create an alternative message (post, short script, storyboard, counter-narrative).

2. Simulation / Game-based decision-making

Participants experience civic dynamics through rule-making, negotiation, conflict resolution, and collective responsibility (with explicit debrief linking back to democracy/citizenship).

3. Creative production

Participants produce outputs (video, rap, podcast, collage) that express perspectives and generate dialogue.

4. Structured reflection creation

Participants use visual or narrative methods to represent a global issue, then link it to civic questions through guided reflection.

Making co-creation concrete

Partner inputs show that co-creation works best when it is explicit. In practice, this means planning where young people will have real decision-making power, such as:

- choosing references/examples;
- selecting themes/messages;
- taking different roles (writer, editor, interviewer, designer, performer);
- deciding what is shared publicly and what remains private.

WAVES demonstrates this through rotating production roles and narrative ownership choices (including the right to rephrase, delete, re-record, or remain off-camera).

Common design issues (and practical fixes)

1.Issue: the activity becomes “just fun” or aesthetic.

Fix: embed reflection checkpoints during and after the activity; clarify the civic/global learning aim upfront.

2.Issue: only confident speakers participate.

Fix: design role variety and output options that include non-verbal participation.

3.Issue: the method is too complex (especially in gamified or location-based designs).

Fix: simplify mechanics and ensure each task aligns to the learning goal (avoid tasks that only fill time).

Practice examples embedded in the mapping

- EUROBOX's Minecraft democracy method illustrates how democracy can be “experienced, not explained,” but also highlights the risk of focusing too much on gameplay without structured reflection and the need for technical resources.
- EUROBOX's collage method illustrates how visual participation reduces reliance on academic language and can make abstract global concepts concrete, while also noting the risk of oversimplification and the need to deepen reflection beyond aesthetics.
- WAVES' participatory video and ethical interview lab illustrates a high-depth participatory model where participants co-produce narratives and learning emerges through dialogue, role rotation, and collective editing, but the method is time-intensive and requires careful safeguarding.



Step 4. Facilitating dialogue and reflection

Aim

To create a safe learning environment, manage dialogue respectfully, and guide reflection so that young people develop critical awareness, empathy, and civic agency.

What partner practice shows

Partner inputs consistently emphasise that facilitation is the difference between engagement and learning. EUROBOX notes that facilitators must actively manage discussions to avoid personal attacks or reinforcing harmful narratives, and that group agreements and structured debriefings are essential when addressing sensitive themes such as gender, power, or inequality.

WAVES provides a more detailed safeguarding lens: empowerment cannot come at the cost of protection, emotional safety precedes artistic depth, multilingual expression can be an asset, and consent must be ongoing especially when there is any possibility of online dissemination.

POP.Ed facilitation foundations (practical, reusable)

- 1. Establish a short group agreement:** Create a shared baseline for respectful dialogue (no personal attacks, confidentiality boundaries, multiple viewpoints allowed, airtime balance).
- 2. Use structured reflection moments:** Plan reflection at key stages rather than leaving it “if we have time.” EUROBOX highlights that reflection moments are essential to move beyond entertainment toward meaning-making.
- 3. Manage disagreement as a learning moment:** Encourage participants to critique ideas and messages rather than individuals; shift from “who is right” to “what is the impact,” and return to group agreements when needed.
- 4. Apply safeguarding proactively** (especially in narrative-based work): Build in opt-out roles (off-camera, editing, observing); repeat consent check-ins; clarify what can be shared publicly; plan what happens if distress appears. WAVES describes ethical practice as including the right to stop, edit, or withdraw material, and recognises risks of emotional distress and re-traumatisation if facilitation is not trauma-informed.

Practical facilitation prompts (aligned with POP.Ed principles)

You can reuse prompts such as:

- Who created this message?
- Whose perspectives are represented or excluded?
- What ideas about identity, power, or social norms are being promoted?
- How might this narrative influence how people think about society?

These prompts help maintain a critical reflection orientation while keeping discussions concrete and accessible.

Step 5. Closing the session and follow-up

Aim

To close with clarity and agency, and to create a follow-up pathway so the learning extends beyond the session.

Thematic pattern across partner inputs

The partner mapping shows that many pop-culture-based methods generate high engagement in the moment, but long-term impact depends on how the session is closed and what happens next. This is especially true when outputs are shared publicly: WAVES notes that public sharing can generate strong emotions and recommends allocating more time for reflection after publication and including a follow-up pathway that sustains participation beyond the workshop.

POP.Ed closing checklist (simple and reusable)

1. Summarise learning: End with 2–3 key takeaways generated by the group (not a facilitator lecture).
2. Individual reflection: Invite each participant to name one takeaway (idea, feeling, or question).
3. Micro-agency step: Offer a realistic next step, such as:
 - creating an alternative message that challenges stereotypes;
 - agreeing on a “responsible sharing” principle for digital spaces;
 - planning a second session with a different pop culture format;
 - connecting the topic to a local action opportunity (youth council, volunteering, community event, community media).
4. Short feedback loop: Use a quick 3-question check:
 - What worked today?
 - What was difficult or unclear?
 - What should we change next time?

