SUPporting Problem-solving mentalities in lifelOng leaRning for Trainers | SUPPORT

Intellectual Output 2

Learning Scenarios for Outreach

Erasmus+

SUPPORT
Problem Solving in
LifeLong Learning

Project Partners

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Introduction

Problem solving is the process of identifying a problem, developing possible solution paths, and taking the appropriate course of action. The European Commission has identified problem solving, and the ability to solve problems and work collaboratively as a main indicator of the transversal skills to be acquired as part of the key competences.

It is the view of the "SUPport of Problem-solving mentality in lifelOng leaRning for Trainers" SUPPORT consortium that adult learning consists of a an everlasting process of problem-posing and problem-solving, especially in the case of dealing with persons with low level of skills or qualifications where the learning environment is not only challenged by the knowledge to be acquired but has to deal with a variety of existing preconceptions, social exclusion, stereotypes, language barriers, cultural limitations and others.

Outreach, more so than others, is one of the main challenges faced by adult education organisation, and any educational institution, in most European countries. Organisations, as it is, are called to tackle multiple "problems" targeting both their educators and their learners. In the Learning Scenarios that you can briefly explore below we have tackled multiple challenges that organisations are called to tackle in order to widen participation and combat exclusion, reaching out to people who are in some way deprived.

The full Learning Scenarios are available in English and can be found in the **SUPPORTing Trainers Platform** of our website https://supportae.eu

Identifying the needs of Organisations to create Effective Outreach Strategies

In order to construct the Learning Scenarios for establishing an Inclusive Learning Environment the partnership carried out a series of focus groups with organization representatives in order to identify the main indications in need of tackling therein.

The identified indicators can be seen categorized below.

What Are the main challenges that education providers face in achieving succesful outreach when it comes to hard to engage learners?

- ✓ Barriers to learning: from very practical/physical ones (e.g. lack of infrastructure) to internal barriers (e.g. "this sounds too difficult, I'm not capable enough"). Both are equally important. Some studies show that physical distance to an adult education centre plays a key role, especially for low-skilled learners. Internalized barriers can also effectively prevent adults from signing up for a course, for example due to negative experiences with formal education.
- ✓ Insufficient knowledge about what learners need. EAEA members frequently stress how important it is to know the community, to identify the barriers that learners might be facing, their specific needs.
- ✓ Rigid curricula, lack of flexbility. One size does not fit all, and adults are more likely to sign up for a course if they know it will offer a certain amount of flexbility (e.g.in terms of timing or venue). Allowing learners to play an active role in shaping the course can be helpful in this respect.

What is Missing?

- ✓ Cooperations
- ✓ Funding earmarked for outreach

What could we do to support the education providers in identifying and resolving these challenges?

- ✓ Provide concise advice in constructing outreach strategies
- ✓ Provide strategic tools
- ✓ Provide resources and good practices

The Learning Scenarios

Based on the aforementioned findings the partnership created the following setof Learning Scenarios through the Organisations' towards challenges.

Each of the scenarios where constructed using the template below.

Title of Challenge Tackled

Scenario   Title of the Specified Scenario

The Learning Challenge – Narative

Narrative of the Learning Challenge Text

Solving the Problem

Suggestion 1

Suggestion 2

Suggestion 3

Solving the Problem: Discussing with educators

Reflection   **Reflection**   **Reflection**

Points for Discussion with Policy Makers

The Learning Scenarios on Outreach| The Organisations' Perspective

Below each scenario will be accompanied by a short introduction and a link to the English version on the project website.

Supporting learners in times of crisis

The ongoing global pandemic has made it more difficult not only to reach out to new learners, but also to keep in touch with those who are already enrolled. Digital exclusion, new (family) responsibilities have proven to be a huge burden for your participants. Increased anxiety about the present and the future has compromised your learners' engagement in the course, affected their concentration and motivation levels. To make matters worse, your teachers and educators are struggling as well: transitioning to an online environment and attempting to keep learners engaged – or at the very least attending the course – seems like an insurmountable challenge. What can you do as an adult education provider to support learners? What can you ask of your teaching staff, taking into account the many responsibilities and pressures they are already facing?

Building a targeted outreach strategy

Your courses are quite popular in the local area, yet part of the community is still clearly missing. While you have no problem filling up language and yoga classes, and they are attended by learners of different age groups, you have realized that there is also a migrant community in the neighbourhood that has almost no representation in your classes. In particular, there is a large group of migrant women who struggle with the language, are often out of employment and yet have not found a way to get to your classes. Why are their missing, and what strategies can you put in place to help them get through the door?

Getting policymakers on board

More and more often you find that in policy discourse, adult learning is considered as a quick solution to economic problems; adults are expected to upskill and reskill and little attention is paid to the reason why they are consistently out ot education and employment. Most of the funding that your organisation receives is project-based and while you would like to spend more resources on building a good outreach strategy: mapping the community and their needs, investing in targeted community-based measures – this is close to impossible with your current budget and in the policy framework that you are bound by. What can you do as an adult education provider to get the policy support for outreach work that you very much need?

