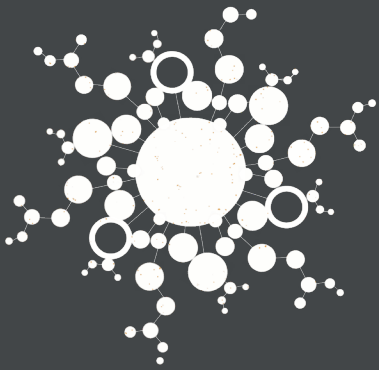




# Graphic Facilitation



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# Graphic Facilitation

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photo credit: ANPCDEFP

2022 Bucharest, Romania

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# graphic facilitation

Connecting the world by non-formal digital education.

The 6th edition of Connector aimed to create the virtual space and context in which people involved in learning to become familiar with and put in practice different non-formal learning methods. Even though it took place online, the event will keep its participative and interactive approach, with a focus on direct experience .

## CONNECTOR 2021 workshop

Capturing ideas and content visually. That would explain, in a few words, graphic facilitation. The workshop invited participants to get started on building their visual vocabularies and on drawing words! Because visual always finds a way to simplify ideas and build understanding beyond words. Don't think about the pretty drawings and don't be afraid to get your hands virtually dirty: the workshop explored key concepts throughout multiple angles by using comprehensive and socially accepted symbols and participants exercised the different roles that colours can have. They gained competences and got empowered to use these tools in their own work!



**Andreea Buzec**

I have been working in community development for more than 10 years, managing a foundation, developing and implementing projects, designing and implementing training modules, facilitating participatory processes for various communities' stakeholders, both at local, as well as at international level.

As a freelance consultant and trainer, I design and deliver training modules for private companies, public authorities, international & national organizations and community members on various topics such as leadership, organizational development, strategic planning, diversity management, conflict management, community development, community organizing, etc. combining technical input with graphic facilitation & recording.



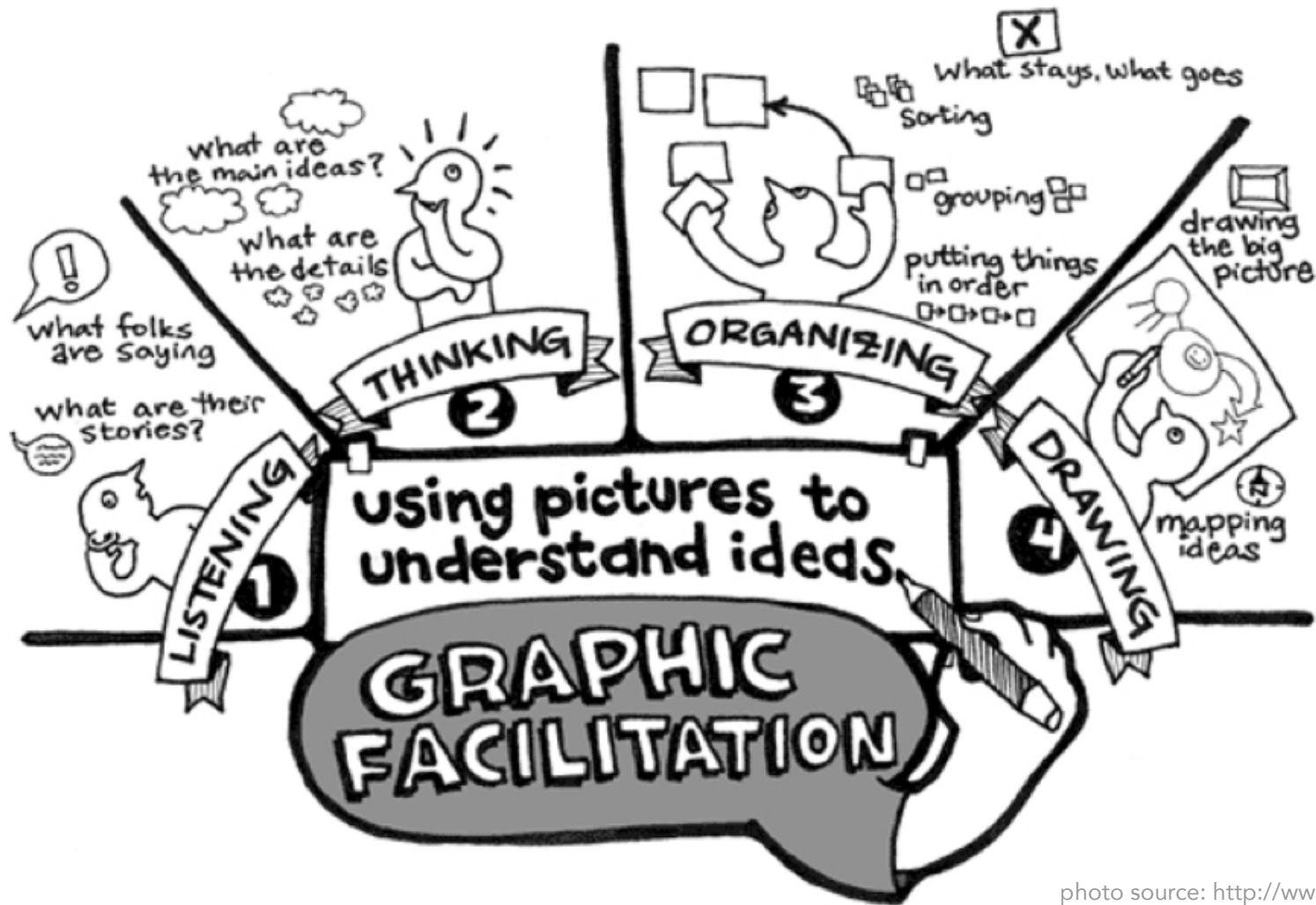


photo source: <http://www.loosetooth.com>

## Intro

What exactly is graphic facilitation, and how is it useful? Graphic Facilitation is the use of imagery and visual tools to help develop shared understanding, think through complexity, provide feedback, and communicate better.