Follow-up and dissemination considerations

If the activity includes public outputs (video, audio, campaigns), follow-up should include:

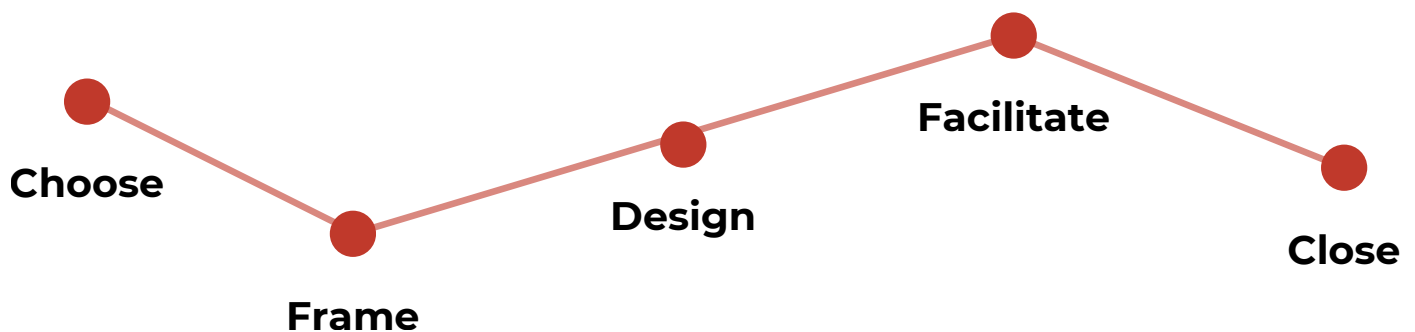
- consent and privacy review;
- emotional debriefing after publication;
- discussion of audience feedback and visibility impacts;
- pathways to continue participation for those who want it (e.g., links to studios, community radio, or local youth platforms).

POP.Ed Walkthrough at a glance (end-of-chapter recap)

1. **Choose** a reference that is relevant, accessible and safe;
2. **Frame** questions that move from observation → meaning → civic/global connection;
3. **Design** participation so young people create meaning, not only consume content;
4. **Facilitate** dialogue and reflection with structure, norms and safeguarding;
5. **Close** with learning, micro-agency, and a follow-up pathway when needed.

Across partner practices, three methodological lessons repeat:

- Pop culture increases engagement, but **reflection and facilitation create the learning.**
- Co-creation is effective only when there is **real power-sharing**, including youth control over themes, roles, and dissemination decisions.
- **Inclusion and safeguarding** are not add-ons; they are design choices that begin at Step 1 and must be applied proactively throughout the process.



Chapter 5. Using Pop Culture Methods in Practice

This chapter presents a selection of practical approaches that use different forms of pop culture as entry points for Global Citizenship Education in youth work. The methods included here are not theoretical examples, but are grounded in the experiences of project partners and reflect practices implemented in diverse contexts across Europe.

Rather than offering fixed models to replicate, this chapter aims to provide adaptable approaches that can inspire youth workers, trainers, and educators to design and facilitate their own activities. Each section focuses on a specific pop culture format, such as music, film, social media, games, audio, or visual culture, and explores how it can be used to engage young people in meaningful learning processes connected to global issues, civic participation, and social inclusion.

The methods are presented in a practical and accessible way, highlighting when they can be used, what they are most effective for, and what risks or challenges facilitators should consider. Insights and examples drawn from partner practices are integrated throughout the chapter to illustrate how these approaches work in real settings and what can be learned from their implementation.

It is important to recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all method. The effectiveness of each approach depends on the target group, the context, and the facilitation process. For this reason, the chapter should be read as a flexible resource that supports adaptation, experimentation, and co-creation with young people (Hart, 1992; Bovill et al., 2023).

Overall, this chapter aims to bridge methodology and practice, supporting youth workers in using pop culture not only as a tool for engagement, but as a meaningful space for critical reflection, participation, and active citizenship (Andreotti, 2006; Giroux, 2011).



Music, Lyrics, and Sound Culture

Music and sound culture are among the most immediate and emotionally resonant forms of expression in young people's lives. From rap and hip-hop to playlists, voice notes, and sound-based storytelling, music functions as both a personal and collective language through which identity, experiences, and social realities are communicated (Dimitriadis, 2001; Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019).

In the context of Global Citizenship Education, music and lyrics offer powerful entry points to explore themes such as identity, migration, inequality, belonging, resistance, and social justice (Akom, 2009; Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019). Because music operates beyond purely verbal communication, it can also create inclusive learning spaces where participants with different linguistic backgrounds can engage and express themselves.

Importantly, music is not only something young people consume, but rather it is something they produce, remix, and reinterpret. This makes it particularly suitable for participatory and co-creative learning processes (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002).

When to use it

- When working with groups with diverse linguistic or cultural backgrounds
- When addressing identity, belonging, migration, or personal experiences
- In contexts where trust-building and emotional expression are needed
- With participants who may feel disengaged from traditional learning formats
- In longer processes that allow for creative development and reflection

What it works best for

- Supporting self-expression and storytelling, especially on sensitive topics
- Building confidence, agency, and voice among participants
- Exploring identity, culture, and lived experience in a meaningful way
- Strengthening group cohesion and mutual understanding
- Connecting personal narratives to broader global and civic issues
- Encouraging multilingual and non-verbal communication

Risks to watch out for

- Emotional topics may surface and require careful facilitation and support
- Risk of superficial engagement if music is used only as entertainment
- Potential reinforcement of stereotypes if lyrics/content are not critically explored
- Unequal participation if some voices dominate the creative process
- Ethical concerns when sharing personal stories publicly
- Requires time, space, and sometimes technical resources

Examples in practice

In the “Multimodal Co-Creation for Empowerment of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors” practice as implemented in the framework of the NEW ABC project (Horizon2020), music, especially rap, is used alongside photography and video as a core medium for expression. Participants create songs that reflect their personal journeys, experiences of migration, and feelings of belonging or exclusion. The flexibility to move between formats allows young people to choose how they express themselves, with music often becoming a powerful starting point.

What makes this approach particularly effective is that music acts as a shared cultural space across different nationalities and languages (Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019). Participants who may struggle with verbal communication are still able to convey complex emotions and ideas through rhythm, sound, and performance. The process is not about producing “perfect” outputs, but about enabling participants to take ownership of their narratives.

Similarly, in broader storytelling-based practices (such as CET’s work on mental health narratives in the framework of the STRONGERYOU(th) project), sound and voice, whether through video storytelling, spoken word, or audio elements, play a central role in making personal experiences relatable and accessible. The use of voice and sound allows participants to communicate vulnerability, resilience, and identity in ways that written or formal discussion might not enable.