Including the target group

You roll out a "Global Thinking and Global Competences" course for the people in your city. It seems to be quite popular with high participation and great interest in its continuation from the participants. Due to this success, you think that it might be a good idea to run the same course for the inhabitants of the villages around to allow them to enhance their knowledge on that. As you wanted to attract as many learners as possible, you've tried to promote it through various means (social media, local radio, and so on). A few days before its beginning, there is almost no interest in participating from the local community, something that makes you postpone it indefinitely. How could you approach potential learners differently? What cooperations might be useful? What is the best way of engaging learners throughout the whole process?

Reaching the hard-to-reach learners

You offer learning courses for senior citizens in remote areas to fight isolation against them and promote active aging. Those courses were always free of cost. You visit one of those remote areas and meet some seniors who recognize you. You are asking them whether they participate in any of the courses you provide, and they replied that, although they would love to, the participation cost is very high for them. Why did this happen? That was due to the lack of proper information they had, something that probably resulted from your inability to reach them and guarantee they will stay informed. What can you do as an adult education provider to ensure that you can reach all potential learners, and especially the hard to reach ones?

Example of Scenario | Filled in and Translated

Supporting learners in times of crisis

Scenario   Supporting learners in times of crisis

The Learning Challenge – Narative

The ongoing global pandemic has made it more difficult not only to reach out to new learners, but also to keep in touch with those who are already enrolled. Digital exclusion, new (family) responsibilities have proven to be a huge burden for your participants. Increased anxiety about the present and the future has compromised your learners' engagement in the course, affected their concentration and motivation levels. To make matters worse, your teachers and educators are struggling as well: transitioning to an online environment and attempting to keep learners engaged – or at the very least attending the course – seems like an insurmountable challenge. What can you do as an adult education provider to support learners? What can you ask of your teaching staff, taking into account the many responsibilities and pressures they are already facing?

Solving the Problem

Suggestion 1

Reflecting on the obstacles faced by your learners might be the first step to solving the problem. Are they stressed? Overwhelemed by home-schooling their children and trying to work at the same time? Or perhaps the situation is even more dire – they rely on an unstable internet connection, have difficulty accessing health services or even doing the groceries. You might find that before getting your participants back into the course, you should try to provide material support, if at all possible. Is there a way for you to donate digital devices? A top-up card for their phone? To organise support packages with food and toileteries? It is unlikely that your participants will come back to or take up learning if their basic needs are not being met.

Suggestion 2

You can also start by reflecting on the objectives of your learning courses, or the main benefits that your learners usually gain – how can you convince your learners that you can still provide them? While you might have a list of learning outcomes at hand, perhaps the most valuable element of learning is interpersonal. You might find that your learners attend your courses because they enjoy the feeling of togetherness and community, and they feel that taking a class has helped them improve their well-being, all the more important during a crisis. A safe learning environment can also be re-established online, and in such difficult times you might find that it will bring learners the much-neeeded feeling of solidarity – and routine. Highlighting the value of learning as a space to share frustrations, discuss problems and support each other can encouage your participants to come back to the course.

Suggestion 3

Think about learners who won't be able to transition to learning online, either because of their low digital skills or because they can't afford or access a digital device. Perhaps the whole family is currently sharing one laptop, or their internet subscription has a data cap. What alternative can you offer to them? Would it be possible for you to send the course materials via snail mail?

Solving the Problem: Discussing with educators

The pandemic has wreaked havoc in everyone's lives, including those of educators. Before agreeing on a course of action, you might want to "check the temperature" among your staff. Who has time resources to help out? What is everyone's availability? Contacting learners might require considerable effort, perhaps phoning or messaging everyone. If you find that a support network for learners is needed, will your educators be equipped (also psychologically) to run it?

Online tools have become the everyday necessity during the pandemic. They can be used to keep in touch with learners but also for an exchange of experiences between educators. While some tools favour communication in professional environments, e.g Slack, others can be used for different purposes, e.g. Facebook Messenger or Whatsapp groups.

Digital exclusion is a reality: not all learners will be able to access your materials if you move everything online. Consider the use of other tools as an alternative: postcards, letters, printed course materials mailed to the door of your learners might be more useful than you thought.

Points for Discussion with Policy Makers

While many adult learning organisations have stepped up to support their most disadvantaged learners during the pandemic – by quickly transitioning to online teaching, or even offering material support when urgently needed – more is needed at the policy level to enable adult learning in times of crisis. Adults need reliable and affordable access to the internet, financial support if te pandemic has put the temporarily out of employment, access to psychological help to deal with anxiety, isolation and family tensions. At the same time, adult learning providers need flexibility in the delivery of their learning programmes to make sure that they can be continued regardless of the situation. Rigid curricula, funding streams dependent on the number of face-to-face classes or high adminsitrative burdens can make not only outreach, but also the delivery of any adult education programmes impossible in times of crisis.