TELLING OTHERWISE: TRAINING YOUTH WORKERS FOR LGBTQIA+ STORYTELLING IN THE QUEER MEDIA EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the ECHOES train-the-trainers programme, a 60-hour Erasmus+ training course for 16 youth workers designed to integrate digital storytelling, algorithmic and AI literacy, and queer affective care for working with LGBTQIA+ young people. Drawing on the Queer Media Education framework (Messina, 2025) and its Q.U.A.K.E. dimensions, the study describes the co-design of the curriculum, the construction of the ECHOES competence tool, and the descriptive pre-post evidence collected during implementation. Results suggest stronger perceived competences in media production, facilitation, advocacy and post-publication care, while AI-related management remains more fragile. The article argues that in algorithmic publics, digital storytelling cannot end with publication: youth workers need to accompany visibility, backlash, consent, interpretation, and persistence.

KEYWORDS
Queer Media Education; youth work; digital storytelling; AI literacy; LGBTQIA+ advocacy.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary media environment is marked by pervasive algorithmic mediation of identity experience. Recommendation systems, automated content classification and generative artificial intelligence shape, in real time, what adolescents see, what they can recognise as desirable, and what they can produce as public narratives of the self (Mascheroni et al., 2026; Vogels et al., 2022). This mediation is not neutral: it organises visibility, ranks voices, predicts interests and establishes the conditions under which some stories circulate while others remain difficult to find (Noble, 2018).

LGBTQIA+ young people occupy a paradigmatic position in this ecosystem. Digital platforms often provide their first, and sometimes only, access to peer communities, vocabulary for naming experience, models of identification beyond family and school norms, and forms of everyday activism (Berger et al., 2022; Cavalcante, 2019; Pain, 2022). At the same time, the same platforms can reduce the visibility of minoritised voices through shadow banning, demonetisation, automated classification of queer content as sensitive, and moderation practices that are opaque to users (Delmonaco et al., 2024; Gillespie, 2018; Messina & Mascitti, 2026). The digital environment is therefore both a resource for identity exploration and a device that can invisibilise the identities it appears to host.

This ambivalence raises a specific educational question: if media ecosystems simultaneously enable self-narration and restrict public appearance, which educational figures are prepared to accompany LGBTQIA+ young people through this process? The answer cannot come from school alone, because school operates with different institutional mandates, temporalities, and constraints. Non-formal education, especially youth work, becomes crucial. Youth workers operate in relational settings in which young people learn by doing, by sharing, by testing boundaries and by producing situated meanings

(Corney et al., 2023). Yet the training of youth workers in Europe remains fragmented with respect to the competences required by algorithmic publics. Literature and practice often separate LGBTQIA+ group facilitation, critical media literacy, digital storytelling, AI literacy and affective care, even though these dimensions are inseparable when promoting queer youth's digital wellbeing in algorithmic ecosystems.

This article addresses that gap through the case of ECHOES, an Erasmus+ project[2] comprising a 60-hour train-the-trainers pathway involving 16 youth workers from four European countries. The programme was co-designed by the Italian organisation Stanza101 Project together with three European partners and was framed through Queer Media Education (Messina, 2025). The research question guiding the study is: how can a training pathway for youth workers integrate technical competences in digital storytelling, critical competences in algorithmic literacy and relational competences in queer affective care into a coherent educational device, and how can the resulting competences be detected? The article presents the theoretical rationale for integration, the training case that translates the rationale into practice, the ECHOES tool used to detect perceived competences, and a descriptive reading of pre-post evidence collected during implementation.

2. Three separated strands and the need for an integrated framework

The literature on training educational figures who work with LGBTQIA+ young people reveals a paradox. The technical strand of digital storytelling, the critical strand of algorithmic and AI literacy, and the relational strand of queer care are each strongly developed in their own research traditions. However, they are rarely brought together in a systematic pedagogical architecture. Considering them separately is insufficient for youth work in contemporary media

[2] The Project ID is 2025-1-IT03-KA220-YOU-000365342

environments, because the same activity can involve narrative production, platform circulation, automated moderation, privacy risks, emotional exposure and political positioning at the same time.