The method is used in various academic and professional environments - meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences - by all types of people.

Some of you might have heard the terms of graphic recording or graphic facilitation and you might want to ask what the difference between would be the 2 of them is.

Here are 2 concrete examples of being in the shoes of a graphic recorder and a graphic facilitator:

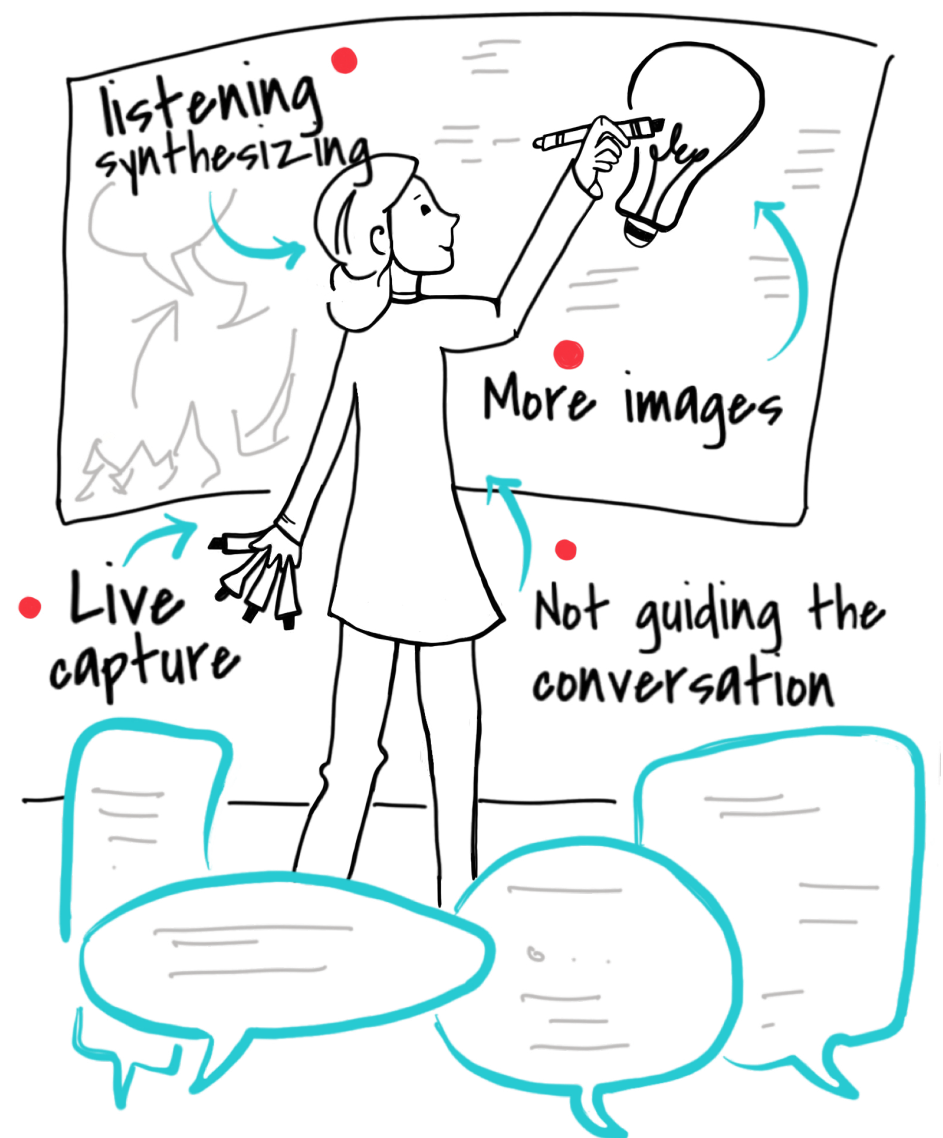


# GRAPHIC RECORDER

As a **graphic recorder**, the focus is live visual capture of content discussed or presented during an event. I have 1-2 planning calls or meetings with my client to understand their goals for including a graphic recorder, and to make sure I understand expectations. I'm a (mostly quiet) partner and resource to the facilitator running the meeting.

During the event, my charts tend to have more illustrations than when I'm facilitating because that's what I'm entirely focused on. A note here: although the word "facilitation" is not in the job title here, graphic recorders are often playing a very important role in the facilitation process, supporting groups and the "official" facilitator as a partner in a very unique and useful visual way.

After the event, you keep the original drawings, I photograph and edit the digital images of the charts and send you a list of suggestions for how to leverage them tailored to you based on our conversations.