Across these examples, music is not treated as an add-on, but as a core medium for meaning-making, communication, and participation.

**USE MUSIC AS A BRIDGE
BETWEEN PERSONAL
EXPERIENCES
AND GLOBAL ISSUES.**

Practice insights

Music is an emotional entry point, not just a tool.

It allows participants to access and express experiences that may be difficult to articulate in traditional ways, especially in contexts involving migration, identity, or trauma.

Expression does not require a shared language.

Rhythm, tone, and sound enable communication across linguistic barriers, making music particularly effective in multicultural groups.

Co-creation must be real, not symbolic.

When participants control the themes, style, and message of their music, the process strengthens ownership and agency. If facilitators dominate decisions, this effect is lost.

Emotional safety comes before artistic output.

Creating music around personal experiences can surface vulnerability. Facilitators must prioritise trust, consent, and support over performance quality.

Music connects the personal to the political.

Individual stories expressed through lyrics often reveal broader issues such as inequality, migration systems, or social exclusion, making them powerful starting points for civic reflection.

How to strengthen this method in practice

To maximise impact, youth workers should:

- Allow participants to choose formats and genres that reflect their identities
- Be attentive to group dynamics and power imbalances in creative processes
- Combine creation with reflection (e.g. discussing themes behind lyrics)
- Ensure ethical handling of personal content, especially when sharing outputs
- Encourage both individual expression and group collaboration
- Use music as a bridge to connect personal experiences with global issues

Social Media, Memes, and Influencers

Social media platforms are among the most influential environments in which young people form opinions, construct identities, and engage with social and political issues (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Content such as memes, influencer posts, short-form videos, and live streams are not only sources of entertainment, but also powerful carriers of values, narratives, and ideologies (Milner, 2016; Mihailidis, 2020).

For Global Citizenship Education, this makes social media a highly relevant space to explore themes such as representation, power, inclusion, misinformation, and civic participation (Harshman, 2018).

Unlike traditional educational materials, social media content is immediate, participatory, and constantly evolving. Young people are not only consumers but also creators, curators, and commentators (Jenkins et al., 2009). This creates a strong foundation for learning processes that move beyond analysis toward active participation and content creation.

When to use it

- When working with digitally active youth or groups strongly engaged with online platforms;
- To explore topics such as gender, identity, misinformation, AI, representation, or digital citizenship;
- In short workshops or longer learning processes focused on media literacy;
- When aiming to connect abstract global issues to everyday digital experiences.

What it works best for

- Developing critical media literacy and awareness of how content is produced and circulated;
- Encouraging reflection on identity, norms, and representation;
- Supporting active citizenship in digital spaces, including responsible content creation;
- Helping young people understand power dynamics in online environments (algorithms, visibility, influence);
- Moving from passive consumption to intentional and critical engagement online.

Risks to watch out for

- Discussions may remain surface-level if not guided toward deeper analysis;
- Ethical concerns when analysing real individuals (e.g. influencers, viral content);
- Rapidly changing trends can make examples quickly outdated;
- Risk of reinforcing problematic content if not critically unpacked;
- Participants may slip into passive scrolling rather than active engagement.
- Blurred boundaries between online and offline realities can complicate reflection.

Examples in practice

In the [“Influencers Under the Microscope”](#) method that was developed in the framework of the project XXX, participants analyse real influencer content to identify gender stereotypes and power dynamics. They then work in groups to create alternative posts that promote more inclusive and equitable representations. This shift—from analysis to production—is key: young people move from recognising problematic narratives to actively reshaping them.

A different approach is seen in “Going Live on Social Media / Digital Live” (CET), where participants explore disinformation, AI-generated content, and online behaviour through peer exchange and reflection. Instead of focusing only on content, this method addresses how young people interact with digital environments—supporting skills such as self-awareness, critical thinking, and intentional media use.

Similarly, the [_AI.Proof initiative](#) uses podcasts, videos, and social media content to make complex topics like artificial intelligence accessible. By translating technical issues into familiar digital formats, the method enables young people to engage with emerging global challenges in ways that feel relevant and understandable.

Across these examples, a common pattern emerges:

SOCIAL MEDIA
IS NOT JUST ANALYSED.
IT IS USED,
QUESTIONED,
AND RESHAPED BY
PARTICIPANTS.

Practice insights

Relevance drives engagement, but not depth

Young people are immediately engaged when working with platforms and content they already use. However, critical reflection does not happen automatically; facilitators must actively guide analysis beyond first impressions.

From consumption to creation is the turning point

The most effective methods do not stop at analysing content. When participants create their own posts, campaigns, or narratives, learning becomes more meaningful and empowering.

Digital environments require critical awareness, not avoidance

Rather than discouraging social media use, effective approaches help young people navigate these spaces more consciously; understanding influence, bias, and manipulation.

Ethics must be addressed explicitly

Working with real content raises questions around privacy, representation, and responsibility. These should be openly discussed as part of the learning process.

Familiar formats make complex issues accessible

Topics like AI, misinformation, or gender norms become easier to engage with when presented through formats such as short videos, podcasts, or influencer-style content

Familiar formats make complex issues accessible

Topics like AI, misinformation, or gender norms become easier to engage with when presented through formats such as short videos, podcasts, or influencer-style content (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019).

How to strengthen this method in practice

To maximise impact, youth workers should:

- Use real, current content that participants recognise;
- Encourage peer exchange and debate rather than facilitator-led conclusions;
- Combine analysis + creation + reflection (not just one of these);
- Make space for personal experiences and digital habits to be discussed;
- Structure discussions with guiding questions (e.g. power, representation, intention);
- Regularly update materials to stay aligned with evolving trends.

Film, Series, and Streaming Content

Film, series, and streaming content are among the most widely consumed forms of storytelling in contemporary youth culture. Through platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, or other streaming services, young people engage daily with narratives that shape their understanding of identity, society, power, and global issues (Giroux, 2011).