2.1 The technical strand of digital storytelling and its limits

The digital storytelling tradition, consolidated by Lambert (2013) and the StoryCenter method, offers a structured pathway from the choice of a meaningful topic to the production of a short multimodal artefact that combines voice, image, sound and personal narration. Its educational strength lies in the fact that it makes authorship accessible: participants learn to identify a point of view, select narrative materials, compose a story, and transform lived experience into a shareable object. Studies have shown the value of digital storytelling in health research, mental health, education and community work, including with marginalised groups and LGBTQIA+ people (Ogbeiwi et al., 2024; Vinogradova et al., 2011; Vivienne, 2016; Vivienne & Burgess, 2012; West et al., 2022; Wu & Chen, 2020).

For the purposes of contemporary queer youth work, however, this tradition has a significant limitation: it tends to focus on production more than on infrastructures of circulation (Dunford, 2017). Much of the method was developed before algorithmic distribution became the ordinary condition of online publication; it can therefore imply that publishing a story is equivalent to making it publicly available. In algorithmic media environments this equivalence no longer holds: a technically well-produced queer story may be classified as sensitive, recommended to a narrow audience, shadow-banned, demonetised, misread by hostile publics or detached from the meaning intended by its author. Technical competence must therefore be accompanied by an understanding of visibility, ranking, moderation, and platform governance.

2.2 The critical strand of algorithmic and AI literacy and its limits

The debate on algorithmic literacy has accelerated in recent years. DigComp 3.0 has incorporated dimensions connected to AI systems (Cosgrove & Cachia, 2025), while Empowering Learners for the Age of AI, developed by OECD and the European Union, organises AI literacy around four progressive domains: Engage with AI, Create with AI, Manage AI and Shape AI (OECD, 2026). The framework also distinguishes knowledge, skills, and attitudes, recognising that AI literacy combines technical understanding, practical ability, and ethical disposition.

For LGBTQIA+ youth work, this tradition is indispensable but incomplete. First, it often remains general with respect to representational bias. It recognises bias as a problem, but it does not always provide situated guidance for working with communities that are under-represented or misrepresented in training data and in automated classification systems (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Noble, 2018). Second, it pays limited pedagogical attention to the affective dimension of interacting with AI. A young person who sees queer identities stereotyped, sexualised, erased or pathologised by a generative system does not merely encounter an information problem; they encounter an affective and relational problem (Mansfield et al., 2025). Critical knowledge therefore needs to be connected to care.

2.3 The relational strand of queer care and its limits

The educational tradition of care, from Noddings (2003) to queer pedagogy (Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2002), has developed a sophisticated language for accompanying vulnerable subjects in educational spaces. Safe space practices, trauma-informed facilitation, consent, revocability of consent, attention to

boundaries, and continuity in relationships are central resources in non-formal education with LGBTQIA+ young people. They protect the possibility of speaking, experimenting, and refusing exposure.

Yet care practices have often been elaborated for spaces of physical co-presence or synchronous digital interaction. Algorithmic publics introduce vulnerabilities that exceed those settings: digital microaggressions, doxing, hostile commenting, automated replies, persistent archives, unexpected redistribution, and the loss of control over a story after it has been posted (McInroy et al., 2025). In this environment, care cannot stop at the creation workshop. It must extend to publication, interpretation, backlash, withdrawal, and the afterlife of content. The relational strand therefore needs to be integrated with technical and critical strands.

2.4 The Q.U.A.K.E. framework as an integrative device

Queer Media Education (Messina, 2025) is proposed here as a conceptual device for integrating the three strands. It is organised around five dimensions, condensed in the acronym Q.U.A.K.E.: the *Queer (Q)* dimension assumes the deconstruction of cis-heteronormativity as an epistemic and pedagogical horizon, in dialogue with queer pedagogy. The *Underground (U)* dimension recognises the generative value of non-mainstream media cultures and digital sanctuaries in which minoritised subjects negotiate visibility, opacity and belonging. The *Affective (A)* dimension places emotional responses to media representations at the centre of the process, drawing on affect theory and on the pedagogy of resonance (Ahmed, 2004; Rosa, 2019). The *Knowledge (K)* dimension articulates situated critical knowledge across data literacy, algorithmic literacy, and AI literacy. The *Emancipatory (E)* release dimension recovers a Freirean orientation to action by translating media competence into militant media citizenship and advocacy.

The five dimensions feed a three-phase operational cycle: 1) Critical Decoding is devoted to the deconstructive reading of media texts and algorithmic infrastructures; it joins critical analysis with attention to affective responses. 2) Critical Re-Coding is devoted to redesigning media artefacts for social equity; it connects the technical production of stories with awareness of how representation is organised. 3) Emancipatory Release concerns publication, redistribution and advocacy; it accompanies participants as their stories enter public space and become exposed to interpretation, appropriation, invisibilisation or backlash.