# GRAPHIC FACILITATOR



sketch inspired by ConverSketch.com

As a **graphic facilitator**, my relationship with the client is more involved because not only am I capturing key content visually during the event, but I'm also working with them to design the process, facilitate the event, and make sure your next steps are clear. We have 3-5 planning calls or meetings (and a lot more emails) as we co-create an agenda that will help your group reach its' goals, think about how to make the most of the visuals, and make sure the space will support the group to do their best thinking. I often spend lots of time preparing large-scale visual "templates" we can fill in together during the meeting (although not always, sometimes we start with a blank sheet too), and can create custom worksheets for the participants. And, because drawing can be such a powerful tool to clarify and deepen idea development, graphic facilitators might design activities and processes to get the participants drawing out their ideas to build shared understanding.

During the meeting, I am facilitating the process, checking in to make sure we're on track, and capturing content visually, but often these charts have more words than pictures as I'm balancing both the capture and guiding the discussion. Again, after the event you keep the original drawings, I photograph and edit the digital images of the charts and send you a list of suggestions for how to leverage them tailored to you, along with a short 1-2-page summary and suggested action steps.

However, I consider both 2 approaches to be included in graphic facilitation. If the meaning of graphic facilitation is the use of imagery and visual tools to help develop shared understanding, think through complexity, provide feedback, and communicate better, then both approaches can be considered graphic facilitation.

## Let's get into details...

Seeking information, you will find two meanings in which the concept of „graphic facilitation” is used.

The first one is very broad and includes any use of visual language elements to facilitate learning, communication, or decision-making. It is often used as an umbrella concept for a multitude of practices, methods, and techniques.

Let's mention 3 of them:

- Visual note taking is the practice of using visual language elements to organize the information received in different contexts for personal use.
- Graphic facilitation: it is a process in which a trained person organizes the key information of a meeting in progress, in a visual manner, accessible to all the participants.
- Visual recording: a person with graphic illustration skills records what other people say in different contexts (eg. conferences, public meetings, meetings).

Graphic facilitation is not an art, and its practice does not require artistic talent. Through an appropriate training, anyone can incorporate it in his/her activities. When you explore and/or use graphic facilitation, you will cross a range of neighboring fields, such as mind mapping, rich picture, storytelling, graphic novel, or comic strip. Depending on the proposed goals, you can integrate in your practice support elements from these areas.



## Why should we use Graphic Facilitation method?

Before you say “*But... I can’t draw,*” consider these facts: an estimated 2/3 of all people are visual learners, and one fourth of our brain is devoted to processing visual information.

Combining speech with images increases retention by 40%! You don’t need to be an artist. Anyone can learn how to integrate graphic facilitation into their work or academic settings. But you do need to familiarize yourself with how to effectively communicate through drawing, develop visual techniques, and practice. In what contexts can it be used?

Graphic facilitation is a very versatile tool that can be adapted and used in various contexts. Depending on the distribution of roles between facilitators and participants, we can distinguish two types of sessions:

- a type in which the facilitator is an expert on the topic and uses the graphic facilitation to present certain elements and the relationship between them. This corresponds to the teaching-learning processes.
- a type in which the participants are experts, and the facilitator helps to build a common understanding of the topic. This corresponds to the processes dedicated to consultation and exploration.

A multitude of learning processes (eg. workshops, lectures, video lectures) can benefit the graphic facilitation, if they consider its specificity and resources. In this case, those

interested in acquiring graphic facilitation skills are teachers and trainers, both in formal and non-formal contexts. It all depends on why you want to use graphic facilitation...

Depending on when it is used in a process, the goals you can pursue by using graphic facilitation aid are:

- facilitating knowledge and understanding;
- exploring and defining a topic;
- defining and assessing actions;
- monitoring the implementation of a process;
- evaluation of results;
- collecting feedback;
- planning processes and changes;
- fostering innovation through exposing different perspectives.

In practice, what makes the difference is the template used to lead the session. If the participants are led towards a certain result (eg. a history lesson), the template will be more direct. If participants have to be encouraged to bring their contribution (eg. design of a new procedure), the template will only be a neutral framework in which information is collected.

A simple google search will lead you to find thousands of templates that you can easily replicate and also discover different practitioners that you like and can start to follow.



## Who can deliver the method?

The use of graphic facilitation relates to the acquisition of a set of skills and anyone who acquires them can use it. The method is developed and promoted by a community of practitioners, but it is not a field subject to rules, standards, or certification systems.

Although drawing confers a specific character to the method, it is only one of the necessary skills. What is generally called artistic talent does not represent an essential factor for the training as a graphic facilitator. Any person who can draw lines and circles meets the minimum criteria to train in the use of the method.

The key factor affecting access to the status of graphic facilitator is a constant exercise, along with personal skills, such as listening and communication. An element often overlooked is the resistance to effort required to complete a session since we have been using for a long time our hand just to take brief notes in writing and mostly for typing.

Graphic facilitation will put you in the position to make and complete sometimes big surface drawings, which require the effort that we used to put in when we were in school and used to write pages of text.  
But it is fun!