These formats offer rich material for Global Citizenship Education because they present complex themes, such as inequality, democracy, migration, gender roles, or environmental challenges, through characters, conflicts, and storylines that are emotionally engaging and easy to relate to (Harshman, 2018). Stories allow young people to explore perspectives different from their own, while also reflecting on how narratives influence beliefs, values, and social norms (Giroux, 2011).

Importantly, film and series are not only tools for analysis, but also for reinterpretation and creative transformation, making them particularly suitable for participatory and co-creative learning processes (Jenkins et al., 2009).

When to use it

- When introducing or unpacking complex or abstract topics through storytelling;
- To explore identity, values, and social norms in a relatable way;
- In groups familiar with specific films or series that can serve as common references;
- During longer learning processes where there is time for analysis, discussion, and creative output;
- When aiming to connect fictional narratives to real-world issues.

What it works best for

- Developing critical thinking and narrative analysis skills;
- Exploring representation, stereotypes, and cultural perspectives;
- Understanding systems such as economy, governance, or social structures through fictional scenarios;
- Encouraging empathy and perspective-taking;
- Supporting creative reinterpretation and storytelling;
- Linking imagined worlds to real societal challenges and solutions.



Risks to watch out for

- Risk of passive consumption if activities rely only on watching content
- Discussions may remain surface-level without structured facilitation
- Some content may reinforce stereotypes or dominant narratives if not critically unpacked
- Participants may focus more on entertainment than reflection
- Cultural or political sensitivities may arise depending on content
- Requires careful selection of material relevant to the group

Examples in practice

Three examples of methods were developed in the framework of the KA1 project **“Show me a Future II – Dare 2 Dream!”** coordinated by CGE Erfurt e.V., that are considered best practice examples for filming and storytelling content. Particularly:

In the **“Make it European” method**, participants take a familiar Hollywood movie scene and reinterpret it through the lens of European values such as democracy, inclusion, and social justice. By rewriting and filming their own versions, young people actively engage with questions of identity and values, rather than passively consuming the original narrative. This process is particularly powerful because it builds on familiar cultural material, allowing participants to **“take ownership” of stories that usually feel distant or controlled by large media industries** (Jenkins et al., 2009). Through reinterpretation, they explore how values are embedded in narratives and how these narratives could be reshaped (Giroux, 2011).

Similarly, **“The Future We Want to Live In” method** uses narrative imagination to shift focus from current global problems to possible futures. Participants create “utopian” scenarios presented as newspaper stories, drawing on storytelling formats common in media. This method highlights **how narrative can be used not only to analyse reality but also to envision** alternatives and inspire action (Andreotti, 2006).

Across these practices, film and storytelling are used not just to understand the world, but to reimagine it.



Practice insights

Familiar stories create immediate entry points

Using well-known films or formats helps participants engage quickly, as they already understand the context, characters, or narrative structure.

Reinterpretation is more powerful than analysis alone

When participants rewrite, adapt, or perform stories, they engage more deeply with underlying values and assumptions.

Narratives shape how we understand reality

Films and series do not simply reflect society—they influence how people think about identity, power, and possibility. Making this visible is key.

Abstract systems become tangible through storytelling

Concepts like economy, governance, or social justice are easier to explore when embedded in stories or imagined worlds.

Hope and imagination are pedagogical tools

Encouraging participants to imagine alternative futures can shift learning from problem-awareness to solution-oriented thinking.

How to strengthen this method in practice

To maximise impact, youth workers should:

- Use short clips or scenes instead of full films to focus discussion;
- Encourage participants to connect narratives to their own experiences and contexts;
- Combine viewing with guided questions and structured reflection;
- Be mindful of cultural sensitivities and representation in chosen content;
- Move from analysis to creative reinterpretation (e.g. rewriting, acting, filming);
- Use storytelling as a bridge between imagination and real-world action.

Audio, Podcasts, and Voice-Based Media

Audio, podcasts, and voice-based media are increasingly central to how young people access information, reflect on complex issues, and engage with public discourse (Drew, 2017). From podcasts and interviews to voice notes and spoken storytelling, these formats offer a more intimate and reflective alternative to fast-paced visual content.

Unlike image-based media, audio places emphasis on listening, narrative, and voice, allowing for deeper engagement with ideas and experiences (Fox et al., 2025). For Global Citizenship Education, this creates valuable opportunities to explore topics such as democracy, identity, migration, technology, and social justice through dialogue, storytelling, and critical reflection.

Audio formats are also highly accessible and flexible. They can be consumed individually or collectively, synchronously or asynchronously, and require relatively low technical resources (Bolliger et al., 2010). This makes them particularly suitable for inclusive learning environments and for reaching young people in different contexts.

When to use it

- When addressing complex or abstract topics that require deeper reflection (e.g. AI, democracy, ethics)
- When working with participants who may prefer speaking or listening over visual performance
- In contexts where low-resource or flexible formats are needed
- To support self-paced or independent learning
- When aiming to create dialogue-based or reflective learning spaces

What it works best for

- Developing critical thinking and reflective listening skills;
- Exploring multiple perspectives and lived experiences;
- Supporting storytelling and narrative-based learning;
- Making complex topics more accessible and understandable;
- Encouraging dialogue, empathy, and deep discussion;
- Strengthening voice, expression, and communication skills.

Risks to watch out for

- Risk of passive consumption if listening is not accompanied by reflection;
- Difficulty in maintaining active engagement without visual element;
- Challenges in integrating audio into structured learning processes: Ethical considerations around voice, identity, and consent;
- Some participants may struggle with attention or concentration in audio-only formats
- Learning outcomes may remain unclear without guided facilitation.