The cycle is sustained by two permanent devices: Queer Care and continuous Feedback. Queer care is not a separate training topic, but the condition that makes the cycle pedagogically viable. Continuous Feedback shifts attention from judgement of the finished artefact to accompaniment of process, risk, meaning and agency. Once the framework is adopted, two practical questions follow: how can it be translated into a concrete training pathway, and how can the competences emerging from that pathway be detected?

3. The framework in practice: the ECHOES train-the-trainers pathway

The conceptual framework guided the co-design of a concrete European training pathway. The main design choices - partnership composition, co-design method, curriculum architecture and module sequence - can be read as organisational translations of Q.U.A.K.E. Rather than adding queer content to a generic media training, the pathway sought to redesign the training ecology around identity, visibility, care and platform mediation.

3.1 Partnership as organisational translation of the five dimensions

The partnership was not an accessory condition but a structural element of the design. Four civil-society organisations with different specialisations were

brought into dialogue. Stanza101 Project, a queer-led organisation based in Italy, contributed expertise in digital storytelling and media literacy, covering especially the Knowledge and Underground dimensions. Verbena contributed expertise in inclusive and intersectional storytelling, strengthening the Queer dimension. IncontACT contributed artistic approaches to narration, supporting the Affective dimension through aesthetic and embodied languages. YIHR-KS contributed a human-rights framework and storytelling for social change, grounding the Emancipatory release dimension. The partnership therefore ensured that each dimension of the framework was represented by organisational expertise during curriculum design.

3.2 Co-design as translation of the operational cycle

Curriculum co-design followed three phases. The first phase, built around User Personas, identified different profiles of final youth beneficiaries, from highly visible young activists to young people who had not disclosed their identity in family or school contexts. The second phase, based on collaborative SWOT analysis, connected the needs emerging from the personas with the internal capacities of each partner. The third phase translated those findings into a curriculum framework organised around four operational pillars: digital storytelling techniques, ethics and privacy, communication strategies, and facilitation methods.

3.3 Curriculum architecture

The 60-hour training pathway consisted of three integrated segments: 6 hours of joint international online webinars, 24 hours of intensive in-person residency, and 30 hours of national training adapted to the needs and local contexts of each partner. Modularity was intended as a pedagogical choice, because the Emancipatory Release phase must be situated in the territories, languages, publics and political conditions in which youth workers operate.

The seven modules followed a progression aligned with the operational cycle. Module 1 (What is a Story) built an operational definition of story and introduced multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), preparing participants for critical decoding. Modules 2 and 3 (Many Ways to Do Digital Storytelling) explored visual and audio techniques and translated Lambert's seven-step method into hands-on practice. Module 4 (Who's Behind the Scenes) activated the Queer and Underground dimensions by analysing media cultures, representation and power. Module 5 (Understanding the Algorithm) activated the Knowledge dimension through data literacy, algorithmic literacy, and AI literacy. Module 6 (The Media and Me) activated the Affective dimension by supporting reflection on emotional responses to media representations. Finally, Module 7 (Let's Do Something About It) activated Emancipatory release by guiding participants toward media advocacy campaigns and public sharing.

The local training was complemented by a series of international webinars, during which participants had the opportunity to engage with peers from other countries. These sessions fostered the exchange of experiences and perspectives, enabling participants to discuss shared challenges related to facilitation and social practices within their respective local contexts.

Care practices were integrated across all phases and modules rather than isolated in a single session. They included the use of names and pronouns at the beginning of each meeting, confidential recording practices, anonymous participation options, co-construction of a group social contract, continuity of facilitators, emotional pauses and grounding practices. This design choice follows the theoretical logic of Q.U.A.K.E.: queer care is transversal to decoding, production and release, because vulnerability can emerge at any point of the process.

4. Research design

The study follows a pre-experimental research design (specifically one-group pretest-posttest, Campbell & Stanley, 1963), in which the same participants completed the ECHOES instrument at two points, ex ante (T1) and ex post (T2), without a comparison group or randomisation. Its purpose is descriptive and exploratory: to trace perceived competence trajectories within a specific training cohort and to generate pedagogically interpretable patterns for future pathway development.

The monitoring had two aims. The first was descriptive: to identify the levels of self-perceived media, algorithmic and queer facilitation competences at the beginning and end of the pathway. The second was exploratory: to identify patterns of variation across competence areas, with special attention to possible integrated competences that joined dimensions usually treated separately.