If you aim at using graphic facilitation in your practice, you might consider acquiring the following types of skills:

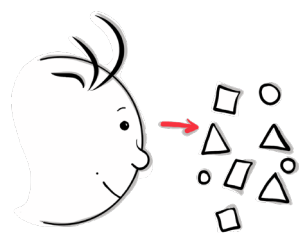
### Technical

- knowing and being able to use the tools required for drawing;
- elementary drawing skills (simple lines and shapes);
- notions regarding the use of colors to highlight the content;
- building a portfolio of symbols or, what otherwise is called visual vocabulary;
- developing your own graphical language or style that sets you apart from other skilled graphic facilitators.

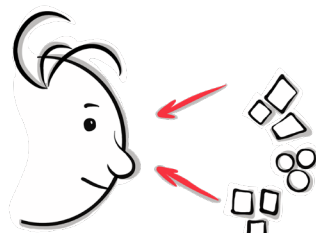
### Conceptual

- listening without applying own filters;
- filtering and essentializing the information to be transmitted or what is otherwise is called the art of imagining – seeing with our eyes closed;
- transforming certain concepts and metaphors into images and symbols;
- the use of appropriate titles/subtitles/texts;
- creating templates for different types of contexts.

All these skills could be all grouped under the umbrella of the visual thinking process that encompasses 4 steps:



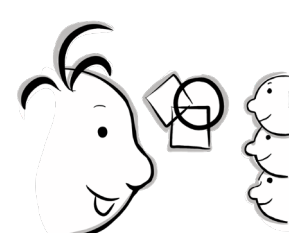
LOOKING



SEEING



IMAGINING



SHOWING

**1.Looking** (collecting & screening) – this is the semi passive process of taking in the information around us. Looking is about collecting inputs and making initial rough assessment of what is out there in terms of concrete and abstract inputs.

**2.Seeing** – this is the phase where we select which inputs are worth more detailed inspection and start making patterns and connections.

**3.Imagining** – it is what happens after the visuals have been collected and selected and the time comes to start manipulating them. Imagining could also be defined such as the act of seeing something that isn't there.

**4.Showing** – once we have found patterns, made connections, and made sense of them and figured out a way to discover something new, we have to show it to the others through drawing.

At international level, there are available training programs offered by practitioners or companies, based on their own experience. Among them, there are several elements of convergence, but also peculiarities related to individual preferences and the context in which the experience has been acquired.

In the Resources chapter you will find some examples.

## How can Graphic Facilitation method be applied in Erasmus + projects?

*Visual techniques can help your team and your participants to better understand often complicated, abstract information in a very short space of time.*

Through real-time drawing, people manage to synthesize themes, metaphors, and abstract ideas much more quickly than through verbal explanation alone. And it's not only the people on the receiving end, you yourself, the information you bring, will benefit from backing your story up with an image worth so much more than 1000 words!

Imagine you organize a training, and you use graphic recording to synthesize the conversations, process and group dynamic and, as a result, you have concrete visuals that will be further promoted online, posted on social media or sent to the people who were present in the capacity building activity in order to be able to remember key points and further share them.

By using the carefully organized images, you can facilitate discussions and turn big ideas into clear, communicable actions, even after the event has ended, within your organization, with different stakeholders, contributing to faster engagement and further valorization and exploitation of results.

As a note-taking method, it helps a group memorize the contents of a presentation or discussion. In this case, however, the facilitator only focuses on the drawing and usually, it takes more effort and years of experience because they work in real time during a meeting or presentation.

It can also benefit day-to-day workshops or meetings.

Prepare and create visual posters and helping materials to go with the topics beforehand.

Then complete these half-done posters with your team and also invite team members to draw so that you facilitate a collective drawing process that benefits all of them and also builds engagement and responsibility for the results.

For right-brained or artistic people, painting and drawing would be healthy ways of enhancing the creative skills that they already manifest. On the other hand, left-brained or analytical people can also stimulate their creativity and improve it.

Therefore, by using these techniques, you will not only enhance the outcomes of your meetings and events, you will make the whole process more enjoyable!



## Overcoming obstacles in using graphic facilitation in a participatory manner

There will always be someone in the room that will resist and question why we need to draw, why we could not approach a certain topic in a more “professional” manner, like a presentation or a debate. That is the moment when you need to stand your ground and be able to build a discourse and approach that supports your visual approach.

Here are some benefits of drawing that you should be aware of and that can help you build your discourse in favor of visual approaches:

### IMPROVED CREATIVITY

Painting and drawing would obviously make use of one’s imagination. They would create vivid images of houses, people, and places. People can even choose to portray their emotions and produce abstract art. As these would entail the creation of personal works, one would have to use his artistic skills. These activities would then play a beneficial role in the development of one’s brain.

For right-brained or artistic people, painting and drawing would be healthy ways of enhancing the creative skills that they already manifest. On the other hand, left-brained or analytical people can also stimulate their creativity and improve it.

Knowing these factors, drawing and painting is highly recommended for children. In fact, many children who are at the developing ages are encouraged to engage in painting and drawing. By promoting the development of their brains, they would be more prepared for academic work. Furthermore, they would have an easier time conveying their ideas to their peers.

### IMPROVED MEMORY

The early field of Graphic Facilitation, or visual notetaking, was named “Explicit Group Memory” by Facilitator Geoff Ball, who discovered that a shared picture supported group learning or more importantly – a lasting memory in the group. On the other hand, the health benefits of painting and drawing are also enjoyed by those who experience illnesses such as Alzheimer’s disease. Although they may have problems with their memory, enabling them to engage in painting and drawing can help boost their recalling skills. As they sharpen their minds through imagination and thinking, they may experience less complicated conditions of their illnesses. Thus, they may still enjoy a lot of activities in their lives in spite of their condition.