Examples in practice

In the “**ABCDemocracy**” **podcast method** as it was developed in the framework of the ABCDemocracy project, participants engage with audio episodes based on real-life democratic scenarios. The podcast format allows young people to explore concepts such as active citizenship and European values in a flexible, on-demand way. This method supports self-directed learning, as participants can listen at their own pace and reflect on situations that mirror real societal challenges (Drew, 2017).

A different approach is seen in **AI.Proof**, where podcasts and video content are used to make complex topics such as artificial intelligence more accessible. By translating technical concepts into conversational and narrative formats, the method helps young people engage with emerging global issues that might otherwise feel distant or difficult to understand.

In the **Participatory Video and Ethical Interview Labs** approach developed in the framework of the NEW ABC project (Horizon2020), voice plays a central role in storytelling. Through interviews and narrative processes, participants reflect on their migration experiences and co-create digital stories. Here, voice is not just a medium; it becomes a tool of **representation and agency**, allowing participants to shape how their stories are told and understood (Lambert, 2013).

Across these examples, audio is used not only to deliver content, but to **create space for reflection, dialogue, and ownership of narratives**.

**CREATE SPACE
FOR REFLECTION,
DIALOGUE,
AND OWNERSHIP OF
NARRATIVES.**

Practice insights

Listening is an active skill, not a passive act

Young people are used to consuming audio, but critical listening requires guidance. Structured reflection is essential to transform listening into learning (Drew, 2017).

Voice creates connection and authenticity

Hearing someone's voice, tone, pauses, emotion, builds a stronger sense of connection than written content, supporting empathy and understanding (Fox et al., 2025).

Audio makes complex topics more approachable.

Conversational formats (e.g. podcasts, interviews) can simplify and humanise issues such as AI, democracy, or migration (Bolliger et al., 2010).

Not everyone wants to be visible, but many want to be heard

Audio provides an alternative form of participation for those who may feel uncomfortable with video or visual exposure.

Narrative ownership is powerful

When participants tell their own stories through voice, they shift from being subjects of discussion to active contributors to knowledge and discourse (Lambert, 2013).

How to strengthen this method in practice

To maximise impact, youth workers should:

- Combine listening with structured reflection (e.g. guiding questions, group discussion);
- Use audio as a starting point for dialogue and co-creation, not just consumption;
- Encourage participants to produce their own audio content (e.g. podcasts, interviews, voice recordings);
- Be attentive to ethical considerations, including consent and representation;
- Break longer audio into manageable segments to maintain attention;
- Connect audio content to real-life experiences and broader global issues.



Visual Culture, Fashion, and Street Culture

Visual culture, fashion, and street culture play a central role in how young people express identity, communicate values, and position themselves within society (Hall, 1997). From clothing styles and aesthetics to visual trends on social media, street art, and collage-based expression, these forms function as everyday languages through which meanings are created and shared. Unlike more structured forms of **communication, visual culture allows for immediate, intuitive, and often non-verbal expression.**

This makes it particularly relevant in diverse and multilingual groups, where participants may have different levels of confidence in verbal or written communication (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Through images, symbols, colours, and styles, young people can explore complex topics such as identity, inequality, belonging, and global interdependence in accessible and personal ways.

In Global Citizenship Education, visual and aesthetic forms are especially effective for connecting abstract global issues to lived experience, making them tangible, relatable, and open to interpretation (Wang & Burris, 1997; Mitchell et al., 2017).

When to use it

- When working with multilingual or mixed-ability groups
- When aiming to support reflection, identity exploration, or emotional expression
- In contexts where participants may feel less comfortable with verbal discussion
- To introduce or explore abstract global issues in a more concrete way
- As part of reflection activities during or after workshops, exchanges, or projects

What it works best for

- Encouraging inclusive participation, especially for those with language barriers
- Supporting self-reflection and personal connection to global issues
- Exploring identity, values, and belonging
- Facilitating group dialogue through visual interpretation and storytelling
- Strengthening creative thinking and interpretation skills
- Making complex topics such as inequality, sustainability, or migration more tangible

Risks to watch out for

- Risk of remaining at a surface level (focusing on aesthetics rather than meaning)
- Oversimplification of complex global issues
- Participants may feel insecure sharing personal or creative outputs
- Requires facilitation to ensure reflection goes beyond description
- Access to materials (magazines, images, space) may be a limitation
- Visual representations may unintentionally reproduce stereotypes if not discussed critically