4.1 Construction of the tool

The integration of digital storytelling, algorithmic literacy and queer affective care creates a methodological problem. Existing self-perception questionnaires generally measure one dimension at a time: media literacy, AI literacy, relational competences, facilitation or advocacy, but no instrument simultaneously captures their integration. The construction of the ECHOES instrument responds to this need.

ECHOES was built ad hoc by combining two reference frameworks. Its architecture takes the four domains from the OECD (2026) AILit Framework (Engage with AI, Create with AI, Manage AI and Shape AI) and translates them into the field of media education and LGBTQIA+ advocacy. These domains were then integrated with the dimensions of Q.U.A.K.E. The choice to use the AI

literacy framework as the base architecture allowed the tool to remain aligned with the most recent European debate, while the Q.U.A.K.E. framework situated the items in queer media education.

Integration operated at two levels. Structurally, the tool reproduced the AI literacy domains and added a specific area on Advocacy with media, corresponding to Emancipatory release. At item level, it combined general AI-literacy items with items addressing LGBTQIA+ representation, stereotypes, affective responses, consent, public exposure, and advocacy. Each item was formulated as a first-person statement, such as “I can” or “I am able to” and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = Not at all to 5 = Very much. Additionally, each area ended with an optional open question, allowing participants to expand their reflection on the competences captured by the closed items. The tool[3] was developed in English, the working language of the European partnership.

4.2 Architecture of the areas

The questionnaire is divided into two main sections, each covering a distinct set of competencies required by youth workers supporting LGBTQIA+ young people: the ECHOES-Core and ECHOES-YW.
ECHOES-Core assesses individual media competences across four domains, positioning the participant as a personal *media agent*:

1. *Engaging with media (C1)*: the ability to recognise the role of media in everyday life and to critically read content, representations, stereotypes, bias, and algorithmic logics.

[3] The questionnaire is available at the following link: https://forms.gle/7hiEkWGZAASv9AsZA

2. *Creating with media (C2):* the ability to use media to express a personal perspective, build a narrative, and produce content that is coherent with one's intended message.

3. *Managing media*, divided into: the ability to use media and digital tools in a responsible, ethical, and safe way, deciding what to share, how to share it, and when to use or not use automated tools or AI *(C3a)*; the items referring to AI-generated or AI-assisted media content *(C3b)*.

4. *Advocacy with media (C4)*: the ability to use media to circulate messages, share perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and participate in public discourse in a constructive way.

ECHOES-YW assesses facilitation competences across four complementary domains, positioning the youth worker as a pedagogical *process mediator* rather than a direct media producer:

1. *Facilitation of media practices (Y1):* the ability to design, lead, and adapt media education and digital storytelling activities in ways that are understandable, participatory, and coherent with the goals of the pathway, including feedback as a practice of support and care.

2. *Safe space and trauma-informed facilitation (Y2):* the ability to create and maintain a working environment that is safe, respectful, inclusive, and attentive to participants' vulnerability, while also supporting emotional expression and the boundaries between intimacy and visibility.

3. *Ethics and consent support (Y3):* the ability to accompany participants in decisions related to consent, privacy, safety, public exposure, and the ethical use of contents, also over time and after sharing.

4. *Support to media advocacy (Y4):* the ability to use media to circulate messages, share perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and participate in public discourse in a constructive way.

The two instruments are not parallel forms, but complementary constructs operating at distinct levels: personal media literacy vs. contextualised professional competence (Eraut, 1994).

4.3 Data analysis

Prior to administration, the instrument underwent an expert-panel content-validation procedure. Seven experts with complementary profiles (media education, linguistics, LGBTQIA+ activism, youth work, and research methodology) rated the relevance, clarity, and formulation of the item clusters on a four-point scale. Following Polit and Beck (2006), the Item-Content Validity Index (I-CVI) and the scale-level indices S-CVI/Average and S-CVI/Universal Agreement were computed, together with the modified kappa correcting for chance agreement. All 48 evaluated items reached an I-CVI of at least 0.78; the overall S-CVI/Average was 0.946 and cluster-level modified kappa ranged from 0.924 to 0.975, values interpretable as excellent (Polit & Beck, 2006). Item wording was revised on the basis of the experts' qualitative feedback before administration. Consistent with the exploratory nature of the study, ECHOES has completed content validation and an initial internal-consistency check but has not yet undergone full psychometric validation (construct validity, confirmatory factor analysis); its use is therefore limited to the exploratory measurement of self-perceived competences pending validation on larger samples.