## IMPROVED COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Another point in the long list of health benefits of painting and drawing would involve the opportunity to improve one's communication with other people.

As art involves expressing one's inner thoughts and feelings, he may project all these indescribable emotions through paintings and drawings. In using art to break free from personal limitations, individuals can surpass their weaknesses. These can include shyness, autism, and other disabilities. Furthermore, as painting and drawing are continuous processes, these individuals would improve their flow of thought as they create such artworks. These can be very useful for their future endeavors.

## IMPROVED PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Aside from these benefits, people may actually be surprised that painting and drawing can also instigate the development of critical thinking and problem solving. In fact, painting and drawing enables an individual to realize that there can be more than one solution to a single problem. As they discover the artworks they can produce from a blank sketch pad, they develop the technique of thinking outside the box. Painting and drawing would widen their perspectives on various situations. In effect, they would be able to address various tasks in a creative and very effective way.

## STRESS RELIEF

Perhaps the major health benefits of painting and drawing involve the emotional aspects of individuals. For one, many people use art to release stress.

As the pressures of life can be very tiring, individuals have tried painting and drawing to relax from the demanding requirements of life. They are able to free themselves from the stress that has accumulated by releasing these in the form of color and drawing. As they temporarily exit the world of fears and worries, they enter the world of fun and excitement. Releasing one's stress can be very beneficial to reduce their risk of other physiological illnesses.

## MORE POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Additionally, creating these paintings and drawings would obviously lessen the negative emotions within an individual. This would be replaced by the positive thoughts and feelings as color and drawings would be exemplified. Of course, as one develops his/her capabilities in painting and drawing, these would produce very good results. Hence, this may make an individual feel good about his capabilities. These activities would boost his/her self-esteem and would inspire him/her to believe in what he/she can do.

Through these health benefits of painting and drawing, an individual may also develop optimism and feel happier through painting and drawing. With the body and mind becoming more relaxed, one can function better.



## RELEASE OF HIDDEN EMOTIONS

Furthermore, as one pours out his emotions through art, he/she concentrates on releasing all these hidden emotions. In fact, physical pain may even disappear as one is deeply involved in his paintings and drawings. Research has called this state the “Alpha”; this signifies that part of one’s brain is consciously performing activities while the unconscious part is also expressed. Such a state can also be obtained from other activities such as prayer, music, and meditation. This state would release energy and would revitalize an individual. He/she would gain strength in this special form of recovery. In effect, the healing process can be faster and more effective. Knowing these benefits, it isn’t surprising to know that painting and drawing are highly recommended for an individual’s recuperation from painful events such as war and abuse (e.g. rape). In fact, many therapists include these activities in the schedules of their patients. They would encourage their patients to release their feelings.

As an individual is able to find a safe environment to convey his/her emotions, the health benefits of painting and drawing can be maximized to aid the recovery of this said individual. He/she would be immersed in a world of cleansing from all the bitter events that may have happened to him. His/her stress level and emotional anxiety would be soothed, thus enabling him/her to function better and return back to his regular work. Through painting and drawing, many therapies have become successful. With the added support of family and loved ones, patients are able to achieve inner peace and find closure from their previous experiences.

## INCREASE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Given these various health benefits of painting and drawing, it is clear that these activities can cause an increase in an individual’s emotional intelligence. In enabling one’s emotions to flow through art, one can create a better grasp of his varying feelings. One can experiment on feelings of joy, peace, love, and happiness while performing these tasks. Through the improvements in one’s personality and emotional stability, painting and drawing do not benefit a single individual but even the people around him. As the individual would be able to respond to the emotions felt by others, these people would also share the positive effects of art. The individual who engages in doing such art can brighten other people’s days and help them cope with whatever difficulties they may experience. As he/she has more control of his/her emotions, he/she would be an excellent companion for the people with whom he interacts.

### Improving the Senses

As the health benefits of painting and drawing are evident in one’s mental activities, these activities can also promote the improvement of the senses. Knowing the role of the brain in delivering messages to instruct the actions to be performed by one’s body, stimulating this integral organ is vital to improve the organs it controls. Thus, an individual who has engaged in painting and drawing would experience many positive changes in how he/she would respond to and perceive the world.

## BETTER MOBILITY

For one, art can enable a person to have better mobility. As the individual would need to use a brush or pencil to create his artworks, he would develop more efficient hand movements. Through the improvement of one's brain activities, signals can be effectively sent from the brain to the motor neurons that would deliver the specific action that must be performed. As a result, fine motor skills would arise.

## YOU BECOME MORE OBSERVANT OF THE DETAILS

To add to the list of health benefits of painting and drawing, These activities would enable one to become more observant of the details of his surroundings. As one is more exposed to light, darkness, color, shading, and many other properties of painting and drawing, he would be able to pay closer attention to finer details. His eyes would be trained to look for intricate designs and forms that may have been ignored in the past. Thus, as the brain would let one's concentration improve, an individual may see and appreciate even the most miniscule details that can be viewed.