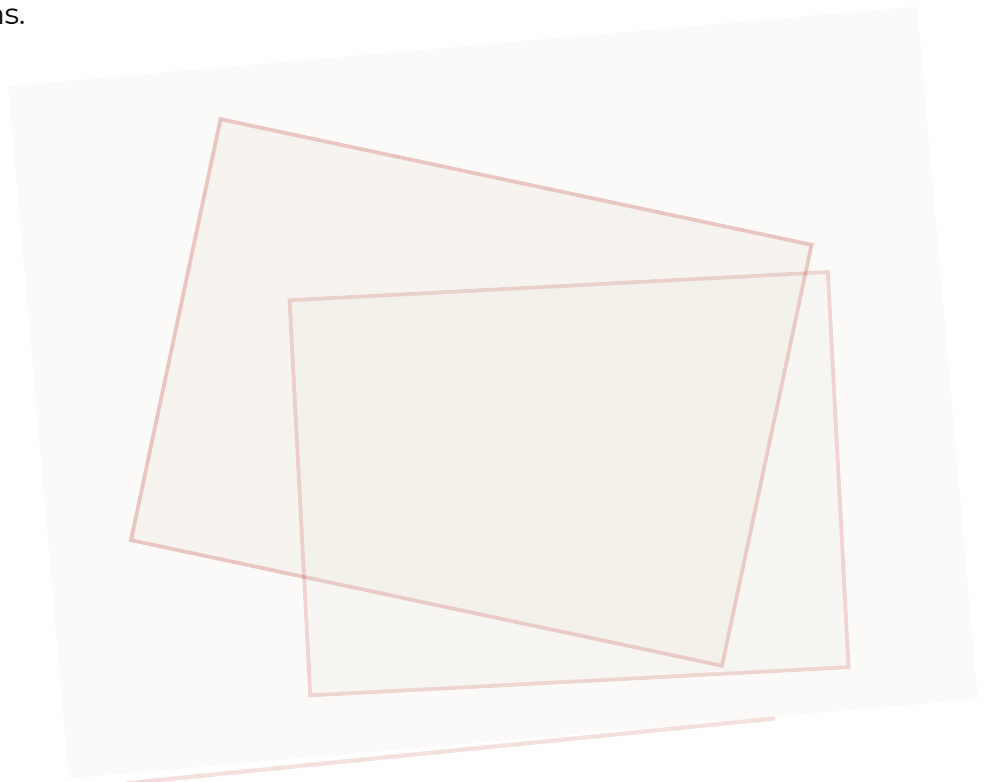
Examples in practice

In the **“Collage for Change”** method developed in the framework of the project Young Women for Equal and Inclusive Neighborhoods, participants create visual collages using images from magazines to represent global issues such as climate justice, migration, or inequality. These collages are then presented and discussed within the group, allowing participants to explain their choices and reflect on their meanings.

This method is particularly effective because it reduces reliance on verbal or academic language. Participants can express complex ideas through images and associations, making it highly inclusive for multicultural groups (Wang & Burris, 1997). However, the real learning happens during **the reflection phase**, where facilitators guide participants to move beyond describing their collage toward analysing the underlying issues and connections (Mitchell et al., 2017).

A similar approach is used in the **“Reflection Mood Board”** as developed in the framework of the youth exchange Ctrl + Find Your Digital Self, where participants visually represented their learning experiences, emotions, and personal takeaways using images and words. This method is often used at the end of activities or exchanges and allows young people to process their experiences in a more personal and creative way. Sharing these mood boards in the group creates space for dialogue, mutual understanding, and recognition of diverse perspectives.

Both examples show how visual culture can support not only expression but also **collective meaning-making, where participants interpret and learn** from each other’s representations.



Practice insights

Visual expression lowers barriers to participation

When participants are not required to rely on language, more people can engage meaningfully, especially those with different linguistic or educational backgrounds (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Images make abstract issues concrete

Global challenges such as inequality or sustainability become easier to grasp when translated into visual representations.

Reflection is what transforms activity into learning

Without guided discussion, visual methods risk staying at the level of aesthetics. Facilitators must actively support interpretation and critical thinking (Mitchell et al., 2017).

There is no single "correct" meaning

Different participants may interpret the same image in different ways. This diversity of perspectives is a strength and should be explored rather than corrected.

Creative insecurity is real

Some participants may feel uncomfortable sharing their visual work. Creating a safe and non-judgmental space is essential.

How to strengthen this method in practice

To maximise impact, youth workers should:

- Emphasise that expression matters more than artistic skill
- Combine individual creation with group dialogue
- Be attentive to representation and stereotypes in chosen images
- Use guiding questions to deepen reflection (e.g. "What does this image represent?" "Why did you choose it?")
- Encourage connections between visuals and personal experiences
- Adapt materials and formats to available resources and group needs

Games, Sports, and Interactive Media

Games, esports, and interactive media are among the most engaging and participatory forms of **contemporary pop culture** (Gee, 2007). Unlike more passive media formats, games require players to make decisions, solve problems, collaborate, and navigate systems, making them particularly powerful tools for experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Gee, 2007).

For many young people, gaming environments are not only spaces of entertainment but also spaces of social interaction, identity formation, and community building (Gee, 2007). Whether through online multiplayer games, simulation platforms, or gamified learning tools, participants actively shape and experience systems, rules, and outcomes.

In the context of Global Citizenship Education, games provide a unique opportunity to **experience concepts rather than only discuss them** (Kolb, 1984). Topics such as democracy, cooperation, inequality, resource distribution, or conflict become tangible through gameplay, allowing participants to reflect on how systems function and how decisions impact others (Aura et al., 2022; Hassan & Hamari, 2020).

When to use it

- When aiming to create high engagement and motivation, especially among disengaged youth
- To explore systems and processes (e.g. democracy, governance, resource management)
- In groups that respond well to interactive and hands-on learning
- When working on teamwork, collaboration, and decision-making
- In settings where digital tools or physical environments can support gameplay

What it works best for

- Experiencing democratic processes and collective decision-making
- Understanding systems thinking (rules, structures, consequences)
- Developing problem-solving and collaboration skills
- Encouraging active participation and shared responsibility
- Making abstract concepts such as governance or citizenship more concrete and relatable
- Supporting experiential and embodied learning

Risks to watch out for

- Focusing too much on gameplay rather than learning outcomes
- Lack of structured reflection may limit deeper understanding
- Technical requirements (devices, internet, platforms) may create barriers
- Complexity of games may overwhelm some participants
- Competitive elements may overshadow collaboration
- Misalignment between game mechanics and learning objectives

Examples in practice

In the “Building Democracy Together: Civic Participation through Minecraft” method inspired to **Democracy by Shapescape ApS**, participants collaborate within a shared Minecraft world to build a community. They must collectively decide on rules, manage resources, and address conflicts as they arise. Through this process, participants do not simply learn about democracy; they experience it directly (Kolb, 1984; Gee, 2007).

The strength of this approach lies in its open-ended structure. Minecraft allows participants to experiment, negotiate, and co-create systems in real time. However, the learning impact depends heavily on facilitation: without guided reflection, the activity can remain at the level of gameplay rather than connecting to real-world democratic processes (Hassan & Hamari, 2020).

A different format is seen in the “**ABCDemocracy Online Escape Room**” as it was developed in the framework of the ABCDemocracy project, where participants work in teams to solve puzzles within a narrative about protecting democratic values. The storyline, recovering the “Orb of Europa’s Light,” uses symbolic storytelling to frame concepts such as unity, freedom, and participation. The collaborative nature of the game encourages communication and shared problem-solving, while the narrative creates emotional engagement (Aura et al., 2022).