The quantitative analysis used descriptive statistics for each item and area, including means and standard deviations. Where paired data were available, pre-post differences were read descriptively and the planned inferential strategy relied on non-parametric tests, specifically the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, because of the ordinal nature of Likert data and the small sample. Open

responses were analysed through framework analysis (Gale et al., 2013), which is appropriate for small qualitative corpora organised by a predefined theoretical structure while still allowing emergent dimensions to appear.

5. Results

5.1 Sample composition and response dynamics

The pathway involved 16 youth workers. The entry survey (T1) collected 15 valid questionnaires for the ECHOES-Core section on perceived media competences and 11 valid questionnaires for the ECHOES-YW section on facilitation competences. The asymmetry between the two entry sections was due to the non-completion of the second part by four participants and suggests a procedural issue: the overall length of the instrument, with 103 Likert items plus open questions, probably exceeded the attentional sustainability threshold for part of the cohort. The ex post survey (T2) collected 8 valid questionnaires on both sections. The paired subset (T1-T2) consisted of 7 participants for the CORE block, and 5 for the YW block. The reading therefore distinguishes between the overall snapshot of available respondents and the movement observed in the paired subset. The marked reduction of respondents between the two entry sections and between the entry and exit measurements exposes the study to potential attrition bias and non-response bias. The small, non-probabilistic paired subset (7 CORE, 5 YW) precludes any statistical generalisation and entails an incomplete characterisation of the sample; results are therefore read as descriptive traces of a situated formative process rather than as generalisable effects, consistent with the intrinsic case-study design (Stake, 1995).

5.2 Descriptives of the questionnaire areas

Figure 1 reports mean values for the nine questionnaire areas in the two measurements (T1 and T2). Two descriptive patterns guide interpretation. First, variation is uniformly positive: in all nine areas, ex post means are higher than ex ante means. Second, the magnitude of variation is asymmetrical. Three areas (C2, Y1, and Y4) record increases close to or above one scale point. Conversely, Y2 shows a limited increase (+0.22) but also the highest mean values in both phases. This is best interpreted as a ceiling effect: participants already entered the pathway with strong perceived competences in affective care, boundaries and safe-space practices.

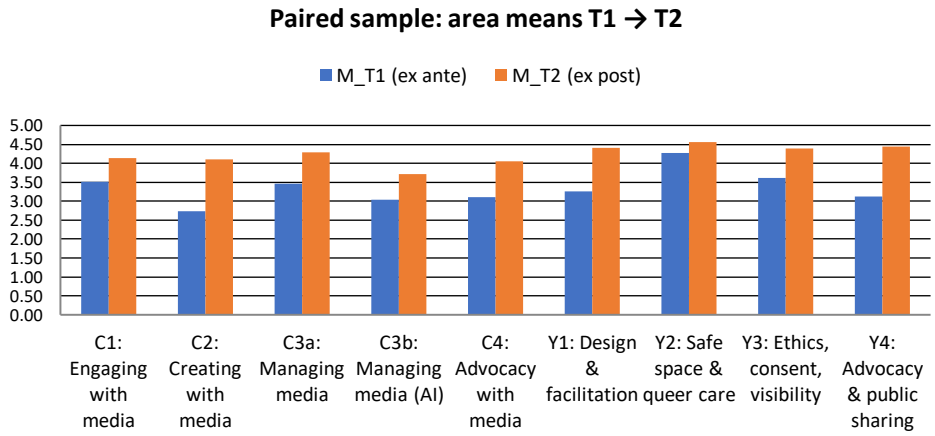


Figure 1*. Area means, ex ante and ex post measurements (available respondents for each phase).*

5.3 Paired subset

Table 1 focuses on respondents who completed both *ex ante* and *ex post* measurements. The small size of the paired subset means that values cannot be interpreted as sample estimates of effect, but they describe a collective movement within the cohort. The areas that showed the largest increases in the full available sample (C2, Y1 and Y4) remain the areas with the largest movement in the paired subset, reaching or exceeding one full scale point. Y2

confirms the pattern of limited growth from an already high starting point. The most distinctive dynamic concerns C3b: it starts with the lowest ex ante mean and remains the only area below 4 in the ex post measurement. This suggests that ethical awareness of AI does not automatically become operational competence.

