



INTALL PROJECT INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 1

LEARNER RECOMMENDATIONS ON JOINT LEARNING PATHWAYS

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1 INTRODUCTION

The present document summarizes the recommendations of participants of the Adult Education Academy on how to implement joint learning pathways. The Adult Education Academy hosts MA and PhD students as well as practitioners in adult education. The recommendations included below are based on the feedback shared by the participants in the evaluation form as well as consultation with selected participants carried out by EAEA. They are addressed to organisations and adult educators aiming to implement joint learning pathways.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Recommendations for the macro and meso level

Establish clear roles. Before starting the programme, brainstorm on the possible tasks and contributions of the participants, taking into account their different profiles and overall aim of the programme. It might help to get more detailed information about the participants – if possible – such as their backgrounds and expertise.

What learning outcomes – and for whom? Each participant, whatever the profile, will expect to have learnt something by the end of the programme. While for some it will be enough to practice speaking a foreign language or improve their intercultural communication, many will have specific expectations, based on their impression of what the programme might provide, and their previous experiences with similar activities. When designing the programme, make sure that each activity is intended to bring benefits to all of the participants, and communicate the planned learning outcomes clearly to avoid misunderstandings.

Invest time in preparing the participants for the programme – but make sure that the process is meaningful. Introductory activities can be easily carried out online, and help break the ice between the participants before the programme. Think about what is included in the preparation that you ask your participants to do. Will they be asked to already share their experiences with each other? To comment on background reading? Whatever the task, make sure that it stays meaningful to the activities that you are actually planning to carry out, and serve a purpose other than getting the participants to interact online.

“During the comparative groups, as practitioners we had a chance to work in a mixed group, with students, and we could contribute different perspectives to the task we were given”

(one of the participants of the Adult Education Academy)

Ensure direct communication with the participants before, during and after the programme. In groups with diverse participants it is easy to get lost. Thanks to clear and regular communication before the programme, your participants will know what is expected of them: from practical issues, such as where they need to be and at what time, to the selection of activities available to them (if any) and the contributions that they will be expected to make. In the case of the Adult Education Academy, MA, PhD students and practitioners each received a tailor-made version of the programme to avoid confusion.

Yet even with the best communication before the implementation of the programme, issues or miscommunication might still arise. Make sure your participants know who they can contact in case they have questions about logistical or content-related problems during the programme. If there are group activities foreseen, ensure that the moderator is aware of the diversity of the participants and provides clear guidance and support to each of them, whatever their profile.

Similarly, follow-up is an important, if often overlooked part of a learning programme. Will there be a way to consult the results online? Will the participants still work together on finalizing a task, e.g. an essay? If new opportunities for partnership have emerged, are (former) participants provided with an opportunity to stay in touch?

“I’ve made some good connections” (one of the participants of the Adult Education Academy)

Take your time with introductions, and provide space for informal get-togethers. Participants with different backgrounds, varying levels of academic knowledge or hands-on experience might need time and support in finding a common ground. Introductions can take place early on in the programme – as ice-breakers with larger or smaller groups of participants – online, for example in a discussion form of an e-learning platform, but also more informally. Participants of the Adult Education Academy have appreciated the opportunity to meet for dinner and other social activities before the official programme starts. Other activities, such as guided city tours can also help different participants get to know each other and build group cohesion.

2.2 Recommendations for the micro level

Find a common ground, and build on it. Even in groups where the participants have different levels of experience or academic background, parallels can be drawn and bridges built. Adult education is a diverse field, and the distinctions between different profiles are not always clear-cut. During group work, you might find out that all of your participants share some teaching experience, or have been involved in activism around a specific issue. Finding out as much as possible about the participants and their backgrounds before the programme will take time, but might benefit you in long term. You might also find common areas during the activity itself: allow yourself to stay flexible in your planning to accommodate some changes.

Encourage collaboration between the participants, and stay involved yourself. There are many ways in which you can organize the cooperation between the participants to ensure collaboration and exchange of experiences. Group discussions, world cafes, or asking the participants to work on a common project can help bring out different voices and perspectives. Even if the work is designed to be self-guided, as a moderator, do make sure that you stay involved, provide support and monitor the group processes. Is everyone participating? If there is someone who is left out of the process, how can they be involved? Is there someone more experienced dominating the discussion and influencing the result? Think about your role as a moderator and make the communication as horizontal as possible.

Be prepared for conflicts and consider them a natural part of the learning process. Intensive learning programmes can be high in emotions; less experienced participants might feel left out; those more experienced might be very vocal about some issues. As an organizer or moderator, make sure that you are aware of the issues and address them accordingly. Setting some ground rules or signing a “learning contract” on cooperation early on might help.

“It is an intense process and can be very emotional, even transformative” (one of the participants of the Adult Education Academy)

Save time for reflection. It is easy to focus on the completion of a task itself, but you might find that discussing the overall process and the contributions of everyone will help the participants take ownership of the assignment. A reflection session after a lecture or a study visit can also help the participants get to know different perspectives.