Similarly, the **Educational Scavenger Hunt** youth exchange transformed physical spaces into interactive learning environments. Participants explored real locations, completed tasks, and engaged with cultural and historical contexts through gamified challenges. This approach combines movement, storytelling, and teamwork, turning learning into an immersive experience.

Across these examples, a common element emerges: learning is embedded within action. Participants engage, decide, and collaborate first, and reflect on meaning afterwards (Kolb, 1984).



Practice insights

Experience comes before understanding. Games allow participants to live through systems such as democracy or cooperation. Reflection afterwards is what transforms experience into learning (Kolb, 1984).

Facilitation is the bridge between play and meaning. Without structured debriefing, participants may enjoy the activity but fail to connect it to broader civic or global issues (Hassan & Hamari, 2020).

Game mechanics shape learning outcomes. The design of the activity (rules, objectives, roles) directly influences what participants learn. Poor alignment can lead to confusion or superficial outcomes (Gee, 2007).

Collaboration matters more than competition. While competition can increase motivation, cooperative gameplay tends to produce deeper learning related to citizenship and collective responsibility (Aura et al., 2022).

Accessibility must be considered. Not all participants have the same level of digital skills or access to technology. Simpler or hybrid approaches can increase inclusion.

Narrative increases engagement. Story-driven games (e.g. escape rooms, missions) help participants connect emotionally with abstract concepts (Gee, 2007).

How to strengthen this method in practice

To maximise impact, youth workers should:

- Clearly define the learning objectives behind the game
- Design or select games where mechanics reflect the concepts being explored
- Always include a structured debriefing phase (What happened? Why? How does this relate to real life?)
- Balance fun and learning, ensuring neither dominates completely
- Encourage collaboration and shared decision-making
- Adapt complexity based on the group's skills and experience
- Consider low-tech or hybrid alternatives when resources are limited

Chapter 6: Co-Creation with Young People and What They Learn

Why co-creation matters in POP.Ed

Co-creation is a central pillar of the POP.Ed methodology. It reflects a shift from traditional educational approaches, where knowledge is transmitted by educators, to participatory models where young people actively contribute to the learning process as creators, interpreters, and decision-makers.

In the context of Global Citizenship Education, this shift is particularly important. Many of the issues addressed, such as inequality, migration, climate change, or digital transformation, directly affect young people's lives. However, young people are often positioned as passive recipients of information rather than as actors with valuable knowledge and perspectives.

POP.Ed challenges this by recognising that young people already engage with global issues through their everyday experiences, especially within digital and pop culture environments. They interpret, remix, and produce content, participate in online discussions, and form opinions about social and political topics. Co-creation builds on these existing practices and transforms them into structured learning processes (Jenkins et al., 2009; Ito et al., 2013).

Importantly, co-creation is not only a pedagogical choice; it is also a democratic one. It creates spaces where young people can express their views, question dominant narratives, and contribute to shaping knowledge and discourse. This is particularly relevant in a context where trust in institutions is declining and where young people may feel disconnected from formal civic processes (OECD, 2024).

By involving young people as co-creators, POP.Ed:

- strengthens ownership and motivation
 - validates lived experiences as legitimate knowledge
 - supports inclusion of diverse voices, especially those often underrepresented
- fosters agency and active participation in civic life

At the same time, co-creation requires a genuine redistribution of roles and power within the learning process. Youth workers move from being knowledge providers to facilitators, while young people take on more active roles in shaping content, direction, and outcomes. This aligns with participatory and learner-centred approaches in non-formal education (Freire, 1970; Fielding, 2011).

How to co-create in practice through pop culture

Co-creation in POP.Ed is not a single method, but a process that can take different forms depending on the context, group, and objectives. Pop culture provides a particularly effective framework for co-creation, as it is already participatory by nature; young people are used to creating content, remixing ideas, and engaging with cultural formats (Jenkins et al., 2009).

In practice, co-creation can happen at different stages of the learning process:

1. Co-creating content and narratives

Young people generate their own content using pop culture formats such as videos, music, podcasts, memes, or visual storytelling. They choose themes, define messages, and shape how issues are represented. For example, in storytelling or music-based practices, participants create narratives about identity, migration, or mental health. In social media-based activities, they design alternative posts or campaigns addressing topics such as gender equality or misinformation.

2. Co-creating meaning through interpretation

Participants engage with existing pop culture content (films, influencer posts, games, or images) and collaboratively analyse and reinterpret it. Meaning is not imposed by the facilitator but constructed through dialogue and exchange. This reflects dialogical learning approaches, where knowledge emerges through interaction rather than transmission (Freire, 1970).

3. Co-creating processes and decisions

Co-creation also involves shared decision-making. Participants contribute to:

- selecting topics and materials
- shaping activities and formats
- defining group rules and dynamics
- deciding how outputs are presented or shared

In game-based methods, this can mean co-creating rules or systems. In creative projects, it may involve deciding collectively on themes, aesthetics, or narratives.

4. Co-creating reflection and outcomes

Reflection is not only guided by facilitators but shaped by participants' questions, insights, and interpretations. Young people connect their experiences to broader global issues and identify possible actions or responses.

Young people generate their own content using pop culture formats such as videos, music, podcasts, memes, or visual storytelling. They choose themes, define messages, and shape how issues are represented. For example, in storytelling or music-based practices, participants create narratives about identity, migration, or mental health. In social media-based activities, they design alternative posts or campaigns addressing topics such as gender equality or misinformation.

Key conditions for meaningful co-creation

To ensure that co-creation is genuine and not symbolic, several conditions are essential:

Real participation, not tokenism

Young people must have actual influence over decisions and outputs, not just be involved in predefined tasks (Hart, 1992).

Safe and inclusive spaces

Participants need to feel respected and comfortable expressing their views, especially when dealing with personal or sensitive topics.