The planned Wilcoxon signed-rank test was computed on the paired subset, with Cohen's dz as the effect-size index. Three CORE areas reached the conventional significance threshold: C2 (W = 0.0, p = .016, dz = 2.00), C3a (W = 1.0, p = .031, dz = 1.40) and C4 (W = 0.0, p = .016, dz = 1.25). The remaining areas did not reach significance (C1: W = 6.5, p = .234; C3b: W = 5.0, p = .156; Y1: W = 0.0, p = .062; Y2: W = 4.0, p = .438; Y3: W = 3.0, p = .312; Y4: W = 0.0, p = .062). These inferential results must be read as exploratory and underpowered: with n = 5 the two-sided Wilcoxon test cannot reach $p < .05$ regardless of the direction of the effect, so the YW p-values (e.g. Y1 and Y4 at p = .062) are reported for completeness only, and interpretation rests on the effect sizes and descriptive deltas rather than on null-hypothesis significance testing. Analyses and conclusions are accordingly confined to a descriptive-exploratory register.

***Table 1**. Area means in the paired subset.*

Area	*n*	*M_IN*	*M_OUT*	*Δ*
C1: Engaging with media	7	3.52	4.13	+0.60
C2: Creating with media	7	2.73	4.11	+1.38
C3a: Managing media	7	3.47	4.29	+0.82
C3b: Managing media (AI)	7	3.04	3.71	+0.68
C4: Advocacy with media	7	3.11	4.05	+0.94
Y1: Design & facilitation	5	3.26	4.41	+1.15
Y2: Safe space & queer care	5	4.28	4.56	+0.28
Y3: Ethics, consent, visibility	5	3.61	4.40	+0.79
Y4: Advocacy & public sharing	5	3.12	4.45	+1.33

Paired subset: Item-level patterns

The area analysis provides an overall picture, but risks concealing what happened at the level of individual items. A closer reading of the items with the largest and smallest increases makes it possible to identify the formative geography of the pathway with greater precision. Table 2 reports the ten items with the highest Δ and the ten items with the lowest or zero Δ in the matched subset.

Table 2. *Items with the Greatest and Smallest Change (Paired Subsample)*
Item with the Greatest Change.

Section	Item	M_IN	M_OUT	Δ
CORE	choose the most suitable media format for a specific message or purpose	2.43	4.29	+1.86
YW	support a person in deciding whether to keep, modify, or withdraw a content after its circulation	2.80	4.60	+1.80
YW	accompany a group during a media production activity	2.40	4.20	+1.80
CORE	create contents that make a little-represented perspective visible	2.43	4.14	+1.71
YW	propose an activity that helps move from a story to a media content	3.00	4.60	+1.60
YW	design a storytelling activity that is coherent with the objectives of the pathway	2.80	4.40	+1.60
YW	help participants consider how their content may be interpreted by different audiences	2.80	4.40	+1.60
YW	explain the task of a media activity clearly	2.60	4.20	+1.60
YW	support the circulation of a story without taking control of its meaning	2.60	4.20	+1.60
YW	help participants assess the risks of public visibility	3.00	4.60	+1.60

Items with Minimal or No Change.

Section	Item	M_IN	M_OUT	Δ
YW	support the expression of emotions without forcing disclosure	4.60	4.40	−0.20
YW	welcome contents linked to affectivity without normalising or judging them	4.60	4.40	−0.20
CORE	recognise when a media content simplifies complex or multifaceted experiences	4.29	4.14	−0.14
CORE	recognise when a media content speaks about LGBTQIA+ people in a stereotypical way	4.43	4.43	0.00
YW	respect the boundary between what a person wants to make visible and what they want to keep to themselves	4.60	4.60	0.00
YW	recognise when a content touches on delicate affective or emotional aspects	4.40	4.40	0.00
YW	support a person in deciding how much of themselves to make public	4.60	4.60	0.00
YW	recognise when an activity may feel too exposing for some participants	4.20	4.40	+0.20
YW	explain when the use of AI should be made transparent	3.60	3.80	+0.20
YW	maintain continuity and reliability in the educational setting	4.20	4.40	+0.20

A comparative reading of the two lists reveals a formative geography that we consider highly coherent. The items with the greatest increase converge on three families of competences.

- The first family concerns the technical translation of a message into a media artefact, encompassing the choice of an appropriate format, the design of storytelling activities, and the accompaniment of the group during production.
- The second family concerns counter-stereotypical production, in which the creation of contents that make under-represented perspectives visible is the most clearly defined competence.

- The third family, and the most pedagogically significant, concerns the accompaniment of content through its public life after publication: supporting participants in deciding whether to keep, modify, or withdraw content that has already circulated; assessing the risks of public visibility; interpreting content in relation to plural and diverse audiences; and supporting circulation without appropriating the story's meaning.