While you have been reading all these benefits, you might have realized that these also apply to you, who will be in the role of a graphic facilitator or of a graphic recorder. Think about them, reflect on your own needs and find the right motivation to engage with using visuals.



## How do you evaluate graphic facilitation?

Before we talk about evaluation, it is important to understand in what context we have applied graphic facilitation and what the objectives were:

- facilitating knowledge and understanding;
- exploring and defining a topic;
- defining and assessing actions;
- monitoring the implementation of a process;
- evaluation of results;
- collecting feedback;
- planning processes and changes;
- fostering innovation through exposing different perspectives.

If the aim was to facilitate knowledge and understanding, then it can be evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively, it all depends on the indicators and targets that you set. You might want to take into consideration asking pertinent questions related to the effectiveness and efficiency of using graphic facilitation, such as:

- To what measure visualizing has helped you better connect different concepts?
- What are the images that impacted you the most?
- What new perspectives/ connections has visualization helped you make?

You can also target the evaluation of how people felt during the process, to assess the impact of graphic facilitation on their state of mind, energy level & engagement versus other traditional approaches.



## How to start & practice graphic facilitation

Starting graphic facilitation from zero can prove frustrating, but fortunately, here come some great ways to practice!

- Start taking notes by hand whenever possible! Instead of popping up notes on your laptop, just grab a piece of paper and go. I especially pay attention to the visual hierarchy and decorate if I have the time.

I also create grocery lists sometimes.

- Copy, copy, copy! Look out for resources and try to remake them. I know it sounds boring, but you will make a lot of progress! Those deeply interested in the subject can listen to a podcast and sketchnote it. Start easy and stop the playback from time to time on the first try. But it can really inspire once you speed up the drawing.

- Whenever you have to make a workshop, retrospective or kick-off meeting, try to create at least some of your materials by hand. You will feel the difference!

One more addition:

I really like this video from

[Verbal To Visual](#) about visual note taking.



## Resources

### Books

1. Dan Roam, **The back of the Napkin**
2. David Sibbet, **Visual Meetings: How Graphics, Sticky Notes and Idea Mapping Can Transform Group Productivity**
3. Brandy Agerbeck, **The Graphic Facilitator's Guide**

### Youtube

There are a lot of videos on Youtube on:

1. [Basics for graphic facilitation](#)

You can simply start researching based on the lead provided by the video mentioned above and find the type of tutorials that appeal to your way of learning.

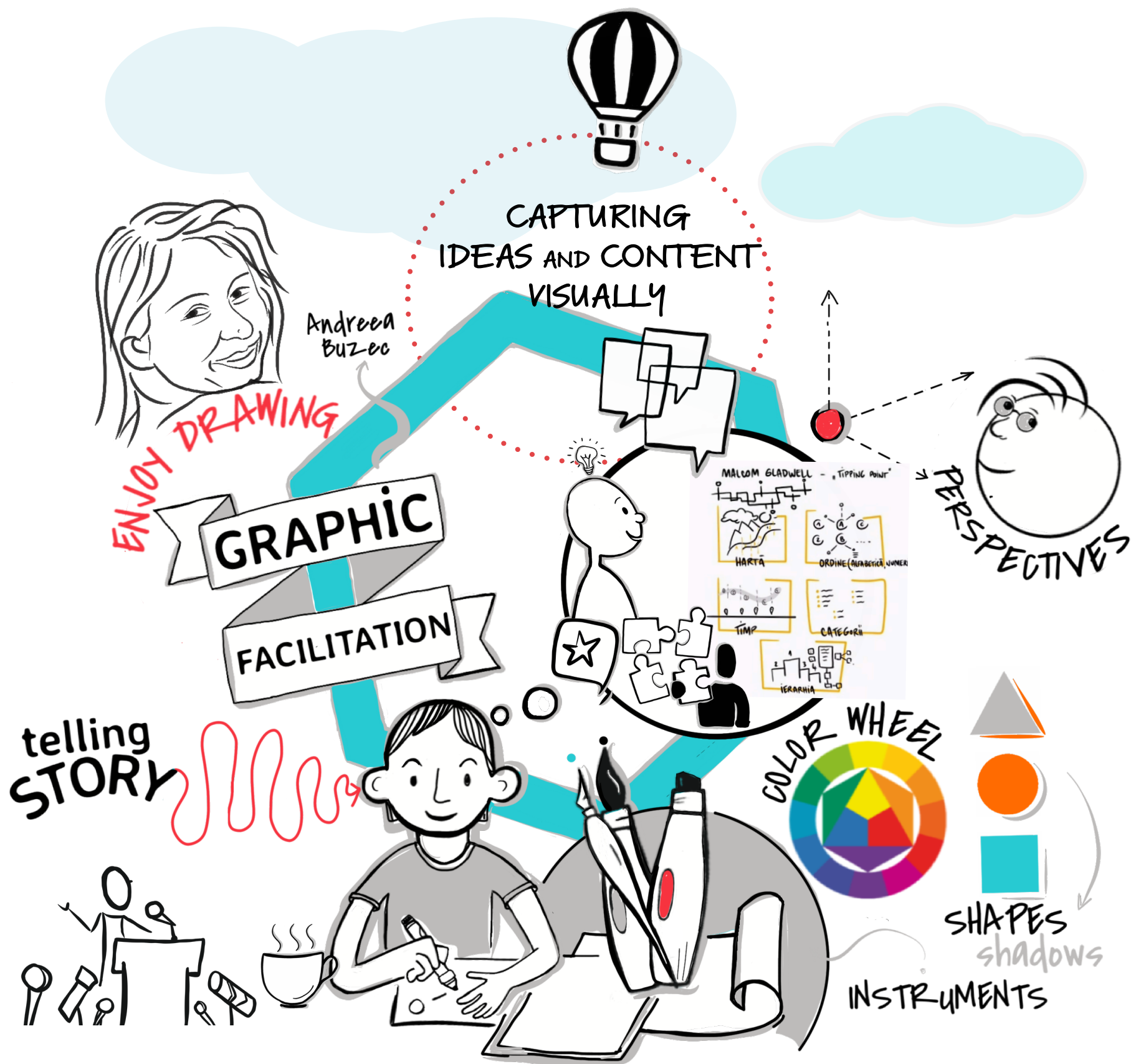
Or on how to use Procreate application for online graphic facilitation:

2. [Procreate: Top 8 Tips for Visual Notetakers](#)
3. [PROCEDURE BASICS | VISUAL TIPS & TRICKS](#)
4. [PROCEDURE for Beginners Tutorial in 10 min - Sketch notes and graphic facilitation on iPad](#)

### Facebook

Communities of practice

5. [Graphic facilitation group](#)
6. [International Forum of Visual Practitioners](#)



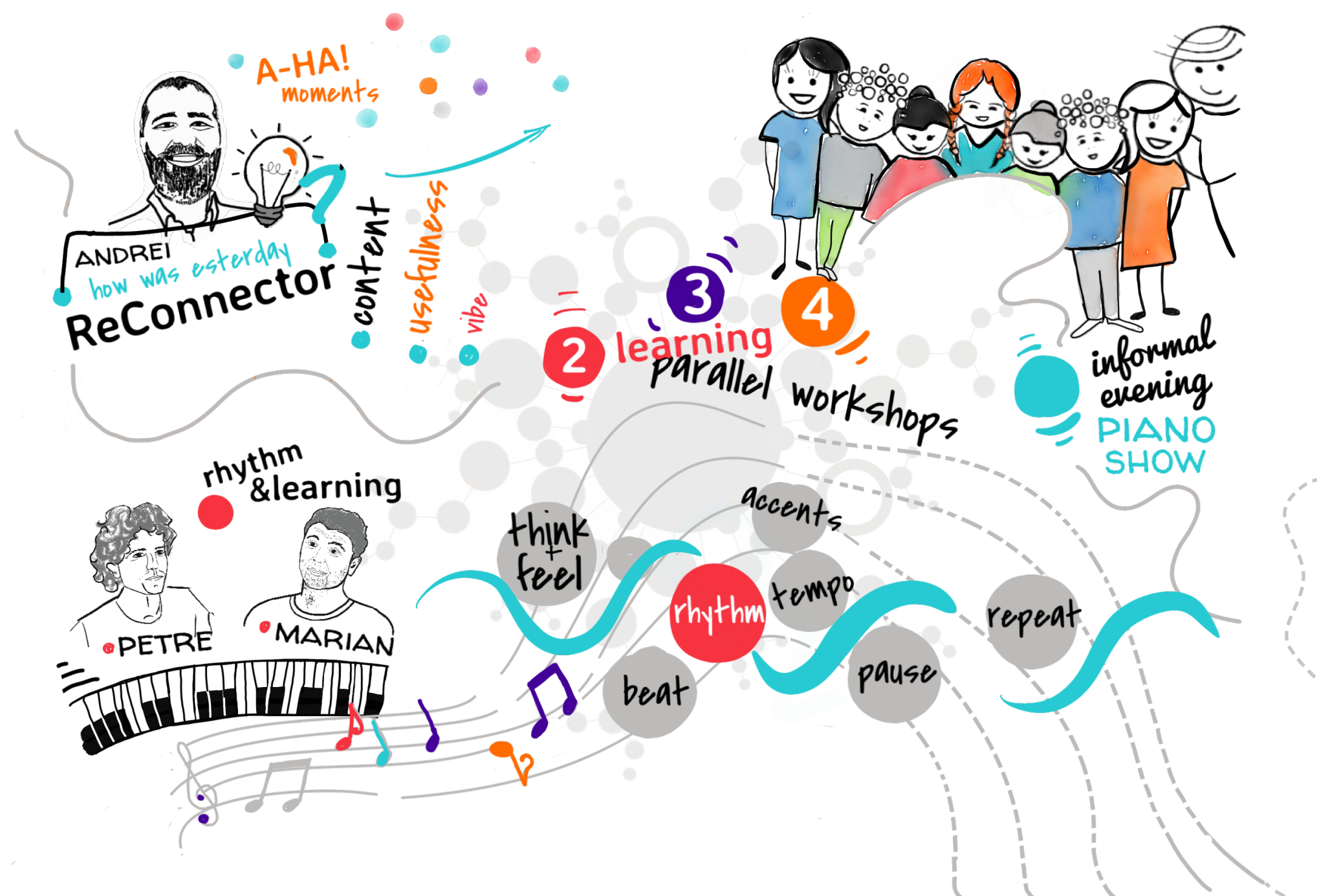
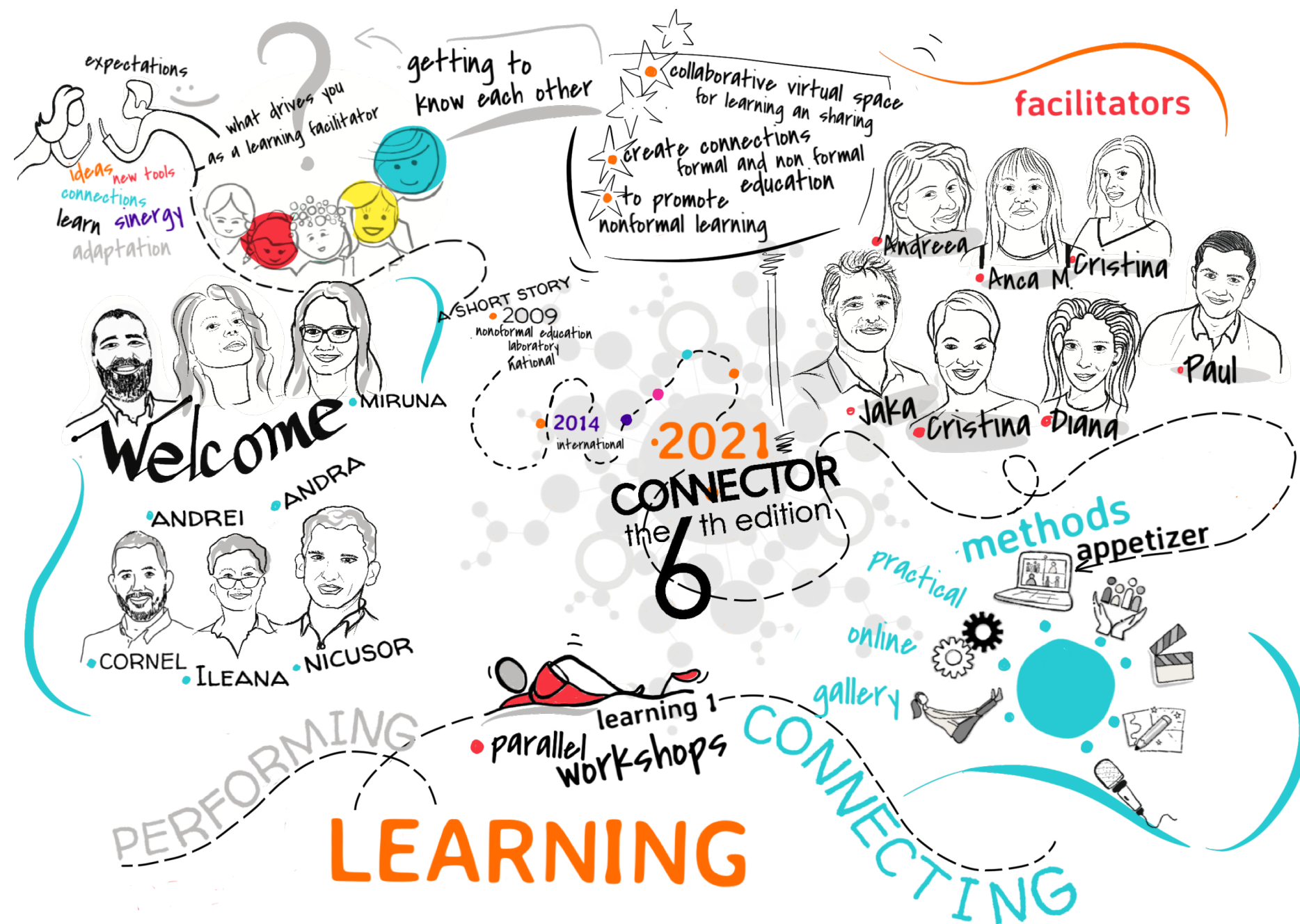


## Testimonials from participants

*"I think you infected me well with the workshop because ... I already draw every day. I started more timidly with replicating existing templates, but it works well. I even got a marker kit and I especially wanted a gray one ... for the shading!"*

*"The graphic facilitation workshop was a dream come true. I wanted for a long time to learn graphic facilitation and Connector was the proper context and my opportunity. Andreea was like a jeweler by taking the potential of each of us and manages to create something beautiful. Thank you for the chance to be part of this story of graphic jewelry!"*





# DAY 1

Welcome day and connect to the world by non-formal digital learning. This first day was about: getting to know each other - *digitally, but equally interactive, participative and friendly* - finding out Connector's story, presenting the facilitators & methods, appetizer of the methods, ending with 7 parallel workshops about the Connector methods.

# DAY 2

We started reconnecting together in the plenary. Special guests brought some rhythm & learning. And then, together with the facilitators, participants get back to discover Connector methods in the second learning session, dedicated to it. And we enjoyed a nice atmosphere, in the informal evening.









## **CONNECTOR**

is an international event focused on nonformal learning  
and organised every year by

### **ANPCDEF**

National Agency for the Community Programmes in the field of Education and Vocational Training  
(Romanian NA for European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+)

[www.anpcdefp.ro](http://www.anpcdefp.ro)