Flexible facilitation

Youth workers must adapt to the group's interests, pace, and dynamics rather than strictly following predefined plans.

Recognition of diverse forms of expression

Co-creation should allow for different formats, visual, audio, performative, not only verbal or written contributions.

Time and process orientation

Co-creation requires time for trust-building, experimentation, and iteration. It cannot be reduced to quick outputs.

Practice insights

Co-creation is effective only when power is genuinely shared, not simulated.

Pop culture formats naturally support co-creation, but structure is still needed.

Participants engage more deeply when they work on topics that reflect their realities.

Flexibility increases inclusion, especially for participants with fewer opportunities.

Facilitation requires balancing guidance and openness.

What young people learn through POP.Ed

Through co-creation processes based on pop culture, young people develop a range of competencies that are central to Global Citizenship Education. These go beyond knowledge acquisition and include skills, attitudes, and values that support active participation in society (UNESCO, 2015; Council of Europe, 2019).

1 Critical understanding of media and society

Analysing how narratives are constructed, how media shapes perceptions, and how power operates.

2 Expression and communication

Strengthening the ability to communicate ideas, tell stories, and express opinions through content creation.

3 Agency and participation

Fostering ownership and responsibility. Young people experience themselves as contributors, not passive learners.

4 Empathy and intercultural understanding

Developing empathy and deeper understanding of different experiences and identities.

5 Collaboration and collective problem-solving

Learning to negotiate, collaborate, and co-create solutions reflecting democratic processes.

6 Systems thinking and global awareness

Connecting personal experiences to broader global issues and understanding interdependencies.

7 Digital and creative competences

Strengthening digital literacy, media production skills, and creative thinking through pop culture formats.

From learning to action

Importantly, POP.Ed does not stop at reflection. By engaging in co-creation, young people are encouraged to:

- share their outputs publicly
- contribute to discussions and awareness-raising
- propose ideas and solutions
- engage with their communities and decision-makers

This connects learning with action and reinforces the role of young people **as**

ACTIVE CITIZENS AND AGENTS OF CHANGE

As it was made evident, co-creation in POP.Ed is not an additional component; it is the foundation that connects methodology, content, and impact. By combining participatory approaches with the cultural language of pop culture, the project creates learning environments where young people can explore, express, and act upon global issues in ways that are meaningful, relevant, and empowering.

7

Chapter 7: How This Guide Feeds into the POP.Ed Training

Link to the curriculum and training modules

This methodological guide provides the foundation upon which the POP.Ed Curriculum

(A2.2) and the POP.Ed Toolkit (A3.1) are built. While this document outlines the core principles, approaches, and methods of the POP.Ed methodology, the curriculum translates these into structured learning content, and the toolkit further operationalises them into concrete training activities and workshop formats.

The POP.Ed Curriculum is organised into 10 learning units, covering key areas of Global Citizenship Education, including global issues, intercultural competence, social justice, sustainability, active citizenship, and the role of pop culture in shaping global perspectives. Each unit combines theoretical background, case studies, and reflection activities, providing youth workers with the conceptual understanding needed to facilitate meaningful learning processes.

This guide supports the curriculum by:

- defining the methodological framework that underpins all learning units
- outlining the core principles (e.g. co-creation, participation, critical thinking, inclusion)
- providing practical approaches and methods for engaging young people through
- pop culture
- clarifying the role of the facilitator in non-formal learning environments

In turn, the POP.Ed Toolkit builds on both the guide and the curriculum by offering:

- step-by-step workshop designs
- ready-to-use activities based on pop culture formats
- facilitation guidelines for different contexts and target groups
- tools for reflection, evaluation, and follow-up

Together, these three components — Methodological Guidelines, Curriculum, and Toolkit — form a coherent learning framework:

- The Guidelines explain **why** and **how**
- The Curriculum defines **what** to teach and explore
- The Toolkit shows **how** to implement it **in practice**

This structure ensures that youth workers are not only equipped with content, but also with the methodological understanding and practical tools needed to adapt activities to their specific contexts.

What comes next in the project

Following the development of this guide and the POP.Ed Curriculum, the project moves into the implementation and testing phase, where the methodology will be applied, refined, and expanded through practice.

A key next step is the development and use of the POP.Ed Toolkit (A3.1), which translates the concepts and approaches presented in this guide into concrete, user-friendly resources for youth workers. These tools will be tested and further developed during the training and roll-out phase (WP3), where youth workers will apply POP.Ed methods in real learning environments with young people.

An essential component of this phase is the active involvement of youth workers and young people through participatory processes, including:

- pilot workshops and training sessions
- feedback collection and iterative improvement of materials
- collaboration within Local Advisory Groups

These processes ensure that the POP.Ed methodology remains dynamic, responsive, and grounded in real experiences.

At the same time, the project extends beyond training and learning activities into the field of advocacy and systemic impact (WP4). Through co-creation processes, young people will contribute to the development of a Youth Manifesto, expressing their perspectives, ideas, and recommendations on global issues and civic participation.

This creates a direct link between:

- learning and reflection
- expression and participation
- education and policy dialogue

By bringing youth voices into public discourse and engaging with decision-makers, the project aims to strengthen the role of Global Citizenship Education within youth work practices and policies.

Closing perspective

This guide is not the end of a process, but the starting point of an evolving methodology. Its purpose is to provide a shared foundation that can be adapted, tested, and enriched through practice.

As the POP.Ed project progresses, the methodology will continue to develop through:

- feedback from youth workers and participants
- experimentation with different pop culture formats and contexts
- collaboration across organisations and countries

Ultimately, the strength of POP.Ed lies in its ability to remain flexible, participatory, and responsive to the realities of young people's lives.

By connecting methodology, practice, and youth voice, the project contributes to a broader vision: empowering young people to understand the world they live in, to critically engage with it, and to actively shape it.

FROM POP CULTURE TO ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP.

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