The items with minimal or no increase share a common characteristic that clarifies the pattern observed in area Y2. Without exception, all belong to the semantic field of affective care and personal boundary negotiation, and all start from an ex ante mean equal to or above 4.20 out of 5. Participants already reported, at entry, feeling adequately competent on these specific items. The two items showing a small decrease (−0.20) are best interpreted as minimal fluctuations within a small group, rather than as genuine regressions in competence.

5.4 Individual-level analysis

Reading aggregate values leaves the variety of individual pathways in the background. Table 3 reports the overall section means for ECHOES-Core and ECHOES-YW for each of the 7 participants in the matched subset, identified by anonymous codes P1–P7.

Table 3. *Individual trajectories in the matched subset: overall section means.*

Participant	CORE_IN	CORE_ OUT	Δ CORE	YW_IN	YW_ OUT	Δ YW
P1	3.24	4.55	+1.32	3.40	4.05	+0.65
P2	4.29	4.76	+0.47	4.62	4.86	+0.25
P3	2.45	3.66	+1.21	n.a.	3.88	n.a.
P4	2.42	2.58	+0.16	n.a.	3.28	n.a.
P5	3.24	5.00	+1.76	3.77	4.85	+1.08
P6	4.13	4.24	+0.11	4.03	4.38	+0.35
P7	2.47	3.84	+1.37	2.02	4.15	+2.14

Table 3 shows that the aggregate movement observed in the area means is not distributed evenly across participants but articulates into three distinct learning figures. The first is consolidation: P2 and P6 enter the pathway with already high scores on both sections (between 4.03 and 4.62) and exit with modest increases that reflect the residual mathematical ceiling of the scale. The second is broad learning: P1, P3, P5, and P7 enter with medium or medium-low scores and show substantial increases spanning much of the scale. P5 and P7 in particular follow extended trajectories, from starting values around 2.0–3.3 to values approaching the maximum. The third is limited learning: P4 enters with the lowest scores in the group (2.42 in CORE) and exits with minimal increases, remaining below the sample mean. This third figure deserves pedagogical attention in the discussion section, as it cannot be reduced simply to a failure of the pathway and requires a more nuanced interpretation.

5.5 The open questions

The responses to the nine open-ended questions of the questionnaire were analysed following the framework analysis approach (Gale et al., 2013), a procedure particularly suited to small textual corpora collected within case studies. Table 4 summarises the distribution of themes across the two phases.

Table 4. *Thematic matrix of open responses**.***

Theme	***Entry occurrences***	***Exit occurrences***
Boundaries / negotiation of exposure	4	1
From personal to political	3	0
AI: ethics and ambivalence	2	0
Feedback as care, not criticism	2	0
Post-publication care	1	1
Conflict management	0	1
Political radicalisation of advocacy	0	1
Visibility as value	1	0

Note. The themes "Conflict management" and "Political radicalisation of advocacy" show zero occurrences in the entry phase and appear exclusively in the exit phase.

Three observations emerge from the matrix. The theme of boundaries and the negotiation between exposure and protection persists across both phases and confirms itself as a central preoccupation among those working with LGBTQIA+ young people, independently of the training pathway. Two new themes appear exclusively in the ex post phase: conflict management as a dimension of facilitation, and the political radicalisation of advocacy, exemplified by the reference to the slogan *No Pride in genocide*, which situates LGBTQIA+ advocacy discourse in dialogue with contemporary political debate. Finally, the theme of post-publication care consolidates: expressed at entry as a formative need (*I feel the need to get to know more about digital footprint*) and at exit as an acquired competence (*Making sure we are all very clear on what the after-effects could be and able to support any emotional struggle*).

From the thematic analysis, five main nuclei emerge. The first is the narrative device from the personal to the political: participants describe digital storytelling as a practice of self-authentication oriented toward shared experience, articulating this grammar with considerable conceptual sophistication already at entry.

The second is the negotiation of the boundary between exposure and protection: voices explicitly frame boundary-setting not as acquired knowledge but as a zone of ongoing professional and personal revision, particularly around visibility management and consent.

The third is ethical ambivalence toward AI systems: participants enter the pathway with a cautious, multi-layered critical stance, covering environmental impact, artists' rights, and privacy opacity, that already aligns with the attitudinal components of the AILit framework (OECD, 2026).

