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INVOLVEment

of learners with educational
background into the lifelong learning process



The learning partnership "INVOLVEment of learners with low educational background into the Lifelong learning process" has focused on the strategies, methods and tools necessary to increase the participation of the special group of learners. As those people are at an increasing risk of unemployment and social exclusion.

The successful involvement of learners with a low educational background is a big challenge for adult educators all over Europe. The partners of this learning partnership were aware that this group does need certain approaches such as a low threshold concerning the accessibility and the participation in adult education and lifelong learning.

The learning partnership has discussed what is available in the participating countries, exchanged experience and identified the needs for developing material, courses or strategies on how to address the target group. A special focus has been paid on how to improve the accessibility of adult education in disadvantaged areas.

Said at the end...

“From the project we have had an insight into the educational system of EU countries and although we are many miles apart we face the same problem, which is bringing learners back into the educational system, with all of our knowledge, expertise and different avenues at bringing creativity into the classroom and tying all learnt from our Involve project the unachievable is achievable across the board. Learners with “low educational background are accommodated and the learning cycle weaves its magic and begins again”

Emma Gibbon, Northumberland College, UK

Learners with a “low educational background” could be anyone - we must never stereotype as low educational background learners may not necessarily be the stereotypical persons you might assume.

“Differentiation” is the process by which differences between learners are accommodated so that all students in a group have the best possible chance of learning; low educational background learners can be demotivated due to poor, unrealistic educational advice.

Ineffective learning can be caused from school age: it may be that a person has never been taught how to learn – i.e. how to make notes, how to revise and so on.

Low achievers are commonly to be found in poor urban areas, but there is very considerable variation among schools and local authorities. Some educational establishments with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils do much better than others, and there is a considerable range of performance among different ethnic groups. As with so many other social issues, low achievement in education is complex and multifaceted.

Low achievement is strongly – but not universally – associated with disadvantage. It works in various ways, some of them connected with poverty itself – its attendant stresses, poor housing, even poor nutrition and health – and social class. A key factor is the ‘home learning environment’: the amount parents read to their children, the number of books in the home, the degree to which parents support their children’s education in and out of school and how it affects the adult later on in life.

Students need to see changes in the light of better educational quality, with the aid of good teaching methods and practice; perhaps educators need to erase old ideas and be inventive and ready to change because as teachers for adults with low educational backgrounds we face different challenges to compulsory education. Often a complex transition is taking place between childhood and adulthood: the transition this time is often from an experience of failure or low achievement to an affirmation of capability and worth.

In recognising the special circumstances of this significant group it is essential that teaching approaches are designed to address issues of poor confidence and low self-esteem, by adapting to their level; evidence suggests that dressing casually like them helps them to engage and develop, as well as teachers addressing the desire for control, autonomy and meaningful educational outcomes. Without the former the latter is certainly made much more difficult.

The skills of educators or the ability to make learning attractive

People with low educational level, often due to an unsatisfactory previous school experience, tend to perceive negative the formal learning environments. For this reason, they should alter that perception and be attracted to learning. For this it is essential that educators are able to:

- listen to proposals from participants to adapt educational programs to their real interests, and not on what educators themselves believe that they want or need.
- establish an educational relationship based on dialogue and respect for the autonomy of the participants to promote equal treatment and to assume their own learning processes.
- recognize the knowledge and skills of participants as a prelude to meaningful learning and improving their self-concept.
- create more flexible structures to ensure the widest possible access to education. This requires adapt the time, space, content and methodologies to the characteristics of the participants. Thus making learners the real subject of education.

How to create a curriculum in order to face the need of the learner

The first important point for implementing a sufficient curriculum is to take the personal learning profile of each individual learner into consideration. The most effective treatment would be an individual guidance of the participants within the target group.

Additionally, a biographical background or at least some personal details of the participants are helpful in order to get the learners started in their future “learning career.” These backgrounds should not only exist of general information but also include skills and abilities as well as future goals, in order to define the participant’s personal level of attainment and to be able to begin with the learning process right at that level – assuring a learning environment based on individual needs. That’s why it is necessary to define realistic goals and the required steps to achieve these goals as well as to adjust the learning content to the participant’s needs.

Competences should be sorted by its relevance in order to get an idea what the participant should learn first. In addition, it is important to use already existing qualifications as a foundation of his/her future learning process in order to motivate and point out that he/she is no amateur in this field. To focus on the strengths and characteristics of the participants including his/her learning style and to give credit to them further motivates the learners.

The second important point is to note that the target group is adults. The level of communication must correspond to the participants who are adults. Additionally respectful behavior within the learning environment is a natural requirement. Furthermore, the adults need to be responsible for their own learning process as much as possible and actively take part in defining and creating their own learning environment in order to let them display but also discover their competences in “real life.” A final point is the healthy balance of being a teaching organization, authority and supervisor and a competent as well as reliable partner for the individual learner.

How to make your organization engaging to low educational background

- A good understanding of the users profile problems and reasons leading them to the training centres
- Offering integrated services: Guidance/counselling for identifying the needs and goals of the users; Competences assessment/check/evaluations to find out what is missing in order to get closer to the goals; Personal development training (*Motivation, Confidence Building, Team Work, Transferable Skills, Assessing Yourself for Work, Employee & Employer Expectations, Money Matters, Presenting Yourself and Personal Information & Basic IT*)/vocational training/employability training (*Sector Related CV, Effective job search, Applying for jobs, Cover Letters application forms, Finances*); Guidance/counselling for finding a job.
- Facilitating the participation of users in the learning process: Flexible schedule; Customised/ personalise training courses (*modular training, training itinerary, training methods adapted to the users 'needs' level*).
- Ensuring adequate human resources to cover the integrated services through internal staff or through cooperation with other organisations (*trainers, employability counsellors, mediators – people closed to different categories of users able to understand and motivate them to participate in the learning process*)
- Permanent evaluation of the organisation achievements and improvement of the provided services (*through satisfaction surveys/questionnaires, follow up of the learners on the labour market, implementation of quality assurance tools, etc.*)
- Networking with the training organisations, employment offices, NGO's involved in different aspects related to the target group, local employees or employees' organisations, trade unions, local authorities etc. in order to reach the target group, to cooperate with it for a better provision of the needed services, to multiply the communication and disseminating channels.
- A continuing process of promotion and dissemination through media (*internet, TV, radio, newspapers/magazines*), posters and flyers, promotion events (*cultural/recreational events*), networking.

Good practice examples

Titel:	The “Dowry” system
Target group:	Workers with low educational level (average 9/10 years of formal schooling), older workers (over 40) or people having worked for a long time doing the same job
Aims and objectives:	To support person who needs to find a new job to enter in a “learning process” (coaching or courses)
Approach	Personalisation (a virtual dowry is given to the “would be” student who spends it where he/she finds the best offer for him/her) - Holistic techniques to favor a new approach to personal well being and to cope with stress.
Contact	v.brunelli@afolsudmilano.it ; Italy–AFOL SUD MILANO
Titel	FOOD FOR BODY ... FOOD FOR MIND
Target:	Prisoners (ex drug addict)
Aims and objectives:	Promote and support the social and occupational reintegration of young offenders acting on two fronts: on the detained person and society.
Approach	Empowerment – Autobiographical approach, Storytelling (oral narrative) Educational game, Learning by doing
Contact	consorzio.mercurio@email.it ; Italy–CONSORZIO MERCURIO
Titel	Festival of the Amateur Theater “Thalia Fest”
Target group:	Young people from several social centers – institutionalized children with low levels of education, from very poor families, and persons deprived of liberty – inmates
Aims and objectives:	To increase the self-esteem of the participants, to stimulate their creativity and spontaneity, to facilitate the socialization and communication, to encourage the teamwork
Approach	Besides the theater performing, the persons from the target group are involved in painting, origami, pottery and other handicraft activities.
Contact	contact@ccbratianu.ro ; Romania–Cultural Centre “Bratianu”
Titel:	Think
Target group:	Teachers, students (this is a set of tools can be used by teachers to learn more about their style of teaching) and Learning styles (for students)
Aims and objectives:	If Students are not learning the way we teach, we need to teach the way they learn... there’s no particular virtue in doing things the way they have always been done.
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