The fourth is feedback as a care device: voices locate feedback not as product judgement but as support for the creative and relational process, configuring a notion already coherent with the Affective dimension of Q.U.A.K.E.

The fifth, and the only nucleus showing an appreciable qualitative shift between entry and exit, is post-publication care: at entry the theme appears as an unmet formative need; at exit it is articulated as active competence, extended to conflict management and, in one voice, to the political radicalisation of advocacy.

Taken together, the five nuclei confirm a professionally mature cohort. The qualitative novelty at exit (post-publication care, conflict management, political advocacy) does not constitute quantitative evidence of a training effect, but indicates directions of professional consolidation that merit pedagogical discussion.

6. Discussion

The main value of the study lies in observing how a specific group of youth workers moved through a programme built around Q.U.A.K.E., integrating digital storytelling, algorithmic literacy and queer affective care. The first relevant finding concerns care: participants entered the programme with an already high competence in creating safe space, boundaries, active listening and consent. Especially when targeting youth workers in queer-led or human-rights organisations, affective care should therefore not be designed as a competence to be built from zero, but should be recognised as an existing professional heritage and used as the transversal condition of the whole training process.

The training appears to have been mostly significant in three competence areas: media production, counter-stereotypical content creation and accompaniment of content after publication. Regarding the last point, digital storytelling has often been imagined as a pathway that culminates in the finished story. In the ECHOES case, the most significant learning concerned what happens after a story enters an algorithmic public: circulation,

interpretation, risk, backlash, withdrawal, persistence and relational support. Youth workers learned not only how to help a group create media, but how to facilitate the pedagogical and affective consequences of media exposure.

The AI-related area remains more fragile. Participants did not approach AI naively: their open responses already expressed concerns about privacy, rights, environmental impact, opacity and the appropriation of artistic labour. Yet this ethical awareness did not fully translate into operational confidence. This distinction is crucial for future training: AI literacy for queer youth work cannot be limited to explaining tools or warning about bias. It requires time to practise situated decisions: when not to use AI, how to disclose its use, how to evaluate generated content, how to identify stereotyping or erasure, and how to care for young people affected by algorithmic misrepresentation.

The individual-level analysis also showed that a single pathway does not produce the same learning for all participants: consolidation, broad learning and limited learning coexisted. Future versions of the pathway should include differentiated entry points, shorter assessment tools, more formative feedback loops and additional opportunities to translate concepts into practice. Participants with strong prior competences need refinement and critical challenge; participants with lower confidence need scaffolding and practice; participants whose scores remain stable need spaces to understand whether stability reflects resistance, overload, critical awareness or contextual barriers.

Finally, the open responses analysis strengthens the central claim of the article: care must be extended from the protected workshop to the public life of the content. In algorithmic publics, publication is not a neutral technical act. It is an exposure to visibility and invisibilisation, to supportive publics and hostile publics, to platform governance and automated interpretation. Queer Media Education becomes specific because it trains youth workers to hold together

technical production, critical awareness, affective care and political positioning. It asks facilitators to support not only the creation of stories but also their afterlife.

This has consequences for curriculum design. A training pathway should not treat privacy, consent and visibility as preliminary warnings given before production begins. They should be revisited at each phase: when participants choose a story, when they select images or voices, when they decide whether to use AI, when they edit, when they imagine audiences, when they publish, and when they evaluate the effects of circulation. The same is true of feedback. Feedback is not only a method for improving a media artefact; it is a care practice that helps participants distinguish between critique of a product, recognition of an experience and protection of narrative agency.

7. Conclusion

The ECHOES case shows that training youth workers for media work with LGBTQIA+ young people requires an integrated framework. Digital storytelling alone risks ignoring algorithmic infrastructures; algorithmic literacy alone risks remaining affectively neutral; queer care alone risks staying attached to spaces of co-presence and not reaching the public circulation of content. Q.U.A.K.E. offers a way to connect these dimensions through critical decoding, critical re-coding and emancipatory release, sustained by queer care and continuous feedback.

The study is limited by the small sample, the drop in post-test responses, the reliance on self-perception measures and the situated nature of the case. Future research should combine the ECHOES tool with interviews, focus groups, observation and analysis of media artefacts produced during training. Nevertheless, the case offers a clear pedagogical indication: in contemporary algorithmic publics, publication is not the end of digital storytelling. It is the

beginning of a new educational responsibility, in which youth workers accompany visibility, consent, interpretation, backlash, withdrawal and persistence while protecting the agency of the young people whose stories are at stake.

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